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PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE  
REGIONS**

**2026 State of Schengen Report**

{SWD(2026) 150 final}

## 2026 STATE OF SCHENGEN REPORT

### 1. SCHENGEN IN A CHANGING WORLD: CONSOLIDATION AND PREPAREDNESS FOR FUTURE CHALLENGES

Since the launch of the Schengen cycle in 2022 <sup>(1)</sup>, the annual State of Schengen report has provided a **strategic oversight and comprehensive situational overview** of the Schengen area. Through integrated analysis and evidence-based insights, the report has shaped a coherent and forward-looking policy agenda for Schengen. It has ensured sustained political attention in the Schengen Council, supported effective priority-setting, and contributed to a more coordinated engagement on Schengen matters.

The Schengen area continues to demonstrate resilience, underpinned by **collective efforts** at both EU and national levels that have **delivered concrete results**. These include a decrease in illegal border crossings and secondary movements within the Schengen area, strengthened cross-border cooperation, and an increase in effective returns of individuals with no right to stay in the EU.

Despite these tangible achievements, Schengen evaluations continue to identify gaps that need to be urgently addressed. This is particularly important in the context of today's **volatile geopolitical environment** and an increasingly complex **security landscape**, which calls for collective responsibility to ensure that the Schengen area remains secure, united and resilient.

**The priorities for the fifth Schengen cycle (2026-2027) will focus on: consolidating achievements, addressing remaining gaps, and enhancing preparedness** to meet current and future challenges. The Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) represents a strategic opportunity to further support sustained and targeted investment in reforms that contribute to a well-functioning Schengen area.

By focusing on consolidation and preparedness, the EU will continue to deliver on one of its most tangible achievements: a Schengen area that is secure, united, and resilient in face of emerging challenges.

### 2. THE 2026 STATE OF SCHENGEN REPORT: THE MOMENT TO CONSOLIDATE

#### 2.1. Schengen's external dimension: a strategic approach to EU visa policy

In 2025, the Schengen area continued to be the most visited destination in the world, attracting more than 790 million travellers. Schengen States issued 10 million visas, and more than 60 countries enjoyed visa-free access to the Schengen area. As the Union's first line of security screening, the **common visa policy** is key to Europe's security, helping prevent illegal migration, organised crime and terrorism. It also facilitates access to Schengen for bona fide travellers and ensures trustworthy relations with partner countries that are based on the respect of and alignment with the Union rules.

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<sup>(1)</sup> The Schengen cycle is structured around an annual reporting and follow-up framework comprising the following instruments: the State of Schengen Report, which sets out the main political and operational priorities to guide the quarterly Schengen Councils; the Schengen Barometer+ which provides twice a year a regular situational picture of developments across the area, drawing on contributions from Member States and EU agencies; and the Schengen Scoreboard, cf. footnote 60. The Commission Schengen Coordinator provides support to the overall functioning of the cycle through structured bilateral and multilateral engagement with Member States.

In January 2026, the Commission adopted the first-ever **EU Visa Strategy** <sup>(2)</sup>, setting out a framework for a visa policy that advances Union's long-term interests, strengthens security across the Schengen area, fosters EU prosperity and competitiveness, and projects Union's position and resilience on the global stage.

The Strategy sets out an **ambitious agenda and concrete actions** that will contribute to strengthening Schengen's external dimension. In this Schengen cycle, the focus will be on developing a new assessment framework with clear criteria for granting visa-free status to partner countries, serving the EU's strategic interests more effectively, as well as preparing a targeted revision of the Visa Code to strengthen EU security. To further enhance the EU's global competitiveness, the Strategy will also foster partnerships with key partner countries to better match global talent with EU labour market needs. In this context, the opening of the first Legal Gateway Office in India <sup>(3)</sup> has marked an important step towards attracting talent and reinforcing mutually beneficial cooperation. The focus should now be on its successful roll out as well as replicating the European Legal Gateway Offices in other key partners.

Furthermore, the Strategy announced targeted measures to support Member States' capacity to effectively manage the **visa process**. The 2025 Schengen evaluations and monitoring activities reveal that the examination of visa applications is generally solid, with established processes that ensure quality decision-making. While significant steps have been taken to reduce waiting times in granting visa appointments and processing visa applications, consulates in some locations still face considerable delays. Therefore, the implementation of the Strategy will also help Member States manage high volumes of applications, especially during peak periods, for example through the roll out of IT systems for border management as well as dedicated support of Frontex in delivering training to consular officers and providing assistance in document verification and detection of document fraud.

## **2.2. An integrated external border for a secure Schengen area**

Maintaining the security of Schengen external borders requires continuous vigilance against evolving geopolitical risks, while ensuring that fundamental rights are respected <sup>(4)</sup>.

In mid-October 2025, the Schengen States started to gradually roll out the **Entry/Exit-System (EES)**, one of the most advanced border management systems in the world, which allows to register non-EU nationals and share in real time information about who crosses EU borders, when and where, as well as information about refusals of entry. During the six-month progressive start, the system has shown clear benefits for the security of EU citizens by stopping criminals, imposters, and document fraudsters from crossing borders under false identities or with fake documents. Since its launch, the Schengen States registered more than 60 million entries and exits of third country nationals. In addition, over 30,000 refusals of entry were recorded in the system due to lack of compliance with entry conditions. Among these cases, nearly 800 persons were considered a threat to internal security while almost 7,000 travellers were denied entry for having overstayed in the Schengen area <sup>(5)</sup>. Since the EES entered into operations, daily fingerprint checks in

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<sup>(2)</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on EU visa policy strategy, COM(2026) 43 final, 29 January 2026.

