



European
Commission

Europe without borders

The Schengen area

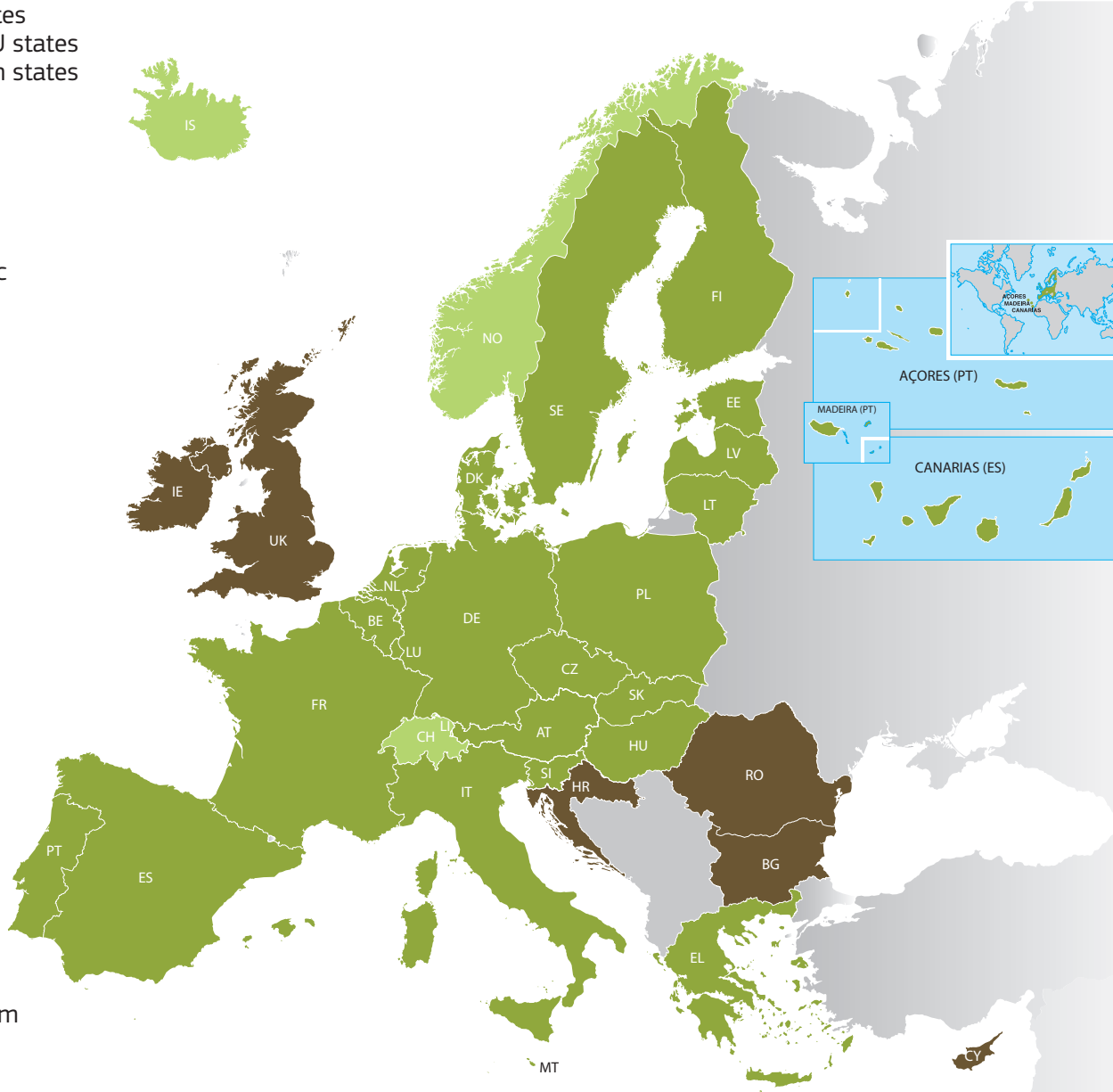


Migration and
Home Affairs

The Schengen area

- EU Schengen states
- Non-Schengen EU states
- Non-EU Schengen states

- AT Austria
- BE Belgium
- BG Bulgaria
- CH Switzerland
- CY Cyprus
- CZ Czech Republic
- DE Germany
- DK Denmark
- EE Estonia
- EL Greece
- ES Spain
- FI Finland
- FR France
- HR Croatia
- HU Hungary
- IE Ireland
- IS Iceland
- IT Italy
- LI Liechtenstein
- LT Lithuania
- LU Luxembourg
- LV Latvia
- MT Malta
- NL Netherlands
- NO Norway
- PL Poland
- PT Portugal
- RO Romania
- SE Sweden
- SI Slovenia
- SK Slovakia
- UK United Kingdom



Note: The latest enlargement of the Schengen area took place on 19 December 2011, when Liechtenstein joined.

