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Family reunification of third-country nationals: State of play of law and practice

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The study was complemented by a questionnaire prepared by the European Commission and submitted to three international organisations, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Red Cross EU Office to gather their inputs. Their combined inputs have been added as boxes in the study, under the relevant sections. The boxes are not present in this inform.

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

This inform was prepared on the basis of national contributions from 25 EMN NCPs (AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and RS) collected via an AHQ developed by the EMN NCPs to ensure, to the extent possible, comparability. The information contained in this inform refers to the situation in the abovementioned EMN Member and Observer Countries up to February 2025

Statistics were sourced from Eurostat, national authorities and other (national) databases.

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1. KEY POINTS TO NOTE

- **Family reunification policies have evolved significantly since 2017** when the last study on family reunification was published by the European Migration Network (EMN), with many Member and Observer Countries aligning their national laws with European Union (EU) case law, introducing digitalised procedures, and embedding family reunification in broader migration and labour strategies.¹
- **EMN Member and Observer Countries have increasingly differentiated their approaches**, facilitating family reunification for attracting certain categories such as skilled workers, while introducing stricter requirements for other groups, such as age thresholds, waiting periods, and proof of income.
- **Eligibility rules for sponsors and family members vary**, with most countries permitting third-country nationals with valid permits to act as sponsors. Definitions of eligible family members range from nuclear to extended family, depending on factors such as dependency and humanitarian grounds.
- **Material and integration requirements remain key conditions for family reunification**, although many countries apply exemptions or case-by-case flexibility for vulnerable groups such as beneficiaries of international protection (BIP), unaccompanied minors, and older adult dependents.
- **Application procedures differ between Member States**, including who can submit the application and how (via consulates, in-person, or online). Required documents, when unavailable, may be substituted with alternative evidence such as interviews or DNA testing, witness statements and history records of the family.
- **Delays, high costs and administrative burdens persist**, especially for applicants from conflict-affected regions. Good practices include digitalisation, priority processing for minors, and inter-agency coordination emerging as effective solutions.
- **Post-reunification access to rights such as education, employment, and healthcare is generally granted**, often supplemented by tailored support like language training, diploma recognition, and vocational services, particularly for BIP.
- **Early access to long-term or autonomous residence varies**, and delays risk dependency on the sponsor. Some countries provide conditions for earlier access in cases of domestic violence or widowhood and are exploring broader equal rights frameworks to enhance integration.



2. INTRODUCTION

Family reunification has long been one of the main channels of legal migration to the EU, accounting for 26% of all first residence permits issued in 2023, or nearly one million permits, according to Eurostat. It plays a crucial role in upholding the right to family life under international and EU law, supporting the integration of third-country nationals, and contributing to labour market needs when family members enter employment.

The EU's legal framework for family reunification of third-country nationals is anchored in Council Directive

2003/86/EC (Family Reunification Directive), which sets out the conditions and rights associated with family reunification for legally residing third-country nationals. Since its adoption in 2003, several significant developments have shaped its implementation, including amendments to national legislation, key rulings by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), and the growing digitalisation of migration procedures across Member States.



3. SCOPE AND RATIONALE

This inform is a concise summary of the main findings of the EMN 2024 study on *Family reunification of third-country nationals in the EU: state of play of law and practice*, corresponding to the executive summary of the mentioned study. It presents the overview of the current situation and latest developments (from January 2017 up to February 2025) related to the implementation of the Family Reunification Directive. It examines the current state of national legislation, policies, and practices after two decades of the Directive's application, incorporating relevant case law and highlighting challenges and good practices. For countries not applying the Directive, such as Ireland and Serbia, the study offers a comparative perspective on similar national frameworks governing family reunification.

Aimed primarily at national policymakers, the study itself supports the development of effective family reunification policies and promotes the exchange of good practices across EMN countries. It maps recent legislative and policy changes, including those prompted by rulings of the CJEU, and explores complementary pathways. It also presents data on the scale and evolution of family reunification between 2017 and 2023 (and 2024 where available), drawing on both Eurostat and national sources. The findings are also relevant to practitioners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international organisations, and the general public engaged in this area.

As specified above, when reference is made to beneficiaries of international protection (BIP) throughout the study, it

¹ Note for the reader: The key points/executive summary section provides a summary of the main information contained in the inform or study. For ease of reading, key points do not contain footnotes. Please note that EMN Member and Observer Countries referred to in the key points or executive summary are listed in the relevant sections within the current document.

means that the rules described apply to both refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. In case of

differentiation, the study will explicitly refer only to refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection.



4. OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN RESPECT OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION

According to Eurostat data, the number of first-time residences permits granted for family reunification to family members joining a non-EU citizen in the 27 EU Member States fluctuated from 531 000 in 2018 to 632 000 in 2023. In 2023, the number of first permits issued for family reasons to non-EU citizens varied from 1 152 issued in Estonia to 168 536 permits issued in Germany. The number of permits issued per 1 000 people on the EU-level was 1.4 permits, ranging between 0.1 in Romania, and 6.8 permits issued in Cyprus.

Numerous changes have been introduced by EMN Member and Observer Countries since 2017, including legislative reforms aligned with EU case law, enhanced digitalisation, and tailored approaches to support skilled migration and integration. As such, family reunification is increasingly integrated into broader migration and labour policies.

Several Member States have facilitated faster or more flexible reunification pathways for skilled workers and their families, in line also with legal changes at EU level in the EU Blue card Directive,² while others³ have introduced stricter requirements for other categories, including minimum age, waiting periods, and proof of sufficient resources. Targeted support for specific groups and BIP is also expanding in some countries.⁴ While France, Germany and Italy have implemented family assistance programmes, four countries⁵ provided information on support for family reunification through existing services. For those not meeting standard requirements, alternative legal avenues may be available, such as humanitarian grounds⁶ or protection of family life under Article 8 of the ECHR,⁷ offering tailored solutions based on individual circumstances.



5. DEFINITIONS OF SPONSOR AND FAMILY MEMBERS

All EMN Member and Observer Countries allow third-country nationals with valid residence permits and refugees to act as sponsors, with some also permitting unaccompanied minors or highly skilled workers to sponsor family members. Beneficiaries of subsidiary protection are also generally eligible,⁸ although often subject to stricter requirements than refugees.

The definition of eligible family members varies across EMN countries. All countries allow reunification with

spouses and minor children under 18, although rules on determining minority status differ. Many countries also permit reunification with adult children,⁹ parents,¹⁰ non-married¹¹ and same-sex partners,¹² and other dependent or extended family members¹³ under specific circumstances, such as health-related dependency or humanitarian grounds. Some countries recognise long-term or registered partnerships, while others limit eligibility to nuclear family members only.



6. REQUIREMENTS AND CONDITIONS FOR EXERCISING THE RIGHT TO FAMILY REUNIFICATION

As per the Family Reunification Directive, EU Member States may require proof of suitable accommodation,¹⁴ sickness insurance,¹⁵ and stable and regular financial resources.¹⁶ While many countries impose minimum space,¹⁷

hygiene,¹⁸ and suitability standards for accommodation,¹⁹ several offer exemptions, particularly for refugees²⁰ and unaccompanied minors.²¹ Exemptions and case-by-case flexibility exist for specific categories, such as refugees,²²

² AT, DE, FI, HU, IE, LT, LU, NL, SK.

³ DE, EE, FI, FR, IT, SE.

⁴ DE, ES, IE, LT, LV, SI.

⁵ AT, FI, LT, LV.

⁶ BE, DE, ES, HR, IT, LV, and RS.

⁷ BE, CY, DE, FR, LU, NL, SE, SK.

⁸ AT, BE, BG, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and RS.

⁹ AT (under very specific circumstances), BE, BG, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FI, HR, HU (only for persons eligible for freedom of movement), IE, IT, LU, LV (only in cases when the adult children are legally incapacitated), NL, SI, SK and RS.

¹⁰ AT (under specific circumstances), BG, CZ, DE (under very specific circumstances), EE, EL, ES, FI, IE, IT, LT, LU, PL, SE, SI, SK and RS.

¹¹ AT, BE, BG, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR (family reunification of BIP), HR, IE, LT, LU, NL, SE, SI and RS.

¹² AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL (in certain cases), ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT (registered partnership), LT, LU, NL, SE, SI.

¹³ AT (under certain circumstances), BE, EE, EL, FI, HR, HU, LV, NL, SE, SI, SK and RS.

¹⁴ AT, BE, BG, CZ, CY, DE, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV (proof of intended residence), MT, SE, SK.

¹⁵ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SI, SK and RS.

¹⁶ AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK and RS.

¹⁷ AT, BE (certain regions), CZ, DE, FR, HU, IT, LT, LU, SI, SK.

¹⁸ AT, BE, CZ, ES, FR, IT, LT, LU, SK.

¹⁹ AT, BE, CZ, ES, HR, HU, IT, LT, LU, SK.

