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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE
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COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

2025 State of Schengen Report

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Schengen's 40-year anniversary

1. Schengen as a strategic asset

Signed on 14 June 1985, the Schengen Agreement marked the beginning of a new era of strategic cooperation and deeper integration centred on the freedom and security of its people. The vision was simple yet profound: to build a Europe where citizens could move across internal borders without facing barriers, thereby fostering economic growth, cultural exchange and social cohesion, all while enhancing collective security.

The creation of the Schengen area was a decisive moment in the process to build a united Europe – a Europe for its people [1]. The Schengen Agreement delivered tangible benefits first at the border regions, which lie at the heart of Europe's integration process, and then extending these benefits across the continent. As the

Schengen project evolved, it expanded beyond a mere agreement to abolish border controls. Over the years, Schengen has become a resilient and multifaceted system, grounded in effective external border management, common rules on visas, returns and police cooperation, close coordination between national authorities and closer international cooperation. Fully integrated into the EU's framework, it has grown both in membership and ambition, symbolising Europe's commitment to unity, freedom and security.

Four decades after its creation, Schengen is far beyond a mere symbol of mobility: it is a vehicle to improve the lives of citizens, facilitate business and a means of enhancing global standing. Today, Schengen is at the heart of a stronger and safer Europe, facilitating daily lives of more than 450 million Europeans. Schengen remains a project designed for the benefit of the people and has also evolved into a strategic asset of the Union, in three ways.

First, as an essential enabler of the Single Market, the Schengen area is a crucial driver of economic growth, competitiveness and Europe's economic sovereignty. In an increasingly volatile global landscape with the re-emergence of geopolitical tensions and geoeconomic competition, the European economy requires a barrier-free environment to flourish and less exposure to external dependencies. The Schengen area strengthens our collective resilience by supporting the free movement of goods, services and people. It plays a critical role in maintaining and strengthening supply chains across Europe and consolidating the Single Market, as underscored in the Letta report [2].

Second, Schengen is the EU's strongest response to the challenges of a world where threats are no longer confined to national borders. It enables us to harness our collective expertise and resources, forging a security framework that is far stronger and more effective than the sum of individual national systems. Schengen provides a set of tools, collective resources and capabilities needed to tackle today's complex, transnational threats to freedom and security. These threats, whether from organised criminal networks or hostile state or non-state actors, cannot be effectively addressed by individual nations. In today's geopolitical and security landscape, Schengen is no longer merely a benefit, it is a necessity.

Third, when hostile actors seek to weaken and fragment Europe, Schengen is a force for unity, bringing Europeans closer together. Schengen fosters unity and contributes to a shared tangible European identity. It is a deeply embedded political defence against attempts to sow division and distrust among Europeans.

For people to fully enjoy the rights and freedoms which derive from the Schengen acquis, mutual trust between Member States is key, and that in turn relies on an effective implementation of the agreed rules. Common standards to tackle illegal migration, to combat organised crime and counter terrorism, and to fight smuggling need to be strictly

adhered to, while ensuring adequate protection of fundamental rights. Effective enforcement mechanisms, and a coordinated effort at all levels are essential for sustainable cooperation among Member States.

Today, just as in 1985, it is time to once again reconfirm our trust in this project, recognising that we are at another decisive moment in our ongoing effort to maintain and consolidate a strong and united Europe. A strategic asset requires continued renewal and investment, including at the political, policy and regulatory, as well as operational levels.

Investing in Schengen as a strategic asset: advancing the political governance and the regulatory framework of the Schengen area

The Schengen governance framework encompasses a set of common rules and a system of institutions and procedures covering all policies and measures that underpin a well-functioning Schengen area. It ensures that the area operates smoothly and in line with policy objectives based on the principles of shared responsibility, mutual trust and monitoring of the agreed rules. It is grounded in close coordination between all authorities and close cooperation between Member States and with relevant EU agencies.

Over the 2024-2025 Schengen Cycle, the Schengen Barometer+ has provided a regular overview of the main factors having an impact on the Schengen area, consolidating Schengen's situational analysis. This information enhances preparedness and policy development, for example on combating drugs trafficking, visa and return. The Commission and the Belgian Presidency co-organised a workshop with Schengen countries and Justice and Home Affairs Agencies in 2024, which underscored the need to streamline reporting obligations, align the definitions of key indicators and maximise the use of other tools such as EUROSUR for information exchange. Eight operational conclusions, including mapping reporting frameworks and resolving specific data gaps, will shape the 2025-2026 Schengen cycle. This will improve the Barometer+, refining it into a focused and more effective tool for better governance.

Progress was also made during the Belgian Presidency to create a common framework for increased coordination, as proposed [3] by the Commission in 2024. A Schengen Senior Officials Meeting was created as a forum to tackle matters of common concern and prepare discussions for the Schengen Council. The first meeting focused on governance, legal coherence and enlargement. The second meeting held under the Hungarian Presidency emphasised regional cooperation as a tangible alternative to internal border controls, strengthening external border management and cooperation with third countries. This format will continue to play a key role in supporting policy coordination.

The global political landscape is undergoing significant transformation,

presenting both operational challenges and opportunities. Deepening and widening the Schengen area would bolster our collective strength to tackle these challenges. A strategic recalibration of implementation of the rules and increased investment in areas with the greatest long-term impact is needed, starting externally with a strong visa policy and closer engagement with third countries. At the same time, we must manage our external borders effectively and focus our resources, equipment and technology on increasing security. This will create the space for deeper cooperation within the Schengen area to boost collective action while fostering greater integration among people. Ultimately, the Schengen area is not a collection of isolated parts, but a cohesive system where all the parts work together to support our shared goals and boost our collective resilience.

The monitoring role of the Commission has been reinforced. Building on the progress made in recent years, the Commission will continue making full use of verification visits, revisits, unannounced visits and other enforcement tools at its disposal. Member States must also prioritise EU funding to tackle the vulnerabilities identified in Schengen evaluations and Frontex's vulnerability assessments. Therefore, a priority is to ensure that EU funds are strategically linked to the reforms needed.

Investing in Schengen as a strategic asset: operational action

The Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism, being the core governance element, is the system's compass to identify deficiencies and areas for improvement before they threaten the system's integrity and ensures the right balance of measures to close any gaps. Mutual trust is at the heart of Schengen, and the evaluation mechanism puts this into practice. Schengen countries not only ensure their systems work effectively but also actively support each other, recognising that the success (and the failures) of one have an impact on the stability and security of the whole Schengen area.

In 2024, the Commission implemented the annual evaluation programme leading to Schengen country reports of Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia. The Commission also monitored implementation of the remedial measures reported by Greece, Ireland and Denmark. Unannounced visits to the consulates in Mumbai, India of Germany, Poland and Spain were carried out in February 2024. Only a limited number of serious deficiencies remain unresolved since the previous evaluation cycle while there is still a significant number of persistent issues that need to be addressed.

Annex 1 contains more details on the implementation of the evaluation of monitoring activities and Annex 2 provides the compendium of best practices identified in recent Schengen evaluations.

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2. The political backbone of Schengen: a strong common governance framework

Navigating the geopolitical changes and the implications for freedom and security starts with a re-commitment to two foundational principles: shared responsibility and mutual trust. Shared responsibility to uphold the rights and security of all people across the Schengen area. Mutual trust among Schengen countries that every part of the Schengen system is managed competently and effectively in line with high common standards.

The 2024 Schengen Scoreboard highlights asymmetries in the implementation of key Schengen requirements. Around 65% of the recommendations issued under the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism have not yet been implemented. There are important operational consequences to persistent deficiencies.

Political action to renew the commitment to shared responsibility and mutual trust must be backed up by decisive action at both political and operational levels to ensure that the Schengen rules are implemented swiftly and effectively. This requires a robust Schengen governance framework with strong political oversight, coordination and accountability.

Over the last year, progress has been made to consolidate the governance framework, which was a key priority of the 2024-2025 Schengen Cycle. In particular, the Commission's enhanced tools, including the Schengen Barometer+ and the Schengen Scoreboard helped foster, among Schengen countries a shared understanding of key issues that require joint action, identify any gaps in implementation and bridge the gap between technical and political levels. This allowed for a more strategic approach to implementing and following up on Schengen evaluation and monitoring activities.

There can be new opportunities to fully leverage political coordination and monitoring. The Schengen Council, modelled on the Mixed Committee established under the Schengen Associated Agreements, is responsible for providing strategic guidance on the policies that have an impact on the functioning of Schengen. Complementing the Home Affairs Council formation, the aim of the Schengen Council is to create an open environment for close policy dialogue between the Schengen area decision-makers.

To ensure that the governance framework really delivers, there is a need to foster a deep understanding of the difficulties on the ground, enhance scrutiny of persistent vulnerabilities and deficiencies and take greater collective responsibility for effective solutions. Cooperation, decisive action and specific measures are needed to overcome persistent shortcomings and uphold the integrity of the commonly agreed rules.

> The 2025-2026 Schengen Cycle should prioritise integrated policy coordination and decision making on all issues that have a strategic impact on freedom and security in an area without internal frontiers by unlocking the full potential of the Schengen Council.
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> · The Commission will support efforts to further strengthen political oversight by the Schengen Council, with a view to ensuring more coordinated action among Member States on issues with direct impact on the functioning of Schengen and to facilitate discussions on common challenges.
>
> · The day-to-day management of the Schengen area can be improved by further strengthening common tools to detect and respond quickly and effectively to vulnerabilities within the Schengen area. The Commission will develop the aggregated Schengen Scoreboard to better support the Schengen Council in identifying key priorities to address gaps and take swift action to mitigate emerging risks.
>
> The Commission is ready to work with the current and incoming Presidencies to achieve these goals in the framework of Priority 1 for the 2025-2026 Schengen cycle as outlined in Section 5.

Work in the 2025-2026 Schengen cycle should also include action to strengthen national Schengen governance systems both in Schengen countries and candidate countries for EU accession. The Commission will organise a series of workshops to agree on minimum standards so that Schengen States can fully implement the Schengen system through effective political and administrative structures. This work will build on the extensive developments and the governance structures established under European Integrated Border Management. This approach will bring together all relevant authorities.

As reported in Schengen evaluations, and building on its own experience, the Commission invites all Schengen countries to nominate a national coordinator to oversee all issues that have an impact on the functioning of Schengen, ensuring clear allocation of responsibilities among all authorities concerned.

According to the follow-up on the 2019-2020 thematic evaluation of Member States' national strategies for integrated border management [4] , all Schengen countries have initiated national processes to revise their strategies. As of the end of 2024, 12 Schengen countries have formally adopted the revised strategies and eight were in the process of adoption. The results show notable improvements, including stronger governance frameworks and better integration of return procedures in national strategies. Most Schengen countries demonstrated progress in aligning their strategies with EU priorities, reflecting advancements in risk analysis, situational awareness and cooperation with the EU.

However, significant gaps persist in human resource planning, interagency coordination and financial arrangements. Only a few Schengen countries successfully link their strategies to action plans, needs analyses and funding frameworks. The national strategies still do not fully integrate specific provisions on fundamental rights safeguards and training. At the same time, the obligations related to the screening procedure established in the Pact on Migration and Asylum, need to be effectively integrated and aligned with the broader integrated border management system. Investing in the governance system for European Integrated Border Management will provide a solid foundation for building robust national Schengen governance frameworks.

3.   The policy and regulatory backbone: a wider and deeper Schengen

3.1. A wider Schengen area

Over 40 years, Schengen has evolved from a regional initiative among a few EU Member States into a truly European project [5] . The Schengen area has been expanded nine times to create what is today the world's largest area of free movement without internal border controls.

Bulgaria and Romania became fully integrated into the Schengen area on 1 January 2025. The decision of the Council of 12 December 2024 [6] , following its decision of 30 December 2023 [7] on the same matter, marked the completion of an 18-year process since both countries became Schengen States following their accession to the EU. By fully joining the Schengen area, Bulgaria and Romania are expected to save billions of euros considering that with internal borders still in place, companies operating in these two countries were estimated to pay billions, annually as a result of increased logistics costs, delays impacting deliveries of goods and equipment, and increased costs for fuel and drivers [8] .

Cyprus is working to implement the Schengen recommendations [9] and its first Schengen evaluation is ongoing. The Commission supports Cyprus in its process to a deeper integration into the Schengen system.

Ireland is uniquely exempt from participating in all provisions of the Schengen rulebook [10] . Given the benefits for Ireland and the Schengen area as a whole, and after being authorised by the Council to participate in certain areas [11] such as the Schengen Information System, as well as police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, a follow-up to its Schengen evaluation is currently underway [12] . The Commission intends to issue the Schengen evaluation report [13] for Ireland in 2025. If positive, this will enable the Council to put into effect these provisions [14] in Ireland, leading to increased Schengen cooperation.

As the EU prepares for further enlargement, with several candidate

countries advancing in their accession negotiations, the Schengen area is also set to expand to those countries as they are required to accept and implement the Schengen rulebook as of the day of their accession to the EU. A new transparent, efficient and effective framework for the admission into the Schengen area will be necessary to tackle the complexities of expanding that area and to ensure a well-prepared integration process. Building on the lessons from the last Schengen enlargement, the framework needs to provide a predictable and fair process allowing new countries to progressively benefit from Schengen participation, and, ultimately, to remove internal border controls as the final milestone.

This process requires rigorous monitoring at all stages to ensure that new Schengen countries continuously meet the high standards applied by existing countries in all areas needed to ultimately abolish internal border controls. As the first step, during the accession negotiations, these countries must continue working to put in place the legal, governance and operational standards needed to anchor the Schengen system in a fully functioning national governance framework by the time they join the EU. This requires robust preparation, including implementation of a Schengen action plan, as set out in the 2024 Communication on EU enlargement policy [15] .

3.2. Deepening Schengen to be fit for the digital age

The EU is currently transforming the way border management is operated, shifting away from mainly physical border checks towards a more modern and digital border system. It is necessary to accelerate the digitalisation of the Schengen framework to enhance security for citizens, strengthen external borders, law enforcement cooperation, and facilitate bona fide travel to and freedom to travel freely within the Schengen area, all while ensuring the protection of fundamental rights and security standards.

As part of efforts to make the Schengen area the reference standard worldwide in facilitating seamless and secure travel, the new rules [16] governing the efficient use of travel information ('advanced passenger information') by border and law enforcement authorities came into force in January 2025. This is an important step towards increasing security without compromising the travel experience, while respecting data protection and privacy rights. In 2025, the Commission intends to launch an evaluation of the rules governing the use of passenger name record data to analyse its effectiveness and efficiency.

The digitalisation of procedures at the EU's external border is a key element of addressing security risks. In December 2024, the Commission presented a proposal establishing the progressive start of operations of the Entry/Exit System. This proposal enables Schengen countries to gradually deploy the Entry/Exit System across their external borders over a period of six months, thus providing them and eu-LISA with flexibility and tools to address remaining challenges

before the full roll out of the system. The Commission calls on the co-legislators to ensure swift negotiations and a rapid adoption of the proposal. Preparations to roll out the European Travel Information and Authorisation System must be swiftly concluded as a number of Schengen countries face difficulties in implementing the required measures.

The Commission calls on the European Parliament and the Council, as well as on Member State authorities and eu-LISA, to ensure the that these major innovations are fully operational and follow the new timeline [17] agreed by the Schengen Council in March 2025.

While these systems will significantly enhance the security and efficiency of travel, the Commission's proposal on the digitalisation of travel documents, presented in October 2024 [18] , is part of a broader commitment to digital innovation for the benefit of travellers. The aim of this initiative is to set a common standard for digital travel documents and to bring in an EU-wide mobile application to help streamline border checks and result in a seamless travel experience for all travellers. Negotiations with the European Parliament and the Council are underway to make this ambition a reality. Work is also ongoing to modernise visa procedures to ensure that third-country nationals also benefit from a more efficient and secure visa procedure. Following the proposal from the Commission on digital visas, the legislative procedures concluded with adoption in 2023. The related implementing acts are currently under review and the aim is to start developing the EU visa application platform in 2026 for a start of operation of the platform and introduction of the digital visa in 2028.

As social and technological changes are moving at an unprecedented pace – unimaginable when Schengen was first created – the Schengen area must adapt to stay ahead. Emerging technologies and digital solutions will be crucial in transforming border management and enabling the early detection of threats. Investments in research and development for future European border management and security technologies should continue to protect the Schengen area using state-of-the-art European solutions in the future. This requires forging closer partnerships, including with Schengen associated countries and with public and private stakeholders, such as researchers, entrepreneurs, innovative companies or research and technology organisations. This work must be complemented with heightened preparedness through advanced threat detection systems, continuous monitoring of critical infrastructure and by putting in place real-time response protocols. These measures are needed to manage the increasing threat of cybersecurity breaches, including in EU agencies and border-related data systems.

3.3. Deepening Schengen to adapt to the evolving security landscape

On 1 April 2025, the Commission adopted ProtectEU: a new European Internal Security Strategy, which sets out the work to enhance the EU's

security apparatus in the coming years and to mainstream security considerations in all EU legislation, policies and programmes. Similar efforts need to be made at national level as the 2024 Schengen evaluations have revealed a persistent gap in the strategic approach to internal security. National authorities still operate in silos, implementing ad hoc measures and lacking a comprehensive European approach. This hinders Schengen countries from identifying national priorities, from having strategic planning of capabilities and from designing cross-border and complementary measures at all levels (national, regional and local). Guaranteeing internal security in an area without internal border controls therefore requires an approach that fosters deeper and more structured cooperation across national law enforcement authorities and at European level, including as regards governance.

As announced in the Internal Security Strategy, to support the discussions with Member States in the Council on the evolving internal security challenges and exchange on key policy priorities, the Commission will develop and present regular threat analyses for EU internal security challenges. To support the wider work on improved situational awareness, it is essential that Member States enhance intelligence sharing with Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC) and ensure better information sharing with EU agencies and bodies.

