

EU-ARMENIA VISA DIALOGUE

ACTION PLAN

ON VISA LIBERALISATION

1. GENERAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. BACKGROUND

Relations between the EU and Armenia are based on the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) which entered into force on 1 March 2021. The Armenia Partnership Priorities adopted on 21 February 2018 provide a clear, mutually agreed, framework for cooperation on mobility and people-to-people contacts. The progress on the implementation of the CEPA agreement and the Partnership Priorities is regularly monitored, in particular through the EU-Armenia Justice, Freedom and Security (JFS) subcommittee meetings.

A Mobility Partnership between the EU and Armenia was established on 26 October 2011, with the participation of 10 EU Member States. That partnership has as an objective to enhance cooperation between the EU and Armenia as regards facilitation of legal migration, maximising the contribution of migration to development, prevention and fight against irregular immigration, as well as strengthening asylum and international protection.

The importance of enhancing the mobility of citizens in a secure and well-managed environment was recognised in the Eastern Partnership Summit declaration adopted on 24 November 2017. The commitment towards increased mobility was reaffirmed at the Eastern Partnership Summit of December 2021, where Member States and partner countries jointly stated that “*new visa liberalisation dialogues could be considered where conditions are met*”.

As a first gradual step towards the future visa-free travel, the EU-Armenia visa facilitation and readmission agreements entered into force on 1 January 2014. Since 1 January 2014, EU citizens have been exempted from a visa to travel to Armenia.

The European Council of 26-27 October 2023 invited the High Representative and the Commission to present options on how best to strengthen EU-Armenia relations “*in all their dimensions*”, including mobility. At the Foreign Affairs Council meeting of 22 July 2024, Foreign Ministers *welcomed “the intention of the Commission to launch a visa liberalisation dialogue with Armenia”*.

The visa liberalisation dialogue between the EU and Armenia aiming to examine all the relevant conditions for visa-free travel to the EU for Armenian citizens was launched in Yerevan on 9 September 2024. This process will be supported also through the Resilience and Growth Plan for Armenia for 2024-27, announced by President von der Leyen in April 2024.

1.2. Methodology

The objective of this Action Plan is to identify all the measures that need to be adopted and implemented by Armenia and to indicate in clear terms the requirements that must be achieved. The Action Plan is tailor-made to Armenia's current situation, considering the wide range of issues relevant for the visa liberalisation dialogue and the importance of establishing a secure environment for visa-free travel. The Action Plan takes into account the TAIEX expert missions conducted during the exploratory phase of the visa dialogue and the detailed information provided by Armenia prior to the missions related to each of the four blocks: document security, including biometrics; integrated border management, migration management, asylum; public order and security; external relations and fundamental rights. In case of a substantial change of the current situation, the Commission, in consultation with the Council, could propose a review and re-adaptation of the Action Plan.

To promote sustainable and well-planned reforms, the Action Plan contains two tiers of benchmarks that will be assessed in separate stages: preliminary benchmarks concerning the policy framework (legislation and planning), which would pave the way for meeting more specific benchmarks (effective and sustainable implementation of relevant measures). The European Parliament and the Council will be kept regularly informed through Commission reports on the fulfilment of each set of benchmarks, which will be assessed through on-site evaluations involving experts from EU Member States. To that end, the Commission expects Armenia to provide detailed information (including relevant statistical data and financial plans to support the implementation of the Action Plan in a sustainable way) allowing for an evaluation of concrete results on the ground.

Moreover, the full and effective implementation of the EU-Armenia Joint Readmission Agreement will continue to be monitored in the relevant Joint Committee. As regards the implementation of the EU-Armenia Visa Facilitation Agreement (monitored by its respective Joint Committee), particular importance will be attached to tackling risks of fraud involving supporting documents.