<sup>(3)</sup> EU Legal Gateway (<https://eu-legal-gateway.eu/>).

<sup>(4)</sup> European Council, *European Council meeting* (19 March 2026) – *Conclusions*, EUCO 1/26, 19 March 2026.

<sup>(5)</sup> These numbers are current up until 20 April 2026.

Schengen Information System (SIS) and Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) conducted by all Member States rose from approximately 17 000 to around 87 000.

During the progressive start, the vast majority of Schengen States implemented the EES effectively, with most countries surpassing the required thresholds of registrations. The option to temporarily suspend the operations of the EES, either fully or partially, was exercised only on a limited number of occasions. Some Schengen States experienced challenges related to infrastructure, for example with the functioning of self-service systems, the capacity to fully register the biometric data, and the congestion of flights in specific timeslots.

The EES was fully deployed with all functionalities at all border crossing points in the Schengen area on 10 April 2026. Overall, the EES has been operating efficiently, bringing visible benefits to EU security. To further optimise the implementation of the EES, Member States are encouraged to make greater use of automation at the borders <sup>(6)</sup>, ensure the deployment of sufficient number of border guards and flow managers, and provide adequate infrastructure, equipment, guidance and training. At the same time, the Commission, Member States as well as transport and tourism stakeholders will continue to closely coordinate, especially in view of the summer travel period.

The upcoming launch of the **European Travel Information and Authorisation System** (ETIAS) will mark another practical step in further strengthening the protection of EU external borders. It will enable the identification and assessment of persons who represent potential risks, and prevent them from entering the Schengen area, while preserving seamless travel for the vast majority of visitors. It will add clear value by strengthening pre-travel risk assessment and enabling earlier identification of potential security concerns before arrival at the external borders. Preparations are progressing, with coordinated efforts underway at EU and national levels to ensure ETIAS' effective roll-out. Early involvement of travel industry stakeholders is crucial for the success of this endeavour.

Besides most modern IT systems, **strong and permanent border control capabilities** need to be in place to safeguard the security of our common external borders. These capabilities depend on the availability of adequate equipment as well as on sufficient and well-trained border guards at the Schengen's external borders. While improvements were made in 2025 by several Member States <sup>(7)</sup> by taking steps to increase staffing levels, persistent shortages continue to affect key functions <sup>(8)</sup> due to scarcity of resources and a lack of structured medium and long-term human resources strategies.

Although further efforts are needed to increase the number of trained border guards, in 2025, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) supported Member States with 18 453 deployments of Standing Corps personnel <sup>(9)</sup> that provided operational, technical, and logistical assistance in 35 operations across key Member States <sup>(10)</sup>. The Commission is preparing a legislative proposal in 2026 to further strengthen the mandate of Frontex.

### ***Border checks***

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<sup>(6)</sup> Such as the use of pre-registration kiosks, e-gates and the mobile application 'Travel to Europe' developed by Frontex.

<sup>(7)</sup> Notably in Czechia, Estonia, Greece, France, Croatia, Italy, Malta, Austria, Poland and Romania.

<sup>(8)</sup> Notably in Spain, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia and Slovakia.

<sup>(9)</sup> These comprise human resources from categories 1, 2 and 3. One human resource can be deployed multiple times, with the most significant deployments in 2025 being the Joint Operations in Greece, Spain and Italy.

<sup>(10)</sup> Frontex, *2025 in brief*, ([https://www.frontex.europa.eu/2025-in-brief/#under\\_hero\\_section](https://www.frontex.europa.eu/2025-in-brief/#under_hero_section)).

**High-quality border checks** at the EU's external borders are essential to prevent serious security threats before they reach the Schengen area. Several Schengen States enhanced the quality of border checks through more consistent verification of entry conditions, and increased use of automation <sup>(11)</sup>. Some countries have shown significant progress in this area. For example, Romania successfully implemented an automation of hit reporting procedures from their e-gates to second line border checks and an integration of the national Advanced Passenger Information System into its border control system. These measures have made it possible to carry out for efficient and high-quality border checks.

Nevertheless, further efforts are still needed to improve the effective use of EU and national databases, strengthen measures against document fraud, enhance inter-agency cooperation, and deploy biometric verification to close existing gaps and bolster security <sup>(12)</sup>.

In 2025, one unannounced Schengen evaluation was carried out and identified serious deficiencies in the Member State's <sup>(13)</sup> capacity to manage their external borders. Following the evaluation, the Member State authorities, with the support of Frontex, initiated immediate remedial measures.

### ***Border surveillance***

A combination of robust border checks and effective border surveillance delivers the **most effective level of protection**. Detections of illegal crossings at the EU's external borders has been consistently declining in the last years, falling to fewer than 180 000, representing a further reduction of over 25% compared to 2024 <sup>(14)</sup>. In several Schengen States <sup>(15)</sup>, enhanced surveillance has contributed to better detection rates, faster response times, reduced illegal crossings, and improved situational awareness. The EU Eastern land border section has also been thoroughly reinforced with sustainable integrated surveillance actions supported by national and EU funds. Significant investments were made in border surveillance capacities, including the purchase of new equipment, the refurbishment of existing equipment and the increased use of advanced technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles and vessels, upgraded radio capabilities and new stationary equipment.

Despite this progress, **surveillance coverage and the integration of systems remain uneven** across the Schengen area, reflecting gaps in equipment, maintenance and strategic planning. In several Member States <sup>(16)</sup>, an integrated border surveillance approach has not yet been fully established, particularly as regards as the early detection of illegal arrivals, and real-time risk assessment.