²⁰ AT (under certain circumstances), BE, CY, DE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, SI, SK.

²¹ AT (under certain circumstances), BE, CY, DE, EL, ES, FR, LT, LV, SI, SK.

²² AT (under certain circumstances), BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, IE, LT, LU, LV, NL, SI, SK.

unaccompanied minors,²³ highly skilled workers,²⁴ and older adult dependents.²⁵ The study also notes varying approaches to calculating income thresholds and reference periods across EMN Member Countries.

In addition to material conditions, some EMN Member Countries²⁶ impose integration requirements, including pre- and post-arrival civic or language obligations. Some EMN Member Countries also apply waiting periods before family reunification is permitted. These waiting periods vary from one to three years, although some countries waive it for refugees.²⁷ The study also highlights the importance of taking into account the best interests of the child and family circumstances when assessing applications for family reunification. More favourable provisions apply to refugees, including a grace period of (minimum) three months before the integration requirements for exercising the right to family reunification can be requested.²⁸

EU Blue Card holders,²⁹ researchers,³⁰ and intra-corporate transferees³¹ also enjoy a more favourable family reunification regime, including shorter processing times³² and exemptions from integration measures.³³

Despite these provisions, several challenges persist.³⁴ High housing costs,³⁵ strict income thresholds,³⁶ and burdensome documentation requirements³⁷ can hinder the family reunification efforts. Integration requirements, particularly language proficiency, also pose barriers, especially for vulnerable applicants.³⁸ Good practices³⁹ include flexible case-by-case decision-making, prioritisation of applications from vulnerable groups, and support services for newly arrived family members. In Luxembourg, for example, there is a dedicated service for newly arrived pupils and parents “the School Integration and Welcoming Service”.



7. APPLICATION PROCESS FOR FAMILY REUNIFICATION

The study uncovers similarities and differences in how EMN Member and Observer Countries manage the submission and examination of family reunification applications. EMN Member and Observer Countries provide information on application for family reunification, primarily through migration authority websites,⁴⁰ but also via telephone,⁴¹ email,⁴² booklets⁴³ or in-person at advice centres⁴⁴ with many also offering such advice via diplomatic and consular missions,⁴⁵ municipalities,⁴⁶ NGOs,⁴⁷ and international organisations such as IOM⁴⁸ and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR).⁴⁹ In some cases, multilingual content⁵⁰ and tailored materials are provided, especially for refugees.⁵¹

Procedures for lodging applications vary between countries, where applications may be submitted either by the sponsor⁵² and/or the family member,⁵³ depending on national rules and the applicant's status. Submission methods for the sponsor include in-person,⁵⁴ postal,⁵⁵ or online channels.⁵⁶ In countries where the family member submits the application, this is typically done at the diplomatic mission or consular post in the country where the person resides or in another country where there is diplomatic representation.⁵⁷

To support the application, a range of documentation of identity and family relationships is required, including, most commonly, a valid travel document,⁵⁸ a marriage certificate⁵⁹ and a birth certificate.⁶⁰ Where such documents

23 AT (under certain circumstances), BE, DE, EE, LU, LV, SI.

24 BE, DE, NL.

25 BE, SI.

26 AT, CZ, DE, ES, FR, IT, NL.

27 EL, IE (no waiting period for BIP provided they apply within 12 months of receiving their decision), IT (for both refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection), LU, LV, NL and RS.

28 AT, BE, CZ, CY, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, LT, NL, SE, SI, SK.

29 AT, BE, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PL, SI, SK.

30 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SI, SK.

31 BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IT, LT, LU, MT, NL, PL, SI, SK.

32 BE, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, LT, LU, LV, NL, SI, SK.

33 AT, BE, DE, EE, ES, FR, NL.

34 AT, BE, BG, DE, EL, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, NL, PL, SK and RS.

35 AT, BE, DE, LU.

36 AT, BE, DE, FI, IE, LU, SK.

37 DE, EL, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LU, LV, MT, SE, SK.

38 AT, IT, NL.

39 IE, IT, LU.

40 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, MT, NL, SE, SI, SK, and RS.

41 AT, CZ, DE, EE, FI, LT, LV, PL, SE, SK.

42 CZ, DE, EE, FI, LT, LV, SE, SK.

43 DE, EE, EL, FR, SK.

44 AT, DE, EE, FI, LT, LV, MT, SK.

45 BE, DE, FI, IT.

46 AT, BE, DE, EE, ES, FI, IT, SK.

47 AT, DE, EE, ES, FI, IE, IT, LT, LV, SK.

48 DE, EE, IE, LT, SK.

49 BE, EE, ES, IE, LT, LV.

50 BE, CZ, EE, EL, FR, FI, LT, LU, SK.

51 EE, EL, FR.

52 BG, CY, EE (for international protection), EL, ES, FR (except international protection), IE (for international protection and minors), IT, LV (for international protection), NL, PL, SI.