The Commission will also continuously monitor *inter alia* the visa refusal rate in Armenia, the number of Armenian citizens refused entry at the EU's external border or apprehended illegally staying in the EU, the number of return decisions and the number of returns to Armenia, the number of asylum applications in the EU from Armenian citizens, as well as other relevant performance indicators. The Commission will also provide an assessment of possible migratory and security impacts on the EU of future visa liberalisation for Armenia as well as taking into account inputs from relevant EU actors, before passing to the assessment of the second phase of benchmarks. Identified potential impacts and measures, will need to be addressed throughout the process of implementing the Action Plan on Visa Liberalisation.

Progress will be founded on a performance-based approach and conditioned on an effective and consistent implementation by Armenia of all benchmarks set by this Action Plan. There will be no automaticity in this process and progress in the fulfilment of each set of benchmarks will be closely examined by the Commission and the Council, with a view to reaching agreement to initiate the assessment of the second phase of benchmarks. The Commission will regularly report to the European Parliament and the Council, including updates on the follow-up of assessment measures of possible migratory and security impacts.

When deciding on whether to present a proposal to the European Parliament and the Council for the lifting of the short-stay visa obligation for Armenia citizens, through an amendment of Regulation EU 2018/1806 – limited to the holders of biometric passports issued in accordance with ICAO standards – the Commission will take also into account the overall relations between the EU and Armenia and possible impacts of visa liberalisation on the basis of trends in inter alia the visa refusal rate, the number of Armenian citizens refused entry at the EU’s external border or apprehended irregularly staying in the EU, the total number of asylum applications in the EU from Armenian citizens, including the misuse of visas for medical treatment, the number of return decisions and the number of returns to Armenia, and other relevant performance indicators.

A substantial improvement in these performance indicators over the course of the visa dialogue, will be used as an indicative reference in the Commission’s assessment of the expected migratory and security impacts of the liberalisation of the visa regime with Armenia, including at the time when the Commission will present its legislative proposal to lift the visa obligation for Armenian citizens.

Following the ordinary legislative procedure laid down in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union for these matters, on the basis of the Commission's proposal, the European Parliament and the Council will take a decision.

1.3. Initial assessment of possible impacts of future visa liberalisation

The exploratory phase of the EU-Armenia visa dialogue allowed for an initial assessment of the relevant factors for the future visa liberalisation. This detailed assessment of the situation on each of the four blocks (document security, including biometrics; integrated border management, migration management, asylum; public order and security; external relations and fundamental rights), allowed for specific recommendations to be made, in view of developing the relevant conditions for the future visa-free travel for Armenian citizens to the EU.

The findings of that assessment confirm that a sustainable visa-free regime for Armenian citizens can only be established once the relevant conditions are put in place. In particular, visa liberalisation is conditional upon: continuation of Armenia's reforms aiming at ensuring a high level of document security, including biometric passports, ID cards and breeder documents; strengthening of border and migration management, asylum and visa policy; reforms and cooperation in the area of public order and security (including addressing trafficking in human beings and the fight against corruption) and addressing external relations issues and fundamental freedoms (including human rights, protection of minorities and anti-discrimination measures) linked to the movement of persons. The assessment took into account the substantial progress made by Armenia in a significant number of areas relevant for the visa liberalisation dialogue. The continuation of these reforms and developments, including at the institutional level, should result in a high level of effectiveness, corresponding to relevant EU and international standards.

In addition, the full and effective implementation of the EU-Armenia Visa Facilitation and Readmission agreements (regularly monitored by the relevant Joint Committee) remains an underlying condition for the continuation of the visa dialogue and is of paramount importance for the establishment of a sustainable visa-free regime. The EU-Armenia Joint Readmission Committee has met nine times since January 2014, most recently in October 2023, and has found that the implementation of the readmission agreement is proceeding in an effective and efficient manner and to the overall satisfaction of both sides.

The same assessment has been made of the implementation of the EU-Armenia Visa Facilitation Agreement, the joint committee of which met for the seventh time in October 2023.