To address the evolving security challenges in a more coordinated, coherent and effective manner, cross-border operational law enforcement cooperation is crucial. The persistent legal and jurisdictional constraints, identified in the Commission's 2024 assessment of the Council Recommendations on operational law enforcement cooperation [19], continue to hinder effective operational cooperation among law enforcement authorities. As announced in the European Internal Security Strategy [20], the Commission will work towards creating a High-Level Group on the future of operational law enforcement cooperation to develop a shared strategic vision and propose tangible solutions to bridge legal gaps, improve information exchange, and ensure a high level of internal security throughout the Schengen area.

One of the challenges faced by law enforcement authorities is to ensure lawful access to data. Striking a balance between security and privacy is essential to safeguard both freedom and safety. Building on the recommendations adopted by the High-Level Group on Access to Data for Law Enforcement in May 2024 and as announced in the European Internal Security Strategy, the Commission will present in the first half of 2025 a roadmap setting out the legal and practical measures it proposes to take to ensure lawful and effective access to data.

Finally, there is a need to update the legal framework to combat migrant smuggling. The Commission urges the European Parliament and the Council to swiftly finalise the negotiations to strengthen Europol's role in combating migrant smuggling [21] . In the meantime,

work will continue to upgrade the already available tools. In January 2025, the Commission supported the launch of a professional network of investigators of online migrant smuggling, managed by Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre and the EU Internet Referral Unit. This network will help disrupt criminal groups operating online. The second International Conference on Migrant Smuggling will assess progress and drive further action supporting the consolidation of the work of the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling.

Similar initiatives have been implemented in response to drug trafficking, focusing on raising awareness of the factors driving this growing threat. Cooperation between public and private stakeholders has been key to tackling the misuse of commercial transport, as promoted through the European Ports Alliance. The initiative will feed into the upcoming EU Ports Strategy that the Commission plans to adopt in 2025, and as announced in the European Internal Security Strategy, it will be extended to include smaller and inland ports.

4. The operational backbone of Schengen: implementation

The true success of Schengen depends fundamentally on the system being implemented effectively by the thousands of authorities operating on the ground, including multiple EU agencies. It is only through consistent, high-quality and coordinated action that policy commitments can be translated into a practical reality. The operational framework of Schengen is supported by border guards, law enforcement officials and immigration authorities and is essential to make Schengen's ambitious vision a real strategic asset. The 2024 Schengen evaluation and monitoring activities revealed that, while the foundations of Schengen remain robust, certain persistent gaps remain in critical areas. They require targeted follow-up action to prevent those deficiencies from undermining the integrity and overall security of the Schengen area.

4.1. Strengthening preparedness well beyond our borders

Schengen primarily benefits European citizens and residents by facilitating the freedom to move across the Schengen area without internal border controls. These benefits also extend to all third-country nationals living legally in the territory of a Schengen country.

In 2024, the total number of regular bona fide travellers – meaning that they entered either with a Schengen visa or were eligible for visa-free travel – exceeded half a billion [22] . For short stays, third-country nationals can access the Schengen area through a unified Schengen visa system, unless they are eligible for visa-free travel [23] . This system, alongside the European Travel Information and Authorisation System to be implemented in 2026, ensures standardised border control, security and entry procedures for short stays across all Schengen countries, enhancing consistency and efficiency in managing both internal mobility and external entry and exit. It is our first line of

defence.

The level of implementation of the common visa rules is high as assessed in the 2024 Schengen evaluation and monitoring activities. Several Schengen countries swiftly tackled deficiencies related to the efficiency of the workflow at consulates processing Schengen visas or related to their visa processing IT system. However, certain improvements are still needed in the countries that process the highest volumes of short-stay Schengen visas with a view to effectively manage high numbers of applications.

Countries worldwide recognise the substantial benefits of the rights and freedoms associated with Schengen, which are central to global connectivity and cooperation. The EU must continue to promote high global standards on border management, law enforcement cooperation and information exchange, with strong protection of fundamental rights.

Moving forward, deepening relations with partner countries in our neighbourhood and beyond must come with an unequivocal commitment to meeting our high standards and shared values. Third countries that are eligible for visa-free access or privileged Schengen relations must not only reap the benefits but also uphold these fundamental commitments. This requires stronger monitoring and accountability. The Commission's new visa strategy, due to be adopted later in 2025, will explore the role of visa policy as a driver for competitiveness, as a leverage to enhance the internal security of the EU and to improve cooperation with third countries, including on readmission. The strategy will also consider measures to facilitate the arrival of top students, researchers and trained workers from third countries in support of the Union of Skills [24] .

Fostering greater cohesion and integration with EU candidate countries, is an opportunity to share experiences and extend core values and standards to our neighbours. In recent years, Frontex has reinforced its support to candidate countries. The EU has negotiated status agreements with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia [25] . In 2024, Frontex presence was extended to the Montenegro-Albania border. These agreements extend a critically important line of border management beyond the EU's own external borders, helping to address potential risks before they reach the EU.

In 2024, candidate countries took steps to align with the Schengen requirements, including action to safeguard high border management standards, align visa policies, combat organised crime, terrorism and hybrid threats, and to forge cooperation on law enforcement. The EU action plan on the Western Balkans [26] has delivered concrete progress on migration management. However, progress remains uneven and further action is needed on visa alignment and on building up a national Schengen governance framework. Montenegro and Serbia

have taken positive steps working towards establishing a Schengen action plan. The Commission is closely monitoring all EU candidate countries. The authorities in candidate countries will be progressively integrated into the Schengen-related activities, including involving them in training and monitoring activities.

Enlargement also means preparing for new geopolitical challenges for border management and security threats. The Commission will prioritise this work in its policy review, focusing on building a dynamic system that is fully equipped to face future needs and configurations.

Partner countries seek to deepen their ties with Member States in the Schengen area with the aim of forging a privileged relationship on border management and security, with tangible benefits for their citizens and closer people-to-people contacts through facilitated bona fide travel and legal migration. Frontex is currently negotiating working arrangements with nearly 20 third countries [27], which could cover information sharing via EUROSUR and risk analysis arrangements. To further strengthen the security of the Schengen area, Europol and EU Member States have stepped up work in recent years to improve the transmission and processing of information from key third countries [28]. This approach ensures that relevant data, particularly on terrorist suspects, is processed and shared efficiently to help detect and prevent security threats at the EU's external borders.

The Commission welcomes the successful finalisation of negotiations for agreements between the EU and, respectively Iceland and Norway covering the use of passenger name record data. The rules are not formally part of the Schengen legal framework, but once entered into forced, they will enable these Schengen countries to transfer and process this type of data, thus significantly improving the Schengen area's ability to combat terrorism and serious crime.

The 2025-2026 Schengen Cycle: closer coordination in Schengen's external action

The global dimension of Schengen also plays a crucial role in countering destabilisation tactics used around the world, particularly in situations of geopolitical rivalry, such as those employed by Russia. The Schengen framework enables the EU to act collectively, for example by taking measures under the visa suspension mechanism and by pooling resources, notably of the EU agencies, to counter critical threats. At the same time, the EU can commit to a coordinated approach to third countries, including for procedures authorising entry to the Schengen area [29].

In 2024, the Commission analysed the implementation of the guidelines issued on 30 September 2022 regarding general visa issuance for Russian applicants. The assessment demonstrates that

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joint action has led to an important overall reduction of the number of Schengen visas issued to Russian nationals, from more than 4 million visas issued in 2019 to 0.5 million in 2023. However, divergent practices among Schengen countries remain, which could jeopardise the EU's security. Some countries still issue a high number of tourist visas to Russian nationals, undermining the collective efforts to strengthen security. Therefore, it is essential to prioritise consistent implementation of coordinated action on third countries across Schengen countries, as discussed by the Schengen Council in March 2025.

4.2. Stronger security for people through robust border management and more effective returns

High-quality European integrated border management is a cornerstone of the Schengen area's success. In 2024, the Schengen area was once again the world's most visited destination, with 40% of global international travel at its external borders. This significant volume of passengers was managed effectively through the daily work of over 120 000 European border and coast guard personnel, although the heavy workload poses major challenges for authorities.

At the same time, geopolitical and security conflicts were a driver of migration flows, further complicating the management of Schengen's external border, including tactics to weaponise migration for political purposes. Intensified EU efforts, for example through strengthened partnerships with third countries, resulted in a significant reduction in irregular border crossings. Around 240 000 detections were recorded in 2024, the lowest level since 2021 [30].
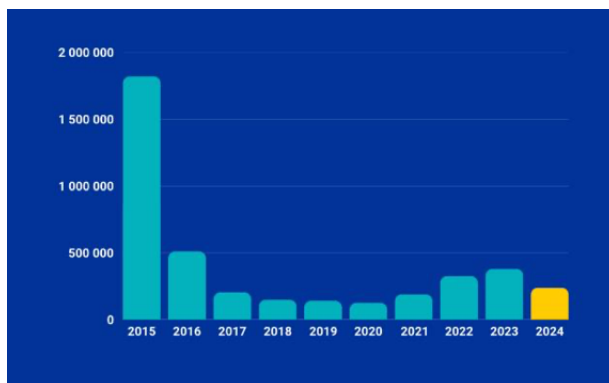
Irregular border crossings into the EU (Frontex)

In addition to the issue of a high flow of passengers, including those attempting to circumvent entry conditions, the EU's external borders are exposed to growing and more complex security threats. Ongoing violence in the Sahel is driving displacement and creating fertile ground for terrorist groups to strengthen their networks, with Russian mercenaries potentially exacerbating the spiral of violence and facilitating jihadists' recruitment efforts [31]. Similarly, regional crises

outside the EU create a ripple effect, providing new motivation for terrorist actors across the entire ideological spectrum to recruit, mobilise or build up their capacities [32] . While these threats currently appear to be more local or regional in nature, they still require close vigilance at external borders to prevent the return to the EU of foreign terrorist fighters and mitigate the risk of terrorism. External borders also remain vulnerable to the smuggling of illicit goods such as drugs and firearms, which can fuel organised crime.

The management of EU external borders is a shared responsibility of the Schengen countries and the EU. In line with its mandate, Frontex continues to provide key support for border management with more than 2 600 standing corps officers and technical assets deployed in Schengen States and third countries. In 2024, Frontex started to roll out its new operational concept and command structure, which will ensure that deployments can respond more swiftly and flexibly to the operational situation. Building on the substantial progress made in recent years and to meet the continuous needs, the Commission will work to strengthen the Agency, including by providing it with state-of-the-art technologies for surveillance and situational awareness. In this context, it is crucial that Schengen countries continue contributing to the European Border and Coast Guard in due time, in particular in terms of staff and assets. In addition, to further enhance border security and strengthen EU cooperation in the face of evolving threats, the Commission will propose next year to reinforce Frontex.

In addition to ensuring Frontex is equipped with the resources it needs to support joint operations on the ground, it is crucial that Schengen countries intensify their efforts, as significant gaps remain in the implementation of border management practices.

Border checks are particularly affected by these implementation gaps. Schengen evaluations show that almost half of all Schengen countries face shortcomings related to human resources, training, implementation of border check procedures and technical issues that affect the functionality of IT equipment, particularly when using the Schengen Information System. The persistence of these deficiencies represents a security gap for the Schengen area and therefore the Commission will work with Schengen countries to examine the reasons for the lack of progress. The Commission will report on progress on this front to the Schengen Council during the 2025-2026 Schengen cycle.

In terms of border surveillance, some Schengen countries exposed to heightened security threats due to the high risk of drug trafficking from third countries and increased migration, present major shortcomings. These vulnerabilities primarily affect sea border surveillance. Over the last year, the EU allocated additional funds amounting to EUR 378 million, under the Border Management and Visa Instrument to support Schengen countries in strengthening their border surveillance infrastructure and capabilities. The Commission calls on the Schengen

countries to accelerate action to ensure that funds are directed towards areas with the most pressing needs and to optimise the use of available technology.

A more effective management of the external borders needs to be accompanied by effective measures to return those with no legal right to stay in Member States. Travellers entering either for short or for long stays must meet all security requirements and diligently meet the requirement to exit the Schengen area within the set timeframe. If they do not, the Schengen area has a set of common minimum rules governing the return of people with no right to stay, including people who circumvent legal entry procedures. Once the Entry/Exit System is operational, it will enhance enforcement by improving the detection of visa overstayers, as they represent a significant share of travellers with no right to stay and who should return.

In 2024, the number of effective returns increased by nearly 12% compared to 2023, reaching almost 123 400 returns, a substantial contribution due to the significant rise in Frontex support. In that year, Frontex assisted Schengen countries in returning more than 56 000 people, a 43% increase on the previous year. Voluntary returns also continued to rise, rising from 54% in 2023 to 64% of returns in 2024.

Frontex Support in 2022-2024 - Forced vs Voluntary Returns
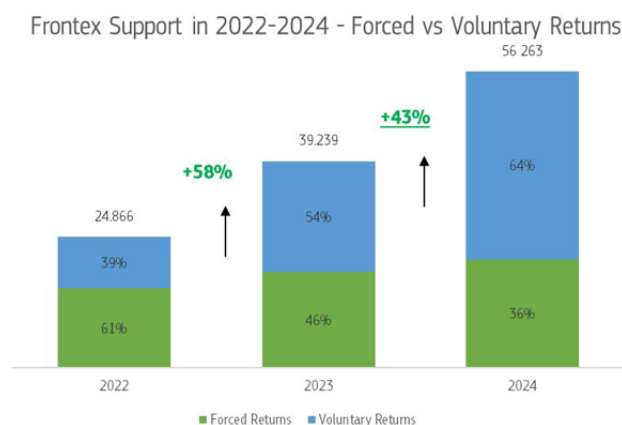
Despite this positive trend, the effectiveness of national return systems remains a significant challenge across the Schengen area, with only 1 in 5 people required to return being effectively returned. At least half of all Schengen countries are still grappling with severe difficulties in carrying out returns, difficulties that are particularly pronounced in countries with higher return caseload.

The use of common alerts in the Schengen Information System for third-country nationals required to leave the Schengen area has contributed to more effective returns, with notable improvements in coordination and information sharing. However, the system is still underutilised as a joint tool to identify people and support return efforts, since in a number of Schengen countries the number of return alerts created is 60% below the number of return decisions issued. This means that there may be returnees who have absconded, but there is no information in the system to ensure their return. Furthermore, in 2024,

some Schengen countries did not include fingerprints in any return alert, and many failed to include identity documents and photographs, even when available. This requires urgent action at national level.

To tackle the specific challenges of third-country nationals who present a security threat, the EU Return Coordinator provided guidance on the use of Schengen Information System return alerts and the 'security flag', drawing on Member State practices.

2024 thematic evaluation for more effective returns

To support the European return system, the Commission carried out a thematic Schengen evaluation on the effectiveness of the return system. It identified progress in developing national return systems but also revealed that the situation is complex, with national legal frameworks and procedures varying across Schengen countries, weakening the EU's overall effectiveness.

The evaluation identified three main issues. First, the lack of a risk analysis to anticipate fluctuations in the return caseload prevents national authorities from taking preparedness measures, including integrated planning of resources, particularly for contingency planning. Second, Schengen countries face challenges in ensuring a smooth return process due to inefficiencies at key stages including the appeals system, effective pre-return identification and sufficient monitoring of the compliance with an obligation to return. Third, the operational implementation of return alerts within the Schengen Information System, by all national authorities, needs to be enhanced to achieve more effective decision-making in return procedures.

To address these challenges, Schengen countries can draw on a wide range of best practices identified. For instance, some countries (the Netherlands, Norway) have put in place integrated planning and control cycles for all authorities involved in the return process, enabling regular coordination and ensuring optimal resource allocation. Additionally, the use of IT case management tools enabling real-time information exchange between different authorities has proven beneficial (Austria, Estonia, the Netherlands, Norway). Equally important are practices that prioritise return counselling as a key step in each return procedure, tailored to the specific needs of returnees (Austria, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Norway), which can significantly improve the overall effectiveness of returns.

The status quo is no longer an option. The Commission has therefore proposed a new legal framework for returns [33] and calls on the co-legislators to make swift progress in the negotiations. It is time to move beyond fragmented solutions and make progress in recognising and enforcing each other's decisions, alongside pooling the national

and European resources needed in a way that benefits all, recognising each other's strengths in contributing to the general European interest. Pending an agreement and application of the new legislative framework on returns, the Commission calls on the Schengen countries to implement the recommendations issued in the thematic evaluation without delay to make optimum use of the existing frameworks and to deliver better and faster results.

4.3. A high level of coordinated action within the Schengen area

A high level of situational awareness particularly at the external borders is a fundamental prerequisite for preparedness in an evolving security landscape. The EU framework already offers robust tools for situational awareness and risk analysis, such as EUROSUR designed to improve external border management by integrating information at national and EU levels, including satellite imagery, information systems and reporting applications to enhance awareness at EU borders. However, around 50% of Schengen countries still face major deficiencies, often linked to a lack of trained personnel and insufficient interagency cooperation, reducing the potential of these tools. To tackle the identified shortcomings and provide Schengen countries and Frontex with practical guidance on the implementation and management of EUROSUR, the Commission adopted in January 2025 a Recommendation establishing the EUROSUR Handbook [34] .

In the 2025-2026 Schengen Cycle, it is necessary to build on the existing efforts and stay ahead of emerging threats by maintaining a clear understanding of developments on the ground. This requires maximising the use of available tools such as EUROSUR, and implementing a more robust and integrated analytical approach, with the active involvement of EU agencies.

Rapid and effective information exchange between law enforcement authorities remains one of the most powerful tools in preventing and combating crime. By the end of 2024, all Schengen countries were required to transpose the new rules of the Directive on Information Exchange [35] into their national systems to ensure seamless and coordinated communication. Eleven Schengen countries have not yet notified the transposition of this Directive [36] and seven have only notified partial transposition. Several countries have not yet created a functioning single point of contact connected to an interoperable case management system. These delays put everyone at risk. There is an urgent need for all countries to complete the legal and technical implementation so that law enforcement authorities can swiftly exchange information.