Similarly, building on existing **national and European capabilities**, further progress towards a fully integrated and consistent situational picture is needed to strengthen Member States' capacity to develop comprehensive and up-to-date intelligence on migration flows, smuggling networks and emerging threats. This will be achieved through the effective implementation of the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR), the technological and operational backbone of the EU's border security. It will contribute to improving the Schengen area's capacity to deal with sudden arrivals or emerging security threats. Closer synergies between border authorities and Europol would also

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<sup>(11)</sup>For example: Bulgaria, France, Austria, Poland, Romania, Finland and Switzerland.

<sup>(12)</sup>For instance in: Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, France, Hungary, Portugal and Slovenia.

<sup>(13)</sup>An unannounced Schengen evaluation in Portugal in December 2025 revealed serious deficiencies in the performance of external border checks at Lisbon Airport.

<sup>(14)</sup>Frontex, 'Irregular border crossings down 26% in 2025, Europe must stay prepared' (<https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-irregular-border-crossings-down-26-in-2025-europe-must-stay-prepared-lyKpVb>).

<sup>(15)</sup>Such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Romania and Finland.

<sup>(16)</sup>For example: in Denmark, Greece, France, Croatia and Slovenia.

reinforce situational awareness, risk analysis and improve the detection of cross-border criminal and terrorist threats.

Strengthening the resilience of our common external borders requires stronger coordination between all the actors involved in border management, migration, and return. From June 2026, the new screening procedure at the Union's external borders will allow to swiftly identify and assess all third-country nationals attempting to illegally enter the Union. In this context, it is important that all Member States are ready to implement the new **screening rules** to ensure that all persons subject to screening are referred to the relevant procedure<sup>(17)</sup>. This framework will be vital for both security and effective migration management in the EU, and its practical application will be assessed during the Schengen evaluations planned for the second half of 2026.

### ***Contingency planning***

Significant progress has been made with all Member States having developed **contingency plans** for border management in the event of a mass influx of third country nationals at the EU's borders. Moreover, the vast majority of Member States have established contingency plans based on comprehensive risk assessments and scenarios, with only three countries<sup>(18)</sup> still in the process of formalising such plans and six<sup>(19)</sup> that have not yet tested their contingency plan's implementation.

Preparedness frameworks have traditionally focused on border management, however, they need to better integrate other related processes, particularly those for returns. National preparedness remains uneven, and it is increasingly clear that what may have been adequate in the past is no longer sufficient for today's challenges especially in light of the ongoing Middle East crisis. Schengen evaluations reveal that the majority of Schengen States<sup>(20)</sup> still need to fully integrate return operations based on risk analyses. To address this, contingency planning must become more European, with national frameworks more systematically aligned with EU tools and mechanisms and better connected to the planning of neighbouring Member States. This will enable faster, more predictable, and more coordinated collective responses when pressures emerge.

At the same time, it is essential to move from largely formal planning frameworks to systems that are fully integrated into day-to-day practice and capable of supporting rapid, coordinated action when crises arise. In eight Schengen States<sup>(21)</sup>, the national plans do not include the possibility to use European support, eleven<sup>(22)</sup> do not cover coordination with Frontex, and ten have not consulted neighbouring Member States in establishing their contingency plans<sup>(23)</sup> in order to enable faster, more predictable, and more coordinated collective responses when pressures emerge.

Furthermore, the European Union needs to be prepared for the potential threat posed to the EU's internal security by Russian ex-combatants having participated in the aggression against Ukraine. Following on the European Council of March 2026, the Commission will prepare an assessment on possible ways to address this issue.

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<sup>(17)</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations (EC) No 767/2008, (EU) 2017/2226, (EU) 2018/1240 and (EU) 2019/817 (OJ L, 2024/1356, 22.5.2024).

<sup>(18)</sup> Greece, Spain and Austria.

<sup>(19)</sup> Greece, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland.

<sup>(20)</sup> In particular: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, Iceland, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden.

<sup>(21)</sup> Belgium, Czechia, Greece, Spain, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Sweden.

<sup>(22)</sup> Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria and Sweden.

<sup>(23)</sup> Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Iceland, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden.

The 2026-2027 Schengen cycle should continue to focus on ensuring an integrated external border for a secure Schengen area. This includes reinforced contingency planning and situational awareness, consistently improving border checks and border surveillance, including through full use of IT systems, and ensuring the effective implementation of screening procedures.

## **2.2 Effective return systems underpinning the integrity of the Schengen area**

Over the years, return has emerged as a core priority, recognised as an element that underpins the credibility, effectiveness and sustainability of the system as a whole. Ensuring the return of those who do not have a right to stay is therefore a fundamental condition for a well-functioning Schengen area.

### *A new legal framework for a common European return system*

The Commission proposal for a new Return Regulation<sup>(24)</sup> addresses key structural obstacles identified in previous periodic Schengen evaluations and the 2024 thematic Schengen evaluation on more effective returns. The Commission welcomes the start of interinstitutional negotiations and stands ready to support a final agreement that meets the needs of the EU.

In parallel, the Return Coordinator has played a key role in shaping a more coherent and strategic EU approach to returns through the High-Level Network on Returns by promoting systematic exchanges of good practices on returns to politically sensitive and priority third countries, as well as returns of illegally staying third country nationals posing a security threat. In particular, progress was made through the Task Force on Statistics to enhance monitoring and improve the reliability of return data. The Coordinator also prioritised strengthening cooperation regarding unaccompanied minors, including through exchanges between Member States and by exploring joint approaches with partner countries.