In terms of initial assessment of possible impacts of a future visa liberalisation, it must be noted that the visa refusal rate stayed almost unchanged between 2019 and 2023 (13.16% in 2019, 13.2% in 2023), while at the same time the total number of visas issued in this period increased by 36%. Latest data from 2024 show that the refusal rate remained stable (12.4%) whereas the number of visa applications increased from 80.356 in 2023 to 100.352 in 2024. The issuance of an increasing number of multiple entry visas for frequent-bona fide Armenian travellers should also be noted.

To note also that the number of Armenian citizens apprehended irregularly staying in the EU has been fluctuating in recent years but remained quite stable, going from 2 150 in 2019 to 2 295 in 2023. The number of Armenian asylum seekers in the EU has also slightly increased from 4 655 in 2019 to 5 125 in 2024 (6 110 in 2023). (*Eurostat data*)

2. ELEMENTS OF THE ACTION PLAN

Block 1: Document security, including biometrics

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

1.1 Consolidation of the legal and institutional framework ensuring the integrity and security of the civil status and civil registration process, including registration of all Armenian citizens in a unified and secure electronic population registry ensuring the highest data protection standards.

1.2 Consolidation of the legal and institutional framework for the issuing of machine-readable biometric passports, in full compliance with highest ICAO standards and recommended practices based on secure identity management (civil registry and breeder documents) according to the “one person one document” principle, including as regards diplomatic and service passports.

1.3 Adoption of a clear timeframe for the complete roll-out of biometric ICAO-compliant passports (including at Armenia’s consulates abroad) and of travel documents (including travel documents for all non-nationals that are distinct from ordinary national travel documents), in accordance with international standards, and for the complete phasing out of old passports

1.4 Adoption of a code of ethics, training programmes on anti-corruption as well as sanctions in case of non-compliance, secure management of personal documents and data protection for officials of public authorities that deal with passports, identity cards and other breeder documents.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

1.5 Effective implementation of the legal and institutional framework for document security, including provision of sufficient financial and human resources, with adequate training programmes.

1.6 Gradual roll-out of biometric passports in full compliance with highest ICAO standards and recommended practices, and complete phasing-out of old passports, including at Armenian consulates abroad and with secure enrolment of biometric data.

1.7 Implementation of the necessary measures to ensure a high level of integrity and security of the document application, personalisation and distribution process for passports, ensuring that stocks of documents are stored at adequately protected places and avoiding the issuance of multiple passports, identity cards and other breeder documents respectively per person.

1.8 Prompt and systematic reporting of travel and identity documents that are stolen, lost, revoked, invalid or stolen blanks to Interpol Stolen and Lost Travel Document database (SLTD).

1.9 Regular exchange of passport specimens, visa forms and information on false documents, and cooperation on document security with the EU and through Member States existing channels.

Block 2: Integrated border management, migration management, asylum

2.1 Integrated Border Management and visa policy

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

2.1.1 Consolidation of the legal and institutional framework for border management according to EU and international standards, including as regards security of data as well as comprehensive control over borders, guaranteeing also efficient inter-agency cooperation between all the agencies involved in border management.

2.1.2 Adoption of a national strategy for integrated border management (IBM) and action plan in accordance with international standards, containing a clear timeframe, strategic and specific objectives as well as implementation measures, detailed milestones, performance indicators and control mechanisms for the further development of legislation, organisation, infrastructure, equipment, sufficient human and financial resources in the area of border and return management, as well as international cooperation.

2.1.3 Adoption of a code of ethics and training programmes on anti-corruption and fight against organised crime, respect for fundamental rights, referral and asylum procedures relevant for border management and the fight against migrant smuggling and anti-trafficking measures specifically covering all the national authorities involved in IBM.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

2.1.4 Effective implementation and updating of the national strategy for integrated border management including return and readmission and action plan. This entails the implementation of legislation on border control through systematic and adequate border checks while ensuring border surveillance and operational effectiveness, the establishment of a full situational picture, including through the use of risk analysis, efficient intelligence and data-flow management, direct access and consultation of relevant national and international databases as well as regular reporting on meeting the IBM strategy's performance indicators.