The enhanced functionalities of large-scale IT systems, particularly the Schengen Information System, have yet to achieve their full potential in enhancing security. In addition, many Schengen countries States continue to face challenges in implementing critical functionalities at the external border such as fingerprint searches when using the Visa

Information System. These difficulties, largely due to a lack of sufficient resources, mean that these tools are significantly underutilised and critical security gaps remain. Without targeted investments and a firm commitment to fully operationalise the Schengen and Visa Information Systems, their potential to serve as a robust and reliable pillar of security remains untapped.

Together with making seamless information exchange a reality, and to complement our external border measures, there is a need for structured and effective cooperation on cross-border operational law enforcement.

Discussions held by the Schengen Coordinator in the 2023-2024 Schengen Cycle as well as recent Schengen evaluation visits to some Schengen countries (Czechia, Croatia, Hungary and Slovakia) have highlighted that cross-border cooperation, particularly at the regional and border areas, has improved significantly over the past year. In 2024, several bilateral and multilateral agreements were renewed to help authorities translate these aims of cooperation into action on the ground, including provisions on exercising police and other public powers in border regions, as provided for in the revised Schengen Borders Code.

Over the last year, there was also a growing focus on implementing more strategic tools that adopt a 'whole-of-route approach', going beyond addressing immediate risks that materialise at the internal border regions to tackle the threats at the external borders. In 2024, the Schengen regional initiative between Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia was further strengthened. It now includes measures at the Bulgarian-Türkiye border to more effectively prevent threats before they reach the Schengen area. Similarly, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia are set to implement joint patrols along their border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, enhancing regional cooperation.

These positive developments confirm the potential of Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/915 of 9 June 2022 on operational law enforcement cooperation [37] and Commission recommendations of 23 November 2023 on alternative measures to controls at the internal borders [38] . Schengen countries have jointly developed many new practices, including joint police stations and regular cross-border joint risk analyses to better tailor joint operations. In addition, several countries are putting in place the transfer procedure brought in by the revised Schengen Borders Code [39] , that aims to facilitate the direct transfer of irregular migrants at the internal borders, with arrangements underway to ensure its practical application. The Commission calls upon the Schengen countries to work closely together with their neighbours, especially where controls have been reintroduced along the internal border, to develop new cooperation initiatives and to enable travellers to cross internal borders seamlessly.

At the same time, there is still untapped potential to operational law

enforcement cooperation as national approaches vary significantly and are not always considered and implemented in a strategic manner. While new initiatives and practices have been developed, these are not uniformly replicated throughout the Schengen area and in many cases are not considered as part of the wider Schengen security toolkit. There is a shared interest to strengthen national efforts and fully leverage the benefits of closer cooperation. This will also help address disruption at the internal borders and ensure the correct functioning of border crossings along the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).

Schengen evaluations in 2024 confirmed that many Schengen countries still lack the legal framework to implement effective cross-border cooperation, as several agreements are still outdated. There are also operational obstacles in some countries, such as limitations to carry out sufficient mobile monitoring or legal limitations for the police to receive passenger data from ferry operators. These have resulted in some cases in the reintroduction of internal border control, when in many instances, the same results could be achieved, often more effectively and efficiently, using national policing powers.

Remedial measures are particularly urgent for the Schengen countries that have notified the reintroduction of controls at the internal borders, as they constitute a derogation from the principles underlying Schengen cooperation. As of April 2025, ten Schengen countries have reintroduced or extended internal border controls.

On 10 July 2024, the revised Schengen Borders Code entered into force. It contains an updated framework for the reintroduction of internal border controls, with clearer deadlines and stricter monitoring and reporting obligations for the Schengen countries and the Commission. The entry into force of the revised Schengen Borders Code is considered as the start of the new legal framework, meaning that deadlines and obligations under the new Code will be calculated from the time of the first notification since its entry into force. The Commission has adopted templates for the notifications and reports to be submitted by the Member States when reintroducing internal border control.

The Commission is closely monitoring Schengen countries' actions, engaging in a structured dialogue with all Member States concerned to identify any gaps or inconsistencies in the application of the new rules, including transfer practices at the internal borders. The ongoing assessments has as its objective to ensure that any measure implemented is both proportionate and necessary; and second, to guarantee that notifications for reintroducing internal border controls are strictly confined to genuine and justified cases, particularly in situations where measures in question merely reinforce police cooperation efforts.

The Commission welcomes the increase in operational cooperation, including at regional level, and fosters further initiatives, such as

exercise of police powers in border areas that are powerful tools to address Member States legitimate concerns on migration and security. The Commission remains committed to upholding the principles of free movement and security across the Schengen area and will follow-up as necessary in the upcoming Schengen cycle, including with the issuance of opinions as set out in the revised Schengen Borders Code.

5.   Priorities in the 2025-2026 Schengen cycle

The benefits that the Schengen area has brought to people in the EU could have hardly been imagined when the five founding Member States signed the Schengen Agreement 40 years ago. Over time, Schengen has evolved into a robust and comprehensive system, effectively managing external borders, security and migration in a coordinated manner in full respect of European values and fundamental rights.

To maintain and build on these achievements, the Schengen area requires continuous attention and commitment. Forty years after Schengen was set up, it is essential to acknowledge that the geopolitical and security landscape has shifted and to take the steps needed to ensure that Schengen's foundations are resilient enough to meet future challenges. With the ongoing EU enlargement process, this is a priority for the Commission.

In the 2025-2026 Schengen cycle, there is a need to strengthen action across three main areas. First, it is essential to consolidate the governance framework to enhance policy coordination. This provides significant opportunities to adopt a more structured approach, prioritising effective implementation, shared responsibility and clear accountability across all levels.

Priority 1: consolidating the governance framework building on the progress made over the last year and with a view to implementing a more structured approach, focused on implementation, shared responsibility and accountability. While technical monitoring remains important, it is not sufficient and therefore strengthening political governance is needed to bring forward tangible progress.

-   At EU level, this requires establishing a structured framework to follow up on priorities, including greater political oversight. The Commission will work closely with the Council Presidencies and Schengen countries in this area.

-   At national level, Schengen countries need to further develop effective national governance systems with stronger internal coordination of all Schengen-related matters. EU candidate countries also need to develop such national governance systems ahead of accession to prepare for joining the Schengen area.

Second, a structured and coherent approach to security is needed, requiring closer police cooperation. Given the persistent legal and operational limitations, more work will need to be pursued at European and national level to step up cooperation among law enforcement authorities. A comprehensive approach that covers the full range of security threats must become a central pillar of the Schengen system.

Priority 2: structured and coherent approach to police cooperation to tap the potential of the Council Recommendation on operational law enforcement cooperation and the Schengen Borders Code, and moving towards regional cooperation initiatives applying the whole-of-route approach.

- At EU level, follow-up is needed on the main conclusion of the Commission's assessment on the recommendations related to police cooperation, stating that 'persistent legal, technical and operational challenges highlight the limits of the current non-binding recommendations'. A strategic discussion at EU level will be launched to develop a shared vision.

- At national level, Schengen countries need to reassess exiting cooperation initiatives in the light of the broader dimension of the threats, which extend beyond immediate neighbours and require a coordinated response to challenges along the entire route. This necessitates using all cross-border cooperation tools, including in the internal border regions, in line with the revised Schengen Borders Code. The Schengen Coordinator will continue to support the work for operational law enforcement cooperation, including by building closer cooperation with law enforcement authorities from EU candidate countries.

Third, efforts must be accelerated to fulfil the promises of digitalisation with key milestones to be achieved in the coming months to ensure that the Entry/Exit System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System are fully on track to meet the new timeline. It is essential to avoid any further delays as this would give rise to significant costs, including prolonged security vulnerabilities, inefficiencies in border management and missed opportunities to streamline migration procedures.

Priority 3: accelerating the digitalisation of procedures and systems to increase security and efficiency at the EU's external borders and within the area without internal border controls.

- At EU level, this requires strong political monitoring of compliance with the milestones and revised timeline. At the same time, strategic discussions must continue on the broader digitalisation framework to tackle security and efficiency gaps, including on document security, migration management and return.

-       At national level, Schengen countries should make better use of existing tools, in particular the Schengen and Visa Information Systems. Schengen countries must put in place the equipment, processes and systems to enable the timely and effective roll out of the interoperability framework, in particular the Entry/Exit System, the European Travel Information and Authorisation System, Eurodac and the Visa Information System.

The Commission invites the Schengen Council to endorse these priorities at its next meeting in June 2025. The priorities and considerations put forward for this new Schengen cycle should also form the basis for increased political dialogue at both national and European levels, including in both the European Parliament and the Council.

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(1)   European Council meeting at Fontainebleau Conclusions of the presidency, June 1984, 1984_June_-_fontainebleau__eng_.pdf .

(2)   'Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity. Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens', Enrico Letta – April 2024. Enrico Letta - Much more than a market (April 2024) .

(3)   COM/2024/173 final.

(4)   Commission Implementing Decision of 17.12.2020 establishing the report of 2019 - 2020 thematic evaluation of Member States` national strategies for integrated border management. C(2020) 8000 final.

(5)   Protocol 19 to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the Schengen acquis integrated into the framework of the European Union applies to 30 countries. Internal border controls have been lifted between 29 participating countries.

(6)   Council Decision (EU) 2024/3212 of 12 December 2024 setting the date for the lifting of checks on persons at internal land borders with and between the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania (OJ L 3212, 23.12.2024).

(7)   Council Decision (EU) 2024/210 of 30 December 2023 on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen acquis in the Republic of Bulgaria and Romania (OJ L 120, 4.1.2024).

(8)   The cost of non-Schengen for the single market – impact on Bulgaria and Romania, own initiative report, European Economic and Social Committee, INT 1046, 4 December 2024.

(9)   Council documents: 5535/21, 10403/22, 12636/21, 12638/21, 12639/21, 11237/24.

(10)   Articles 4 and 5 of Protocol 19 to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the Schengen acquis integrated into the framework of the European Union.

(11)   Council Decision 2002/192/EC of 28 February 2002 concerning Ireland's request to take part in some of the provisions of the Schengen acquis.

(12)   Pursuant to Article 2 of Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2020/1745, evaluation visits related to police cooperation and the Schengen Information System were carried out in 2021 under the first-time Schengen evaluation of Ireland. In view of assessing the progress made by Ireland, a verification visit was carried out between 25 and 29 November 2024 in accordance with Article 21(3) of Regulation (EU) 2022/922. While progress was observed, Ireland still needs to take further measures to implement the pending remedial measures. The Commission will continue monitoring the implementation of the action plan.

(13)   Covering the assessment by the evaluation team of the implementation by Ireland of the requirements on judicial cooperation in criminal matters, drugs cooperation and Article 26 of the Schengen Convention.

(14)   Council Decision 2002/192/EC of 28 February 2002 concerning Ireland's request to take part in some of the provisions of the Schengen acquis.

(15)   2024 Commission's Communication on EU enlargement policy of 30.10.2024. COM(2024) 690 final.

(16)   Regulation (EU) 2025/12 and Regulation (EU) 2025/13.

(17)   According to the revised timeline, the roll out of the Entry/Exit System will be progressive, starting in October 2025. The European Travel and Authorisation System will be launched in the last quarter of 2026.

(18)   Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an application for the electronic submission of travel data ("EU Digital Travel application") and amending Regulations (EU) 2016/399 and (EU) 2018/1726 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EC) No 2252/2004, as regards the use of digital travel credentials (COM/2024/670 final); Proposal for a Council Decision on the issuance of digital travel credentials based on identity cards (COM(2024) 671 final).

(19)   Commission Staff Working Document, assessment of the effect given by the Member States to Council Recommendation (EU) 2022/915 of 9 June 2022 on operational law enforcement cooperation. SWD(2025) 36 final of 31.1.2025.

(20)   COM(2025) 148 final.

(21)   Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on enhancing police cooperation in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and on enhancing Europol's support to preventing and combating such crimes and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/794 (COM/2023/754 final); Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down minimum rules to prevent and counter the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and stay in the Union, and replacing Council Directive 2002/90/EC and Council Framework Decision 2002/946 JHA (COM/2023/755 final).

(22)   March 2025 Schengen Barometer+.

(23)   Following a case-by-case assessment to determine whether third countries meet the high Schengen standards, the EU currently has a visa-free regime in place with 61 non-EU countries, two special administrative regions of China (Hong Kong and Macao) and one territorial authority that is not recognised as a state by at least one EU Member State (Taiwan). Under this regime, non-EU citizens with a biometric passport can enter the Schengen area for short stays without needing a visa. The principle of visa reciprocity applies enabling EU citizens to travel to those non-EU countries.

(24)   Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions on the Union of Skills. COM(2025) 90 final of 5 March 2025.

(25)   While the status agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina is being finalised, the agreements with Albania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have all been signed and joint operations are ongoing.

(26)   EU Action Plan on the Western Balkans - European Commission .

(27)   Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Canada, The Gambia, Jordan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Mauritania, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Senegal, Serbia, USA, and Ukraine.

(28)   For instance, in March 2025 the EU and Brazil signed an agreement that strengthens the partnership between Europol and Brazilian law enforcement, enabling the exchange of operational information.

(29)   Communication from the Commission 1. Updating guidelines on general visa issuance in relation to Russian applicants following Council Decision (EU) 2022/1500 of 9 September 2022 on the suspension in whole of the application of the Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on the facilitation of the issuance of visas to the citizens of the European Union and the Russian Federation; and 2. Providing guidelines on controls of Russian citizens at the external borders (C(2022) 7111 final).

(30)   Frontex data (14 January 2025). Irregular border crossings into EU drop sharply in 2024 .

(31)   Frontex 2024 strategic risk analysis. Strategic_Risk_Analysis_2024_Report.pdf

(32)   COM(2025) 148 final.

(33)   COM/2025/101 final.

(34)   Commission Recommendation of 17.1.2025 establishing the practical handbook for the implementation and management of EUROSUR ('EUROSUR Handbook'), C(2025) 117 final.

(35)   Directive (EU) 2023/977 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 on the exchange of information between the law enforcement authorities of Member States and repealing Council Framework Decision

2006/960/JHA. OJ L 134, 22.5.2023, p. 1–24.
(36)   On 31 January 2025, the Commission opened infringement procedures by sending a letter of formal notice to 18 Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Slovenia).
(37)   OJ L 158, 13.6.2022, p. 53–64.
(38)   Commission Recommendation of 23.11.2023 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, 17.01.2024.
(39)   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).

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels,
23.4.2025

COM(2025)
185 final

ANNEX
to the

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

2025 State of Schengen Report

ANNEX 1

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHENGEN SYSTEM: A HORIZONTAL AND COUNTRY-SPECIFIC OVERVIEW OF SCHENGEN EVALUATION AND MONITORING ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING THE SITUATION AT INTERNAL BORDERS

Schengen is the world's largest area of freedom, security and justice

without internal frontiers. It benefits more than 450 million EU citizens, along with non-EU nationals living in the EU or visiting the EU as tourists, students or for business purposes. For the past four decades, Schengen has provided this freedom and security thanks to a robust framework that underpins its daily operations. The Schengen system sets harmonised, high-standard rules for entry, ensures rigorous and effective management of the external border, and promotes effective cooperation on law enforcement and immigration matters. The system does not operate in isolation; it is grounded in a governance framework that prioritises effective implementation of the Schengen rules and coordinated responses.

Against this background, the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism plays a key role in promoting the conditions for a well-functioning area without controls at the internal borders. Through this peer-to-peer mechanism, teams of national experts, coordinated by the Commission and supported by observers from EU agencies and bodies, conduct evaluations of each Schengen country to identify deficiencies and ensure their prompt resolution, thus preventing any spillover effects that could jeopardise the integrity and stability of Schengen. The mechanism is also the tool used to assess new countries' readiness to apply all Schengen rules, with the ultimate goal of abolishing control at the internal borders as part of the Schengen accession process.

In 2024, the Commission and the Schengen countries, with strong support from EU agencies and bodies, made continued progress on the third generation of Schengen evaluations. The application of the new Schengen Evaluation Regulation has involved a major simplification and reduction of administrative burden (the new Schengen Country reports resulted in six times fewer reports, leading to fewer recommendations), with more strategic focus and streamlining, and more transparency about the results. This was also supported by strengthening the involvement of national country coordinators. In addition, a comprehensive training strategy was developed to create a unified Schengen evaluation training framework. The Commission will continue to consolidate this new approach with shorter reports and fewer recommendations, while focusing on greater implementation of the most important structural reforms.

Schengen evaluations were carried out in 2024 in Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia, shedding particular light on the situation at the EU's eastern borders. These evaluations highlighted the challenges stemming from the current geopolitical environment, including Russia's hybrid threats, which have significant implications for the internal security of Schengen. Overall, evaluations revealed that these countries are participating effectively in the Schengen architecture and implementing the established rules. However, in the light of evolving security challenges, there is a need for greater preparedness. While ensuring full respect of fundamental rights at the border was a common challenge, Hungary's evaluation revealed

serious deficiencies in the respect of fundamental rights during border and return procedures. Evaluations were also conducted at the consulates of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, related to their 2022 Schengen evaluations on visa policy, helping to finally close the backlog of evaluations that had been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, one unannounced visit took place in Mumbai, India, on the application of the common visa policy by the consulates of Germany, Poland and Spain.

As part of the evaluation activities, particular focus was also paid to the situation at the internal borders. Although none of the Schengen countries evaluated had reintroduced controls at their internal borders during the evaluation visits, such controls affected some of those evaluated (i.e. Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia) because of reintroductions of such controls by neighbouring countries. The Schengen Coordinator also emphasised this important issue during regular bilateral and multilateral meetings with Schengen countries. Within the framework of this structured dialogue, 15 meetings took place between countries that had reintroduced internal border control and countries affected by such controls. These discussions reaffirmed the targeted nature of internal border controls and provided opportunities to further strengthen cross-border cooperation, taking into account the enhanced tools introduced by the Schengen Borders Code, which came into force last year.

As part of the strengthened monitoring efforts under the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism, revisits and verification visits were carried out in Greece (due to serious deficiencies identified in 2021), Ireland (as part of the ongoing first-time Schengen evaluation) and Denmark. The results of all monitoring activities were included in the 2024 Schengen Scoreboard, which was presented to the Schengen countries during the December Schengen Council.