53 AT (or by a person authorised by the family member), BE, CZ, DE, EE (except international protection), FI, FR (for international protection), HR, HU, IE (except international protection), LT, LU, LV (except international protection), NL, SE, SK and RS.

54 BG, CY, EE, EL, ES, IE (in some cases), LU, PL, SI.

55 FR, IE, LU, LV, NL, SI.

56 CY, EL, ES, FR, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL.

57 AT, BE, CZ, EE, FI, FR, HR, LT, LU, LV, NL, SE, SK.

58 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, MT, SE, SI, SK, and RS.

59 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and RS.

60 AT, BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK, and RS.

are unavailable, alternative evidence such as interviews,⁶¹ witness statements,⁶² or DNA testing⁶³ may be accepted. Administrative fees apply in most countries,⁶⁴ although certain categories of persons are exempt⁶⁵ from fees or are subject to lower fees.⁶⁶ Across countries, the processing times varies significantly between the legal time limits and the actual duration in practice. Many countries have legal deadlines for decision-making depending on the type of application, ranging from 10 days in Latvia for family members of EU Blue Card holders to the maximum limit prescribed in the Family Reunification Directive of nine months in some countries.⁶⁷

Practical implementation varies widely, with several EMN Member and Observer Countries highlighting challenges

such as long processing times,⁶⁸ difficulties in accessing consular services,⁶⁹ and high costs for applicants,⁷⁰ particularly for refugees from conflict zones. National authorities face administrative burdens due to fragmented responsibilities, document verification issues, and growing caseloads.⁷¹ Good practices include digitalisation of applications (e.g. France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania), improved inter-agency coordination (e.g. Finland, Lithuania), targeted support for vulnerable groups (e.g. Ireland's travel assistance programme), and standardised national procedures. Slovenia reported effective efforts to improve access to information and introduce priority channels for unaccompanied minors and applicants with special needs.



8. ACCESS TO RIGHTS FOLLOWING FAMILY REUNIFICATION

In line with Article 14 of the Family Reunification Directive, family members generally have access to education, employment, and vocational training under the same conditions as the sponsor. Tailored support measures such as language training,⁷² civic integration programmes,⁷³ and diploma recognition⁷⁴ are often available, particularly for refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and their families.⁷⁵ Access to healthcare and social benefits is also broadly provided, although the scope and conditions vary depending on national systems and the sponsor's residence status. Autonomous residence permits must be granted no later than five years after arrival, with some countries allowing earlier access,⁷⁶ particularly in cases of widowhood, separation, or domestic violence. Family members may also apply for long-term residence

or naturalisation after a specified period, ranging from 3 to 5 years for long-term residence⁷⁷ and 5 to 10 years for citizenship through naturalisation.⁷⁸ Recent legislative changes have extended these periods (e.g. Finland, the Netherlands).

Despite the legal entitlements, challenges persist in practice. These include bureaucratic barriers,⁷⁹ delays or difficulties with registration,⁸⁰ and social and labour market integration,⁸¹ particularly for women and vulnerable groups. Some Member States reported dependency risks when access to autonomous residence is delayed. Good practices in addressing these barriers include early integration programmes (e.g. Italy), specialised educational support (e.g. Serbia), and labour market reforms such as the abolition of the labour market test (e.g. Luxembourg).



9. CONCLUSIONS

■ **Between 2017 and 2025, the scope of who can be a sponsor for family reunification in EMN Member and Observer Countries has broadened and become more harmonised.** While already in 2017, most countries allowed third-country national sponsors with valid residence permits and those granted international protection to act as sponsors, by 2025 this has become

standard practice across all EMN countries, including for those holding temporary residence. Notable changes also occurred in the treatment of specific family members. Access for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection has also expanded. Whereas in 2017 access for this group varied—with some Member States applying waiting periods or specific limitations—by 2025, most

61 AT, BE, BG, CY, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, LT, LU, LV (BIP), MT, NL, SE, SI, and RS.

62 BE, CY, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, LU, LV (BIP), NL, SE, SI, and RS.

63 AT, BE, BG, DE, EE (possible in legislation, but not done in practice), EL, FI, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, NL, SE.