### *Operational improvements driving more effective returns*

The effectiveness of return policies is measured by tangible results on the ground. In 2025, a slight upward trend in the effectiveness of national return systems was observed in seventeen Schengen States<sup>(25)</sup>. This progress translated into an **increased number of effective returns** in 2025, with a rise of 19% compared to the previous year. National legislative reforms contributed to progress, including those adopted to implement the Pact on Migration and Asylum. Frontex provided significant support to Member States in the area of returns. In 2025, **Frontex** deployed 140 Return Specialists<sup>(26)</sup> and supported 63 500 effective returns, representing 42% of the total, confirming the sustained upward trend observed in recent years.

Further efforts are required across all Member States to address challenges related to the timely issuance of return decisions, the streamlining of procedures<sup>(27)</sup> and the implementation of measures to prevent absconding and unauthorised secondary movements<sup>(28)</sup>. This is particularly important when dealing with individuals who may pose security risks, requiring the involvement of multiple authorities, specialised expertise

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<sup>(24)</sup>European Commission, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union, COM(2025) 101 final.

<sup>(25)</sup>Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Iceland, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Finland and Sweden.

<sup>(26)</sup>Despite this number, there are still challenges in meeting the deployment needs for Return Specialists due to high language proficiency requirements and specialised operational skills.

<sup>(27)</sup>For example, in: Spain, Italy, Poland and Portugal.

<sup>(28)</sup>For example in: Spain, Portugal and Switzerland.

and measures to prevent absconding <sup>(29)</sup>. Schengen evaluations uncovered a discrepancy between the number of return decisions issued and the number of return alerts created in the Schengen Information System, as well as the inconsistent lodging of all relevant information in the system <sup>(30)</sup>. It is therefore essential to make full use of SIS return alerts by systematically including all relevant information, such as biometrics, photographs and security flags.

**Voluntary return** is increasingly recognised as a core component of an effective and sustainable EU return policy. While some Member States <sup>(31)</sup> have moved towards more proactive and tailored models, the full potential of voluntary returns is yet to be realised through its consistent integration in national return frameworks <sup>(32)</sup>.

Member States have made efforts to strengthen **operational capabilities**, related to enhancing training frameworks <sup>(33)</sup>, allocating additional human resources <sup>(34)</sup>, and strengthening coordination between national authorities <sup>(35)</sup>. Further efforts are necessary to ensure sustained continued impact in operational performance, particularly where the lack of adequate and sufficient capabilities remains one of the key obstacles to carrying out returns <sup>(36)</sup>.

The gradual **modernisation of operational tools and systems for returns** is progressing in several Member States <sup>(37)</sup>. However, this process remains incomplete. In particular, the improvement of return case management systems is still ongoing in several Schengen countries <sup>(38)</sup>, underlining the need to accelerate digital transformation in preparation for the next phase of the EU-wide digitalisation of return procedures and the Commission's forthcoming legislative proposal in this area in 2026.

The return process must be accompanied by strong and effective **safeguards to guarantee fundamental rights**. 2025 shows a general improvement in the quality and application of these safeguards. Several Member States <sup>(39)</sup> improved their return decision-making processes to respect the principle of *non-refoulement*, the right to be heard, the provision of adequate information and effective access to remedies. Nevertheless, further efforts are needed to consolidate and sustain these improvements <sup>(40)</sup>, including as regard forced return monitoring systems <sup>(41)</sup>, and appeal procedures for return decisions <sup>(42)</sup>.

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<sup>(29)</sup> Cf. 2026 Compendium of best practices identified in the framework of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism. Bulgaria's approach of systematically interviewing apprehended third-country nationals and checking them against EU and international databases to detect potential security risks was identified as a best practice during its Schengen evaluation.

<sup>(30)</sup> According to Article 3(1) of Regulation 2018/1860 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 November 2018 on the use of the Schengen Information System for the return of illegally staying third-country nationals (OJ L 312, 7.12.2018), Member States have an obligation to create a return alert following the issuance of a return decision.

<sup>(31)</sup> For example: Belgium and Italy.

<sup>(32)</sup> For instance: in Spain and Portugal.

<sup>(33)</sup> Belgium, France and Italy.

<sup>(34)</sup> For example: Italy, Lithuania and Malta.

<sup>(35)</sup> Such as in Finland.

<sup>(36)</sup> In particular in Greece, Spain and Portugal.

<sup>(37)</sup> Including France and Cyprus.

<sup>(38)</sup> Such as: Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Slovakia.

<sup>(39)</sup> Such as Belgium, Malta and Portugal.

<sup>(40)</sup> For example in: Greece and Hungary.

<sup>(41)</sup> For instance in: Czechia, Germany, Spain, Iceland, Austria and Portugal.

<sup>(42)</sup> Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden.

The effective return of third-country nationals will remain a core priority in the 2026-2027 Schengen cycle. 2026 will see the launch of the new return border procedure under the Pact on Migration and Asylum. It is therefore essential that national systems are fully prepared to ensure the effective and consistent Pact's implementation. Full and timely implementation of the Schengen evaluation recommendations will play a key role in achieving this objective.

### 2.3 Internal security cooperation

Internal security cooperation is essential for the Schengen Area, as it provides measures that maintain safety and law enforcement efficiency. However, Schengen evaluations reveal that some challenges still persist.

#### *Effective and secure information exchange*

Information exchange is a core element of Schengen's internal security system. Particular progress has been observed in nineteen Member States that have notified full transposition of the **Information Exchange Directive** <sup>(43)</sup>, and in eighteen Member States <sup>(44)</sup> that have established national case management systems interoperable with the Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA). However, the 2025 Schengen evaluations reveal gaps between formal transposition of the Directive and operational effectiveness. In each of the five Member States evaluated in 2025 <sup>(45)</sup>, the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) has not yet fully met the Directive's requirements, resulting in a slower cross-border information exchange that is also less standardised and more prone to error than designed.