2024 was also the year to deliver on a key strategic priority, as identified by the European Council, with implementation of the thematic evaluation on more effective returns. The adoption of the report in December 2024 paved the way for concrete improvements to return systems, identifying shortcomings in the return process that limit the system's effectiveness, together with best practices implemented by some Schengen countries that provide solutions to common challenges. The thematic evaluation results have also fed into the Commission's proposal for a new legislative framework on returns, adopted on 11 March 2025, and provide a roadmap for action until the new rules take effect.

Looking ahead in this important year in which we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Schengen Agreement, one of the key achievements of EU integration, the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism remains central to the work on the ground to implement the Schengen architecture. To reflect the new regulatory framework, the evaluation questionnaire will be updated, and the Commission will sharpen the

strategic focus by refining (in close cooperation with the national country coordinators) the scope of evaluation to prioritise areas with the greatest impact. This, in turn, needs to be accompanied by stronger political oversight, as persistent deficiencies in implementing Schengen rules continue to undermine its proper functioning. Addressing these shortcomings urgently requires tangible remedial action.

1. EVALUATION AND MONITORING ACTIVITIES IN 2024

- 2024 evaluation visits
- 2024 monitoring visits
- 2024 unannounced visits
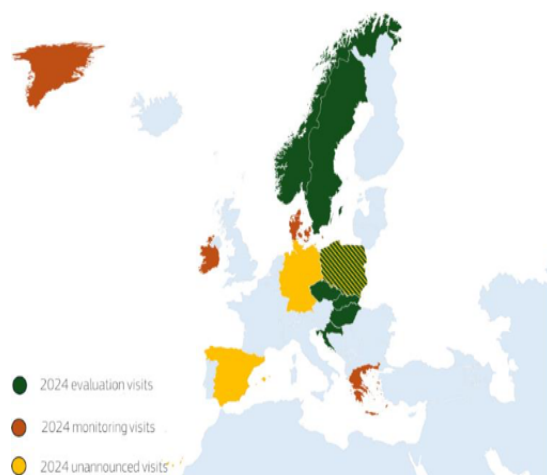
Evaluation activities in 2024 [1]

Over the past year, experts from both the Commission and the Schengen countries, supported by observers from EU agencies, offices and bodies [2] , implemented the 2024 annual programme for Schengen evaluations. The countries evaluated were Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czechia. Following these evaluations, the Commission adopted Schengen country reports for Croatia [3] and Poland [4] , as well as an evaluation report on the serious deficiencies identified in Hungary. Evaluations of Denmark, Norway and Sweden (which had been postponed owing to the restrictions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic) were also concluded.

Considering the regional dynamics affecting these countries, particularly those exposed to hybrid threats from Russia and the weaponisation of migration by Belarus, high migratory pressure and cross-border crime, specific attention was given to the following priorities:

- · solid national Schengen governance as a precondition for Schengen countries to participate effectively in and implement fully the Schengen system, through efficient political and administrative capacities;

- · strengthened border management capacities to control external borders effectively, both under normal circumstances and during

crises, including robust contingency planning together with full respect of fundamental rights under the European integrated border management;

· fit-for-purpose security initiatives with neighbouring Schengen countries, adopting a comprehensive whole-of-route approach that emphasises proactive cooperation among police forces and the seamless exchange of information;

· rigorous checks of entry conditions of third countries as part of visa procedures, and implementation of efficient processes to return individuals who are not authorised to remain in the Schengen area;

· harnessing of large-scale IT systems to support every stage of the Schengen process, ensuring that their enhanced functionalities deliver tangible outcomes in strengthening security, managing external borders and facilitating information exchange, while respecting data protection requirements.

Key conclusions of the 2024 country evaluations

Overall, the 2024 country evaluations highlighted the growing importance of the Schengen architecture in tackling key challenges faced by Schengen countries and the EU, including greater pressure at external borders, managing internal security in the face of evolving threats and streamlining processes across the board. This was particularly evident in the countries evaluated, especially those along the EU's eastern border, which share similar regional dynamics.

While some of the countries evaluated have made significant progress in implementing the Schengen rules, for instance as regards enhanced land border surveillance and more active police cooperation, others continue to face challenges in fully meeting Schengen's high standards. Vulnerabilities often arise from insufficient specialised resources, misalignment between strategic and operational priorities, and insufficient use of existing technical and legal tools to identify and tackle quickly evolving cross-border security threats.

The 2024 evaluations once again highlight the urgent need to prioritise at political, strategic and operational levels, Schengen policies, processes and tools to ensure effective on-the-ground implementation, thereby contributing to a well-functioning Schengen area.

In February 2024, the Commission carried out an unannounced visit to the German, Polish and Spanish consulates in Mumbai, India, to assess the common visa policy. The objective was to assess potential

vulnerabilities in this key pre-Schengen entry hub, which is one of the locations that issue the highest volume of short-stay visas, and which faces an ever-growing demand. The evaluation made possible to assess some of the complaints that the Commission receives regularly about excessive waiting times for appointments, which can lead, among other things, to visa shopping. In this context, the evaluation team assessed both cooperation with external service providers and country-specific issues (e.g. for Germany, centralisation of operations in Mumbai). The unannounced evaluation concluded that there were no serious deficiencies in the application of the visa requirements by the three Schengen countries in their respective consulates and that decisions on visa applications were generally well-founded. Recurrent issues still requiring attention and improvements include cooperation with external service providers and the use of IT systems supporting visa procedures.

Monitoring activities in 2024

Continuous monitoring is at the heart of governance efforts to identify challenges and respond with real, measurable results. Therefore, the success of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism – and, by extension, the stability of Schengen itself – depends on the effective implementation of the recommended remedial measures. The measures are tailored to the specific situation in each Schengen country and are designed to both enhance the application of the Schengen rules and ensure that every Member State contributes positively to collective freedom and security.

In its efforts to strengthen the monitoring dimension of Schengen evaluations, the Commission has stepped up scrutiny of the follow-up reports submitted by Schengen countries to identify promptly any gaps and delays in implementation. While the Schengen Scoreboard has made reporting by Schengen countries more consistent and regular, the follow-up reports still need to be submitted on time. In 2024, seven Schengen countries were late in submitting their follow-up reports. Efforts must also focus on improving the quality of reporting to ensure that the information provided is relevant. This will enable the Commission to fulfil its monitoring role effectively and ensure that there is a meaningful exchange, leading to tangible solutions while identifying both progress and remaining gaps.

As part of the enhanced monitoring efforts, the Commission carried out targeted monitoring visits, including one revisit to assess serious deficiencies that had been identified previously and three verification visits to evaluate progress in implementing action plans.

Revisit in 2024

· Greece (November 2024). Given the serious deficiencies identified in 2021 concerning processes and safeguards in the return of third-country nationals with no legal right to stay, the

aim of the visit was to assess the implementation of the remedial measures. Considering the limited progress made by Greece, the evaluation team concluded that the serious deficiencies persist.

Verification visits in 2024

·   Greece – management of the external borders (September 2024). The reason for this visit was the limited progress reported by Greece following the evaluation in 2021. The visit highlighted low progress at the strategic level and at the land borders, requiring urgent remedial measures.

·   Denmark – management of the external borders (December 2024). The objective was to evaluate the developments reported by the Danish authorities in strengthening the overall governance and coordination of border management. The visit confirmed that notable improvements had been made; however, further efforts are needed to speed up full implementation of the reinforced border governance structure, supported by a comprehensive human resources strategy with sufficient staffing and proper training.

·   Ireland – internal security as a follow-up to the ongoing first-time evaluation (November 2024). The visit confirmed that significant progress had been made to boost the EU's internal security by implementing the Schengen Information System, including the new functionalities; however, improvements in police cooperation remained limited. Further efforts are required to push forward work under the first-time Schengen evaluation, which would benefit from stronger Schengen governance to ensure the swift implementation of remedial measures.

Currently, three Schengen countries still have serious deficiencies in implementing the Schengen rules [5] . The Schengen Coordinator is following up closely with the relevant national authorities and the Commission is actively monitoring the situation.

Following the latest assessments of follow-up reports submitted by Member States, the Commission hereby closes the action plans [6] of Liechtenstein in the fields of the Schengen Information System [7] and police cooperation [8] , and the action plan of Slovenia [9] related to compliance with data protection requirements in implementation of the Schengen architecture, in accordance with Article 21(3) of the Schengen Evaluation Regulation. Considering the results of the evaluation activities carried out in 2024, the Commission has technically closed the action plans of Poland that were still open at the time of the evaluation [10] .

2.   2024 SCHENGEN SCOREBOARD

During the Schengen Council meeting in December 2024, the

Commission provided ministers of the Schengen area with the 2024 Schengen Scoreboard. The Scoreboard was accompanied by tailored strategic priorities, highlighting the progress made while also urging greater efforts in key areas.
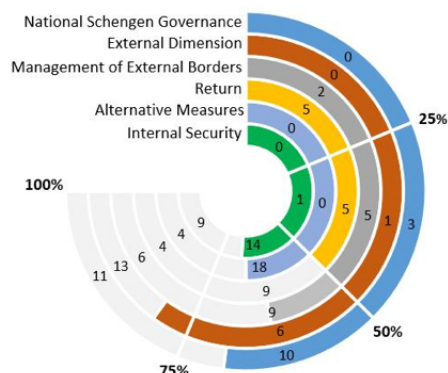
2024 Schengen Scoreboard (aggregation): overall state of implementation by specific dimension

An analysis of the evaluation and monitoring activities conducted in 2024 revealed progress in several important areas, with some Schengen countries making rapid progress in implementing their respective action plans. On Schengen visa policy, for example, several countries reported horizontal improvements in addressing deficiencies in the practices of external service providers. Norway and Sweden, in particular, despite being evaluated in the visa field in 2024, have made substantial progress and are close to completing their action plans. Similarly, Cyprus has undertaken significant efforts to implement the remedial measures required, with notable improvements in the return process and the Schengen Information System. Meanwhile, the evaluations of Poland and Hungary, while leading to new recommendations, also highlighted significant progress in implementing the remedial measures from the previous evaluation cycle.

However, the 2024 Schengen Scoreboard also confirmed a persistent trend observed in recent years, namely the uneven pace of implementation of recommendations at national level following a Schengen evaluation. While the Schengen Scoreboard provides a snapshot of the implementation status at a given time [11] , Schengen countries evaluated in the same year, and therefore expected to be at similar stages of implementation, still show significantly different levels of progress. For instance, whereas two of the Schengen countries that are being evaluated in 2025 have almost fully implemented all recommendations, this is not true for the third country.

State of play in implementing the Schengen evaluation recommendations as of April 2025

Moreover, a significant number of longstanding deficiencies persist in

several Schengen countries years after their evaluations took place; many of these deficiencies relate to core aspects of the Schengen framework. This undermines the effectiveness of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism in supporting fully the functioning, security and integrity of the Schengen area. This, in turn, creates critical vulnerabilities that, if not addressed swiftly, could have a substantial negative impact on the overall functioning of Schengen.

A horizontal element requiring urgent remedial action concerns implementation of the large-scale IT systems that underpin the Schengen architecture – a vulnerability with far-reaching security implications for border management, migration and law enforcement. This was identified as a major shortcoming in at least half of the countries evaluated. Despite the enhanced functionalities of the Schengen Information System – designed to reinforce security and streamline procedures – their full potential remains unrealised, as Schengen countries are not using the system to its required standards and capabilities. For example, five countries still fail to issue alerts on vulnerable people, such as children at risk of abduction, while one country is responsible for issuing 75% of such alerts. Only 16 countries have created alerts for inquiry checks, leaving critical gaps in the system: these checks make it possible to obtain information on people or related objects for the purposes of prosecuting criminal offences and preventing threats to public or national security. These gaps affect the security of Schengen as a whole.

At the same time, Schengen countries are not adequately putting essential data into the system, even when such information is readily available at the national level. At the beginning of 2025, there were around 1.7 million alerts on individuals, of which only around 900 000 (52%) included photographs and only around 600 000 (35%) contained fingerprints. These severe gaps significantly hamper countries' ability to identify individuals, particularly those posing security threats. Furthermore, Member States at times need to improve a number of data protection requirements of the large-scale IT systems and to enhance the monitoring of those requirements. Addressing these shortcomings is not just a technical necessity but a fundamental requirement for safeguarding the integrity and security of the Schengen area.

The Commission calls on all Schengen countries to pursue effective follow-up to the results of the 2024 Schengen Scoreboards and to actively engage, as appropriate, with the Schengen Coordinator. Where recommendations have financial implications for the Schengen countries, the Commission invites those countries to prioritise their implementation within the national programmes of EU funds [12]. Although significant financial resources are available, EU funding is often not directed where it is most needed. Stronger links need to be made between Schengen evaluation recommendations, vulnerability assessments and funding under the new multiannual financial framework.

3. Thematic Schengen evaluations for 2024

Thematic Schengen evaluations provide a unique opportunity to assess the state of implementation of the Schengen rules across Schengen countries at a specific point in time and to compare practices among those facing similar challenges.

Thematic evaluation on more effective returns

Over the past year, the European Council has called for determined action at all levels to facilitate, increase and speed up returns from the EU, using all applicable EU policies, instruments and tools. More effective implementation of current legislation on return, coupled with further work on a common approach to return, also supports a faster and more efficient implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

In response to this call for action, the thematic Schengen evaluation on more effective returns was carried out and finalised in 2024. The report was adopted in December 2024 and includes a cross-cutting analysis of current instruments that can contribute to this goal, including the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation, the Return Directive, the Schengen Borders Code and the Schengen Information System.

The evaluation team was made up of 15 experts from Schengen countries, two Commission experts, one observer from Frontex, and one observer from the Agency for Fundamental Rights. The team worked throughout 2024 to perform a thorough analysis and carried out visits to Italy, Norway and the Netherlands to evaluate practices that, owing to their specific nature, could not be assessed effectively remotely.

The evaluation highlighted the complexity of return processes, which apply to a diverse range of third-country nationals, including:

· people entering the Schengen area legally but overstaying their permit or legal stay (e.g. visa-free nationals);

· people entering illegally and being apprehended at the external borders; and

· people apprehended within the territory of a Schengen country due to illegal stay following either legal or illegal entry.

As such, effective return measures are among the most sustainable tools for safeguarding the area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers.

Given the multiple stakeholders, processes and mechanisms involved, the thematic Schengen evaluation report emphasised the importance of

return as a key part of European integrated border management. To achieve this, effective interagency cooperation at national and European levels is crucial, together with a sufficient level of preparedness and better exchange of information. This is necessary both for efficient and informed decision-making and for the enforcement of return decisions. All this can be facilitated through the Schengen Information System. The report identifies common challenges related to key phases of the return process, including its initiation, identification of third-country nationals, voluntary and forced returns, as well as the cooperation structures and mechanisms that support these processes.

Based on the evaluation report, the Council adopted recommendations to tackle the common challenges identified [13] . The evaluation report also identifies best practices from some Schengen countries that can help implement remedial measures.

The results of the thematic evaluation fed into the proposal for a new common approach on returns, as presented by the Commission in March 2025 [14] . They form a roadmap for improving national return systems until the new legislative framework is fully in place.

Follow-up to the thematic evaluation on European Integrated Border Management (EIBM)

Integrated border management is a key objective of the EU, as established by Article 77(2)(d) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It aims to facilitate border crossings and ensure a uniform, high level of border control at the EU's external borders, thereby contributing to the EU's internal security and efficient migration management, while respecting fundamental rights. It is based on the four-tier access control model, comprising measures in third countries, such as under the common visa policy, measures with neighbouring third countries, border control measures at the external borders, risk analysis and measures within the Schengen area and return.

A thematic evaluation of the Schengen countries' national strategies for integrated border management was carried out in 2019-2020. Following the thematic evaluation, the Council adopted a Decision setting out a Recommendation on addressing the deficiencies identified in the 2019-2020 thematic evaluation of Member States' national strategies for integrated border management [15] . The Recommendation identified the most important aspects for countries to consider when revising their national strategies.

In the second half of 2024, the Commission and Schengen country experts [16] , together with an observer from Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, looked into what progress had been made so far. They looked at the extent to which the revised national strategies were aligned with EU policy priorities, focusing on

governance mechanisms, resource planning and strategic objectives. Using 140 indicators, the evaluation assessed the extent to which recommendations from the previous evaluation had been implemented and identified areas still requiring further attention.

This comprehensive analysis is a key tool for enhancing the coherence and operational effectiveness of Schengen governance and strengthening the implementation of European integrated border management at both EU and national levels.
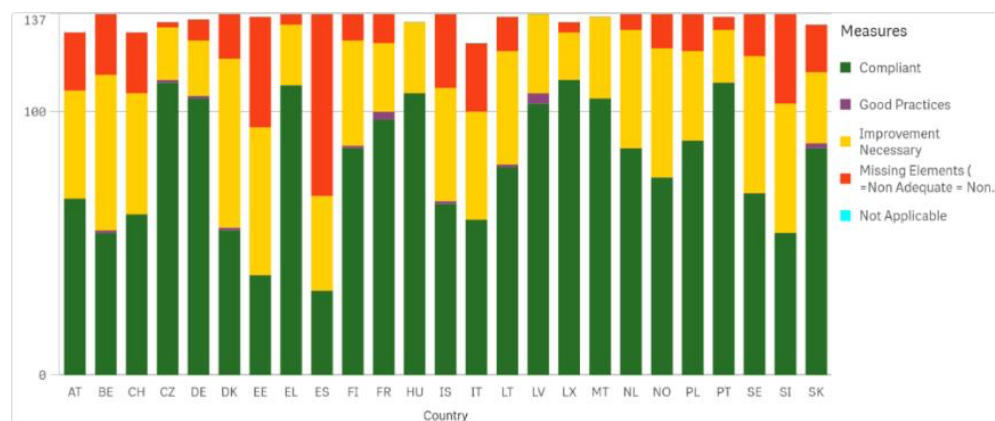
Results of the assessment

The results show notable improvements, a sign that countries are highly committed to making progress in line with the European multiannual strategic policy cycle. Key improvements since the 2019-2020 evaluation include stronger governance mechanisms at both national and EU levels, a more coherent risk-based approach to border control, and better strategic planning for financial resources. In particular, the return component has become central to national strategies, reinforcing the integrated approach by also integrating migration management, though further harmonisation is still needed. Another major step forward is the enhanced focus on internal security, which is now a core pillar of integrated border management across Schengen countries.