2.1.5 Continued improvement of inter-agency cooperation (including exchange of data between all the authorities involved in IBM, including border guards and customs).

2.1.6 Provision of adequate infrastructure, technical equipment, IT systems, financial and human resources in accordance with the IBM strategy and action plan, and effective implementation of training programmes and anti-corruption measures.

2.1.7 Continued improvement in international cooperation, including cooperation with neighbouring countries and commitment to deepen operational cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard, including negotiation and implementation of a new working arrangement with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).

2.1.8 Regular assessment and follow-up mechanism established by the Armenian authorities of possible security or immigration risks to the EU resulting from Armenia's visa policy, including sharing of the result of these regular assessments and the relevant data with the EU.

2.1.9 Enhance cooperation with the EU to effectively address the issue of non-recovery of debts incurred by Armenian nationals staying within the Schengen area in relation to the healthcare systems, including the development of relevant information campaigns.

2.2 Migration Management

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

2.2.1 Consolidation of the legal and institutional framework for migration policy, in line with EU and international standards, including in the field of legal/labour migration, measures supporting the integration of foreigners and the re-integration of Armenian citizens (returning voluntarily or not) and the fight against irregular migration (including continued efforts to conclude readmission agreements with the main countries of origin and/or transit and inland detection of irregular migrants).

2.2.2 Adoption of a national migration strategy which ensures an efficient application of the legal aspects of migration policy, including fundamental rights standards (including for children), clear time frames, purposes, activities, results, performance indicators, as well as development and approval of the relevant action plan providing for the human and financial resources.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

2.2.3 Fully ensure and enforce the continued effective implementation of the EU-Armenia readmission agreement, in order to contribute to the increase of the number of effective returns as well as relevant readmission agreements of Armenia with third countries, and of measures providing for the sustainable reintegration of Armenian citizens (returning voluntarily or not).

2.2.4 Effective implementation of the legal framework for migration management, including provision of administrative structures with adequate human and financial resources with clear competences for all aspects of migration management, as well as effective cooperation between relevant agencies.

2.2.5 Consolidation and regular updating of Armenia's migration profile, and effective analysis of data on migration stocks and flows (including those listed in the methodology), as well their regular exchange with EU competent authorities.

2.2.6 Consistent implementation of an effective methodology on inland detection of irregular migrants, risk analysis (including the reporting of relevant agencies and analysis on all administrative levels), and investigation of cases of organised facilitated irregular migration, including effective cooperation between relevant agencies.

2.2.7 Provision of an adequate infrastructure (including detention centres) and strengthening of responsible bodies to ensure, according to EU and international standards and in full respect of migrants' fundamental rights, the effective return of irregularly staying and/or transiting third country nationals from the territory of Armenia, taking due consideration of the best interests of the child when minors are involved, and corresponding reintegration assistance programmes.

2.3 Asylum policy

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

2.3.1 Consolidation and approximation to the EU and international standards of the legal and institutional framework of the asylum policy in full compliance with the non-refoulement principle and comprising subsidiary protection, through adoption of legislation ensuring effective access to fair procedures for status determination, rights protection (freedom of movement, healthcare, education, non-discrimination, other labour and social rights), durable solutions, including the integration of seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, as well as special attention to persons in a vulnerable situation, including stateless persons.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

2.3.2 Effective implementation of asylum legislation, including provision of an adequate infrastructure and strengthening of the responsible authorities (staff, funding, training programmes), in particular in the area of asylum procedures, reception of persons seeking international protection and beneficiaries of international protection, protection of their rights and dignity, as well as integration of seekers and beneficiaries of international protection, ensuring their capacity to self-sustain, to access public services and social and labour rights and to integrate in Armenia, including access to travel documents as foreseen by the legislation.