Schengen evaluations have revealed that the functionalities of the SIS are not being maximised <sup>(46)</sup>. For example, the systematic attachment of biometric data to SIS alerts, the roll-out and use of fingerprint searches by all relevant authorities particularly during border checks and by migration authorities <sup>(47)</sup>, and the sharing of terrorism-related SIS hits with Europol remain inconsistent <sup>(48)</sup>. By contrast, Member States that have invested in automation and the systematic integration of case management systems and national databases are achieving demonstrably better operational results <sup>(49)</sup>.

Additionally, there are structural challenges related to **human resources** and **technical capacities**. Several Member States <sup>(50)</sup> face staff shortages either in their N.SIS offices

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<sup>(43)</sup> Directive (EU) 2023/977 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 on the exchange of information between law enforcement authorities, OJ L 134, 22.5.2023. The Directive establishes harmonised rules for the adequate and rapid exchange of information between the competent law enforcement authorities for the purpose of preventing, detecting or investigating criminal offences. As of April 2026, nineteen Member States notified full transposition of the Directive, while four notified partial transposition. Reasoned opinions were issued for the remaining three Member States (Belgium, Estonia and Spain).

<sup>(44)</sup> Czechia, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland and Sweden.

<sup>(45)</sup> Bulgaria, Austria, Romania, Slovenia and Switzerland.

<sup>(46)</sup> Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden.

<sup>(47)</sup> For example, inconsistencies are observed in Czechia, Spain, France, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden.

<sup>(48)</sup> This remains an issue in all Member States except Austria.

<sup>(49)</sup> Germany and Austria.

<sup>(50)</sup> Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Iceland, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden.

and/or S.I.R.E.N.E.<sup>(51)</sup> Bureaux, and SPOCs, negatively affecting business continuity and the quality of information exchange.

### ***Law enforcement cooperation***

Schengen evaluations consistently show that the legal and institutional foundations for cross-border law enforcement cooperation are broadly in place across the Schengen area, but their operational potential remains underused. Police Cooperation Centres are valuable hubs for day-to-day cooperation, yet they continue to function predominantly as information relays rather than operational enablers<sup>(52)</sup>.

**Joint operations** reveal a mixed picture. Cross-border cooperation between Austria and Hungary is a strong example of how different tools<sup>(53)</sup> can be combined to form a single coherent system. However, joint operations in many Member States remain reactive and partner-driven. There are systematically fewer outgoing surveillance and hot pursuit operations than incoming ones, and the infrastructure for joint operational situational awareness is largely absent.

Working closely with Member States to address these and other challenges, the Commission established the **Informal Expert Group on Cross-Border Operational Law Enforcement Cooperation** to share best practices, identify common challenges and develop practical solutions. Building on its work, the Commission will prepare a study to map existing cooperation agreements, providing a basis to assess whether the existing soft-law framework for cross-border law enforcement cooperation remains adequate. This is becoming increasingly relevant as the EU's internal security strategy's<sup>(54)</sup> call to establish a High-Level Group on the future of operational law enforcement cooperation responds directly to what Schengen evaluations have consistently found: existing tools are largely sound but require a more solid legal basis. At the same time, the forthcoming proposals to strengthen **Europol's mandate** will make it better equipped to provide operational support to Member States, including by facilitating cross-border analysis, enhanced information exchange and coordinated actions against threats affecting the Schengen area.

Underpinning all these efforts is the need for a shared professional culture grounded in mutual trust and interoperable skills. The Commission is assessing how to best support **law enforcement training** through the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL). Addressing gaps in specialised areas such as digital forensics, lawful decryption, and advanced data analysis is particularly important as crime increasingly exploits emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence.

### ***Situation at internal borders***

Schengen contributes significantly to the **well-functioning of the internal market** and the **economic prosperity** of the EU. As goods, workers and services cross internal borders unhindered, cross-border regions thrive and national economies benefit from lower administrative burdens and economies of scale. To evaluate the 'Schengen effect', the Commission has commissioned a study into the benefits of Schengen and the cost of reintroducing internal border control, which will be published in the second half of 2026.

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<sup>(51)</sup> SIRENE stands for supplementary information request at the national entries. Member States that use the SIS have to set up a national SIRENE Bureau, operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, responsible for exchanging information and coordinating activities connected to SIS alerts.

<sup>(52)</sup> Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/915 of 9 June 2022 on operational law enforcement cooperation, (OJ L 158, 13.6.2022).

<sup>(53)</sup> Bilateral agreements, shared coordination centres and EMPACT.

<sup>(54)</sup> European Commission, 'Commission presents ProtectEU – Internal Security Strategy' ([https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-presents-protecteu-internal-security-strategy-2025-04-01\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-presents-protecteu-internal-security-strategy-2025-04-01_en)).

In 2025, ten Schengen States prolonged and maintained the reintroduction of control at their internal borders <sup>(55)</sup>, motivated by migration and security concerns. These include the continued instability along key migratory routes, the weaponisation of migration by hostile state actors, and the persistent pressure of cross-border organised crime.

Where internal border control is reintroduced, it is crucial that Member States take steps to **limit any negative consequence on cross border commuters and communities**. Therefore, the Schengen Coordinator's structured dialogue with the Member States concerned as well as the consultation process initiated under the revised Schengen Borders Code <sup>(56)</sup>, played an important role, both delivering concrete results in addressing waiting times at the internal borders and improving operational coordination and information exchange. In most instances, the reintroduction of internal border controls concerned non-systematic spot checks.