However, gaps remain. National strategies often lack alignment with capability planning, particularly in human resources, training and investment in infrastructure and equipment. Additionally, interagency cooperation remains fragmented, limiting the effectiveness of governance structures. These persistent shortcomings, already identified in the previous evaluation, highlight the need for further integration and strategic coordination to ensure a truly unified and resilient European integrated border management system.

Follow-up to the thematic evaluation on drug trafficking into the Schengen area

Considering the significant increase in drug trafficking into the EU, as evidenced by record-breaking cocaine seizures [17] , a thematic

evaluation was carried out from February to November 2023 to identify best practices in countries' national capabilities in combating drug trafficking into the EU. As a result, in March 2024, the Council adopted an Implementing Decision [18] setting out a recommendation for the implementation of the best practices identified in the 2023 thematic Schengen evaluation.

Given that the primary aim of this thematic Schengen evaluation was to identify best practices, Schengen countries were encouraged to assess the added value and feasibility of incorporating these practices into their national frameworks, consulting, where relevant, with countries that had already implemented them.

Of the 27 Member States and associated countries evaluated, all but one country submitted action plans to the Commission and the Council. The Commission received action plans from Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

In 2024 the Commission reviewed [19] the action plans submitted to check for implementation of the Council recommendation requiring countries to analyse and consider the implementation of best practices identified during the thematic evaluation in their respective national systems.

Based on the action plans submitted, the Member States that intend to implement, or have already implemented, the highest number of best practices are Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Malta and the Netherlands. Furthermore, best practices in mapping illicit drug flows demonstrate the highest total implementation rate, showing a strong collective commitment and significant progress in identifying illicit drug flows to the Schengen area. By contrast, best practices for creating barriers and increasing the resilience of logistical hubs demonstrate a notably low overall implementation rate, emphasising the considerable challenges that may arise from resource limitations, operational complexities, or divergent national priorities. The lack of substantial progress in this area is particularly concerning given the strategic importance of logistical hubs, which represent critical points of vulnerability in the fight against drug trafficking. Addressing these challenges will require greater coordination, targeted funding, and more technical support for countries that are struggling in this area.

Based on the information provided in the action plans, the Commission considers all the action plans submitted to be closed, with one exception. The implementation of best practices will continue to be monitored through periodic Schengen evaluations, in accordance with the multiannual evaluation programme and set out in the Council Implementing Decision.

4.   SITUATION AT THE INTERNAL BORDERS

On 1 January 2025, internal border control at the internal land borders with Romania and Bulgaria was lifted, leaving only one EU Member State, Cyprus, awaiting the lifting of internal border controls.

On 10 July 2024, the revised Schengen Borders Code [20] entered into force, setting out a new framework for the reintroduction of internal border control, with revised deadlines and stronger requirements for monitoring and reporting. Based on these new rules, the Commission has adopted implementing decisions creating a template for countries to notify the reintroduction or prolongation of internal border control, together with a uniform format for reporting on the reintroduction or extension of internal border control [21] .

Since the entry into force of the amended Schengen Borders Code, 10 Schengen countries have reintroduced border control at their internal borders [22] . Six Member States (i.e. Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway and Sweden) already had border controls in place for extended periods prior to the entry into force of the amended Schengen Borders Code. Germany has subsequently extended the geographical scope of these controls to all its internal borders. The Netherlands notified the reintroduction of border control for the first time at all its land and air borders. Bulgaria temporarily reintroduced internal border control at its land borders, as a preventative measure, following the lifting of controls at the internal borders.

The Commission applies the new deadlines and reporting obligations to all reintroductions and prolongations that have been notified since the entry into force of the amended Code.

As part of its ongoing dialogue on internal border control, the Commission has been in close contact with the countries that have reintroduced internal border control, as well as with countries affected by the reintroduction of such measures. These discussions have fostered an exchange of information between the country concerned, as well as between the Commission and the Schengen countries. The Commission has emphasised that countries are obliged to adopt mitigating measures to limit, as much as possible, the impact of a border control on cross-border travel, freight operations [23] and the functioning of cross-border regions. Discussions have also focused on the continued progress in following up on the Commission's Recommendations of November 2023 on alternative measures to address serious threats to public policy and national security [24] .

At the same time, the Schengen evaluations carried out in 2024 visited police and customs cooperation centres and police stations in the internal border regions. These visits aimed to verify whether structures and procedures ensure timely exchange of information and effective joint operations, addressing cross-border crime, irregular migration and

threats to public safety. The overall purpose of these assessments was to (a) ensure efficient information sharing and operational cooperation among law enforcement authorities, thereby enhancing internal security, and (b) identify areas needing improvement or corrective actions. These monitoring activities and discussions revealed the non-systematic nature of checks.

The Commission is also working to ensure that no Schengen country or cross-border region is particularly affected by the reintroduction of internal border controls, notably those with a unique geographical situation. Relevant steps are being taken to address instances where the reintroduction of internal border control causes serious inconvenience to the daily lives of individuals and businesses.

The Commission has also promoted operational cooperation between Schengen countries to address the security and migration concerns of the Member States in a more effective and efficient manner. The Commission has also fostered the development of regional cooperation along migration routes, actively engaging with third countries as well. To ensure the fast, but also orderly, turning back of irregular migrants at the internal borders, Schengen countries must apply their pre-existing bilateral readmission agreements, or alternatively conclude operational arrangements to put into effect the transfer procedure introduced under the amended Schengen Borders Code.

So far, one Member State, Germany has prolonged internal border control since the entry into force of the amended Schengen Borders Code. At the request of Luxembourg, the Commission has already launched a consultation [25] . This has resulted in meetings at operational and ministerial levels aimed at addressing practical impediments to cross-border flows and increasing cooperation on alternative operational measures. The Commission remains committed to upholding the principles of free movement and security across the Schengen area and will follow-up as necessary in the upcoming Schengen cycle, including with the issuance of opinions as set out in the revised Schengen Borders Code.

5. SCHENGEN EVALUATION AND MONITORING TOOLS

In November 2024, the Commission established the 2025 pool of Schengen evaluators. In line with the requirements of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism, nearly all Schengen countries designated at least one expert. Only one country refrained on the grounds that the designation would substantially affect the discharge of national tasks [26] , and was therefore unable to nominate at least one expert for each field of the Schengen system [27] .

In total, 545 national experts were designated, out of which 525 national experts were selected for the 2025 pool, taking into account

the general and specific criteria laid down in Regulation (EU) 922/2022 and in the relevant invitation to the Schengen countries [28] .
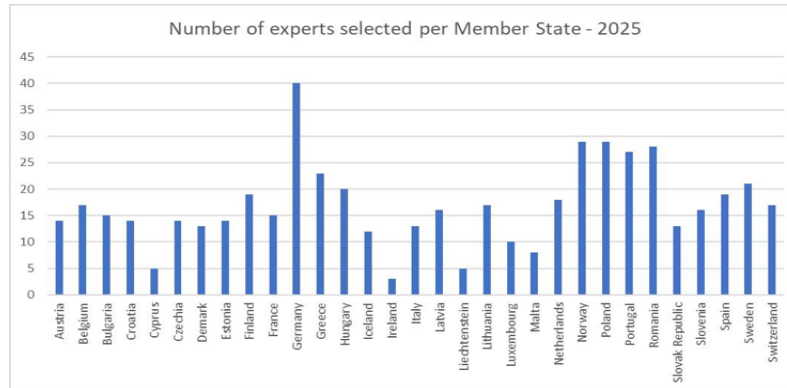
Number of experts selected per Schengen country (2025)

To ensure a high-quality pool of experts for evaluation and monitoring activities, a Schengen evaluation training strategy was drawn up in 2024. The strategy sets out the core aspects of the Schengen evaluation training activities, based on short and medium-term objectives, with a view to implementing a coherent methodology for a common and integrated Schengen evaluation training framework. It aims to deliver, among other things, a common curriculum for all training activities, strengthened governance for training implementation and a streamlined selection of trainees, thereby improving synergies with the pool of Schengen evaluators. In 2024, 90 experts were trained and certified as Schengen evaluators in initial training activities under this common framework.

The third country coordinator and lead expert workshop took place in January 2025, bringing together Schengen countries and Commission country coordinators along with the designated lead experts for the 2024 and 2025 evaluations. More than 40 senior experts from Schengen countries, representing a community of more than 500 Schengen evaluators, had a strategic exchange about the future of the Schengen area and, in particular, about how to reinforce the governance framework at both European and national levels. The workshop also aimed to prepare national country coordinators and lead experts for the 2025 Schengen evaluation activities.

6.   LOOKING AHEAD: EVALUATION AND MONITORING ACTIVITIES IN 2025

2025 marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Schengen Agreement on 14 June 1985. This milestone will shape the agenda for Schengen governance throughout the year, reaffirming Schengen as a symbol of our collective achievement, namely a secure and united Europe benefiting European citizens and businesses alike. As we celebrate this important achievement, Schengen will remain at the core

of the Commission's priorities and an essential strategic asset for navigating the evolving geopolitical landscape.

The Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism will continue to reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of the Schengen project, ensuring its resilience and effectiveness in a changing environment. New legal requirements have been adopted, in particular those stemming from the Pact on Migration and Asylum (e.g. Screening Regulation, Return Border Regulation) and those connected to the new digital architecture supporting border management and the internal security of the Schengen area (e.g. Interoperability regulations, ETIAS procedures, law enforcement access to EES, ETIAS, Interoperability, Exchange of information Directive).

On the back of this, the Commission, in consultation with the Schengen countries and relevant EU bodies, will revise [29] the standard Schengen questionnaire in 2025. The updated questionnaire will also strengthen the strategic aspects underpinning the well-functioning of the Schengen area, such as Schengen governance and the use of related EU financial instruments.

In line with the multiannual evaluation programme for 2023-2029, the 2025 annual evaluation programme [30] will be implemented. This includes the periodic evaluations of Switzerland, Slovenia and Austria, together with evaluations of Bulgaria and Romania following their full integration into the Schengen area without controls at the internal borders. As regards monitoring activities for 2025, the Commission is planning to carry out visits to France (which has already taken place in March 2025), Greece (September 2025) and Portugal.

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.-Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Periodic evaluation	Switzerland		Slovenia		Austria			Romania		Bulgaria	
First-time evaluation											
Thematic evaluation											

Given the specific role of thematic evaluations in identifying and addressing cross-cutting challenges for the Schengen area, such as drugs trafficking and return in the two previous years, following consultations with Schengen countries, the Commission considers 2026 to be an opportune moment to launch another thematic evaluation. With the ongoing war in Ukraine and the continuing increased security risks, this evaluation would aim to identify gaps and

vulnerabilities in the Schengen border and security architecture, with a view to reinforcing its coherence and increasing the overall level of internal security.

Furthermore, in 2025, the Commission will continue to monitor the follow-up to the ongoing first-time Schengen evaluations to push forward the technical readiness of both countries concerned. For Cyprus, the necessary visits [31] could still take place in 2025, provided that the required remedial measures have been implemented by the Cypriot authorities. For Ireland, the Commission intends to issue the Schengen report covering judicial cooperation in criminal matters, drugs cooperation and Article 26 of the Schengen Convention in the first half of 2025. If the outcome is positive and remedial measures in other relevant areas, notably police cooperation, are implemented swiftly, it will enable the Council to put these provisions into effect in Ireland and will lead to increased Schengen cooperation.

The Commission will also intensify its efforts in 2025 to support the seamless integration of Schengen requirements for countries aspiring to join the EU. As EU candidate countries are Schengen candidates, the EU enlargement process has significant implications for Schengen. EU candidate countries must meet all Schengen requirements by the time they join the EU, even if some Schengen rights, such as full active access to all information systems, the right to issue Schengen visas and the right to abolish controls at the internal borders, will only apply at a later stage. The Commission will work closely with candidate countries so that, by the time they join the EU, the Schengen system is anchored in a fully functioning national Schengen governance framework. This requires robust preparation, including the implementation of Schengen action plans, as set out in the 2024 Communication on EU enlargement policy [32] .

Finally, concerning training, implementation of a common curriculum in the initial training courses in 2024 has created a solid foundation for designing future training. The next initial training activities are scheduled for spring, summer and autumn 2025.

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(1)

    For an overview of the 2024 evaluation activities see: Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism - European Commission .

(2)

    European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex); European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS); European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA); European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom Security and Justice (eu-LISA).

(3)

    Schengen Evaluation of Croatia – Executive summary and recommendations available at: Schengen evaluation of Croatia .

(4)

    Schengen Evaluation of Poland – Executive summary and recommendations available at: [Schengen evaluation of Poland](#) .

(5)

Greece, France and Hungary.

(6)

    The action plans that were not yet closed prior to the 2024 periodic evaluations of Czechia, Hungary and Slovakia will be closed through the Schengen country reports to be adopted in 2025.

(7)

Closed on 16 October 2024.

(8)

Closed on 1 November 2024.

(9)

Closed on 8 November 2024.

(10)

C(2024) 8110 final of 17 December 2024.

(11)

    In line with the methodology for the Schengen Scoreboard, the 2024 Schengen Scoreboard does not include scores for Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, as the country reports with the respective recommendations following the 2024 periodic evaluations had not yet been adopted. Bulgaria and Romania were also not included, as their first periodic evaluation will only take place in the second half of 2025. Schengen countries recently evaluated in 2023 and early 2024 (i.e. Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania) have not yet had the opportunity to submit either their action plans, which include the planned remedial measures to be taken, or their first follow-up reports, as the deadlines have not yet expired.

(12)

    The Integrated Border Management Fund – Border Management and Visa Instrument, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the Internal Security Fund.

(13)

    Council Implementing Decision of 6 March 2025 setting out recommendations addressing identified common areas for improvement resulting from the 2024 thematic Schengen evaluation 'Bridging national gaps: towards an effective EU return system through common solutions and innovative practices'.

(14)

    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, and repealing Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and the Council, Council Directive 2001/40/EC and Council Decision 2004/191/EC. COM(2025) 101 final.

(15)

Council document 6755/21 of 8 March 2021.

(16)

    Belgium, Germany, Greece, France, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and Romania, led by Norway.

(17)

The fourth comprehensive overview of illicit drug markets in the European Union, conducted by Europol and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA - renamed the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) as of July 2024).

(18)

Council Implementing Decision of 5 March 2024 setting out a recommendation on the implementation of the best practices identified in the 2023 thematic Schengen evaluation of Member States' capabilities in the areas of police cooperation, protection of the external borders, and management of IT systems to fight against drug trafficking into the Union.

(19)

In line with Article 21(2), first subparagraph of Regulation (EU) 2022/922.

(20)

Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code).

(21)

Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2025/315 of 14 February 2025 establishing a template for the notification of the temporary reintroduction or prolongation of border control at internal borders. C/2025/902; Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2025/308 of 14 February 2025 establishing a uniform format for the report on the reintroduction or prolongation of border control at internal borders in accordance with Article 33 of Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council. C/2025/905.

(22)

For an overview see: [Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control - European Commission](#) .

(23)

According to the Commission's Green Lanes Communication, freight vehicles should not face more than 15 minutes total delay in crossing internal borders of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) network irrespective of the goods they carry. The Commission has continued to organise meetings with the Network of National Transport Contact Points whenever potential issues have been identified that could negatively affect the flow of road carrier transport within the internal market.

(24)

Commission Recommendation of 23.11.2023 on cooperation between the Member States with regard to serious threats to internal security and public policy in the area without internal border controls. C(2023) 8139 final.

(25)

In line with Article 27a of Regulation (EU) 2016/399.

(26)

In line with Article 17(2) of Regulation (EU) 2022/922.

(27)

Denmark did not nominate an expert on police cooperation.

(28)

Article 15(1) of Regulation (EU) 2022/922.

(29)

In line with Article 14 of Regulation (EU) 2022/922.

(30)

      The 2025 annual evaluation programme available at [Annual evaluation](#) .

(31)

      Article 23 of Regulation (EU) 2022/922.

(32)

      Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions 2024. Communication on EU enlargement policy. COM(2024) 690 final.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels,
23.4.2025

COM(2025)
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Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

2025 State of Schengen Report

ANNEX 2

Compendium of best practices identified in the framework of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism

The well-functioning of the Schengen area relies on Member States' effective and efficient application of the Schengen rules. The Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism is a key safeguard to ensure the adequate implementation of the Schengen acquis, which allows not only for the timely detection of vulnerabilities, but also allows for the

identification of best practices and innovative solutions put in place by Member States.

The compendium of best practices accompanying the 2025 State of Schengen Report marks its third edition since the new Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Regulation came into force. As a living document, it encompasses both the best practices identified in the previous iteration of the compendium, as well as new and innovative measures identified in the evaluations that took place in 2024, which significantly improve the implementation of common rules and that could be put into practice by other Member States.

The compendium of best practices brings together a wide range of best practices covering several aspects of the Schengen acquis, including national Schengen governance, management of the external borders, visa policy, returns, as well as measures within the Schengen area, such as internal borders and internal security. The aim is to provide insights into innovative strategies, tools, and measures that can support Member State authorities in the implementation of the Schengen acquis and to facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge sharing. Further exchange of knowledge and experience should be fostered within the relevant Council bodies to reinforce this collaborative effort. The compendium serves to complement existing best practices outlined in applicable Commission or Council Recommendations or handbooks with new insights.

This compendium is explanatory and has no legally binding status. It is intended as a valuable resource for policymakers, law enforcement officials, and other stakeholders involved in ensuring the smooth and efficient functioning of the Schengen area but also to support possible solutions for remedial actions addressing future recommendations proposed by evaluation teams. It is part of the annual report referred to in Article 25 of Council Regulation (EU) 2022/922.