Block 3. Public order and security

3.1 Preventing and fighting organized crime, terrorism and corruption

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

3.1.1. Consolidation, according to the EU and international standards, of the legal and institutional framework for preventing and fighting organised crime, together with a national strategy and action plan containing, within a clear timeframe, specific objectives, activities, results, performance indicators and sufficient human and financial resources.

3.1.2 Consolidate the legal and institutional framework in the field of fight against trafficking in human beings and bring it into compliance with the EU and international standards including the development and approval of the relevant action plan providing for clear timeframes, objectives, activities, results, performance indicators, human and financial resources.

3.1.3 Consolidation of the legal and institutional framework for prevention and fight against corruption and adaptation thereof to EU and international standards, as well as adoption of a national anti-corruption strategy, development and approval of action plan targeted at the enforcement of the said strategy and providing for clear time-frames, objectives, activities, results, performance indicators, human and financial resources, coordination of efforts of anti-corruption bodies, including the Anti-Corruption Council and the Corruption Prevention Commission, aiming notably at ensuring the independence, efficiency, empowerment and accountability of the authorities responsible for the fight against corruption and strengthening the mechanisms for information exchange between them; establishment of a sound legislative and regulated institutional framework, including adoption of secondary legislation necessary for an efficient functioning of internal control mechanisms targeted at the prevention and repression of corruption (including corruption at high-levels, corruption in international transactions and protection of whistleblowers reporting on cases of corruption), corruption risks and at setting integrity standards within public institutions/authorities; consolidation of the legislative framework for the, amongst others, follow-up of GRECO (Council of Europe Group of States against Corruption) and OECD (Anti-Corruption Network – Istanbul Anti-Corruption action plan) recommendations.

3.1.4 Consolidation of the legal and institutional framework for anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) and bringing it in line with EU and international standards set by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

3.1.5 Regular update of the corresponding AML/CFT national strategy.

3.1.6 Consolidation of an Independent Financial Intelligence Unit, with adequate powers and resources.

3.1.7 Consolidation of the legal and institutional framework for asset recovery and bringing it in line with EU and international standards, including the establishment of an asset recovery office.

3.1.8 Adoption of legislative framework for the protection of whistleblowers reporting, among others, on money laundering and terrorism financing.

3.1.9 Adoption of a national strategy concerning drug policies, taking a balanced and comprehensive approach, including measures aimed to fight against drug trafficking as well as addressing demand and the harms related to drugs, in compliance with EU and international standards, as well as development and approval of action plan providing for clear timeframes, objectives, activities, results, performance indicators, human and financial resources designed to ensure the implementation of the national strategy.

3.1.10 Signature, ratification and transposition into national legislation of all relevant UN and Council of Europe conventions and respective protocols in the areas listed above and on the fight against terrorism, including the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism as well as the 1996 Hague Convention on Protection of Children (Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Cooperation in respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children), the 2007 Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, and the Additional Protocol to the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

3.1.11 Implementation of the legislation, national strategy and action plan on preventing and fighting organised crime, including effective coordination between the relevant authorities, as well as conducting effective investigation, prosecution and confiscation of proceeds of crime.

3.1.12 Implementation of legislation, national strategy and action plan on combating trafficking in human beings, including effective coordination between state agencies, effective protection and an adequate referral mechanism to support services and assistance of victims of trafficking, in particular children, as well as effective measures to prosecute and convict human traffickers and users of services of trafficking victims; provision of adequate infrastructures and funds ensuring decent reception conditions and protection of the rights and dignity of trafficking victims, and supporting their social and professional reintegration.