While internal border control may play a role in addressing some Member States' migration and security concerns, **more efficient and effective alternatives and solutions** are available. In particular, operational cooperation, information exchange and checks within the territory can provide a valuable substitute for controls at internal borders, especially via non-systematic police checks or mobile biometric identification and vehicle tracking technologies <sup>(57)</sup>. Romania's operational approach at its internal borders with Hungary and Bulgaria provides a model that could be replicated in other Member States. It combines intelligence-led joint operations, targeted risk-based police checks, joint patrols, and fully functioning Police Cooperation Centres.

Swift readmission of irregular migrants apprehended in border areas can be achieved through the **transfer procedure**, an instrument introduced by the revised Schengen Borders Code. Several Member States <sup>(58)</sup> are in the process of agreeing practical arrangements for its application, while others continue to rely on existing bilateral readmission agreements.

Looking ahead, the EES and the upcoming entry into application of the instruments of the Pact on Migration and Asylum will significantly strengthen structural conditions to progressively lift internal border controls. Both initiatives will provide Member States with operational tools to manage migratory and security pressures at their external borders and counter unauthorised movements within the Schengen area.

The Commission remains committed to upholding the principles of free movement and security across the Schengen area and will soon issue the opinions as set out in the revised Schengen Borders Code.

### **3. THE KEY TO CONSOLIDATION AND SUSTAINED IMPLEMENTATION: SCHENGEN GOVERNANCE**

In earlier phases of Schengen integration, the system could largely function through established routines, practical cooperation, and a strong presumption of trust between Member States. As a result, Schengen governance, covering all areas enables the

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<sup>(55)</sup>European Commission, 'Temporary reintroduction of border control' ([https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/schengen-area/temporary-reintroduction-border-control\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/schengen-area/temporary-reintroduction-border-control_en)).

<sup>(56)</sup>Regulation (EU) 2024/1717 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders, (OJ L, 2024/1717, 20.6.2024).

<sup>(57)</sup>Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/268 of 23 November 2023 on cooperation between the Member States with regard to serious threats to internal security and public policy in the area without internal border controls, (OJ L, 2024/268, 17.1.2024).

<sup>(58)</sup>The Schengen evaluations of Austria, Romania, and Slovenia confirm that negotiations to implement it have not yet been initiated.

functioning of the Schengen area, tended to play a supportive rather than central role, with day-to-day management relying more on informal coordination than on a strong shared political framework.

That context has fundamentally changed. Today, Schengen operates in a far more complex and demanding environment, shaped by geopolitical instability, new security threats and technological disruption. In this setting, the effectiveness and coherence of Schengen can no longer rely predominantly on informal arrangements. As recognised in the Schengen Declaration<sup>(59)</sup>, reinforcing the Schengen area under current conditions requires a governance that is more structured, more collective, and more firmly anchored in the political level, ensuring clarity, coordination and a shared strategic direction. **Strengthening national Schengen governance** is therefore the key condition to ensure that the Schengen area can respond effectively to both present and future challenges.

### 3.1 Strengthening Schengen governance

The 2025 Schengen Scoreboard<sup>(60)</sup> paints a diverse picture of how Member States contribute to the functioning of the Schengen area:



*Aggregated Scoreboard of December 2025*

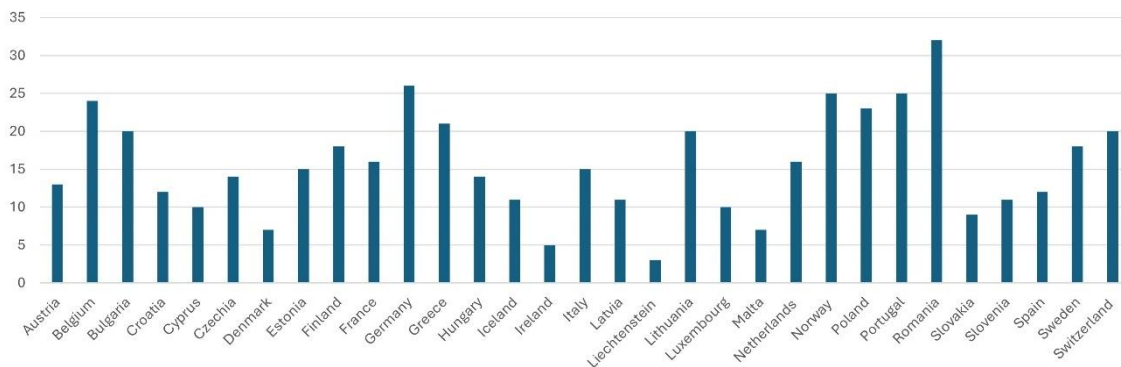
While progress is evident in many areas, disparities persist, leading to operational and security gaps. At the same time, when responsibilities are not upheld consistently, mutual trust between Member States can be undermined, affecting the collective strength and unity of the Schengen area<sup>(61)</sup>. Similarly to previous years, in 2025 the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism played a crucial role in identifying areas for improvement and promoting a culture of joint responsibility among Member States. The mechanism, involving more than 500 experts from all Schengen States, allows for the effective and timely identification of deficiencies, as well as best practices and innovative solutions.

<sup>(59)</sup>The Schengen Declaration was adopted by the Council on 12 June 2025, reaffirming Member States commitment to preserving the integrity of Schengen; Council of the European Union, *Schengen Declaration*, adopted on 12 June 2025 (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/gjrnbywx/st10068en25.pdf>).