NATIONAL SCHENGEN GOVERNANCE

1.   National strategies

Implementation of European Integrated Border Management (EIBM)
Governance of national Integrated border Management ·   The contingency plan includes detailed procedures for a variety of potential crisis scenarios, defines clear roles and responsibilities for all relevant national authorities (including police, customs, armed forces and immigration services), as

well as local stakeholders (such as municipalities and non-governmental organisations). Such plans are further complemented with procedures for requesting and integrating European support. Several tests of the contingency planning framework were performed involving all national authorities with responsibilities in crises. [Finland, 2023]

· The long-term and national development strategy and short-term governmental programme on internal security include priorities on the implementation of EU and Schengen acquis, as well as international law enforcement cooperation developments. The Schengen evaluation recommendations are also covered by the programme. Annual analysis and reporting ensure efficient implementation and operationalisation. This national strategic architecture, connecting the EU priorities to the national strategies facilitates the efficient implementation (resourcing) and operationalisation of the EU and Schengen acquis in a systematic manner. [Croatia, 2024]

· An overarching strategic document guides national efforts in implementing Schengen rules from 2021 to 2027, aligning with European standards to enhance Schengen cooperation. Public authorities, including various ministerial departments, play key roles in this national Schengen governance concept. The Schengen Implementation Plan 2023 serves as the main tool for accomplishing these goals across different areas of the Schengen framework. The Ministry of Interior is tasked with assessing progress, updating the concept and reporting to the government biennially, using indicators and timelines to measure success and align with Czechia's European border management objectives. [Czechia, 2024]

Quality control mechanism

· The Ministry of the Interior has established a national evaluation mechanism for external borders, built on the European and national quality control mechanisms. It brings together the recommendations from the Schengen evaluation mechanism, Frontex vulnerability assessment and national evaluation visits. The latter includes an evaluation of the Schengen Information System/SIRENE and police cooperation issues. [Austria, 2020]

· Border management at national and EU level should be systematically subject to the application of the European quality control mechanism covering the entire scope of the EIBM. The permanent national quality control mechanism includes a national evaluators' pool, which is trained in Frontex Schengen Evaluators' courses. [Thematic Evaluation of national IBM strategies, 2020]

Interagency cooperation
· Close and effective formalised inter-agency coordination and cooperation between the different national authorities at central, regional and local level are considered essential for the effective functioning of integrated border management systems. Border guard units are deployed in the territorial waters and on land of the third countries concerned, ensuring constant joint patrolling by sea and air on board vessels and airplanes of the Member State, supported by electronic means such as the integrated external surveillance system (SIVE). [Thematic Evaluation of national IBM strategies, 2020] · The interagency sharing of intelligence information through the same platform, contributes to build a common structured picture that improves the quality of information sharing and supports the main stakeholders in the accomplishment of their institutional mission, avoiding the duplication of efforts. [Estonia, 2023] · Joint investigation cell established involving other national law enforcement authorities and five other EU members States affected by the migration flow, as well as Europol and Frontex. This allowed an effective and high-speed exchange of information, thus fast reaction, and effective measures to be taken to slow down the migration flow and carry out actions against the facilitators. Criminal intelligence and open-source information collection and concentration in this cell, cross checking of persons made the joint investigation cell an operational hub at the external border supporting the overall management of the phenomenon. [Lithuania, 2023]

2.　　National capabilities

Training
Cooperation with CEPOL
· Coordinated and active participation to European law enforcement training is an integral part of the inter-agency cooperation within the Police, Customs and Border Guard permanent governance structure. The training needs are regularly discussed not only by the national Police University College, but also in constant cooperation with Border Guard´s and Custom´s training institutions. The participation in CEPOL courses is high and the access to the CEPOL e-learning platform LEED is granted to a wide number of law enforcement officers. CEPOL trainings are included in the national Police, Customs and Border Guard annual training plans and under the coordination of the national Police

University College, available CEPOL training seats are shared between the law enforcement authorities based on their needs and competencies. Moreover, the information concerning the possibilities of the CEPOL trainings are easily accessible at the police, Customs and Border Guard intranet. [Finland, 2023]

Returns

· Agreement with an airline company to use aircrafts and simulators in regular basis to train the pool of escorts on return operations, not only from an operational perspective, but also to simulate emergency situations that could take place during the return operations such as fires. [Finland, 2023]

SIRENE Bureau

· The SIRENE Bureau of the National Bureau of Investigation has created a national online training course focusing on the renewed Schengen Information System. The course contains theoretical material and knowledge checks. The online training package is mandatory for Police officers, Border Guards and Customs officers and completion of the course is monitored and followed-up. [Finland, 2023]

· Establishment of a state-of-the-art Training centre within the premises of the SIRENE Bureau, which provides a comprehensive practical training opportunities for all the end users of all national Law Enforcement Agencies. The educational activities include practical sessions in computer labs and the availability of e-learning platforms, including the Police intranet and CEPOL courses, related to Schengen Information System distance learning. The Police Academy regularly cooperates with the relevant departments in the Police, local universities and non-governmental organisations to ensure that regular updates are included in the training programme, also in the field of international police cooperation and Schengen matters. A full set of Manuals containing with all relevant information on Schengen Information System, Automated Fingerprint Identification System and SIRENE matters for each competent national authorities and Police Services is available via e-libraries on the Police intranet. [Cyprus, 2023]

· The national IT system records information and documents about third-country nationals subject to return, thus giving a complete picture of their situation. The SIRENE Bureau is in charge of converting directly in the Migration authorities' systems the national alerts on return to alerts on refusal of entry and stay upon receiving R-A SIRENE forms from other Member States on national alerts. The same procedure can be performed by the border guards when the person, subject to a

return alert is located at exit out of EU territory. [Estonia, 2023]

· The SIRENE national bureau has implemented an outstanding training practice on SIS-related topics, offering materials like posters, handbooks and podcasts to enhance national awareness and usage of SIS. Trainers are available for on-demand sessions and materials have been distributed across relevant national authorities. [Czechia, 2024]

Joint training with other Member States

· The Member State has embraced the concept of joint training with the police services of its neighbouring countries as a way to improve cooperation in the border areas. Joint trainings and other law enforcement agencies with foreign counterparts stem for instance from the work of the Bilateral Cooperation Committee. Joint trainings are also organised by the Police and Customs Cooperation Centre. [Germany, 2020; Spain 2022]

Data protection

· There is well developed data protection training for expatriate staff at Consular Posts and data protection training, which is organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Data Protection Officer and the Data Protection Authority. [Czechia, 2019]

· Wide-ranging training concept of the National Schengen Information System controller and in particular, the provision of e-learning modules and the comprehensive training strategy for new staff members. [The Netherlands, 2021]

· The comprehensive training on data protection requirements related to the Schengen Information System organised by the Data Protection Officer and provided for the National Schengen Information System and SIRENE Bureau's staff members and end users, especially regarding awareness raising efforts. [Italy, 2021]

· The Ministry of Foreign Affairs training and awareness raising of staff on data protection requirements in relation to visa issuing procedure and to the Visa Information System, including the active involvement of the DPO Office, for end users, in particular for consular staff before posting to embassies/consulates. [Greece, 2021]

· The Data Protection Officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides a handbook on processing and protection of personal data to all Visa Information System end-users. The guide is concise and user-friendly. [Czechia, 2024]

· Staff training on data protection in large scale IT-Systems through regular online and in-person sessions, including "train the trainer" courses to maximize reach and promote a data protection culture. Data Protection Officers of the different authorities play a key role in organizing and delivering these trainings. [Poland, 2024]

Online training

· Regular training established at all border crossing points, which ensures that border guards are constantly learning and have up to date knowledge of border check procedures. The online training is established consists of daily tests which the border guards have to take during their duty. There is a pool of 200 multiple choice questions from which 10 per day are attributed randomly to the border guards on duty. The questions are also covering legal bases, the handling of equipment and data protection. The shift leader is checking the results and based on gaps identified in the border guards' knowledge of certain topics, monthly targeted trainings are organised on those topics. [Hungary, 2024]

Fundamental rights

· National authorities have online knowledge-refresher tools for border guards with both mandatory and optional courses. As a complement to these platforms, an online platform for refresher training is developed and used, solely focused on fundamental rights in border control and returns. the platform is based on the 2019 Frontex course manual for fundamental rights trainers and it is publicly available, well-structured and user-friendly, connecting fundamental rights standards and safeguards to border control scenarios. [Croatia, 2024]

Equipment

Mobile devices

· Mobile devices have been deployed to provide patrol officers with access to relevant databases via a mobile application. Both user-friendly and powerful, mobile devices can read vehicle licence plates as well as the Machine-Readable Zone (MRZ) of identity documents. They are also equipped with facial recognition capabilities (i.e. send photographs for facial recognition purposes to a central database). [Hungary, 2019]

· All police officers with the relevant profile have been equipped with smartphones with direct access to (inter)national databases and with a secure communication application. The national police forces use a mobile solution for working outside the

office. Via mobile devices (tablets, smartphones and laptops), every operational police officer can query (inter)national databases (such as identity documents, license plates and biometrics). Objects, such as license plates, which are scanned with the smartphone, are immediately checked against the central database. [The Netherlands, 2021]

Documents to check entry conditions

· Border guards in the first line at the international airport have the availability to use a form containing necessary questions to establish the fulfilment of most entry conditions laid down in Article 6(1) of the Schengen Borders Code. The form facilitates the verification of entry conditions for third-country nationals, improves communication between border police officers and travellers and overcomes potential language barriers. The form is available in 28 languages corresponding to the international traffic at the airport such as Chinese, Korean, Russian, Ukrainian and Albanian, and is used to facilitate the check of entry conditions when there is a communication barrier between passengers and border guards. It requires only a short time to complete the form by the third country national and does not affect the waiting times at the borders. [Hungary, 2024]

3.   Large-scale IT systems

National applications
Alerts and queries
· If the SIRENE Bureau creates, updates or deletes an alert using the national application, the issuing/requesting authority is automatically notified using an automatic email notification. This simplifies the procedure, reduces the workload and improves the exchange of information between the different authorities involved. [Hungary, 2019]
· The Member State receives passenger data from all flights coming from third countries, the Targeting Centre Borders compiles it, and the data is processed automatically through the national Advance Passenger Information (API) System. The API System consists of national databases, 'watch lists', profiles based on risk analysis, the Schengen Information System and the Stolen and Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) database. In case of a match, the operators have access to several databases and use the national application to verify the match and get more information about the alert (photographs, fingerprints, more details about the 'action to be taken', etc.). The hit result displays identifiers, 'reason for request' and

'action to be taken'. The suspect's data and flight details are sent to the relevant airport or seaport which is responsible for apprehending the suspect. [The Netherlands, 2021]

· Besides the owners of firearms, all imported firearms also have to be registered by the importers and dealers in the police register with the same automated queries being made. Since August 2022, it has become mandatory to upload photos of the firearms indicating all available markings and serial numbers. This ensures that the photographs are available for attachment to alerts if a weapon is being entered in the Schengen Information System. [Lithuania, 2023]

· A user-friendly alert creation process with high automation for national alerts on (national) citizens. It involves the automatic import of national registry data, including photos. This data is directly transferred to Schengen Information System alerts when they are created. [Croatia, 2024]

· The national Customs Authority has an automated query system to check vehicle customs declarations against the Schengen Information System using VIN numbers. [Croatia, 2024]

· Proactive updates of previously created alerts on persons with the description of their ID/document increases the likelihood of successfully finding an alert during searches. [Croatia, 2024]

Hit reporting

· Several practices are in place to ensure the automatic notification of a hit to the SIRENE Bureau. In particular:

- Displaying of information on second line officer's screens on a hit as soon as it is registered in the first line. The border guards in the SIRENE Bureau also receive information on hits via the border guard application. [Poland, 2015]

- When the National Road Vehicle Agency achieves a hit, the SIRENE Bureau receives an automatic e-mail notification. This allows the SIRENE operator to verify the hit and contact the Agency in case the latter has not taken the initiative. [Luxembourg, 2016]

- The border application has a direct 'chat' functionality with the case handler in the SIRENE Bureau, which allows immediate direct contact with the SIRENE Bureau if an internal hit reporting form is sent off. [Croatia, 2018]

· At the airport, border guards have set up an effective follow-up procedure for hits on discreet check alerts in cooperation with customs officers. When border guards notice that a passenger is

subject to a request for a discreet check in the Schengen Information System, they will discreetly signal this to customs officers. [France, 2021]

· The national application provides the Schengen Information System alerts hit reporting form for the end users, with a pre-filled template which retrieves from the alert all the available data. The end users fill out the hit relevant fields and send it directly to the SIRENE Bureau, a received email message includes HTML format, which can be directly converted into a SIRENE form. Inquiry check questions are prefilled in the hit-reporting form. This ensures a very good level of data quality and hit reporting in real time. [Lithuania, 2023]

· Effective procedure to report that a person who is subject to a return decision and return alert has left the Schengen area. In such cases, the border guard authority which had the hit records the departure directly into the application used by the Migration Service. The SIRENE Bureau deletes the return alert and introduces the refusal of entry alert outside office hours when the information of the departure is received from other Schengen Member State or the national Embassies or Consulates. In cases of forced return, the local police units which executed the forced return also record it directly in the system. Such procedure ensures an effective management of the return policy at national level and also ensures that the refusal of entry alert is introduced to the Schengen Information System without delay when the return decision is accompanied by an entry ban. [Finland, 2023]

· Automated and user-friendly communication of a hit between the first and the second line at certain border crossing points. In case of a hit, the first-line officer has the possibility to send the hit information from the first line directly to the second line. Subsequently, a notification in red colour will be visible to the second line. In case of a hit on persons for discreet check, the first line discreetly collects available information and in addition attaches screenshots of the passport/ID card/vehicle registration certificate. This will automatically be sent to the second line, a hit reporting form will be established and sent to SIRENE. [Hungary, 2024]

· Upon receiving a national hit form on a foreign Schengen Information System alert, the SIRENE case management system automatically transfers the data already in English to SIRENE G, H or R forms depending on the category of the alert. The necessary manual input is minimal before sending it to other SIRENE bureaus. When the SIRENE Bureau receives a SIRENE R-A form on a national return alert, the form is automatically transferred from the management system to a database used by the Border and Foreign Police authorities. It

then automatically converts the alert as needed or deletes it if the return decision is not accompanied by an entry ban. The same process applies for receival of SIRENE R-B or R-E forms. There is timely processing of the hit forms and the alerts. For national hit alerts on missing persons, the national hit form includes a mandatory field about consent for sharing location information with the person filing the missing person's report. [Slovakia, 2024]

Alert creation

- In the SIRENE workflow, a warning message was created to remind the authorities of the necessity to insert biometrics if available when creating an alert in SIS. [The Netherlands, 2021]

- High level of data quality and automation in two processes in the Register of Wanted Persons. First, when an alert on a national is created, the register automatically checks whether there is a vehicle, or a firearm registered in the national databases to the name of the person and automatically offers to the end-user the possibility to include the object as an extension to the alert, which needs to be confirmed by the end-user. Second, when entering an alert on a resident, the register pre-fills and imports the alphanumeric data (including the ID document information) in the alert from the national registers (the photograph of the ID document is not uploaded automatically, but added manually, when available). In addition, when creating a return alert in the national application on a person whose personal information is in the national registers, the national application imports the alphanumeric and biometric data in the alert as well (including the copy of the ID document, when available). [Lithuania, 2023]

- Automatic pre-filling of data in alerts. When entering an alert on a national resident in the warrant registration system, the register pre-fills and imports the alphanumeric data and photograph of the subject to the alert from the relevant national register. [Hungary, 2024]

Exchange of information

- When a national alert for a missing person is entered into the Schengen Information System, the national SIRENE Bureau will receive an automatically generated SIRENE C form. This form includes all relevant supplementary information and can be directly forwarded to other SIRENE Bureaux by the national

SIRENE Bureau. The automatic generation of SIRENE C forms for Article 32 alerts enables quick transmission of data to assist other Member States in urgent cases. [Ireland, 2024]

National Schengen and Visa Information Systems and IT systems

· The Security operation centre monitors the security at user's level of the entire police network, detecting anomalies that might indicate possible attacks. When the Security operation centre detects a suspicious use, the operation centre has to intervene to verify the possible anomaly. The active monitoring of 'atypical behaviour' from the end users performing queries allows them to identify signs of improper use of the Schengen Information System and to prevent possible data security risks. [The Netherlands, 2021]

· In the national IT visa system, urgent applications (e.g. in a case when an applicant needs to travel very shortly following the submission of the application, such as hospitalisation of a close family member) are permanently flagged. Therefore, urgent applications are easy to identify, and their examination can be easily prioritised. [Malta, 2022]

· The monthly data quality reports produced by eu-LISA are received at the National Schengen Information System Office and are then, prefiltered to include only the alerts that the SIRENE Bureau needs to check and/or forward to the end users who have created the specific alert. The two-tier verification of possible errors ensures to a high degree the good quality of the data entered in the Schengen Information System by the authorities. [Lithuania, 2023]

· The National Schengen Information System application displays in a prominent manner "Immediate reporting" and "Misused identity", by placing the text at the top of the alert, highlighted in red letters. Such a display allows the end user to be instantly aware of the situation in terms of urgency, complexity and sensitivity of the alert. [Cyprus, 2023]

· The visa processing IT infrastructure significantly facilitates the submission and examination of visa applications in a secure manner, limiting the dependency on the external service provider concerning the management and control of the systems. First, an online visa application form available at the Foreign Ministry's website and used approximately in 80% of the visa applications, including a "Guide" with useful explanation in many languages regarding the data to be inserted into the different fields. At the end of the process, it is possible to generate a checklist for the necessary supporting documents

depending on the place of submission of the application and the purpose of the journey. Second, data entry system developed for the external service provider for registering applications and combining them with biometrics and scanned supporting document and fully managed by the national authorities. Finally, the "core" application processing system for the examination of applications and decision-making has an intuitive, user-friendly interface, allowing the decision-makers to easily contact the consulates, external service providers, border guards, and the police in relation to a particular application. The VIS Mail is integrated into the system in a user-friendly manner and the system has various analytical and statistical tools. The log management and control functionality of the system notifies the Ministry's support team of any unusual activities of users processing data. [Finland, 2023]