64 AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL, SK, and RS.

65 BE, CY, EE, EL, LT, LV (BIP and family members are exempt from the fee when applying for a residence permit for the first time), NL, SE, SK, and RS.

66 AT, CZ, EE, NL, SE, and RS.

67 BE, CY, CZ, LU, MT.

68 BE, DE, EL, FI, FR, IE, SE.

69 AT, BE, BG, EE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, LV, NL.

70 AT, BE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, SE.

71 AT, BE, DE, EE, FR, IE, IT, LU, LV, NL, SE.

72 AT, CY, CZ, EE, EL, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LU, SK.

73 BE, DE (access granted to integration courses (language and civic training), but generally not free of charge; participation is mandatory unless the person already has a good command of the German language), EE, FI, FR, IT, LU.

74 EE, HR, LT, LU, SI.

75 In Czech Republic and Greece, support measures are only available for refugees and their families.

76 AT, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, NL, SE and RS.

77 For example, the minimum years of continuous residence required for family members applying for permanent residency is: three years: DE, HR, HU, SE; four years: FI; five years: AT, CY, CZ, EL, ES, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, SK. In all cases, specific conditions can be and/or are applied, depending on national legislation.

78 For example, the minimum years of continuous residence required for family members applying for citizenship through naturalisation is: five years: BE, CZ, DE, IE, LU; eight years: EE, HU; 10 years: AT, IT, LT, SK. In all cases, specific conditions can be and/or are applied, depending on national legislation.

79 BE, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU.

80 FI, FR.

81 DE, IE, SI.

countries permit beneficiaries of subsidiary protection to sponsor family members under the same conditions as refugees. With regard to parents, whereas some Member States previously excluded them entirely unless the sponsor was an unaccompanied minor, by 2025 more countries allow reunification in cases of proven dependency, often linked to health, financial, or social factors. Similarly, family reunification with adult children, once highly restricted and generally limited to cases of disability or dependency, is now permitted under specific conditions in the majority of countries, though implementation still varies. Recognition of same-sex partners has also advanced: while in 2017 a few Member States did not acknowledge same-sex partnerships for reunification purposes, by 2025 the majority of EMN Member Countries recognise registered same-sex partnerships or marriages as equivalent to heterosexual unions, although exceptions remain in a limited number of states. Overall, the trend has been toward more inclusive definitions of family and sponsor eligibility, though with continued divergences in national practices.

In terms of requirements, countries have increasingly formalised and standardised the requirements for family reunification, particularly regarding accommodation, health insurance, financial resources, and integration. While many of these requirements already existed in 2017, by 2025 more countries specify detailed criteria—such as minimum housing space, hygiene standards, and income thresholds—often with inspections or documentation. Exemptions for refugees and, where applicable, for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have become more widespread. Financial requirements now more often consider future income or family member contributions, and humanitarian exemptions are more systematically applied. Integration measures are now required in a growing number of countries, either before or after arrival, including language proficiency and civic integration linked to residence permits. This reflects a broader shift toward clearer, more conditional access, with increased differentiation based on status and application timing.

■ **Recent and planned legal and policy changes demonstrate a dual trend of facilitating family reunification for skilled migrants while introducing more restrictive measures for other categories.**

Legal and policy reforms increasingly focus on attracting high-skilled labour by easing family reunification processes, including immediate labour market access for family members and digitalised applications. Planned reforms in several Member States suggest a trend towards tightening access to family reunification, especially for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, with the implementation of restrictive measures such as waiting periods, reduced eligibility for extended family members, and stricter documentation requirements.

■ **The definition of eligible family members differs considerably between EMN Member and Observer Countries, with nuclear family members granted family reunification, but eligibility of extended family members depending on national legislation and specific conditions.**

Unlike nuclear family members, family reunification for adult children, parents, non-married or same-sex partners, and other dependent relatives often requires proof of dependency, health conditions, or humanitarian considerations. This variation results in differing levels of access to family reunification.

■ **Requirements related to accommodation, financial resources, and sickness insurance remain core conditions for family reunification across EMN Member and Observer Countries, but their application varies significantly, depending on the sponsor's status and national frameworks.**

While these requirements are broadly implemented among EMN Member and Observer countries, a range of exemptions exist, particularly for refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, and highly skilled migrants, reflecting efforts to balance migration management with humanitarian and economic considerations.