3.1.13 Effective implementation of the legal framework and national strategy and action plan on preventing and fighting corruption, ensuring the independence and efficient functioning (including analytical capacity) of anti-corruption bodies, including the Anti-Corruption Council and the Corruption Prevention Commission; ensuring effective measures for addressing corruption in areas/sectors identified as being most vulnerable (risk assessments); ensuring and maintaining a convincing track-record of corruption cases (from prosecutions to final court decisions), including corruption at high-levels, as well as of detection and sanctioning of conflicts of interest and unjustified wealth; development of effective codes of ethics accompanied by sanctions applicable to public officials (elected and appointed) and notably regarding elected officials at central and local level, law enforcement and judiciary; ensuring appropriate capacity, specialisation and training of law enforcement and judiciary to detect and address corruption cases in an efficient manner; ensuring the establishment of confidential reporting channels at least in the public administration, appropriate handling and follow-up to such reports by authorities designated as competent for this purpose, and effective protection of whistleblowers, including by ensuring their access to legal remedies.

3.1.14 Implementation of the AML/CFT legislation, including on reporting obligations; implementation of relevant legislation on search, freezing, seizure and confiscation of assets of criminals (including of the provisions addressing cross-border aspects)) to tackle organised crime and terrorist financing.

3.1.15 Implementation of the national strategy concerning drug policies, and action plan, ensuring adequate working of the inter-agency coordination, making the information on drug seizures and persons involved accessible at border crossing points, and further developing cooperation and information exchange with relevant international bodies in the drug field; pursuing effective cooperation with the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA).

3.1.16 Sound implementation of relevant UN and Council of Europe Conventions, as well as GRECO recommendations in the above-mentioned areas.

3.1.17 Provision of sufficient financial and human resources, including adequate training programmes, to ensure effective implementation of all the measures mentioned above.

3.2 Judicial cooperation in criminal matters

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

3.2.1 Consolidation of the legal and institutional frameworks ensuring efficient mutual assistance in criminal matters.

3.2.2 Signature, ratification and transposition into the national legislation of relevant international conventions and the protocols thereof, in particular, the Second Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters and the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

3.2.3 Sound implementation of international conventions concerning judicial assistance, judicial cooperation in criminal matters and protection of children (in particular Council of Europe Conventions).

3.2.4 Providing the necessary financial and institutional arrangements (i.e. financial, human and technical resources, including training for judges and prosecutors) for ensuring a high level of effectiveness of judicial co-operation in criminal matters, including on extradition and criminal asset recovery matters, with the EU Member States and third countries. The necessary training for judges and prosecutors should also be provided to this end.

3.2.5 Implementation through legislative and sub-legislative instruments of the obligations stemming from the international agreement on cooperation with Eurojust, including as regards an independent data protection supervisory authority.

3.2.6 Conclusion of negotiations and effective implementation of a working arrangement with the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), in accordance with the rules set out in the EPPO Regulation 2017/1939.

3.3 Law enforcement cooperation

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

3.3.1 Introduction of effective coordination mechanisms between competent state agencies and establishment of a common data bank (of IT system) envisaging the right to direct access for relevant officials.

3.3.2 Pursuing effective structured cooperation through the implementation of the Working Arrangement with both Europol (including through the SIENA connection and the deployment of a liaison officer) and CEPOL, as well as continuing active participation in regional capacity-building projects in the Eastern Partnership area.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

3.3.3 Ensuring a high level of operational and special investigative capacity of law enforcement services and its consistent and efficient use to tackle cross-border crime.

3.3.4 Ensuring a high level of effectiveness of law enforcement co-operation among relevant national agencies - especially border guards, police, customs officers -, as well as cooperation with the judicial authorities.

3.3.5 Once structured cooperation with Europol has been achieved, working towards establishing a structured exchange of personal data between Armenia's relevant law enforcement authorities and Europol notably through an international agreement concluded with the Union

3.3.6 Strengthened bilateral and multilateral operational law enforcement cooperation agreements or working arrangements, namely with INTERPOL, including by sharing on time relevant information and conducting joint investigations and operations with competent law enforcement authorities of EU Member States and third countries, in line with data protection requirements and through the appropriate channels.

