

Brussels, 29 September 2025
(OR. en)

13141/1/25
REV 1

LIMITE

**SCH-EVAL 47
SCHENGEN 36
COMIX 272
JAI 1294
FRONT 214
MIGR 300
ASIM 63
ENFOPOL 337
IXIM 204
VISA 136
CH
IS
LI
NO**

NOTE

From:	Commission services
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Overall state of the Schengen area – Schengen Barometer +

Delegations will find in annex the Schengen Barometer + revised version, as provided by the services of the Commission with a view to the Schengen Council on 14 October 2025.



10th Edition

SCHENGEN BAROMETER+

SCHENGEN COUNCIL

14 OCTOBER 2025



Dear colleagues,

The 10th edition of the Schengen Barometer+ coincides with the year of Schengen's 40th anniversary. Four decades have passed since the signing of the Schengen Agreement that redefined the daily lives of millions of Europeans. What began in 1985 with a signature on the Moselle River as a blueprint of an area of freedom, security and justice without internal borders, has grown into the largest area of free movement in the world, a cornerstone of our Union, and a shared responsibility that demands constant care.

Since 2022, the Barometer+ has been more than a compilation of figures. It provides a structured way of understanding Schengen: identifying where our system is strong, where it is under strain, and where action is needed. It serves as our compass for implementation priorities and policy development. This tenth edition is also a signal of sustained cooperation between Member States, the Justice and Home Affairs Agencies and the Commission.

In this edition, the Barometer+ looks closely at the **external and internal borders**, whose effectiveness directly shapes a Schengen area marked by rising mobility. Passenger flows have surpassed pre-pandemic levels, contributing to economic growth, while at the same time placing renewed pressure on border management systems already under strain. This makes it increasingly urgent to address existing deficiencies in the quality of border management of all Member States as this is a collective effort. The follow-up to the Schengen thematic evaluation on more effective returns also points to opportunities for further progress in the period ahead. Enhanced cross-border police cooperation has shown that joint approaches offer a sustainable way forward, yet challenges at some internal borders remain. The Barometer highlights the progress achieved and the need to strengthen cooperation frameworks with partners both inside and outside the EU to ensure resilience.

In this context, the role of our Agencies is of strategic importance, showcasing the strength of European cooperation by multiplying capacities, building synergies, and turning shared commitments into concrete results. On external borders, Frontex stands out as a central actor, already indispensable, yet with untapped potential to reinforce our common action.

The Barometer+ also points to a demanding **security landscape**. Hybrid threats linked to Russia, the uncertain trajectory of the war in Ukraine, instability in Syria and the wider conflict in the Middle East, as well as growing insecurity in the Sahel continue to shape the risk environment. Terrorism and radicalisation remain pressing concerns, organised crime is diversifying, and both are exploiting digital tools and drawing in younger audiences. These dynamics show that, while the Schengen area has new tools in border management to protect people and businesses, sustained investments are indispensable.

Looking ahead, this Barometer is part of a wider set of tools that will guide our choices. The forthcoming annual migration report will provide the data necessary to assess migratory pressure, while the internal security threat analysis under ProtectEU, the European Internal Security Strategy, will deepen our understanding of the risks on the horizon. Read together, these instruments will allow us to act with clarity, responsibility, and unity. The message of this tenth edition is clear: progress is real, and benefits are tangible, but challenges are pressing. Our response must continue to match the ambition that has defined Schengen since its creation.

Yours sincerely,

Magnus Brunner

The data and analysis presented in the Schengen Barometer+ covers the period from **1 January to 30 June 2025**, unless otherwise specified, and draw on contributions from Member States, EU agencies, and Commission services.

1. THE SCHENGEN NEIGHBOURHOOD

Outlook

- The increase in **international tourist arrivals** in early 2025 points to continued growth in travel to the Schengen area, supported by stronger air connectivity and by Europe's concerted efforts to maintain its position as a secure and competitive destination. This trend will require increased capacities for border control and a faster pace of digitalisation to ensure efficiency and security in border management.
- **Air routes** are likely to remain a key entry point to the EU, yet they are susceptible to misuse of visa-free regimes as well as abuse of airport transit visa waivers. Failure to address these loopholes, including rigorous security screening in legal migration procedures, could fuel identity and document fraud, raising the vulnerability of major Schengen entry points and exposing weaknesses that organised facilitation networks are likely to exploit. [Frontex]
- **Increased instability** in the European neighbourhood and beyond will continue to shape Schengen's security, reinforcing the need for vigilance at external borders and deeper cooperation both among Member States and with third countries. The situation at the **eastern external border** requires particular attention, as the evolving phase of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is likely to trigger unpredictable and recurrent irregular migration flows, organised to destabilise the EU, and affecting the security across various entry points and green border corridors. [Frontex]
- **EU enlargement** is expected to gain momentum and greater relevance in several third countries. Building on the significant progress already achieved in reducing irregular migration and cross-border crime, this dynamic can foster deeper Schengen cooperation with the **Western Balkans**, through reinforced national Schengen governance.
- In the **Southern neighbourhood**, instability in Libya, the Sahel and wider North Africa is likely to sustain **Central and Western Mediterranean** migratory flows, while the conflict and dire humanitarian situation in the Middle East and Africa could increase displacement along **Eastern and Central Mediterranean** routes. [Frontex]

1.1. Travelling to and residing in the Schengen area

- During the first three months of 2025, the Schengen area welcomed **125 million international tourists** (41% of the global total), 5.1% above pre-pandemic levels. [UNWTO]
- The total number of valid residence permits in the EU in 2025 is unknown. Available data from 2024 indicate that there are already more than **26 million permits**¹.

¹ Data for Denmark is only available through December 2023.

1.1.1 Travelling for short stays: Schengen visa

- In the first eight months of 2025, Member States received more than **8 million applications for Schengen visas** (+5% compared to the same period the year before). The top nationalities applying for Schengen visas remained stable with China, India and Türkiye making up about 40% of the total. [eu-LISA]
- More than **5 million Schengen visas** were issued for **multiple entry**. [eu-LISA]
- As of June 2025, there were **7 million active Schengen visas** (China, India, Türkiye accounting for around 11%; Saudi Arabia 10%; and Morocco 8%). [eu-LISA]

Russians entering the Schengen area

- Member States continue to implement the **2022 guidelines on visa issuance to Russian applicants**², leading to an overall improvement. The number of visas issued to Russian nationals has decreased significantly, from 4 million in 2019 to half a million as of August 2025. However, practices remain inconsistent across Member States, the majority of visas are still issued for tourism, and there has been an increase in the number of visas issued this year.

Schengen visas issued to Russian nationals



Russian entering the Schengen area



² C(2022) 7111 final

1.1.2. Travelling for short stays: visa-free entries [Jan-Sept 2025]

- Passenger flows of visa-free third country nationals³ increased by 4% compared to the same period last year on entry and exit. [Frontex]
- **Top five entry Member States:**⁴ Spain, Poland, Germany, Netherlands and Hungary. Highest increases: Lithuania (24%), Estonia, Czechia (21%), and Finland, Malta (+19%). [Frontex]
- **Top 5 visa-free countries** on entry/exit: United Kingdom, Ukraine, United States, Serbia, and Israel. However, in 37% of the entries/exits, Member States did not report the traveller's nationality, which is therefore recorded as 'unknown'. [Frontex]
- **112 600 asylum applications from visa-free nationals** were lodged⁵, a 9% decrease compared to the same period in 2024. The top five nationalities continue to be Venezuelans (48 700; +31%), Ukrainians (15 700; +29%), Colombians (13 400; -53%), Peruvians (10 500; -24%), and Georgians (7 700; +4%). The main receiving Member States were Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and Belgium⁶. [EUAA]
- In January-June 2025, around **39 900 nationals of visa-free countries** were issued a return decision (-5% compared to the same period in 2024), mainly nationals of Georgia, Albania and Colombia. Around **20 400 visa-free nationals were effectively returned** (-5%), representing a 51% implementation rate. [Eurostat]

³ As of June 2025, only 18 Member States and Schengen Associated Countries have reported passenger flows indicator for third country nationals of visa free countries. From those, the data is missing for Austria (until February 2025).