<sup>(60)</sup>The aggregated Schengen Scoreboard scores and visualises for all Schengen Member States the overall implementation of recommendations stemming from Schengen evaluations. In line with the methodology agreed with the Member States in December 2023, it is structured into six policy dimensions, each addressing key aspects for the effective functioning of the Schengen area. Based on the individual Schengen Scoreboards that assign Member States scores on the level of implementation of the recommendations, the visualisation illustrates the overall average score per dimension across Schengen.

<sup>(61)</sup>Providing timely and quality reporting on the measures taken to address the deficiencies identified during the evaluation is a prerequisite for a well-functioning Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism.

These best practices are combined in a dedicated Compendium <sup>(62)</sup>, which can provide useful solutions and serves as an inspiration to Member States.



*Number of selected experts per Member State for 2026*

The 2025 evaluation activities <sup>(63)</sup>, including the targeted monitoring activities <sup>(64)</sup> and the recently launched Schengen monitoring dialogues <sup>(65)</sup>, emphasised the need for Member States to strengthen their national Schengen governance frameworks, ensuring effective coordination, clear strategic planning, and full alignment between national priorities, operational needs and EU funding. These processes have strengthened daily Schengen implementation, supported by ongoing exchanges with the Schengen Coordinator <sup>(66)</sup>.

Some Member States have made notable progress in this area, with twelve Member States <sup>(67)</sup> appointing national Schengen Coordinators. Additionally, **Romania’s first periodic Schengen evaluation** after its full integration into the Schengen area demonstrated the results of a strengthened comprehensive national Schengen governance model, which ensures a high level of preparedness by integrating institutional arrangements, strategic planning, national quality control mechanisms, and both political and operational coordination.

Despite this progress, several Member States still face significant challenges in implementing Schengen governance effectively. Schengen governance frameworks remain fragmented, with responsibilities dispersed across multiple authorities and without a clear central coordination function. This reflects a broader pattern in which Schengen implementation continues to be managed through siloed national arrangements, with insufficient integration of responsibilities, coordination and oversight.

<sup>(62)</sup> Commission Staff Working Document, *2026 Compendium of best practices identified in the framework of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism*.

<sup>(63)</sup> In 2025, the Commission implemented the annual evaluation programme leading to Schengen country reports of Bulgaria, Austria, Romania, Slovenia and Switzerland, which will be soon adopted. European Commission, ‘Schengen evaluation and monitoring’ ([https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/schengen-area/schengen-governance/schengen-evaluation-and-monitoring\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/schengen-area/schengen-governance/schengen-evaluation-and-monitoring_en)).

<sup>(64)</sup> In Greece, France, Italy and Cyprus.

<sup>(65)</sup> Aimed at enhancing the process of evaluating and monitoring the implementation of Schengen standards by Member States, these dialogues focus on fostering commitment and improving national Schengen governance through structured discussions led by Country Coordinators, addressing key challenges, ensuring timely reporting and follow-up on recommendations, and facilitating technical exchanges to resolve persistent issues.

<sup>(66)</sup> These efforts have also allowed the Commission to assess the progress made by Member States. Following the latest assessments of follow-up reports submitted by Member States, the Commission, via these reports, closes the action plans of Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden in the field of visa policy, in accordance with Article 21(3) of the Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism Regulation.

<sup>(67)</sup> Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Portugal, Romania, and Finland.

Effective Schengen governance starts with **strong national governance structures**, capitalising on the efforts already taken by the European Integrated Border Management <sup>(68)</sup>. The most advanced national governance models have shown four key elements. First, a **coordinated approach** to national Schengen governance is necessary, involving mapping and connecting all relevant stakeholders, clearly defining roles and responsibilities at political, administrative and operational levels, establishing formal coordination mechanisms, and designating a national Schengen Coordinator with sufficient oversight authority. Second, a **comprehensive and strategic framework** is required to set out a coherent medium- and long-term vision for the functioning of the Schengen area, building on existing sectoral strategies. Third, a **coherent vision for operational follow-up**, which translates strategic objectives into concrete measures with clear timelines, assigned responsibilities, and appropriate resources, ensuring structured implementation, is necessary to achieve real results. Finally, strong national governance needs to be accompanied by **adequate capabilities** that enable the effective implementation of Schengen obligations. By taking these steps, Member States can ensure effective national responsibility and strengthen the coherence of Schengen at the EU level.

The stakes go beyond individual national concerns as the strength of the Schengen area depends on the responsibility of each Member State towards each other. The true value of evaluations lies in their ability to translate findings into common European level conclusions. In 2026, the Commission will continue to support Member States in this effort to strengthen Schengen governance, through the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism, including with evaluation activities in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Liechtenstein <sup>(69)</sup>. Member States will also receive guidance and resources to strengthen their national governance frameworks, along with financial support under a dedicated Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI) call.

### **3.2 Schengen implementation through targeted EU funding**

Reinforcing national Schengen governance should go hand in hand with the strategic use of EU funding. This is particularly important in the preparations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028-2034. While still subject to agreement by the European Parliament and the Council, the Commission proposal on funding for Schengen initiatives within the framework introduces a stronger focus on performance and the strategic use of EU funding. In this context, **EU funding** will contribute supporting national Schengen governance and actions, in a coordinated and targeted manner, fully aligned with strategic priorities as determined during Schengen evaluations.

As the preparatory process for the next MFF continues, it is essential to connect the structural reforms identified by the Schengen evaluations and the Schengen broad priorities established for the 2026-2027 cycle with programming of EU funding in the area of Home Affairs through the National and Regional Partnership Plans to translate EU's objectives into national investment and reform agendas.

### **3.3 Completion and expansion of the Schengen area**

Schengen is designed as a common framework, where shared rules, standards and responsibilities apply equally across all participating Member States.