Europe without borders

The Schengen area

The story began in 1985, when five EU states decided to abolish internal border controls — the Schengen area was born. On a continent where nations once shed blood to defend their territories, today borders only exist on maps. Europeans make over 1.25 billion journeys within the Schengen area every year. A Europe without internal borders brings huge benefits to the economy as well, which shows how tangible, popular and successful the Schengen achievement is and the importance it has for our daily lives and for our societies. We need to preserve and reinforce this common achievement.

Removing borders, ensuring safety and building trust took many years after two devastating world wars. The creation of the Schengen area is one of the greatest achievements of the EU and it is irreversible. Now, free movement makes Europe smaller and unites us. Enjoy and cherish this right. Jump on a train or hop in the car and visit your neighbours. All this is possible without giving borders a second thought.

Happy travelling!

Dimitris Avramopoulos,
Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship



The Schengen area

The Schengen area guarantees unrestricted travel within a territory of 26 countries, home to more than 400 million citizens

An area without internal border controls

Currently, the Schengen area consists of 26 European countries (of which 22 are EU states): Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden, along with Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

Being part of the area without internal border controls means that these countries:

- do not carry out border checks at their internal borders (i.e. borders between two Schengen states);
- carry out harmonised controls, based on clearly defined criteria, at their external borders (i.e. borders between a Schengen state and a non-Schengen state).

As a result, both EU citizens and non-EU nationals may freely travel within the Schengen area and are checked only when crossing the external border.

Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, Romania and the United Kingdom are EU states that are not, or not yet, part of the Schengen area. This means that a flight from one of these states to a Schengen state is regarded as an external flight and is subject to border checks. However, EU citizens have the right to free movement when travelling within the EU, regardless of whether the country is part of Schengen or not. In principle, when entering a non-Schengen EU state, EU citizens only undergo minimum checks to verify their identities on the basis of travel documents (passport or identity card).

At internal borders ...

... you do not undergo border checks.

... Schengen states must remove all obstacles to the fluid flow of road traffic, such as unnecessary speed limits.

... police checks may be carried out, but only on the basis of police information about possible threats to public security or suspected cross-border crime.

... security checks may be carried out at ports and airports, but only to verify a person's identity..

If you think that you have been subjected to an unlawful check at an internal border, you may file a complaint to the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/make_a_complaint_en.htm.



Joining the Schengen area

To join the Schengen area, the Schengen states have had to demonstrate that they are able to:

- take responsibility for controlling the area's external border on behalf of the other Schengen states and for issuing uniform short-stay visas (Schengen visas);
- efficiently cooperate with the other Schengen states in order to maintain a high level of security once internal border controls are abolished;
- apply the set of Schengen rules, such as rules on land, sea and air border controls, visa issuing, police cooperation and personal data protection;
- connect to and use the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the Visa Information System (VIS).

Schengen states undergo periodic evaluations to control that they correctly apply the Schengen rules.



A secure area

To ensure security within the border-free area, Schengen states exchange information to tackle organised cross-border crime and terrorism. They have increased police cooperation, in particular through hot pursuit, cross-border surveillance, the establishment of joint police centres and teams, as well as the use of the SIS.

Hot pursuit allows police officers from one Schengen state who catch criminals in the act of committing serious offences to pursue the perpetrators across the border and detain them on the territory of another Schengen state.

Cross-border surveillance allows police officers to continue their surveillance of suspected criminals even across the Schengen area's internal borders.

As very visible structures of the enhanced cooperation, Schengen states have so far created around 50 bi- or multilateral police cooperation centres in Europe, as well as a considerable number of joint teams. This allows for swift exchanges of information at regional level and for fast reactions to imminent threats in border regions.

The Schengen rules still allow national authorities to exceptionally and temporarily reintroduce internal border controls in case of a serious threat to security or of serious deficiencies at the external border that can put the overall functioning of the Schengen area at risk.

To make legitimate travel easier without undermining security, the EU provides its Member States with funding through the 'Borders' part of the Internal Security Fund. During the period 2014–20, a total of EUR 2.76 billion is available to enhance the management of and controls at the external border in order to better tackle irregular migration and to improve the processing of Schengen visa applications. Moreover, to increase police cooperation and information exchange in the Schengen area itself, the EU provides EUR 1 billion through the 'Police' part of the Internal Security Fund.