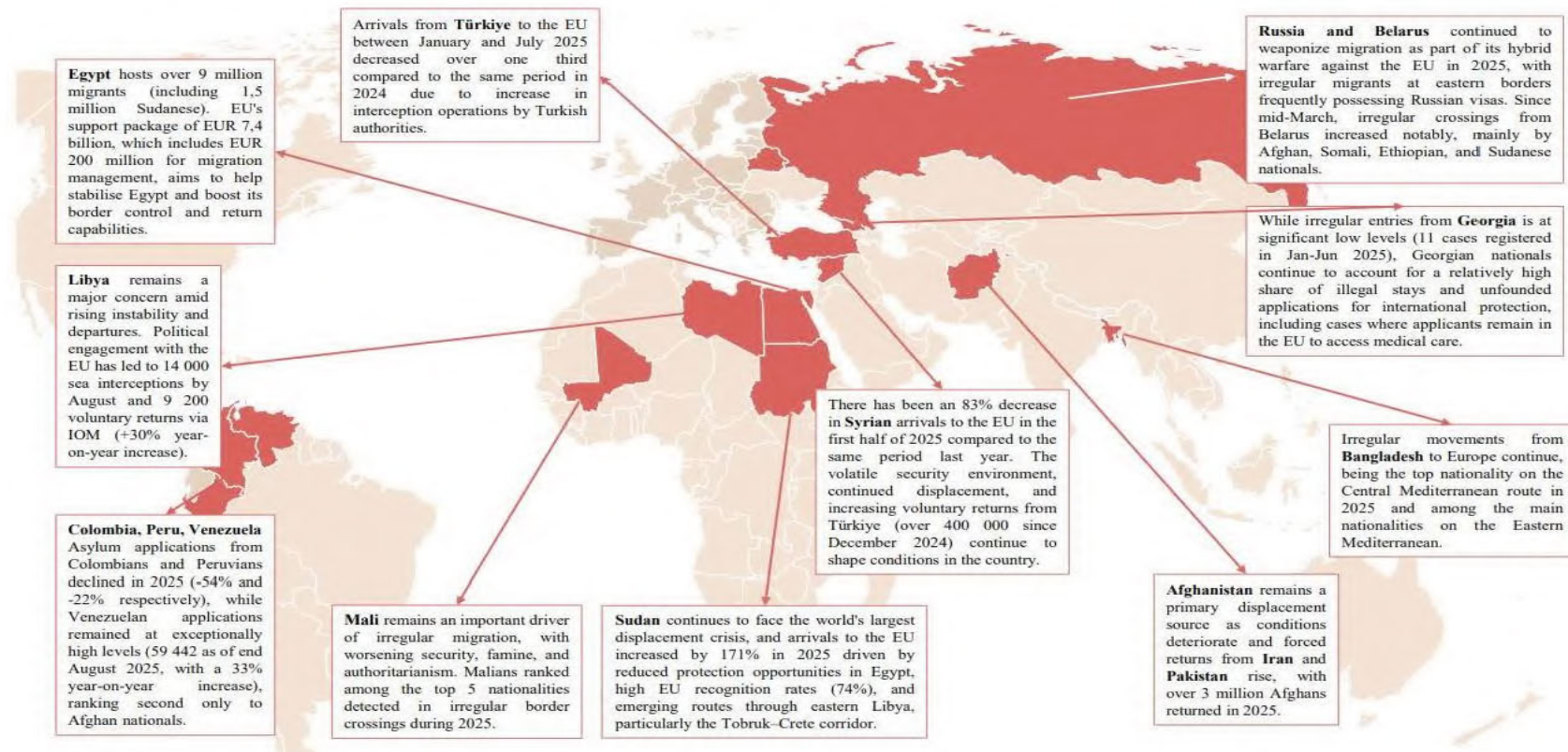
⁴ Data from the Netherlands is incomplete as for some border crossing points there is only information on entry

⁵ Data includes EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland

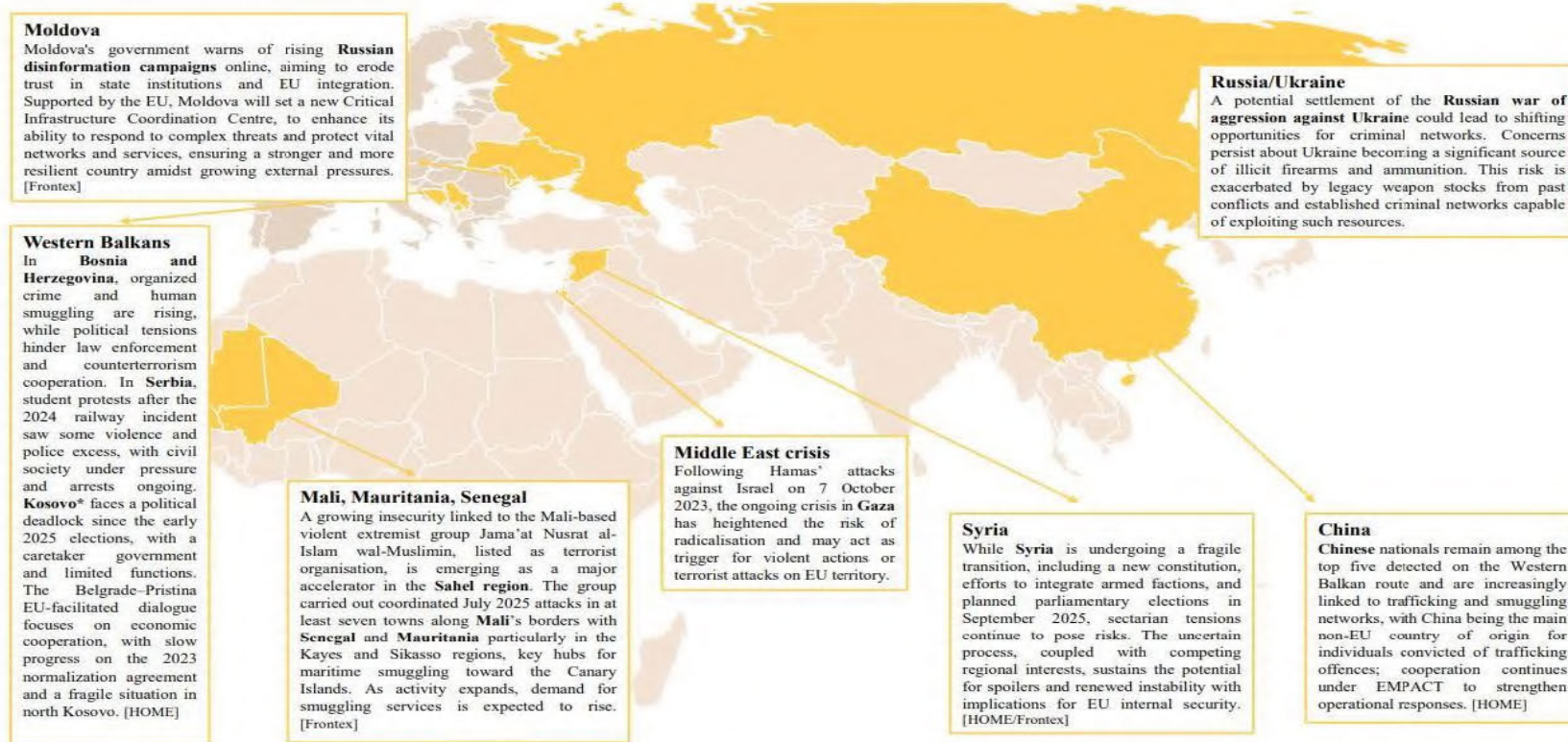
⁶ For example, Italy overtook Germany as the second destination for Venezuelan and Colombian applicants, and Italy became the top destination for Georgian applicants, ahead of France and Germany. In the case of Peruvians, Germany entered the top 5, replacing Sweden.