■ **Waiting periods, integration conditions, and income thresholds are identified as obstacles in practice for sponsors and their families.**

In several countries, meeting the financial and accommodation requirements can be particularly challenging due to high income thresholds, strict documentation demands, and rising housing costs. Sponsors often face delays or denials when required to provide evidence of stable income over extended periods, with limited flexibility for those in short-term employment. Integration measures such as pre-departure language exams or post-arrival civic integration requirements can also create barriers, especially for vulnerable groups such as women or older family members.

■ **Application procedures and submission methods for family reunification vary between countries, depending on the status of the sponsor and the applicant, and may involve either in-country or consular processes.**

In some EMN Member and Observer Countries, the application is lodged by the sponsor, while in others it must be submitted by the family member, typically through diplomatic missions abroad. Exceptions apply in cases involving BIP, minors, or highly skilled workers, where more flexible or facilitated procedures may be available. Some countries allow third-party representation or online applications, although access to these options remains uneven. These procedural differences can affect how quickly and efficiently applications are submitted and processed, particularly when family members are located in regions with limited consular access.

■ **Requirements for documentation to prove identity and family ties are generally based on civil status documents, but countries provide alternative means of verification where such documents are unavailable.**

While marriage and birth certificates are the standard forms of proof, countries typically also accept alternative evidence such as personal interviews, DNA testing, or witness statements, especially in cases involving refugees or stateless persons who may not have access to official documents. However, practices vary significantly between countries regarding the thresholds

and procedures for accepting such alternative evidence. The use of verification mechanisms such as interviews at consulates or cross-checks with national authorities may add time and complexity to the process, especially in contexts where diplomatic presence is limited.

- **Fees and associated costs for family reunification procedures differ significantly, with some exemptions for specific categories such as minors or BIP, but financial burdens remain a barrier in many cases.**

Application fees vary considerably, with additional costs for visas, translations, document legalisation, and DNA testing often borne by the applicant. Although some EMN Member Countries offer reduced or waived fees for children, low-income applicants, or refugees, such exemptions are not consistently applied and may require additional documentation or formal requests.

- **Access to core rights such as education, employment, vocational training and healthcare is broadly guaranteed across EMN Member and Observer Countries, but differences in implementation and eligibility criteria may affect practical access for family members.**

While all countries provide formal access to compulsory education and basic healthcare, access to employment, vocational training, and higher education may depend on the legal status of the sponsor, the type of residence permit issued, or the category of third-country national. Additional barriers, such as limited recognition of foreign qualifications, language requirements, or administrative delays, may hinder access in practice.

- **The right to obtain an autonomous residence permit is generally respected across countries, but waiting periods, additional requirements, and exceptions in cases of vulnerability vary considerably.**

Most countries permit family members to apply for independent residence status after five years, as required under the Family Reunification Directive, with some offering shorter waiting periods for BIP. However, access to autonomous residence in situations of divorce, death, or domestic violence often depends on discretionary conditions, such as length of cohabitation or integration criteria.



For more information

EMN website: <http://ec.europa.eu/emn>

EMN LinkedIn page: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/european-migration-network>

EMN X account: <https://x.com/emnmigration>

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Bulgaria www.emn-bg.com/

Croatia emn.gov.hr/

Cyprus www.moi.gov.cy/moi/crmd/emnncpc.nsf/home/home?opendocument

The Czech Republic www.emncz.eu/

Estonia www.emn.ee/

Finland emn.fi/en/

France www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Europe-et-International/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM3/Le-reseau-europeen-des-migrations-REM2

Germany www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/EMN/emn-node.html

Greece <https://migration.gov.gr/emn/>

Hungary www.emnhungary.hu/en

Ireland www.emn.ie/

Italy www.emnitalyncp.it/

Latvia www.emn.lv

Lithuania www.emn.lt/

Luxembourg emnluxembourg.uni.lu/

Malta emn.gov.mt/

The Netherlands www.emnnetherlands.nl/

Poland www.gov.pl/web/european-migration-network

Portugal rem.sef.pt/en/

Romania www.mai.gov.ro/

Spain www.emnspain.gob.es/en/home

The Slovak Republic www.emn.sk/en

Slovenia emnslovenia.si

Sweden www.emnsweden.se/

Norway www.udi.no/en/statistics-and-analysis/european-migration-network---norway#

Georgia migration.commission.ge/

The Republic of Moldova bma.gov.md/en

Ukraine dmsu.gov.ua/en-home.html

Montenegro www.gov.me/mup

Armenia migration.am/?lang=en

Serbia kirs.gov.rs/eng

The Republic of North Macedonia <https://mvr.gov.mk/>

Albania