



## Towards a stronger and more resilient Schengen area

Brussels, 2 June 2021

Today, the European Commission is presenting a new [Strategy](#) to make the largest free travel area in the world – the Schengen area – stronger and more resilient.

The Schengen area is home to more than 420 million people across 26 countries. The removal of internal border controls between Schengen States is an integral part of the European way of life: almost 1.7 million people reside in one Schengen State and work in another. People have built their lives around the freedoms offered by the Schengen area, with 3.5 million people crossing between Schengen States every day.

The free flow of people, goods and services is at the heart of the European Union and is key for Europe's recovery following the coronavirus crisis. With today's Strategy, the Commission takes stock of the challenges faced by the Schengen area in recent years, and sets out a path forward that maintains the benefits of Schengen. Common action is needed at Union level for Member States to cope with today's challenges.

Underpinning the well-functioning of the Schengen area are three pillars: effective management of the EU's external borders, strengthening internal measures to compensate for the absence of internal border controls, in particular on police cooperation, security and migration management, and ensuring robust preparedness and governance, including the completion of Schengen. To foster mutual trust in the implementation of the Schengen rules, the Commission is also presenting today a [proposal](#) to revise the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism.

President of the European Commission, Ursula **von der Leyen**, said: *"The freedom to move, live and work in different Member States is a freedom Europeans hold dearly. One of the greatest achievements of the EU, different crises and challenges have shown us that we cannot take Schengen for granted. Today, we are presenting a way forward that makes sure that Schengen can bear the test of time, one that will ensure the free flow of people, goods and services whatever the circumstances to rebuild our economies and for us to emerge stronger together."*

Vice-President for Promoting our European Way of Life, Margaritis **Schinias**, said: *"Unfettered movement within the Schengen area is essential to our European way of life. Schengen is a well-oiled machine but like any machine, to stand the test of time, its foundations need to be constantly shored up and strengthened. Today we are setting out a new way forward that ensures the security and mobility of EU citizens while boosting Schengen's resilience to challenges. Of course, Schengen is not complete without all our Member States. A more inclusive Schengen will be a stronger and more secure Schengen."*

Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva **Johansson**, said: *"With today's Schengen Strategy, we will be stronger outwards to be freer inwards. State-of-the-art IT systems will improve external border management while enhanced police cooperation and common migration management will help reinforce the Schengen area without border checks. Today's Strategy will foster the trust and governance to allow us to better anticipate, prepare and react and I am committed to making sure all Member States play their part."*

The Strategy aims to:

- **Ensure effective management of the EU's external borders**, through the ongoing roll out of the European Border and Coast Guard standing corps; making information systems for border and migration management interoperable by 2023; and an upcoming proposal on making visa applications and travel documents digital. The Commission is also calling on co-legislators to quickly adopt the New Pact on Migration and Asylum proposal on screening of people crossing without authorisation.
- **Reinforce the Schengen area internally**, as close cooperation between Member States on preventing and fighting security threats is crucial to sustain and compensate for the absence of controls at internal borders. New initiatives will include an EU Police Cooperation Code; the upgrade of the 'Prüm' framework for exchanging information on DNA, fingerprints and vehicle

registration; and expanding the use of advance passenger information to intra-Schengen flights. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum, once adopted, will also establish a common approach to managing migration, an important element for the well-functioning of the Schengen area.

- **Improve preparedness and governance:** The Commission is proposing today to [revise](#) the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism (more below). It will also convene regular Schengen Forums to foster political dialogue on addressing common challenges, based on annual reports on the State of Schengen. Later this year, the Commission will propose to revise the Schengen Borders Code to boost Schengen's resilience to serious threats by ensuring close coordination and introducing the necessary safeguards so that reintroducing internal border checks remains a measure of last resort. The Commission will also present a contingency plan allowing the reactivation of the successful Green Lanes system for uninterrupted freight traffic in case of future crises. Finally, the Commission will launch a dialogue with Member States to address long-lasting reintroductions of controls at internal borders.
- **Enlarge the Schengen area:** Schengen's future must be marked by the expansion to those EU Member States that are not yet part of the Schengen area. This is both a legitimate expectation and a legal obligation for those countries evaluated as ready for accession.

### A revised evaluation mechanism for enhanced trust

To foster common trust in the implementation of the Schengen rules and make sure any deficiencies are identified and remedied quickly, the Commission is proposing today to [revise](#) the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism. Changes include accelerating the evaluation process as well as a fast-track procedure in case of significant deficiencies that could put Schengen as a whole at risk. There will also be more political focus on Schengen evaluations as their results will be included in the annual report on the State of Schengen and discussed with the European Parliament and the Council. The revised mechanism includes enhanced monitoring for the respect of fundamental rights.

### Background

36 years ago, 5 Member States agreed to remove border controls between themselves. Today, the Schengen area without controls at internal borders is home to over 420 million people in 26 European States. The Schengen area is composed of all EU countries except Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Cyprus and Ireland. It also includes four non-EU countries: Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein.

Schengen rules require an update to adapt them to evolving challenges. To build a more resilient Schengen area, President **von der Leyen** announced in her [State of the Union address](#) in September last year that the Commission would put forward a new strategy for the future of Schengen.

This Strategy is based on extensive consultations with Members of the European Parliament and Home Affairs Ministers meeting within the Schengen Forum in November 2020 and May 2021.

### For More information

[MEMO](#): Towards a fully functioning and resilient Schengen area

[Fact page](#)

[Strategy](#) towards a fully functioning and resilient Schengen area

[Proposal](#) to revise the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism + [Annex](#) (see also the [impact assessment](#) and its [executive summary](#))

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Press contacts:

[Adalbert JAHNZ](#) (+ 32 2 295 31 56)

[Laura BERARD](#) (+32 2 295 57 21)

[Ciara BOTTOMLEY](#) (+32 2 296 99 71 )

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)

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