1.2 Developments in third countries

1.2.1. Migratory trends in key third countries of origin and transit



1.2.2. Geopolitical developments and internal security threats



*Note: This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

- **Frontex Status Agreements** entered into force with Serbia (1 April 2025) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (11 June 2025). Frontex initiated the renewal of Working Arrangements with several priority third countries, and the one with Moldova was concluded in July
- **Frontex activities in third countries** Joint operations targeting migrant smuggling were hosted in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Georgia, as well as with Kosovo*, with 655 Frontex officers deployed. The results included: 74 detections of concealed persons, 25 suspected facilitators apprehended, 242 falsified documents seized, and 12 weapons with 2 451 rounds of ammunition detected
- **Frontex operational support still faces challenges**, notably to respond to *ad hoc* requests from host Member States and third countries for additional personnel beyond what had been planned, while ensuring continuity of operations across all deployment locations. In addition, legal constraints in several Member States limit the use of Frontex-owned mobile surveillance systems, particularly due to national data protection rules. [Frontex]



- [illegible]

Europol also has two Liaison Officers in the US (Washington DC)

2. SCHENGEN EXTERNAL BORDERS

Outlook
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To further strengthen the overall management of external borders, increasing the necessary resources will be essential to address existing shortcomings [Schengen evaluations and Frontex Vulnerability Assessment] Geopolitical circumstances and a volatile operational environment will keep testing preparedness and reaction capabilities at the EU's external borders. Irregular migration is expected to continue its downward trend in 2025, building on the significant decreases already recorded in 2024. However, it remains necessary to strengthen surveillance capacities, particularly along the Mediterranean. Strengthened measures at the Channel, including those under the agreement between France and the United Kingdom, are expected to reinforce border management, while seasonal conditions may heighten risks and call for reinforced efforts to prevent departures. Hybrid threats and the risk of weaponisation of migration will reinforce the need for contingency planning and targeted capacity investments at the Eastern land borders and across the EU. [Frontex]

2.1. Protection of the EU external borders

- Certain improvements have been made in the management of the external borders. The number of vulnerabilities related to border-control capacities identified through the Vulnerability Assessment⁷ fell to 104 in 2025, down from 163 in 2022. Remedial efforts and EU support have contributed to tangible progress. [Frontex VA]
- In the 2025 Baseline Assessment cycle, there was a decrease in the number of recommended measures pertaining to border control, issued by Frontex to the Member States. [Frontex VA]

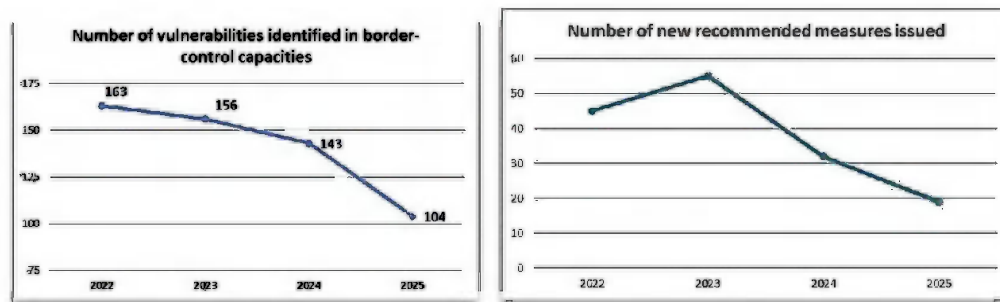


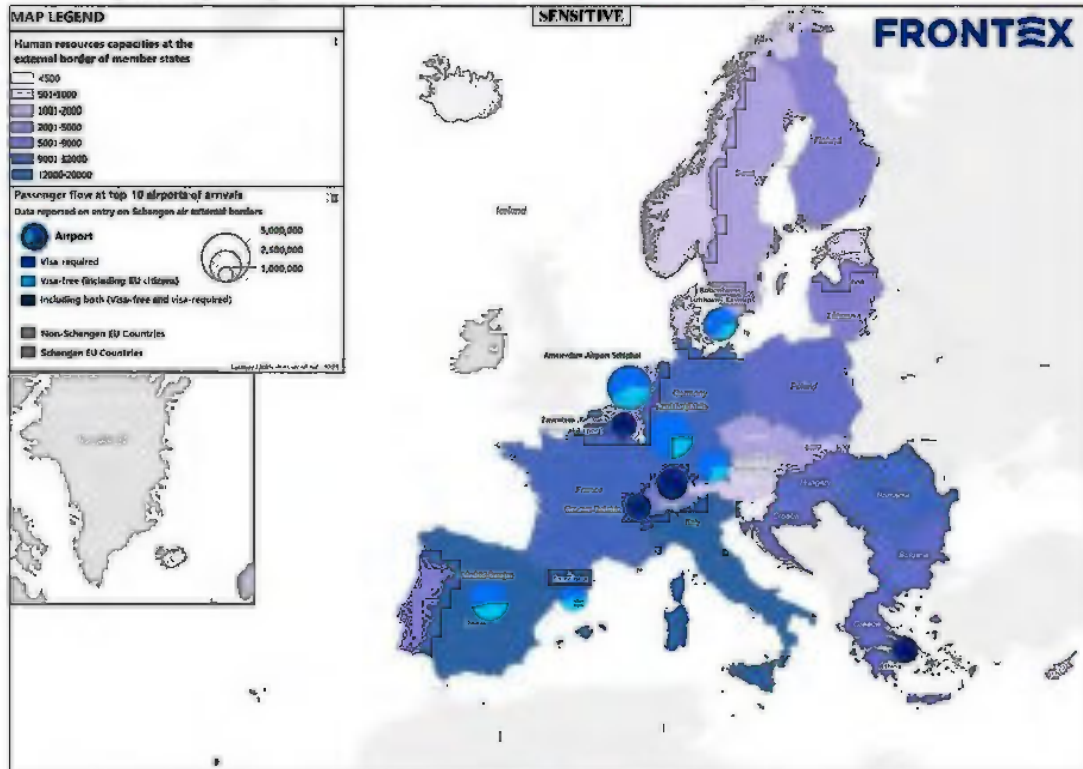
Figure 1 and 2 - Source: Frontex

- In May 2025, EUR 3 billion were allocated under AMIF and BMVI for the 2025-2027 period to support Member States in implementing the Pact on Migration and Asylum. An additional amount of EUR 513 million was allocated for the years 2025- 2027 from the mid-term review of their BMVI programmes. [HOME]

⁷ Frontex Vulnerability Assessment is largely based on data provided to the Agency by Member States/Schengen-associated countries

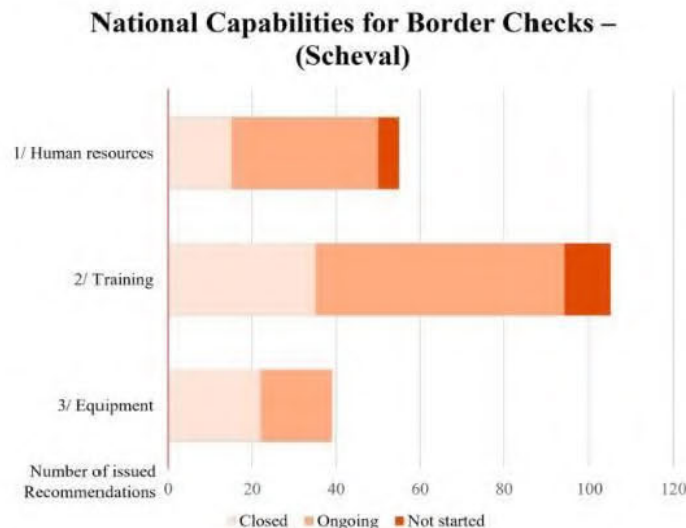
BORDER CAPACITIES

- Needs at the external borders vary significantly across sections, depending on geographical position, passenger flows, security threats, and operational challenges



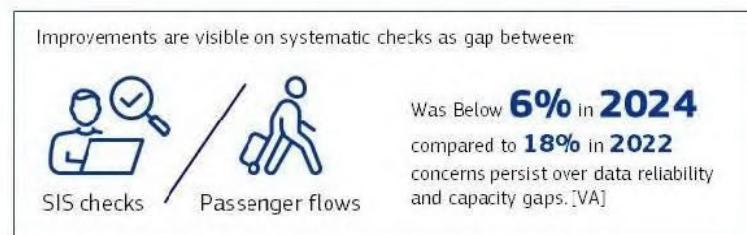
- Ensuring sufficient resources remains a key consideration for **nearly all Member States** [Schengen evaluations]. In most cases, staffing levels for border control have not increased since 2023, underscoring the importance of enhancing resilience in the context of growing passenger flows and an increasingly complex environment [Frontex VA]. In response, several Member States, including most recently Cyprus and Sweden, are undertaking comprehensive assessment of resource needs in order to ensure a more effective alignment with evolving demands at the external borders. [Schengen evaluations]
- Training** remains a common area for further development across almost all Member States, as regard basic, continuous, and specialised training [Schengen evaluations]. Notably, the availability of specialised training in the detection of firearms, ammunition and explosives could be further strengthened, especially in light of increasing risks related to firearms smuggling. Addressing these gaps presents an important opportunity to enhance operational capacity in this critical area. [Frontex VA]

- Certain Member States are working to implement **coherent training strategies** to address structural challenges. While these efforts represent a positive step forward, continued progress will be important to ensure that training frameworks are fully responsive to operational needs. Encouragingly, interest in specialised training is growing, as illustrated by recent initiatives in Norway - though there remains a need for a more structured and coordinated approach to maximise their impact.