· Standardized procedure for capturing photos of third-country nationals in the alien's policy registry following ICAO standards. This results in high-quality photographs and facilitates the identification of persons subject to national alerts on return and alerts for refusals of entry. [Hungary, 2024]

· Automated fingerprint checks performed based on criminal and immigration risk analysis in addition to establish the identity of individuals and to confirm hits. [Hungary, 2024]

· There is a well-planned and documented process for the business continuity at datacentres. Identical setups are used for development, preproduction and production environments and there is a georedundant, highly secured secondary site. There is regular testing of uninterruptible power supply, backup restoration and failover systems between the primary data centre and the back-up site. Information security documentation is regularly reviewed and updated; internal audits are conducted regularly. [Slovakia, 2024]

· The SIRENE Bureau's case management system includes a robust tool for producing statistical reports, allowing for detailed reports per police station and border crossing point on the basis of internal hit reporting forms. Statistics can be filtered by various parameters, such as offense type, which aids in monitoring the Schengen Information System's use countrywide and reporting to eu-LISA. [Croatia, 2024]

· In situations where direct access to the Schengen Information System is unavailable, end-users can contact the Central Technical Authority via fax or email to manage alerts through the web communication channel in emergency mode. Clear national procedures provide minimum criteria and templates for this process, making sure there is uninterrupted availability of all functionalities in the Schengen Information System for the

end-users. [Poland, 2024]

Data Protection requirements in relation to the National Schengen Information System (N.SIS)

· The authorities managing the N.SIS accept data subject's rights requests made in languages other than the Member States' language. [Lithuania, 2018]

· The Data Protection Officer of the N.SIS controller has established a comprehensive data breach notification policy, including procedures, tools and instructions to staff. [Germany, 2020; Norway, 2022]

· Decentralised structure of personal data protection monitoring where contact persons for the issues regarding personal data protection are available in every unit of the police whilst two data protection officers (DPOs) are in charge of general supervision. [The Netherlands, 2021]

· The Data Protection Officer is in charge of performing vulnerability management, coordinating the vulnerability assessment activity and performing risk assessment and auditing; he/she cooperates with the data controller in a proactive and collaborative manner, e.g. regarding the project for the realisation of a Cyber Security Operation Centre that allows a prompt and effective incident management. [Italy, 2021]

· The user authorisation management of the National Police Board prevents unauthorised access to personal data. In addition to the situation where the post or tasks change, the superior of the user controls and assesses annually that the subordinates' user authorisations are appropriate and, if necessary, launches an internal procedure to update them. The responsible system coordinator must annually check that the user rights given to stakeholder groups and external persons are appropriate and updated. [Finland, 2023]

· The new Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) tool is implemented as a log analysis tool which significantly improves the detection of anomalies and potential misuse of the Schengen Information System. This lowers the vulnerability of the system. [Sweden 2022]

· Proactive provision of information on the data subjects' rights by the Airport Police. They provide a link to the police data protection portal through QR codes, which are placed visibly at the first and second line at the border-crossing points.

[Hungary, 2024]

Data Protection requirements in relation to the visa issuing procedure / Visa Information System

- Extensive activities of the N.VIS controller in relation to the supervision of the consulates and of the external service provider, including on data security and data protection issues. In particular, a series of self-audits were performed in the last years by the N.VIS controller. [Spain, 2017; Italy, 2021]

- The Data Protection Officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation is involved in the Ministry's inspections of the visa issuing procedure and is also in general strongly involved in many data protection aspects of the visa issuing procedure. [Spain, 2022]

- Extensive log control carried out by an automated software tool to detect incidents in the log files. [Denmark, 2022; Sweden 2022]

- The Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) solution implemented in the IT system of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is designed with numerous predefined rules triggering alarms and notifying by email the Ministry VISA support team in case of any unusual activity of users processing data in the Central Visa Information System (C-VIS). As the VISA system (the national core application processing system for the examination of applications and decision-making) logs all processing of data in the VISA and C-VIS by all end-user authorities with access rights, the log control covers all those authorities, as well. The Ministry's Data Protection team has a well-established procedure for assessing data breaches and what additional steps need to be taken, including the timeframe for notifying the Data Protection Authority. [Finland, 2023]

SIRENE Bureau

SIRENE procedures

- The Prosecutor's Office has a duty desk that is available 24/7 for referrals from the SIRENE Bureau. [Denmark, 2017]

- Involvement of SIRENE staff in on-spot activities during large-scale police operations. [Switzerland, 2018]

- There is a facility to submit fingerprints from the Schengen

Information System to the national Automated Fingerprint Identification System through the SIRENE workflow system and get hit/no-hit responses automatically. This process is only initiated when a case file is created in the SIRENE workflow system. In accordance with the legislation, the process does not entail the storage of the SIS fingerprints in the national AFIS. [Ireland, 2021]

· All relevant authorities related to the police internal secured network have their official dedicated mail accounts, used to exchange information. All police reports of incidents are visible to all offices with dedicated mail accounts, including the SIRENE officers who proactively search against the available databases, including the SIS, all EU and third-country nationals involved in the reported incidents. As a result of these queries, in case a positive match is produced, the SIRENE Bureau contacts immediately the Police station in charge of the case (that has reported the incident) and requests further action to be taken regarding the subject of the alert. The proactive approach developed by the SIRENE Bureau ensures that no hits are missed during the queries performed against the SIS. [Cyprus, 2023]

SIRENE workflow system

· In the case-management applications, when there is a hit in an alert that contains aliases, misused identities and/or links, a window pops up highlighting the presence of this relevant information. This notification effectively addresses one of the most common problems among the query solutions in the different Member States: the difficulty of making this information visible to the end user. [Hungary, 2019]

· The SIRENE workflow system automatically checks all incoming messages from all international channels (including also SIRENE forms), against pre-defined keywords. Personal data included in the forms is automatically checked against the connected databases. Positive results from such screening are marked as 'hot hits' to indicate that those forms should be handled as a priority. Thanks to this solution, the SIRENE Bureau can effectively manage incoming requests without any backlog. [Liechtenstein, 2021]

· Incoming A and M forms (used to exchange information on European arrest warrants and extradition requests, and on miscellaneous supplementary information when no procedure is laid down, respectively) on persons are processed automatically in the SIRENE case management system, which automatically transfers the incoming forms on alerts related to terrorism to the Danish Security and Intelligence Service. [Denmark, 2022]

· The SIRENE forms created by officers are pre-filled with alert data and have predefined texts available that can be added just with one click. The predefined texts are tailored for each form and type of alert. [Slovakia, 2019]

· The SIRENE case management system is a single IT application that handles all messages in a highly automated way: incoming SIRENE forms are registered automatically to existing cases and assigned to the competent case officer; incoming A forms are processed automatically and checked against the national databases based on keywords. This process allows for all incoming A forms relate to these key words to be automatically sent once per day in a batch to the relevant departments and units. The A forms are assigned to an operator for manual handling only in case of a match. The dedicated national hit-forms are automatically sent from a preview window in the Schengen Information System alert by the end-users from the Police browser/registers and received in the ILO's incoming messages mailbox, and then converted into SIRENE hit-reporting forms. These processes significantly facilitate the performance of the tasks of the SIRENE Bureau and support the timely effectiveness of the exchange of supplementary information and forms. [Lithuania, 2023]

4.   Fundamental Rights aspects

Forced-return monitoring

· Adequate monitoring is ensured by the full independence of the National Guarantor, the scope of its action, the trainings provided to the return escorts on fundamental rights (including on the rights of vulnerable groups of persons) and the principle of non-refoulement, as well as the regional network of trained forced return monitors operating on the whole territory. [Italy, 2021]

· The regular online publication of the forced-return monitoring reports by the Public Defender of Rights, including in English as part of the annual general report of the Ombudsman ensures an additional layer of scrutiny over the removal process, enhancing its transparency, and further supports the effectiveness of the forced-return monitoring mechanism. [Czechia, 2019]

· The Border Guard Headquarters has a designated human rights advisor to mainstream and support fundamental rights compliant border management practices. Regional Border Guard divisions also have such designated human rights advisors, who take part in delivering training on fundamental

rights at regional and local levels. [Poland, 2024]

5.   Data protection supervision

· The Data State Inspectorate organises supervision of the Schengen and Visa Information Systems within the Business Process Model and Notation - a graphical representation for defining business processes in a business process model. Business Process Model and Notation allows employees to understand their responsibilities at each stage, as well as the entire process of supervision. [Latvia, 2023]

EXTERNAL DIMENSION

Cooperation with third countries

Liaison officers

· There is a direct access from the International Liaison Office intranet to the Database of dactyloscopy data that allows the officers to query the national AFIS with a NIST file attached to an alert, allowing to retrieve any matches in a matter of minutes. When the automatic search results in a match, this match is also subject to a fingerprint expert verification. This functionality allows not only to query the national databases with alphanumeric parameters but also with biometrics, which increases the accuracy of the identification of the person. [Lithuania, 2023]

· Visa advisors or liaison officers are deployed in priority third countries, tasked with identifying potential irregular migration to the Schengen area and gathering intelligence on new methods or trends. When fraudulent documents or identities are detected by visa authorities, not only is the Schengen visa refused but an entry ban is also issued to prevent the third-country national from attempting entry through another Member State. The intelligence collected by these officers is regularly shared with relevant authorities through coordinated meetings, enhancing preparedness at external borders and for return procedures. This intelligence aids in forming national and regional plans, allowing targeted actions against entities involved in facilitating irregular migration. Irregular migrants identified in these operations are directed to the appropriate return processes. [Hungary, 2024]

· Liaison officers have been given direct access to the case management system managed by the Single Point of Contact, enabling real-time information retrieval from national and

international databases. This access improves their decision-making, supports cross-border investigations and enhances operational efficiency with international collaborators. Additionally, oversight by the Single Point of Contact ensures that communications between liaison officers and law enforcement are coordinated, transparent and secure. [Czechia, 2024].

International cooperation

· The establishment of multilateral cooperation and bilateral agreements with several third countries allows data exchange in real time on maritime surveillance and in the border crossing points for the checks on ferries, and other border-related information. The authorities actively support the development of national capabilities for border control in third countries by donating assets. [Italy, 2021]

· The national authorities manage the migration flows and tackle cross-border crime from outside the Schengen area through the implementation of a regional concept of border surveillance. It includes the deployment of liaison officers from third countries to the regional coordination centres of the Member State and vice versa, which aims to facilitate direct cooperation and exchange of information. Border guard units are deployed in the territorial waters and on land of the third countries, ensuring constant joint patrolling by sea and air. A search and rescue mechanism complements the regional border surveillance system with vessels coordinated by the national search and rescue agency. [Spain, 2022]

· The "Safe Tourist Destination" project runs since 2006, hosting and deploying police officers internationally to better serve tourists and nationals abroad. With growing participation of foreign police organisations, 2023 saw involvement from 24 organizations across 21 countries. Foreign police officers operate under agreed powers, providing services in tourists' languages which lowers barriers to seek police help. Visible in their national uniforms, guest police officers contribute to crime prevention and enhance safety. [Croatia, 2024]

· Arrangements established with neighbouring third countries according to which guest officers are deployed at these borders to support surveillance and other control activities, such as border checks. It increases reaction capabilities and information exchange. Within one neighbouring territory, border police officers from a partner third country are patrolling in cooperation with local border officers on a daily basis to prevent illegal migration and identify facilitators of human smuggling. Based on a bilateral agreement with another partner country, an officer is currently working at specific border

crossing points to support checks and facilitate communication with passengers. [Hungary, 2024]

· Courts and Prosecutor's offices create alerts for wanted persons along with a European Arrest Warrant (EAW) in both Polish and English. Attaching the English version to the alert expedites procedures in the other MS for actions on international hits. [Poland, 2024]

Visa Policy

External Service Provider

· Imposing financial sanctions on external service providers in case of non-compliance with the contract, combined with reinforced monitoring of their work, is an effective way to bring the external service provider in conformity with the provisions of the contract and improve its performance. [Austria, 2022]

MANAGEMENT OF THE EXTERNAL BORDERS

National and European situational awareness and early warning system

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Cooperation (situational awareness)

· The coordination between the National Coordination Centres of two neighbouring Member States allows for a common situational picture, efficient information exchange, improved situational awareness at the common borders and an increased response capacity, as the positioning of the assets is also shared between the two countries. [Portugal/ Spain, 2017]

· The direct access to national databases (beyond those just used for border control) enables the National Coordination Centre to maintain a comprehensive national situational picture and ensure an enhanced situational awareness for its stakeholders at national and European level. [Finland, 2023]

· The National Coordination Centre established a procedure for reviewing requests for activation of EUROSUR Fusion Services at the district and local levels. Such procedure verifies the legality and relevance of each request of EUROSUR Fusion Services, before they are submitted to Frontex, ensuring that only relevant and cost-effective requests for EUROSUR Fusion

Services are sent to Frontex and then used in the operational activities. [Finland, 2023]

· Within the EMPACT framework, acting as a "Driver" of the EMPACT operational action plan targeting criminal networks involved in the production, trafficking and distribution of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances. The Police Central Bureau of Investigation's drug unit Head acts as the "Driver," benefiting from a rather unique operational support and efficiently identifying and accessing various financial opportunities. The European Project Implementation Centre within the Ministry of Interior Affairs supports this activity as a priority and assists by handling administrative tasks and supporting efforts to combat drug trafficking. [Poland, 2024]

· Border Guards and Customs authorities closely cooperate through an integrated Digital Border procedure at crossing points to strengthen the checks and ensure a smoother process. Data gathered and first line checks results, including SIS information, are directly transferred from Border Guards to Customs, who continue inspections with pre-filled details. [Poland, 2024]

Risk Analysis

Land borders

· The national risk analysis system of the border control institution is efficient and supported by functional inter-agency cooperation. Twice per year, the border control institution issues common risk analysis products with the Customs and the National Police. The regular and systematic exchange of information between relevant national authorities involved in the implementation of the European Integrated Border Management resulting in joint risk analysis products ensures comprehensive national situational awareness and supports adequate reaction capabilities. In addition, common trainings, joint operations, and tailored actions are organised between the relevant authorities involved in border management. [Lithuania, 2023]

· The application to detect person and/or vehicles with a specific risk profile as part of the national risk analysis system of the Border Police and integrated in the National Border Management Information System, The application is available at all border crossing points to all police officers involved in border control and ensures effective use of risk analysis profiles by all organisational levels and increases the quality of border

control. To identify high-risk persons or vehicles, the Border Police developed an automatic risk indicators application which is integrated in the Border Management Information System. When activated, the indicators automatically detect potential perpetrators during border checks. The indicators are automatically linked with risk profiles, showing a yellow alarm on the border guard's screen with a link to the profile, giving targeted instructions to determine a person's status. Border guards can activate these indicators at specific border crossings and times. [Croatia, 2024]

Border checks

Air borders

· A dedicated unit of six border guards monitors private transport and recreational aviation, including light aircrafts and helicopters, as it has access to real-time route tracking and flight data from the military radar. The unit receives all the flight plans which are then analysed. When the airport of departure or arrival is not a border crossing point, an alert is given to a police unit to intervene. In case of unauthorised landings at aerodromes not dedicated to border crossings, the authorities impose fines. Risk assessment of deviating flight routes is carried out regularly. [Belgium, 2020]

· The communication between the first and the second lines at border crossing points at the airport via the national application is very highly automated and user-friendly. In case of a hit, the first-line officer has the possibility to type in comments in a dedicated field and the hit information together with the comments message is sent through the national application from the first line to the second line. When it comes to the e-gates, in case of a hit on a discreet check alert, the e-gate operator can also add a comment to the hit which is then immediately forwarded to the second line which collects additional available information and sends the hit form to SIRENE. This allows the check to be completed without any contact with the subject of the alert, while collecting the information needed. [Lithuania, 2023]

· Passenger Information Unit responsible for the collection and processing of passengers' data on all flights currently operating in the country. Its role is to inform (24/7) competent law enforcement authorities of the need to further examine incoming and outgoing passengers, after the automated comparison of their data with relevant databases (such as the Schengen Information System, I24/7), or against abstract profiles modelled in cooperation and/or upon request of such

authorities. As they receive queries from all law enforcement agencies, the unit is in a unique position to notice overlapping investigations and objects of interests and to inform respective agencies. Well-developed case management system for handling communications with competent authorities and Passenger Information Units of other Member States, established following international best practices, is at the heart of successful fulfilment Unit´s tasks and information exchange. The operations take due account of data protection and procedural requirements established by the relevant EU and national law. The Unit proactively runs awareness raising campaigns on the capabilities it offers. It is equipped with high quality technical and human capabilities. [Latvia, 2023]

Land borders

· Automatic pre-check in the Schengen Information System of vehicles approaching the land border control booths via the Automatic Number Plate Recognition, including object extensions. [Croatia, 2024]

Border surveillance

· The border guard uses Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) for surveillance and intervention tasks. Each of the regional units responsible for the external land borders is connected to the system. It consists of three platforms (unmanned mini motor gliders), a ground station (with remote control, screens and antenna) and other supporting equipment. The platforms are equipped with daylight and night-vision cameras, and one platform can be used at any given time. High-quality images from the cameras are delivered in real-time either to the ground station or other connected recipients. This UAV system can enhance the border surveillance capacity, improve situational awareness and facilitate reaction capacities. Once a flying object is detected, the Regional Coordination Centre is swiftly informed for specific intervention measures to be conducted. [Poland, 2019]

· An electronic barrier system has been installed along the majority of the external land border, consisting of a high number of day, night and thermal cameras and motion and seismic sensors. Regional centres monitor the system, transmitting automatically generated alarms to local coordination centres for dispatching patrols. This effectively detects unauthorized crossings, allows real-time monitoring and enhances patrol response times. [Poland, 2024]