3.4 Data protection

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

3.4.1 Consolidation of the legal and institutional frameworks currently effective in the field of personal data protection, and bringing those in line with the EU and international standards, including through the adoption of by-laws, instructions and regulations to regulate appropriate processes, operations and procedures

3.4.2 Transposition into the national legislation of relevant international conventions, protocols and recommendations, including the 2001 Additional Protocol to the European Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data regarding to supervisory authorities and transborder data flows (ETS 181), the 2018 Protocol amending the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (CETS No. 223), and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation No. R (87) 15 regulating the use of personal data in the Police Sector.

3.4.3 Establishment of an independent personal data protection supervisory agency vested with adequate powers and obligations.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

3.4.4 Implementation of the legislation on the protection of personal data both in the public and private sectors.

3.4.5 Ensure efficient functioning of the independent data protection supervisory authority both in the public and private sectors also through the allocation of the necessary human and financial resources.

3.4.6 Conduct training programmes and raise awareness on data protection, including establishment of guidelines and codes of ethics for officials and authorities concerned.

Block 4: External relations and Fundamental rights

4.1 Freedom of movement within the Republic of Armenia

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

4.1.1 Improvement and consolidation of the legal framework regulating the registration of foreign citizens and stateless persons legally residing within the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

4.1.2 Ensuring that freedom of movement within Armenia of Armenian citizens, legally staying foreigners and stateless persons is not subject to unjustified restrictions, including measures of a discriminatory nature, based on any ground such as gender, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, health status (including HIV/AIDS), language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation.

4.2 Conditions and procedures for the issuance of travel and identity documents

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

4.2.1 Consolidation of legal and institutional frameworks ensuring the setup of an effective and fully functional system for the issuance of travel and identity documentation without any discrimination, including for women, children, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, persons belonging to minorities or persons in a vulnerable situation.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

4.2.2 Full and effective access to travel and identity documents for all Armenian citizens including women, children, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, refugees, people belonging to minorities and persons in a vulnerable situation.

4.3 Rights of the citizens including protection of minorities

1st phase (legislative and policy framework):

4.3.1 Adoption of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, as recommended by UN and Council of Europe monitoring bodies, to promote equality and ensure effective protection against discrimination, including setting up a dedicated equality body.

4.3.2 Signature, ratification and transposition into the national legislation of relevant UN and the Council of Europe legal documents promoting equality and addressing anti-discrimination, taking into account the provisions of the UN Convention “On the Status of Stateless persons” and the standing recommendations of the Council of Europe regarding the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Consolidate policies to ensure the socio-economic inclusion of displaced persons.

4.3.3 Establishing fair and transparent conditions for the acquisition of Armenian citizenship, which will also address the challenges linked to the facilitation of Armenian naturalisation and dual-citizenship, and mitigate the risk of abuse of the possible future visa-free regime. Refraining from developing an investor citizenship scheme.

4.3.4 Elaboration and adoption of a National Strategy and action plan on Human Rights, actively pursuing recommendations and standards, notably on equality and anti-discrimination, minority rights, personal data protection, effective access to justice and religious freedom by UN bodies, OSCE/ODIHR, CoE and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and other international human rights bodies.

2nd phase (benchmarks for effective implementation):

4.3.5 Effective implementation of legislation and policies gender equality and anti-discrimination, including by ensuring effective legal aid and the independence of the judiciary; implementation of relevant UN and Council of Europe instruments and allocation of adequate human and financial resources to the dedicated equality body.

4.3.6 Effective implementation of the National Human Rights Strategy and action plan measures to prevent and address discrimination (including allocation of adequate human and financial resources), including to ensure the rights of persons belonging to minorities, personal data protection, effective access to justice (including fair trial rights) and religious freedom; general awareness raising campaigns against racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination; strengthening the capacities of responsible bodies for anti-discrimination policy and combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination.

4.3.7 Effective implementation of relevant policies to strengthen the accountability of the law enforcement authorities, including through training and effective (disciplinary and criminal) proceedings, as necessary.

4.3.8 Effective implementation of relevant policies to ensure the socio-economic inclusion of the displaced Karabakh Armenians.