BORDER CHECKS

- **Schengen evaluation recommendations** related to the quality of border checks remain to be fully implemented by **nearly all Member States**. While progress has been made, further efforts will be essential to close remaining gaps and strengthen the overall security framework, particularly in view of the upcoming full implementation of the Entry/Exit System. [HOME].
- **Several Member States have reinforced systematic checks** on passengers crossing the external border. Nonetheless, certain challenges remain at specific border sections, highlighting the importance of continued efforts to ensure consistent implementation across all areas. [Schengen evaluations, Frontex VA]

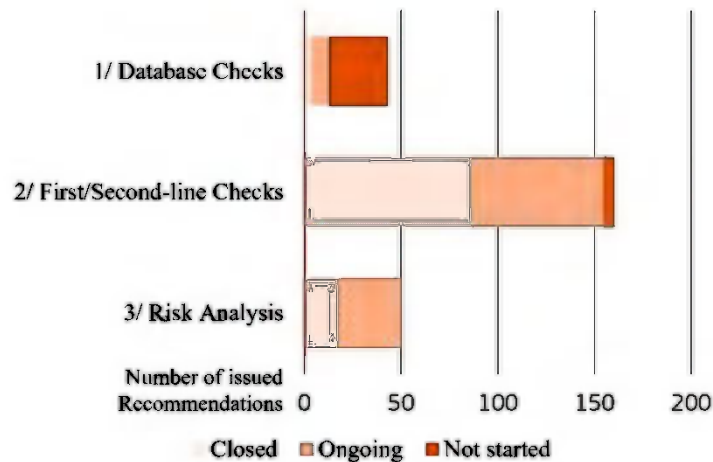


- Further efforts remain important in half of the Member States to enhance the quality of **first- and second-line checks**. Key areas for further improvement include: optimising resources allocation, providing adequate training, ensuring complete assessment of entry conditions, strengthening

document fraud detection capabilities, ensuring effective supervision of e-gates, and using harmonised visa verification practices.

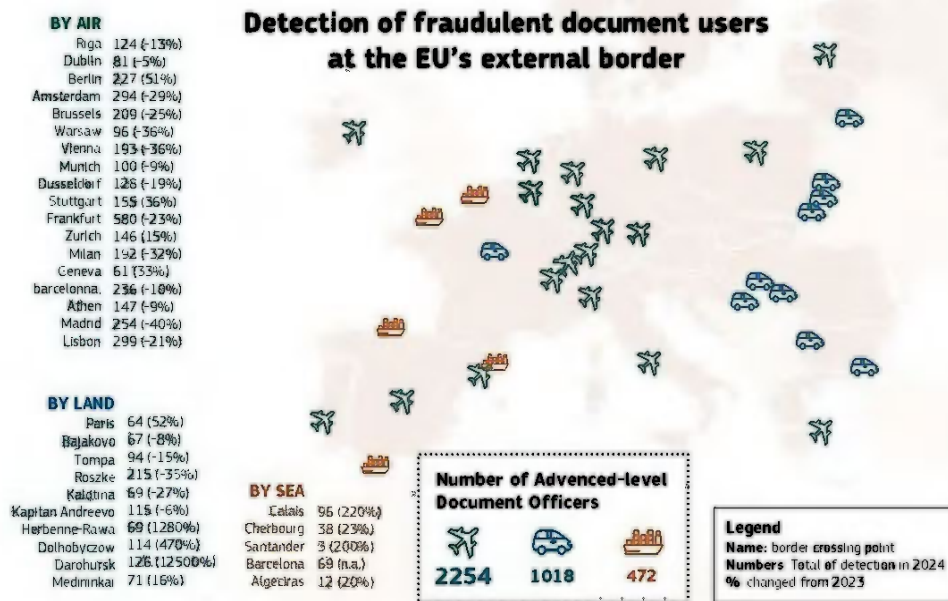
- One third of Member States are in the process of developing **risk analysis for border checks**. Priority areas for reinforcement include: increasing availability of specialised staff, improving the use of profiles and indicators, enhancing strategic and operational coordination. Strengthening these aspects will support better integration of intelligence into frontline procedures, improve threat detection, and reinforce the preventive role of border controls.

Border Check Procedures – (Scheval)



- The use of **fraudulent documents** remains a key method facilitating irregular migration to the Schengen area with 9 419 fraudulent documents reported, mainly from Türkiye by air and from Ukraine by land. [Frontex].
- **Enhancing specialised training** to combat identity fraud remains an important tool as current gaps and fragmentation in this area have notable operational implications.



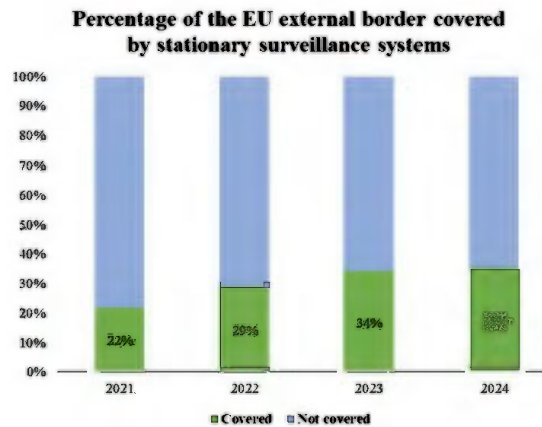


Source Frontex

BORDER SURVEILLANCE


- Notable progress has been achieved in strengthening border surveillance, particularly along the **Eastern land border**, where Member States, such as **Poland and Finland**, have made significant investments to reinforce their capacities.
- Similarly, **Cyprus, Italy, Malta and Spain** have implemented measures to ensure effective border surveillance, however, continued efforts remain important to address rising security threats and the ongoing presence of irregular migration. [Schengen evaluations]
- **Croatia** has also advanced efforts to reinforce border surveillance through the deployment of new video systems and mobile thermal cameras. Further measures will help to fully secure vulnerable sections of the external border, in particular at the border with Bosnia Herzegovina. [Schengen evaluations]






CONTINGENCY PLANS

- There is a strong commitment to contingency planning at the external borders, with many Member States demonstrating closer coordination across border management, migration, return, and asylum.
- Reinforced measures have been implemented at the Eastern land border in response to the evolving security situation.
- Most Member States have developed contingency plans. The contingency plan of Finland is considered a best practice, as it establishes tailored procedures for requesting and integrating European support, and it is regularly tested to ensure it remains effective in addressing the evolving situation. [Schengen evaluations] Nevertheless, three Member States have yet to adopt such plans, which is important to further strengthen both national preparedness and the overall resilience of the Schengen area. [Schengen evaluations, VA]
- Integration of return measures into contingency planning has recently gained greater attention addressing a previous gap in the Union's overall preparedness. Although progress varies across Member States, important advances have been made, reflecting a positive shift in the approach. Nonetheless, some structural challenges remain to be addressed.



Persistent structural shortcomings remain, including lack of standardised procedures and coordination mechanisms, unclear thresholds for action, and insufficient risk analysis and scenario building.

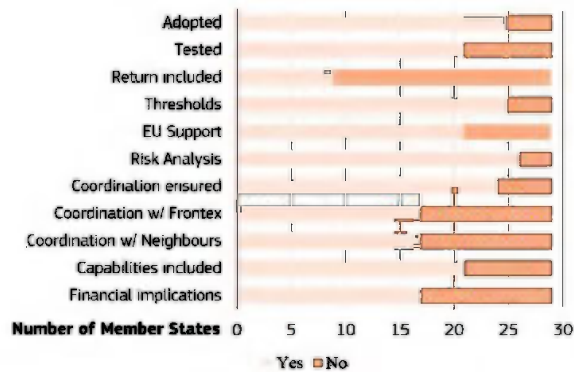


The 2024 Schengen thematic evaluation on the effectiveness of returns showed that most Member States have **yet to fully integrate return operations into their contingency plans** and to provide detailed coverage of the measures required.