· The national border guard uses an IT system for planning,

coordinating and reporting operational actions, which serves as an all-in-one platform to increase overall efficient external border control. The system has several modules which enable the user to save and share information on events, display events on a map, plan patrols and work schedules, display the position of operational units in real time and transmit reports. [Poland, 2024]

National database for border surveillance

· The national border surveillance concept is based on a comprehensive and efficient national database, combining all the relevant functionalities to support operational and tactical tasks. This system follows all elements of the operational cycle of border surveillance: providing support for information collection, reporting on the tactical and operational outcome of activities, planning of shifts, management and coordination of patrols and designing efficient reaction response in the field and providing coherent situational awareness. The software provides for a single service platform for all law enforcement thus ensures effective utilisation of resources in case of emergency and benefits of compilation of the situational picture in designated areas of responsibility. The software is linked with functions of the mobile IT environment of the patrol deployed at the field. Based on its comprehensive and coherent design, the system can be operated on local, regional and national level. [Estonia, 2023]

RETURN

Effectiveness of the national return system

Return procedures

· The practice of taking return, removal and entry ban decisions in one step reduces the administrative burden while the procedural rights of the returnees are fully respected. [Austria, 2015]

· The procedure of notifying the 'intention of issuing an entry ban' when an irregular stay is detected during exit checks, giving the third-country national the opportunity to raise

objections, allows the authorities to issue an entry ban without interrupting the departure of the third-country national while respecting the third-country national's rights. [The Netherlands, 2021]

· National authorities developed a notice on available assistance for reintegration, to be signed by third-country nationals post-consultation. This is stored with their case files, easing communication with return counsellors at detention centres. [Croatia, 2024]

· Mutual recognition of return decisions issued by other Member States. If a third-country national with no right to stay is found and has a return decision issued by another EU country, national authorities will recognise and enforce this decision without delay. They will not issue a new return decision or contact the issuing country but instead, will proceed with the removal of the individual to their country of return, following, where justified, an updated assessment. [Czechia, 2024]

Forced-return procedure

· Procedures are in place enabling authorities to take a fast decision on a subsequent asylum application lodged during the removal process to avoid postponing or delaying the removal of a third-country national while ensuring effective implementation of the principle of non-refoulement. [The Netherlands, 2015]

Voluntary return

· Throughout the entire return process, voluntary return is a priority for the national authorities. There is a proactive approach to motivate third-country nationals for voluntary departure during all stages of the procedure, particularly at detention centres. The detention centres are considered conducive to promote voluntary return, with case managers and authorities actively motivating third-country nationals to leave the country voluntarily, while providing adequate accommodation and support. [The Netherlands, 2021]

· The early engagement with returnees when promoting voluntary return/departure and the possibility for a returnee to participate in a voluntary return scheme at any point of the return process, promotes and increases the use of voluntary return and reintegration as an integral part of a common EU system for return in line with the EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration. [Luxembourg, 2016; Denmark, 2022]

IT system

- The national IT return case management system, which was developed in line with the Frontex model (RECAMAS), provides return-related authorities with an efficient and integrated tool, favouring the effective management of return cases. [Italy, 2021; Estonia 2023]

- The connection of the national migration case management system to the Frontex Application for Return (FAR) charter flights module allows national authorities to reach directly all charter operations organised with the support of Frontex and help them to organise and participate in return operations more efficiently. [Austria, 2020]

Detention for the purpose of removal

Detention centres

- A children's room in registration facilities for foreigners provides appropriate and stimulating surroundings for children. The long opening hours and accessibility without restrictions, the presence of a social worker and the large number of games and activities available make it attractive for children to use. [Lithuania, 2018]

- Family centres and targeted psychiatric facilities can cater to the particular needs of vulnerable persons in detention. The family centre's layout, activities and staff commitment allow for family life as close as possible to normal and provide appropriate and stimulating surroundings for families and unaccompanied minors. The psychiatric facility provides for close cooperation between the relevant partners to address the needs of vulnerable persons with psychological problems in the return process while increasing the efficiency of return procedures. [The Netherlands, 2021]

- The developed protocols and training of the personnel, combined with the design and the regime contribute to mitigating the stress and trauma for minors in the return process and are in line with the best interests of the child principle. [Norway, 2022]

- The facilities for foreigners have mental healthcare offices, offering third-country nationals assistance with mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder and prevention of suicide as well as supporting their adaptation. The psychologists carry out an initial appraisal with all new arrivals and inform them about the possibilities of seeking psychological support within the facility. This allows for the early identification of psychological issues, which can guarantee an effective approach and handling of such cases.

The mental healthcare offices can be accessed during office hours from Monday to Friday after an appointment by phone or with an application form. This helps create an open and safe environment, especially when dealing with victims of trafficking and other vulnerable persons. [Lithuania, 2023]

· Detention conditions feature spacious outdoor recreational areas at a Reception Centre, with a dedicated outdoor playing area for young children and grassy recreational area for adults, creating a pleasant atmosphere with space for privacy. It mitigates risk of conflict and overcrowding. [Croatia, 2024]

· Detention centre staffed with an educational unit of 11 officers, which organises a wide variety of educational, social, cultural (with attention to cultural sensitivities) and sports activities as well as events. The staff is available to the detainees from Monday to Saturday, 12 hours/day and officers are dressed in civilian clothes. Some of them have a professional background in education and psychology and they have an active role in conflict prevention within the centre. [Poland, 2024]

· Detention centres offer detainees extensive medical care tailored to their needs. If care cannot be provided on-site, detainees are quickly taken to outside specialized clinics. The Border Guard covers costs of these treatments. In case of a serious condition, detainees are released and transferred to specialized care organisations. [Poland, 2024]

· The Detention Centre provides a dedicated nursery room, available 24/7, where mothers can care for their newborn children in a private and separate facility. The room is equipped with essential furniture and items to support the care of infants. There is also a childcare section, spacious and well-equipped, offering a wide range of age-appropriate activities, toys, and games. Children whose parents are detained at the Centre can visit the playroom with their parents' consent. For very young children, visits can also be supervised by one of their parents, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for all. [Czechia, 2024]

· The detention centre has implemented a range of visual aids, including orientation tables, signposts, house rules, and posters, which are designed to be child-friendly and accessible. These materials feature pictograms and are displayed at a height and appearance that is easy for minors to understand. Additionally, the 'Toolbox for Children' of Frontex, has been made widely available and accessible in multiple languages. [Czechia, 2024]

INTERNAL BORDERS

Cross-border cooperation in internal border areas

Operational cooperation with neighbouring Member States

- Joint trilateral patrols on trains with its neighbours. [Austria, 2015]

- A bi-annual joint crime analysis report and an operational crime analysis report are prepared between Member States on a fortnightly basis. Further, a daily briefing with information on crimes committed in one Member State is prepared and shared with the partner Member States. [Liechtenstein, 2015]

- Within a border region police district, there is a joint analysis team. This consists of several agencies comprising police, customs, and border and criminal offices. The analyses are used to inform decisions regarding border controls, policing and customs matters. It was noted that analysis reports were used to brief officers in advance of joint patrols, including the determination of the days, times and locations where such patrols would take place. For the ports authorised for non-Schengen arrivals, monthly risk analysis reports are compiled. These are used to inform the operational as well as the administrative aspects of the border controls. [Denmark, 2017]

- To ensure effective cross-border cooperation and mutualisation of resources, neighbouring Member States signed an agreement on the Common use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources to carry out undercover intelligence operations through a common pool of police officers. [Lithuania, 2018]

- The national data system delivers screen flashes when an operation starts thus immediately alerting operators for necessary follow-up. It also provides live feed. The geolocation of the patrolling cars is also visible in the system. Both the Police Cooperation and Customs Centres and the SPOC have direct access to it. [Czechia, 2019]

- Joint bi-national brigades to combat illegal immigration and smugglers are integrated and permanent international cooperation mechanisms enabling two neighbouring countries

to organise controls based on shared analysis of migration risks. Composed of an equal number of officers from both countries selected for their technical and linguistic skills, these 'brigades' (or 'joint units') set up at the Franco-German and Franco-Italian borders are either governed by the Prüm agreements or by a bilateral agreement. In addition to the organisation of joint patrols, the joint brigades (or joint units) provide joint training. This joint brigade system facilitates the exchange of information between two neighbouring countries and the coordination of control operations and should therefore be encouraged and extended to other borders in particular the French-Spanish border. [France, 2021]

· At the regional level, cross border cooperation is based on administrative protocols with competent authorities of the neighbouring Member States, which are further implemented through annual action plans. This practical cooperation covers joint risk analysis, joint operations and patrols, managing of specific events and joint trainings. Joint patrols are planned on a regular basis. This cooperation concept creates good basis for a joint operational response at the regional level, common use of limited resources and more comprehensive crime situational picture. [Estonia, 2023; Latvia, 2023]

· Proactive measures are taken to limit temporary reintroductions of internal border controls by having regular and targeted meetings with neighbouring countries and having tactical and operational cooperation in border regions. Joint cross-border trainings and cross-border hot pursuit exercises are regularly organised and basic information on this possibility is spread via leaflets to all national police officers. Via an extensive network and designated senior officials in every border region, police authorities are in permanent contact with its (internal) cross-border counterparts. There is constant joint monitoring, analysis and response to emerging threats. This can be upscaled to joint patrols, actions, exercises, planning et cet. when security threats emerge or increase. If internal border controls are reintroduced, both countries analyse the implementation to prevent future occurrences. [Slovakia, 2024]

· On the political and strategical level this is done by regular as well as targeted meetings and consultations with neighbouring countries, but the main focus is put on the tactical and operational cooperation in the border regions. Joint trainings and exercises on cross-border hot pursuit are organised on a regular basis together with the neighbouring Member States, and basic information on this possibility is made available through leaflets for all Slovak police officers. Through its extensive network of PCC's and by designating certain senior officials in every border region as responsible for the coordination of law enforcement cooperation with the

neighbouring country ('Border Plenipotentiaries') the Slovak Police Force is permanently in contact with its counterparts on the other side of the internal border. This ensures a constant joint monitoring and analysis of the security situation in the border regions, allowing for swift detection of and joint response to emerging threats. When certain security threats emerge or increase, cross-border cooperation is intensified in the form of joint patrols, joint actions, joint exercises, joint planning, etc. When despite these preventive measures in certain cases the reintroduction of internal border controls is deemed necessary nevertheless, the implementation of these controls is jointly analysed by both countries afterward in order to identify possible measures to further avoid them in the future. This is considered a best practice. [Slovakia, 2024]

· Intensified police cooperation by neighbouring Schengen States due to a new joint patrol concept developed from a 2023 agreement between relevant national police headquarters. An operational centre with command, control, and communication capabilities was established at a cross-border police cooperation centre. A regional risk-based operational plan guides the efforts. Participating patrols are tracked via GPS devices and are aware of each other's locations through mobile devices. Joint operations, including 12-16 mixed patrols per month, occur near the shared border. Patrol types and equipment, such as drones and night vision, are selected according to the plan. Since June 2022, additional neighbouring Schengen authorities have joined these operations. [Hungary, 2024]

INTERNAL SECURITY

National Strategies on Law Enforcement
· Every four years, the Minister of Justice and Security sets the National Security Agenda with national policy objectives for police duties. On a regional level, the local government translates the national priorities into regional policy objectives for the police in the Regional Security Agenda. Law enforcement agencies exchange intelligence and information to gather appropriate information and intelligence to contribute to the National Security Agenda, the Regional Security Agendas and Europol's Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA). Steering Committees from the Research Department are tasked with the coordination and monitoring of the whole procedure. A daily operational briefing allows the different police teams to be informed about the specific points of

attention in their working field. They are used for instance as a starting point for policymaking in the fight against organised crime and estimating threat levels that indicate the likelihood of a terrorist attack. Additionally, the Research and Analysis desks of all Regional Intelligence Services make their own threat and security assessments. [The Netherlands, 2021]

·   The Office of the Prosecutor General appointed a liaison prosecutor to the SPOC who is frequently consulted on flagging of alerts and international arrest warrants, complexed international criminal investigations and any other cases, where the prosecutorial input is needed. [Portugal, 2022]

·   Very close cooperation between the Foreign Liaison officers and the central authority for international judicial cooperation who can advise and assist in writing European Investigation orders or Mutual legal assistance requests addressed to the Member State. [Portugal, 2022]

·   Use of an analysis tool by the Police in its criminal analysis units, allowing for the establishment of 'profiles' of crime phenomena, based on operational data, which show the user an interactive visualization of said phenomenon, its trends, modi operandi and evolutions. Since starting the roll out of this application in 2019, the Police has significantly extended the number of analysed crime phenomena and of users. [Lithuania, 2023]

Organisation of the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for international law enforcement information exchange

Organisation, information exchange

·   For better coordination of international police cooperation, the Police created a network of contact officers for international police cooperation. They are located in all Regional Police headquarters and the capital's Metropolitan Police headquarter. The contact officers help to improve the quality and facilitate the coordination of information exchange requests. [Poland, 2019]

·   There is a well-established daily flow of criminal incidents reporting from the local to the regional and state levels. In practice, an e-report on the events of the last 24 hours is regularly available to the local station management team, the regional level and the State Central Criminal Police Office. It allows all levels to take informed decisions. [Germany, 2020]

·   The system for the coordination of counter-terrorist operations gathers all the intelligence from the different police

organisations and institutions responsible for preventing and countering terrorism, violent radicalism, organised and serious crime. The system presents an adequate alternative, combining information management with operational coordination in a situation where the relevant national authorities do not have access to each other's databases. [Spain, 2022]

· Deployment of international case officers at regional level in different Police Departments. These officers are part of the Single Point of Contact and have four weeks training on large-scale IT systems, exchange of supplementary information through the SIRENE channel, management of biometrics and field visits to Europol and Eurojust. They have full access to the case management systems of the Single Point of Contact, Interpol's I-24/7 secure global police communications system and have rights to introduce Schengen Information System alerts and Interpol notices. They also have access to the relevant systems and permissions equivalent to a case officer attached to the national SIRENE Bureau and the International Communications Centre. This has resulted in having expertise on the Schengen Information System available in each local division. Furthermore, the international case officers verify both quality and legal relevance of the requested information, draft SIENA messages to be sent to Liaison Officers at Europol and provide training, on international police cooperation within the local Police Department. [Finland, 2023]

· An Integrated Case Management System is used by national police to facilitate real-time communication, resource coordination and task assignment within command centres. Its user-friendly design allows swift responses and efficient coordination in dynamic situations by sharing commands and information directly with patrols and specialized units. It enhances operational readiness and public safety. The system also incorporates key non-police partners such as Customs, the Fire Brigade and Ambulance Services, for real-time information exchange and cohesive resource allocation. [Czechia, 2024]

Organisation

· The permanent Police, Customs and Border Guard Crime Intelligence and Analysis Centre is a form of effective cooperation and coordination between the law enforcement authorities producing, among others, common analytical and threat assessment products. [Finland, 2018]

· The creation of Central Offices, pooling resources from different administrations and focusing on one type of crime, leads to very effective operational results. [France, 2021]

· Effective structure to produce not only the national threat assessment but also dedicated threat and risk assessments. It combines centrally organised quality control with requirement analysis at regional level. The multi-disciplinary strategic analysis unit is responsible for strategic crime analysis. The unit consists of a team working at the national level and field teams in several regions. Quality control is maintained at the central level which also ensures coherence between the different analytical products. The unit produces the annual national threat assessment which focuses on organised crime groups. [France, 2021]

· Memorandum of understanding between the police and customs enables extensive cooperation between both administrations, which foresees for the exchange and sharing of relevant information and strategic, tactical and operational intelligence, in particular by facilitating mutual access to databases, with due regard for individual rights and data protection rules, development and promotion of best practices, procedures for operational matters with respect to joint actions, joint mobile patrol squads, joint investigation teams, joint intelligence teams, sharing of equipment between services and cooperation on the development, purchasing, deployment and use of technology. [Cyprus, 2021]

· The SPOC has a risk analysis group responsible for deeper analysis of national and international requests, received in SPOC, gathering additional information in available databases, and providing analysis reports on discovered crime trends, modus operandi. The reports are then forwarded to prosecutors and/or respective police agencies for supporting relevant investigations. [Portugal, 2022]

· The International Cooperation Division combines operational information exchange with strategic decision-making at international level. This Division hosts the national Single Point of Contact for law enforcement international information exchanges. It benefits from representation from both national police forces, regional police forces as well as customs. Both relevant authorities have a network of experts on international police cooperation, which assist and advise the criminal intelligence units at regional level on the use of the instruments of international police cooperation. The main law enforcement authorities train experts on international police cooperation regularly. These experts form part of their unit at regional level and perform this function in addition to their daily work. Knowledge is transmitted to the network at an annual meeting, where for example national Liaison Officers at Europol are invited as speakers. In between these meetings, knowledge about new procedures is transmitted to the network either via newsletters or ad hoc meetings. In addition, the experts of the

authority's network receive a one-week capability training before joining the network. These expert networks are a low-threshold way for the dissemination of knowledge on international police cooperation at the regional level. [Spain, 2022]

· The national PIU is integrated in the national SPOC, managing all PNR-related cases for various authorities (police, customs, intelligence services, military police, prosecutors' office and courts, etc.). This integration makes the system more comprehensive and enhances the SPOC's role as a general information hub for all international security information exchanges. Sharing one case management system with other SPOC units enables easy integration and cross-checking of information, leading to more comprehensive analysis. [Slovakia, 2024]

Use of Europol tools for cross-border cooperation and information exchange

· Data from the national system for police investigations is automatically uploaded into Europol's Information System. The database of ongoing investigations is connected to an automated data loader in Europol's Information System. New information is inserted, existing information is enhanced, and old information is removed daily. This process is completely automated. The Europol National Unit handles hits occurring between national investigations and foreign investigations, already available within Europol's Information System. [The Netherlands, 2021]

· Integration of QUEST (Querying Europol Systems) with the national query system to perform searches in the Europol Information System. In addition, the searching scope was extended to all objects that are available in the system and the same search functionality will be available for Customs. This has increased the number of searches, making the Member State the third most active using the search functionality in 2024. [Hungary, 2024]