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A photograph showing several police officers in blue uniforms with 'Politie' written on the back, standing around a white van with 'POLICE' written on the side. They appear to be conducting a check or inspection. The background shows a truck and some trees under a clear sky.

Schengen Information System

The Schengen information system (SIS) was established to help maintain internal security within the Schengen states in the absence of internal border controls. It is a large-scale information system that enables police, migration, judicial and other authorities to enter and consult alerts on missing persons, on persons or objects related to criminal offences and on non-EU nationals who are not allowed to enter or stay in the Schengen area. In this way the SIS is a cornerstone of law enforcement cooperation. At the same time, it contributes to a great extent to the protection of the external Schengen border.

Right of access to the SIS

Every person has the right to access his or her personal data in the SIS and ask for its correction or deletion.

If you are a non-EU national, you may address your request to the consulate of any Schengen state. If you are a citizen of a Schengen state, you may either address your request directly to the competent national authority responsible for the issuance of the alert or indirectly via the national data protection authority.

For more information about how to request access to your data, see the guidelines on the European data protection supervisor's website: <https://secure.edps.europa.eu/EDPSWEB/edps/Supervision>

The Schengen area is encircled by 42 673 km of sea borders and 7 721 km of land borders

An area with a common external border

The Schengen states share a common external border for which, in the absence of internal border controls, they are responsible together in order to ensure security within the Schengen area. However, efficiently controlling the external border does not imply that Europe is turned into a 'fortress'. On the contrary, it is essential that business travel and tourism are encouraged for the sake of European economies. The external border also needs to remain open for people coming for work or seeking refuge from war and persecution.

Nationals from certain non-EU countries need a visa to enter into the Schengen area. The Schengen states have common rules for issuing short-stay Schengen visas, which are valid within the entire Schengen area. These visas allow a person

to stay and travel in the territories of Schengen states for a maximum of 90 days in any 180-day period.

The Schengen rules also include a local border traffic regime, which makes it easier for nationals of neighbouring non-EU countries residing near the border to enter into the Schengen area. Schengen states may draw up agreements with their neighbouring non-EU countries that allow those border residents who frequently need to cross into the Schengen area to do so without having to undergo regular border checks or without needing a Schengen visa.



Left: Rio Tambre patrol boat of the Spanish Civil Guard patrolling close to Gran Canaria of the Canary Islands. This boat was financed by the EU External Borders Fund.

Right: Norwegian military border guards, under supervision of police from the Ostfinnmark police district, patrol the border with Russia near the town of Kirkenes in northern Norway. The police snowmobiles and part of the clothing and equipment are supported by the EU External Borders Fund.

At the external border ...

... EU nationals generally undergo minimum checks to verify their identities on the basis of travel documents.

... non-EU nationals must present a valid travel document and a visa, if required, or a residence permit, as well as documents that justify the purpose of their stay and prove that they possess sufficient financial resources to support themselves during their stay.

Did you know that ...

... a regularly updated list of countries whose nationals must hold a visa to enter the Schengen area can be found on the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs' website:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/e-library/documents/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy/index_en.htm.

... a Schengen visa application must be lodged at the consulate of the Schengen state of main destination, which can also provide detailed information about the application procedure.

How long can you stay in the Schengen area with or without a Schengen visa?

If you are not sure how many days you still can stay within the Schengen area, calculate the number of days remaining with the short-stay visa calculator: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/index_en.htm.

Visa Information System

The Visa Information System (VIS) is an IT system that connects Schengen consulates in non-EU countries, competent national authorities and all external border crossing points of Schengen states. It allows Schengen states' visa authorities to share information on visa applications, border guards to verify with the use of biometric data (e.g. fingerprints) that a person presenting a visa is its rightful holder and competent authorities to identify persons found on the Schengen territory with no or fraudulent documents. The VIS is also used by the competent asylum authorities.



What does Schengen mean for travellers?

Europeans make over 1.25 billion journeys within the Schengen area every year

What if I'm from an EU state?

Francesca is an Italian student who dreams of visiting Sweden with her friends. She has already bought her inter-rail ticket, but she does not know which travel documents she needs or whether she has to comply with any special legal formalities. As an EU citizen, Francesca has the right to enter all EU states upon presentation of a valid passport or identity card, but she will not need to show it when travelling within the Schengen area. However, she has to carry a valid passport or identity card because the authorities may require her to prove her identity.

Peter is Austrian. He wants to go to Norway, but wonders whether the same rules on visas and passports apply to Norway as to EU states. Although Norway is not part of the EU, it is a member of Schengen and applies free movement rules. Therefore Peter will only need to carry a valid passport or identity card in order to be able to prove his identity, if asked.

