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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL 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 report².

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 \(April 2024\)](#).

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 proposed³ 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,

³ COM/2024/173 final.

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.

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**.

- 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

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.

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 project⁵. 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 2024⁶, following its decision of 30 December 2023⁷ 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 drivers⁸.

Cyprus is working to implement the Schengen recommendations⁹ 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 rulebook¹⁰. Given the benefits for Ireland and the Schengen area as a whole, and after being authorised by the Council to participate in certain areas¹¹ such as the Schengen Information System, as well as police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, a follow-up to its Schengen

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*.

evaluation is currently underway¹². The Commission intends to issue the Schengen evaluation report¹³ for Ireland in 2025. If positive, this will enable the Council to put into effect these provisions¹⁴ 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 policy¹⁵.

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 rules¹⁶ 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

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.

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 that these major innovations are fully operational and follow the new timeline¹⁷ 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 2024¹⁸, 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**

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).

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 cooperation¹⁹, continue to hinder effective operational cooperation among law enforcement authorities. As announced in the European Internal Security Strategy²⁰, 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,

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.

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 smuggling²¹. 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.

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).

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 billion²². For short stays, third-country nationals can access the Schengen area through a unified **Schengen visa system**, unless they are eligible for visa-free travel²³. 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 Skills²⁴.

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

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.

and Serbia²⁵. 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 Balkans²⁶ 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 countries²⁷, 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 countries²⁸. 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 force, 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.

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.

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 area²⁹.

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 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.

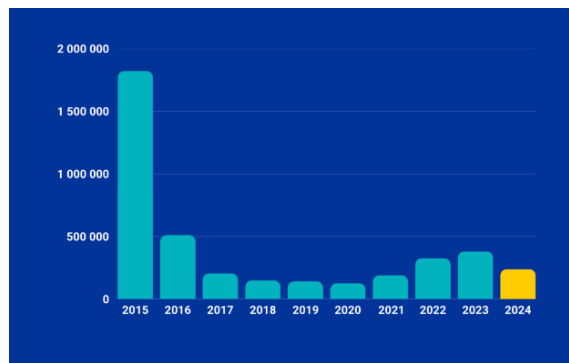
4.2. Stronger security for people through robust border management and more effective returns

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 2021³⁰.

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](#).



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 efforts³¹. 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 capacities³². 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

³¹ Frontex 2024 strategic risk analysis. [Strategic Risk Analysis 2024 Report.pdf](#)

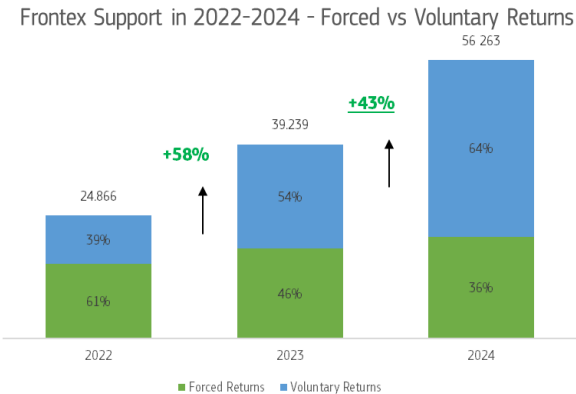
³² COM(2025) 148 final.

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.



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 returns³³ 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 Handbook³⁴.

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 Exchange³⁵ into their national systems to ensure seamless and coordinated communication. Eleven Schengen countries have not yet notified the transposition of this Directive³⁶ 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

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).

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 cooperation³⁷ and Commission recommendations of 23 November 2023 on alternative measures to controls at the internal borders³⁸. 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 Code³⁹, that aims to facilitate the direct transfer of irregular migrants at the

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).

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.