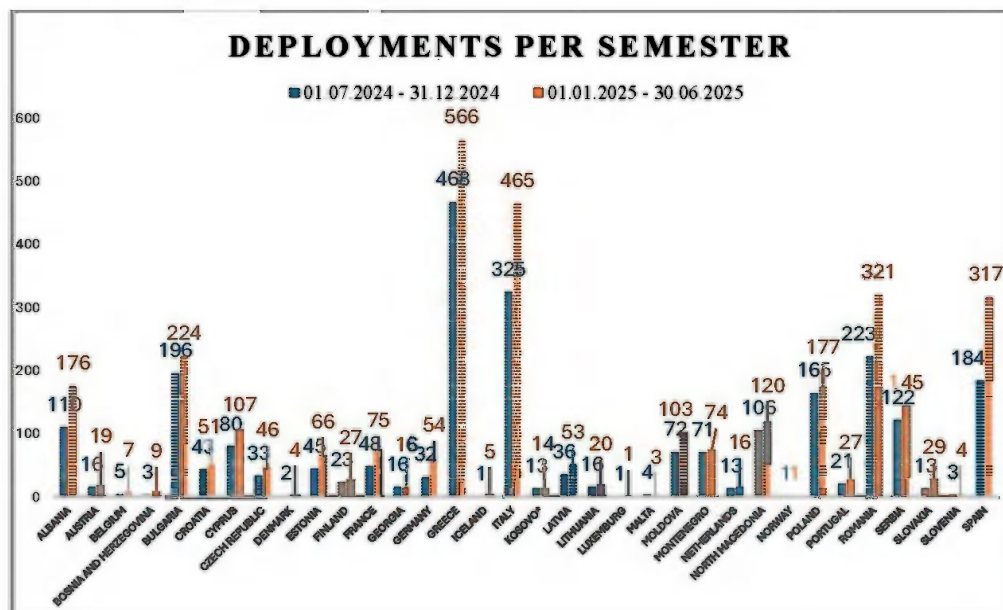
Some Member States still foresee only a **minimal role** for EU support, including lack of coordination mechanism with Frontex and neighbouring countries.

Contingency Plans in Member States



Source: Schengen evaluations and Frontex VA

2.1.1. Joint measures and EU support



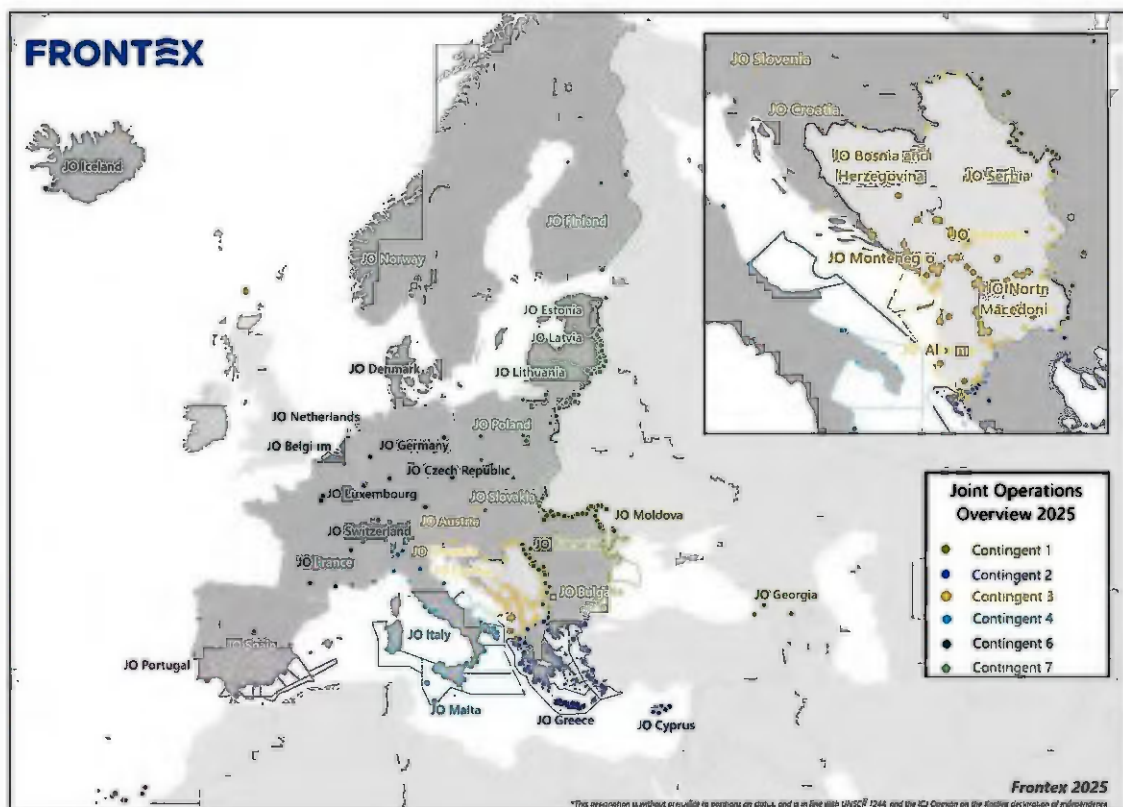
Source: Frontex. Frontex deployments at the external borders of the EU and in third countries

- As of June, 2 673 Standing Corps officers were deployed.

Results from Frontex deployments [1 Jan – 29 Jun]	
Activity	Total
Migrants saved in SAR cases with Frontex co-financed assets involvement	5093
SAR cases with Frontex co-financed assets involvement	95

Persons detected hidden in the transportation means	267
Suspected smugglers of migrants and traffickers of human beings apprehended	86

- Member State contributions to the Standing Corps Category 2 reached 90% of the agreed quota (865 of 1 000 officers). Deployment cancellations – due to limited hosting capacity and unavailability of specialised profiles, such as dog handlers and return specialists – have occurred leading to additional Category 3 requests, with declining response rates⁸. [Frontex]
- Operational needs for major equipment rose by 29% in 2025, mainly driven by unanticipated Multipurpose Maritime Operations. Member States are increasingly making EU co-funded equipment available for Frontex operations. In 2025, 336 deployment periods were offered across 129 assets, with countries like Austria, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain ensuring year-round availability of key terrestrial systems⁹. [Frontex]
- Access to EU databases, including Passenger Name Records and the Schengen Information System, remains a major operational need for Frontex deployments. [Frontex]
- Currently there are 35 ongoing Frontex Joint Operations with approximately 340 deployment locations:



⁸ Overall commitments declined for several critical profiles such as Dog Handlers, Return Specialists, Advanced Level Document Officers over the course of the year.
⁹ Patrol Cars and Mobile Surveillance System

- By August 2025, **61% of Schengen visas** issued between November 2024 and January 2025 were checked in the Visa Information System at external borders¹⁰. Five Member States checked less than 50% of their issued visas. Out of those border checks, 67% were carried out with fingerprints, the same rate as in 2023. Nine Member States met the 80% fingerprint verification threshold¹¹. [eu-LISA]
- **Shared Biometric Matching Service (sBMS)** became operational on 20 May 2025, as of 1 September 2025, over 4 million fingerprint sets have been inserted, supporting 2.5 million verifications and 3.8 million identifications across the EU. [eu-LISA]
- While many Member States are accelerating their efforts, preparedness across the Schengen area for the launch of the **European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)** remains uneven. [HOME]