In an increasingly complex geopolitical context, **Cyprus** makes a unique contribution to strengthening shared situational awareness of risks and opportunities in its region, while

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<sup>(68)</sup> The European Integrated Border Management aims to ensure the coherent and coordinated management of the EU's external borders through joint operations, shared resources, and strategic partnerships.

<sup>(69)</sup> European Commission, 'Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring – Migration and Home Affairs', ([https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/schengen-area/schengen-governance/schengen-evaluation-and-monitoring\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/schengen-area/schengen-governance/schengen-evaluation-and-monitoring_en)).

bringing experience that strengthens collective capacity in border, migration and security matters. In this context, the Commission conducted a Schengen monitoring activity in December 2025 to assess Cyprus' state of preparedness and support the next steps towards its full accession to the Schengen Area. Substantial progress was made in 2025, with the Cypriot authorities implementing significant reforms and measures in line with the highest Schengen standards. **Ireland** has continued its efforts to demonstrate its readiness to fully apply the parts of the Schengen framework related to the internal security of the Schengen area.

It is also equally necessary to continue deepening structured engagement with enlargement partners. **EU candidates are Schengen candidates**, therefore, it is essential to ensure that Schengen readiness is systematically embedded in the EU accession process. The first step on the road to Schengen membership is the establishment of robust Schengen governance frameworks at a national level. This is why the Commission has already **stepped up its engagement with enlargement countries**. Together with Frontex and Member State experts, the Commission held the first Schengen governance awareness-raising session for enlargement countries in February 2026. Hosted by Montenegro, this initiative provided practical guidance on building effective national coordination structures. It also confirmed strong interest from enlargement countries and highlighted the added value of early and structured preparation. At the same time, there is an intensified focus on early Schengen preparations in the negotiations, closely monitoring the development and implementation of Schengen Action Plans in enlargement partners, and providing country-specific technical assistance to support candidate countries in this process.

#### 4 NEXT STEPS

Consolidating achievements and addressing any remaining gaps will ensure that the Schengen area remains vigilant and well-prepared, as rapidly evolving geopolitical conditions could substantially affect the dynamics of migration and security. For the 2026-2027 Schengen cycle, the Commission invites the Schengen Council to endorse the following priorities at its next meeting in June 2026.

##### **Priority implementation actions for the 2026-2027 Schengen Cycle**

#### **1. To support Schengen's external dimension**

At EU level:

- Propose the **revision of the Visa Code** with targeted measures to strengthen EU security.
- Enhance **EU's global competitiveness**, by further developing mutually beneficial partnerships with key countries to attract talent for innovation.

#### **2. To ensure an integrated external border for a secure Schengen area**

At national level, Schengen countries need to:

- Advance the **digitalisation** of procedures and the development of large-scale IT systems, including their interoperability. Continue the effective implementation of the Entry/Exit System, at all border crossing points, including by deploying adequately all functionalities, reducing processing times, increasing automated solutions at the borders, and improving registration and the quality of biometrics. Ensure a well-prepared launch of ETIAS with adequate testing and the necessary resources in place.
- Continue to improve the **quality and effectiveness of border checks** through the full use of existing systems and their interoperability, as well as further

developments of national capabilities for border surveillance, including training and infrastructures.

- Ensure a high level of **situational awareness** and in-depth understanding of threats and emerging challenges by consolidating evidence-based and intelligence-driven policy making.
- Ensure the effective implementation of the **Screening Regulation**, by allocating resources and capabilities, which includes setting up an independent monitoring mechanism.
- Strengthen and further develop **contingency planning** to increase reaction capabilities during crisis situations and ensure greater preparedness by promoting a more European approach.

### **3. To enhance the effectiveness of return systems**

At national level, Schengen countries need to:

- Ensure the effective implementation of **the return border procedure**.
- Strengthen the necessary **operational capacities and tools** to support the return and reintegration process, including sufficient capabilities for return procedures, as well as modernising tools and systems such as return case management and making full use of the functionalities of the Schengen Information System.
- Make use of **Frontex support** and actively address challenges in meeting deployment needs for Return Specialists.

### **4. To consolidate the operational framework for internal security cooperation**

At EU level:

- Advance the work of the **Informal Expert Group on Cross-Border Operational Law Enforcement Cooperation** by addressing joint operations, cross-border surveillance, and secure communications.
- Continue the **structured dialogue facilitated by the Schengen Coordinator** with all Member States concerned by or affected by internal border controls, in view of the gradual lifting of the controls.

At national level, Schengen countries need to:

- Complete the legal and operational implementation of the Information Exchange Directive, including through fully functioning **Single Points of Contact** and promoting the **systematic use of Europol information Systems**, such as SIENA.
- Make full use of all the **enhanced functionalities** of the Schengen Information System.
- Address **human resources and technical capacity needs (including training and digital infrastructure)** to match operational needs.
- **Maximise the use** of all instruments made available by the **revised Schengen Borders Code** to phase out internal border controls. Deepen regional cooperation initiatives and strengthen joint operational capacity by **expanding law enforcement cooperation frameworks**.

## 5. To strengthen Schengen governance

At EU level:

- Ensure the consolidation of achievements and implementation of the priorities identified in this report, including through **more systematic country-specific discussions**, and with strategic funding under the next MFF.
- Complete **Cyprus'** accession to the Schengen area.
- Complete the necessary procedures for the full implementation of the Schengen rules relevant to internal security in **Ireland**.
- Continue strong engagement with **enlargement countries**.

At national level, Schengen States need to:

- **Enhance national Schengen governance frameworks**, building on the advanced national governance models, all under the oversight of a designated national **Schengen Coordinator**.