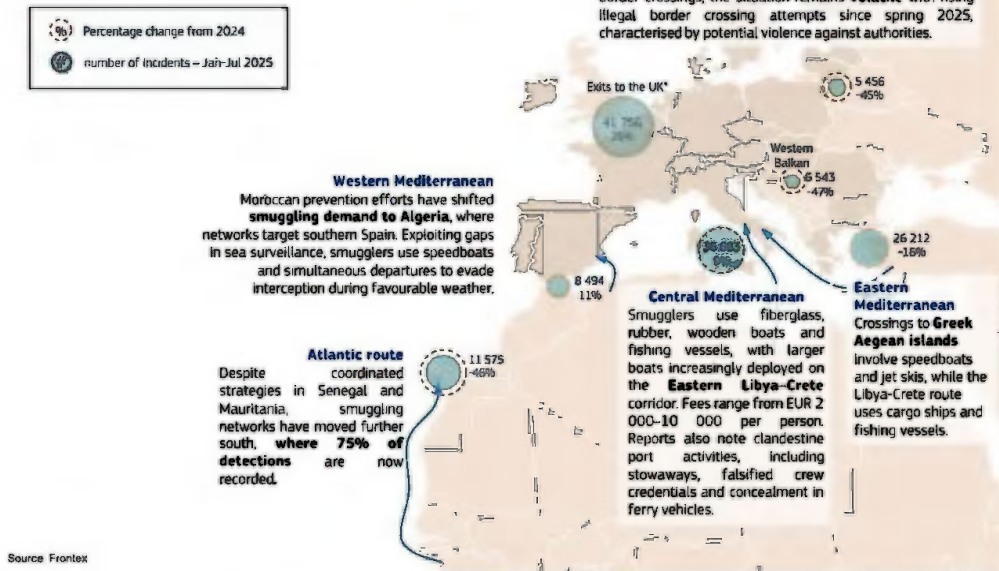


- **The notable downward trend in irregular border crossings** strengthened in 2025, with an 18% decrease (97 581) on top of the sharp fall in 2024, when numbers reached their lowest level since 2021. [Frontex]
- **Nationality trends** Most frequently reported nationalities were Bangladeshi, Egyptian, and Afghan. [Frontex] Syrian irregular movements via Western Balkans decreased after March 2025, Turkish nationals became a primary group on Eastern Mediterranean land and Western Balkan routes. [Europol]

¹¹ The threshold is set at 80% since not all third-country nationals crossing the external borders are legally subject to a biometric check. This includes notably children under 12 years.

- In August 2025, EUROSUR Impact Level for the Channel and North Sea was raised from medium to high, due to increased migratory outflows and irregular border crossings detections. [Frontex]

Illegal migration



800 migrants were recorded dead or missing in the Mediterranean (-41% compared to the same period in 2024), 199 on the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands (-39%) and 56 in Europe (-54%), including 19 in the English Channel (-10%), out of a total of over 2 800 migrants reported globally. [IOM]

2.2.2. Secondary movements [joint analysis: EUAA, Frontex, Europol, eu-LISA]

- An estimated **25% decrease in secondary movements** compared to the same period last year. However, onward movements by recognised refugees, especially from Greece, increased by nearly 66%.
- Germany** remained the main destination (around one third of all cases), followed by France.
- Afghans and Syrians** were the main nationalities, though the Syrian share dropped from 20% in 2024 to 5–7% in April–June 2025. Others included Algerians, Moroccans, Egyptians, Turks, Russians, and Somali
- The **Croatian Slovenian corridor** remained among the most active Western Balkan routes, with smugglers abusing legal business structures and often resorting to violence and reckless methods causing casualties. [Europol]

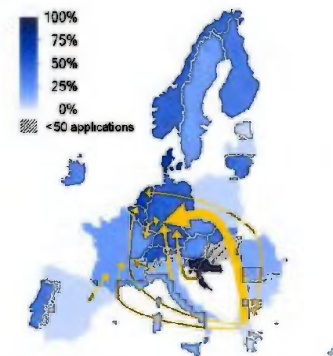


Figure 1: Share of applications lodged after secondary movements (legend) and top flows based on Dublin decisions and Eurodac hits (averaged), Jan – Jun 2025 (Source: EUAA calculation based on EUAA EPS, DG HOME/eu-LISA data)

2.3. Asylum

- **There was a 23% decrease in applications for international protection** (around 400 000 applications). France (78 000), Spain (77 000) and Germany (70 000) accounted for almost 60% of all applications. Most Member States saw stable or lower numbers than in 2024, except¹² Poland (8 500; +8%) and Latvia (550; +35%). [EUAA]
- **Venezuelans** (49 000) lodged the most applications in the EU+, followed by **Afghans** (42 000) and by **Syrians** (25 000, with a sharp decline by two thirds). Among the top nationalities, **Ukrainians** (16 000) applied over a quarter more than in the first half of 2024, while **Congolese** (DR) lodged over a half more applications (9 900). [EUAA]
- As of 30 June 2025, there were more than 4.3 million beneficiaries of temporary protection in Schengen. [Eurostat¹³]
- About **276 000 negative decisions¹⁴** are projected¹⁵ to be issued at the EU+ level in the first half of 2025, based on the current first instance caseload, pending cases at Member State and citizenship level, and not counting any new applications that would be lodged. [EUAA]

¹² Among Member States where at least 100 applications were lodged

¹³ [Eurostat | Data](#)

¹⁴ Negative decisions refer only to rejections (national forms of protection are counted as positive outcomes)

¹⁵ Estimates assume stable decision-making, with EU+ countries likely to issue a similar number of decisions in the next six months as in the previous period, based on the existing caseload. The model excludes new asylum applications lodged after June 2025.

2.4. Effectiveness of returns [Jan – July 2025]

Third-country nationals ordered to leave

240 825¹⁶ third-country nationals were ordered to leave the Schengen area (+11%). Most decisions were issued by France, Germany and Spain. Algerian, Moroccan, and Turkish nationals accounted for 20% of the total. Return decisions rose sharply for Somali (+95%), Vietnamese (+83%), and Malian (+37%) nationals, while those concerning Georgians fell by 26%. [Eurostat]

Effective returns

56 795¹⁷ third-country nationals were returned (+9%), 54% voluntarily. France, Germany, and Cyprus carried out most returns, with eight of the top ten Member States increasing returns year-on-year. Georgia, Türkiye, and Albania were the main nationalities, with sharp rises for Syrians (+206%) and smaller increases for Russians, Brazilians, Kosovars, and Egyptians. [Eurostat]

Readmission

Requests for identification or issuance of travel documents fell by 21% and the number of documents issued slightly declined (8%). However, the overall issuance rate increased to 37% in 2025 compared to 31% in 2024.

The **sixth report on readmission cooperation** (July 2025) reflects sustained and positive cooperation by Bangladesh and Iraq.

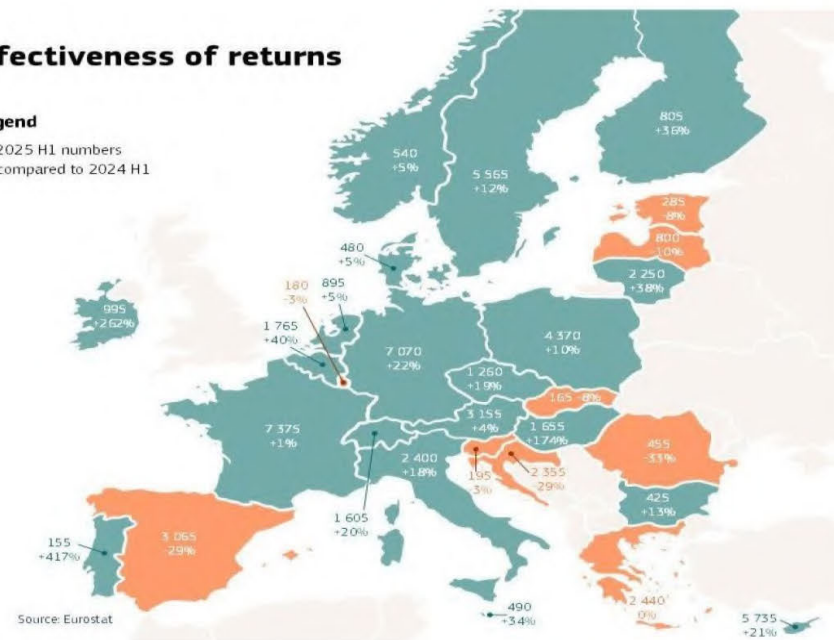
¹⁶ Data missing for Portugal in Q2 2025.

¹⁷ Data missing for Portugal in Q2 2025.

Effectiveness of returns

Legend

2025 H1 numbers
% compared to 2024 H1



Returns to Syria [Jan – July 2025]

- **83% decrease** in irregular border crossings by Syrian nationals (first half of 2025 vs. same period of 2024). [Frontex]
- **Significant decrease** in asylum first-instance recognition rate: 16% in January-June 2025, down from 90% in 2024. [EUAA]
- **12 365 return decisions¹⁸** issued to Syrian nationals (in January-June 2025; +12% compared to the same period in 2024). [ESTAT]
- **Returns to Syria surged¹⁹**: in January-June 2025, 3 135 Syrians returned following a return decision, a three-fold increase compared to the same period one year before (1 025). During the same period, voluntary returns significantly increased (+1110%; 2 905 vs 240). [ESTAT]
- **Cyprus drives returns to Syria**. The EU return trend to Syria is to stabilise once most Syrians in Cyprus have returned, unless new developments change the situation. Almost 90% of the returns were implemented by Cyprus, Austria and Croatia.
- **Frontex support** for voluntary returns to Syria launched in March 2025. By June 2025, the Agency supported almost half (1 360) of all returns to Syria, mostly from Cyprus and Germany.
- **EU Reintegration Programme (EURP)** extended to Syrians²⁰ in June. So far, only 4 individuals have benefitted from it²¹, as the programme requires a return decision.



2024 Thematic Schengen Evaluation on returns

- In March, the Council adopted **Schengen-wide recommendations** to address horizontal shortcomings hindering the effectiveness of the EU return system.
- **29 Member States** have submitted their Schengen Action Plans.
- Three specific areas require accelerated efforts:
 1. Need to periodically update return measures of capability development and contingency plans based on risk analysis.
 2. Exit of third-country nationals subject to return needs to be systematically and without delay registered in the Schengen Information System.
 3. Assess and upgrade of the national appeal system for return decisions to ensure prompt appeal procedures, while fully respecting fundamental rights.

¹⁸ Missing data from Portugal for Q2 2025.

¹⁹ Missing data from Portugal for Q2 2025.

²⁰ The EU Reintegration Programme for Syrian beneficiaries consist of migrants who have no legal (or only tolerated) stay in the EU and therefore, are in possession of a return decision. Syrian migrants whose asylum claim have been granted and wishing to go back home, are not eligible for the EU Reintegration Programme.

²¹ By September 2025 around 1 000 beneficiaries have been registered for the programme.

2.4.1. European dimension: return alerts in the Schengen Information System

- As of 1 August 2025, there were over **723 500 return alerts** in the Schengen Information System (+44% compared to 1 January 2025). When comparing the number of return alerts created and number of return decisions issued, the rate was **below 60%** in 12 Member States when assessing the situation in all Member States, indicating non-compliance with the obligation of creating a return alert following issuance of a return decision.

- As of 1 August 2025, 23 Member States have not included **fingerprints** in more than 80% of return alerts. Two Member States did not include fingerprints in any return alert²².
- 7 Member States do not include **photographs** in the return alerts²³.
- Seven Member States²⁴ have not included any **identity document** in the return alerts.

- Between January and July 2025, around **47 800 hits on return alerts**²⁵ were registered on return alerts. About 60% (28 600) occurred in a Member State other than the one that issued the alert. A further 23% (11 000) were detected after departure via another Member State, and 13% (6 100) at the external border when attempting entry. [eu-LISA]
- The number of return alerts with a **security flag**²⁶ has increased in the majority of Member States with around 11 150 return alerts having the security marking by 1 August 2025 (+26% compared to 1 January 2025). About 31% of all security markings included **fingerprints**, 68% included **photographs**, and 48% included **identity documents**. [eu-LISA]

2.4.2. Frontex support on returns

- 96 Return Specialists** carried out 130 deployments in 14 Member States with an important share of this support provided to Cyprus and Greece. Of those, **8 342 return and reintegration counselling sessions** were carried out resulting in 3725 declarations to return voluntarily (45% of all sessions conducted). **95 FRESO** were deployed in June 2025, in 8 Member States and 13 locations.
- Capacity gaps** still remain between the actual needs reported by Member States and the number of officers currently available for deployment. Another challenge lies in ensuring adequate training and matching profiles with the right expertise to guarantee high quality support to Member States.
- Frontex supported **30 148 returns** (+12%), with growth driven by new support for voluntary returns to Syria. Top third countries were Türkiye, Georgia, Syria, Albania, and Colombia. Top five Member States using Frontex return support were Germany, Cyprus, France, Belgium and Sweden (76% of all returns).
- 6 695 third country nationals** benefitted from **EU reintegration support** (+50%), with the main beneficiaries being from Türkiye, Iraq, Georgia, Armenia, and Venezuela.

²² Malta and Portugal

²³ Cyprus, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland

²⁴ Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, and Slovenia

²⁵ The SIS hit counts are approximate estimates of the total numbers. Member States only report hits resulting from alerts issued by other Member States

²⁶ This includes third-country nationals who pose a threat to public policy, to public security or to national security.

3. INTERNAL SECURITY OF THE SCHENGEN AREA

Outlook
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EU internal security threat analysis, announced in ProtectEU – the EU Internal Security Strategy, provides a picture of evolving cross-sectoral trends and challenges for the security of the EU and Schengen [HOME]. • Hybrid threats associated with Russia and Belarus (or their proxies) are expected to remain a defining element of the risk landscape, likely to continue deploying disinformation, cyber intrusions against border IT systems, sabotage of border and critical infrastructure and the potential concealed entry of combat-trained individuals with irregular flows. [Frontex] • Post-war scenarios in Ukraine may open new opportunities for criminal networks. A settlement may create new openings for firearms trafficking, expand recruitment pools for organised crime, generate fraud related to recovery funds and blur lines between licit and illicit structures. [Europol] • Terrorism and radicalisation will likely remain pressing concerns. Extremist groups are expected to further expand their misuse of digital tools, including generative AI. Youth involvement may rise further, as there is an increasing share of criminal cases involving minors. • Syria's volatile security environment will continue to require monitoring, notably regarding the potential resurgence of ISIS/Da'esh, potential movement and return of foreign terrorist fighters, and the management of individuals detained in prisons and camps under the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) control in Northeast Syria. • Synthetic drugs operations are likely to grow in scale and sophistication. Criminal networks are expected to further exploit legal supply chains, diversify chemical processes, and distribute production. As of September 2025, 25 new psychoactive substances (NPS) were identified; among monitored NPS opioids, nitazenes now account for 25%, with rapid spread across EU markets (detected in 76% countries) including in falsified medicines. [EUDA] • Cocaine trafficking will likely involve greater use of everyday goods for concealment, alongside rising shipments of cocaine paste processed into hydrochloride in the EU.

3.1. Cross border cooperation and information exchange

- In 2025, 328 additional law enforcement authorities have been connected²⁷, now totalling 3 754 authorities exchanging information via Europol's secure network, SIENA. The steady rollout has significantly strengthened cross-border cooperation, particularly with Schengen associated countries and Member States at the EU's eastern external borders. In the first eight months of 2025 alone, 121 883 new cases were initiated (+8,5%). Nonetheless, implementation remains incomplete, as Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Spain, and Poland have not yet notified the transposition of the Information Exchange Directive. [HOME]
- **Terrorism:** In the first half of 2025, Europol received 2 223 reports of terrorism-related hits on SIS alerts. While this figure remains lower than initially anticipated, it nevertheless reflects the continued use of the system by Member States. Some inconsistencies have also been observed, particularly regarding the transmission of incomplete hit information. These instances may be

²⁷ In accordance with the Information Exchange Directive. The procedure does not apply to Denmark.

linked to a range of factors, such as national legal or procedural limitations, varying levels of awareness and training concerning Europol's role in the process, or, in certain cases, limited information included in the original hit report by end users. Similarly, the lower-than-expected number of reported hits may be attributable to differences in national procedures or to a reduced volume of terrorism-related alerts entered into the SIS during this period. [Europol]

- **Drug trafficking:** The second European Ports Alliance Ministerial Meeting (21 July 2025, Denmark) focused on cooperation to counter traffic diversion to smaller ports as well as use of advanced concealment strategies by traffickers

Baltic synthetic opioid –developments [EUDA]

- **The Baltic opioid market is shifting:** nitazenes have displaced fentanyl in Estonia and Latvia, while carfentanil remains prevalent in Lithuania. New synthetic opioids continue to emerge, showing high adaptability.
 - **Trafficking routes** involve nitazenes sourced from China via postal and courier services, and carfentanil likely entering Lithuania from Russia by land. Latvian criminal networks play a central role, with links to Russian organised crime.
 - **EU response options** include mapping criminal networks and precursor flows, strengthening detection tools and research, expanding monitoring (syringe residues, hospital admissions and ambulance data, naloxone provision data), scaling up test purchases, and enhancing cross-border cooperation through EMPACT.
- **Organised crime and minors:** the Operational Taskforce GRIMM, led by Sweden with Europol support and involving several Member States, assists Member States in countering recruitment of young perpetrators. In June 2025, authorities arrested suspects aged 14–26, including recruiters of minors for killings in Denmark and Sweden²⁸. [Europol]
 - **Firearms trafficking:** Europol's Analysis Project Weapons and Explosives continuously supports investigations on firearms, including through the framework of EMPACT.
 - **Action days supported by Europol** led to 2 109 arrests (+1%) and 158 461 kg of drugs seized (+423%), Operations supported by the European Counter Terrorism Centre increased by 43%.
 - **Europol guest officers are deployed in 10 Member States** (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia) and in Moldova.
 - In the first half of 2025, the total number of objects in the **Europol Information System** increased by 7.3%, rising to 1 763 847, while total searches declined by 25.5%, falling to 5 225 991. This divergence may reflect shifting operational priorities or potential underutilisation of available data.
 - Reflecting its central role in coordinating cross-border judicial cooperation, Eurojust supported **over 11 000 cross-border criminal cases**, including more than 700 involving European Arrest Warrants and more than 5 300 cases involving European Investigation Order cases. Eurojust supported 343 JITs, 68 of which newly established, with the majority focused on swindling and fraud (93), drug trafficking (88), and money laundering (78).

²⁸ Europol, 19 June 2025, Teenagers recruited as hitmen: Denmark and Sweden strike back at violence-as-a-service, accessible at <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/teenagers-recruited-hitmen-denmark-and-sweden-strike-back-violence-service>.

3.2. Law enforcement cooperation and situation at the internal borders

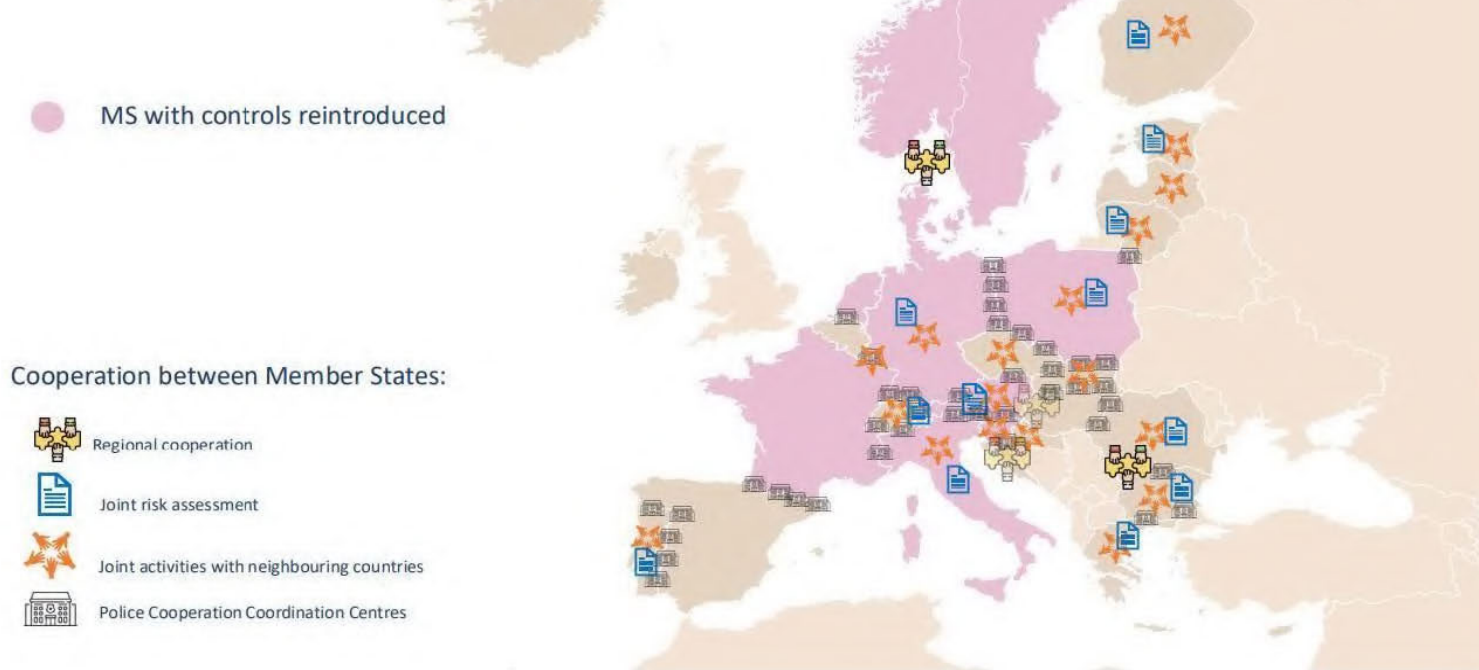
- In April 2025, the Commission set up an **informal expert group on operational law enforcement cooperation** to share best practices and address key challenges. At its first meeting, Member States agreed to lead discussions on cross-border surveillance, joint operations and patrols, and the use of technology and equipment. The next meeting, in December 2025, will focus on Joint Cooperation Centres.
- There are currently more than **90 bilateral and multilateral law enforcement cooperation agreements** in force²⁹, out of which 24³⁰ do not have a formal review mechanism, limiting their operational effectiveness. Regarding their scope related to **operational activities**, several agreements still do not provide for the possibility to have mixed teams.
- The large majority of agreements³¹ allows for the possibility of developing **joint risk assessments**. Member States that have reported not conducting joint risk assessments with other countries, have nevertheless stated that, when conducting national risk analysis, they systematically take into account the information provided by counterparts from neighbouring countries.
- Member States are cooperating more and more, with over **36 joint cooperation centres**. Member States have also reported the regular **information exchange** with neighbouring Member States to support and assess the situation at the border.
- Despite the availability of the **Article 23a transfer procedure** under the Schengen Borders Code, no Member State has yet implemented the required cooperation frameworks or carried out transfers; however, some, notably France and Luxembourg, are in discussions with neighbouring countries to establish such arrangements.
- As of 11 September 2025, 10 Member States have resorted to **reintroducing or prolonging internal border controls**.
- Following up on the previous structured dialogue and in line with the Commission's obligations under Article 25a(4) of the revised Schengen Borders Code, the Schengen Coordinator initiated a **consultation process** in the period February-July 2025. Since February 2025, a total of 16 consultation meetings were convened.
- Information provided by some Member States that have reintroduced controls at the internal border suggest **less than 0,2% of persons controlled represented an actual risk**. Joint activities, such as mixed patrols, have proven a more efficient use of resources yielding more results with an estimated ratio of 1 person of interest identified per mixed patrol organised.
- The use of **technology** as an effective alternative to border controls remains uneven. Five Member States do not use Automated Number Plate Recognition, including some with reintroduced controls, while two others do not connect it to the Schengen Information System.

²⁹ The information here provided is based on the targeted questionnaire sent by the Commission services to the Member States. 24 Member States provided replies. Information is missing for Denmark and the Netherlands.

³⁰ In a number of cases, Member States taking part in the same agreement have provided contradictory information.

³¹ Only three agreements are reported to not allow for it.

SITUATION AT THE INTERNAL BORDERS (JAN-JUN 2025)



4. SCHENGEN EVALUATIONS AND SCHENGEN CYCLE DEVELOPMENTS

4.1. Updates on Schengen evaluations in 2025/26

September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schengen evaluation of Romania • Monitoring visit to Greece on external borders
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schengen evaluation Romania
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schengen evaluation Bulgaria
First half 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schengen evaluation of Germany (March/April), Belgium (May/June) • Monitoring visit to France • Monitoring visit to Italy

4.2. Schengen Cycle 2025/2026