Danuta is Polish and works in Brussels. Next month she has to participate in a business meeting that will take place in Warsaw, her hometown where her parents live. She wants to take her baby Ewa with her to spend some time with her parents. As citizens of the EU, Danuta and Ewa have the right to travel anywhere in the EU and the Schengen area. Their right does not depend on their circumstances, i.e. whether they are travelling for professional or private

reasons. Danuta only has to make sure that both she and Ewa have their own individual passport or identity card.

Angel is Spanish. He flies to Bulgaria every month to visit his girlfriend. Although Bulgaria is a member of the EU, it is not yet part of the Schengen area — this is also the case for five other EU states (Croatia, Cyprus, Ireland, Romania and the United Kingdom). This means that when going to and coming from Bulgaria, he will have to show his passport or identity card and undergo the normal, minimum border controls for EU citizens.

Did you know that ...

... practical information about travelling in Europe can be found on the Your Europe portal: ec.europa.eu/youreurope.

... the Europe Direct Contact Centre answers questions via telephone (00800 67891011) and e-mail: europa.eu/europedirect.

In 2013, over 16 million Schengen visas were issued for non-EU travellers to the Schengen area

What if I'm from a non-EU country?

Martine is a Canadian student who won a scholarship that will allow her to spend two months at the Sorbonne University in Paris to carry out research for her thesis. Before going back to Canada, she would like to travel for three weeks throughout Greece, Spain and Italy. As a citizen of a non-EU country, Martine may enter and travel within the Schengen territory for up to 90 days, as long as she fulfils certain entry conditions. In the first place, she needs a valid passport. She must also be able to demonstrate the purpose of her journey, that she has the means to live in Europe for the intended duration of her stay and that she has already bought her return ticket (or that she has enough money to buy one). As a Canadian citizen, Martine is exempt from the short-stay (Schengen) visa requirement.

Punjit is from India. He is planning to spend his holidays visiting several Schengen states: Greece, Spain, France and Italy. He will stay in Europe for a month. Punjit needs a short-stay visa to go to Europe because India belongs to those non-EU countries whose nationals must have a visa when crossing the Schengen area's external border. Since Punjit does not have a main destination, he should apply for a visa at the embassy or consulate of the EU state where he will stay the longest. If his stays in the different Schengen states are of the same length, he should apply at the consulate of the state of entry into the Schengen area. The visa obtained will allow him to move throughout the Schengen area.

Hisham is Tunisian. He lives in Germany and spends his holidays with his parents in Tunisia. On his way back, he would like to go and visit his brother in Portugal. He has a valid residence permit issued by Germany, which belongs to the Schengen area. This residence permit, together with a valid travel document, ensures that he does not need to apply for a Schengen visa. As a non-EU national, Hisham can enter Portugal, another Schengen state, for a short stay without a

visa simply by showing his passport and the German-issued residence permit. If Hisham had a residence permit issued by one of the non-Schengen EU states, he would not be able to enter the Schengen area without a short-stay visa.

Solinas is Bolivian. She would like to move to Spain because she has found a job in Madrid. As Solinas is planning to stay in Madrid for more than 90 days, she needs a long-stay visa or a residence permit. For some categories of workers, such as highly skilled workers or researchers, EU law sets the requirements that non-EU nationals must fulfil to reside and work in the EU. For the categories of workers not regulated under EU law, it is up to the Schengen states to set their own requirements for issuing long-stay visas and resident permits.





The construction of the Schengen area began in 1985 when five countries signed the Schengen Agreement that set out the gradual abolition of checks at common borders. The agreement was supplemented by the 1990 Schengen Implementing Convention that set out the final abolition of internal border controls, as well as a series of necessary accompanying measures. The convention strengthened external border checks, defined procedures for issuing uniform visas, established the SIS, increased police cooperation at internal borders and improved action against drug trafficking.

Key dates

The Schengen Agreement was named after a small village in Luxembourg that is located on the point where its borders meet those of Germany and France. Having started as an initiative between governments, Schengen cooperation is now incorporated into EU laws and rules

June 1985

Schengen Agreement signed by Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands

June 1990

Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement signed by Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands

March 1995

Convention entered into force and border controls abolished between Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal (Spain and Portugal signed the agreement in June 1991)

October 1997

Border controls abolished with Italy (agreement signed in November 1990)

December 1997

Border controls abolished with Austria (agreement signed in April 1995)



Jean Weyrich, Archives Luxemburger Wort

14 June 1985 — Schengen Agreement signed by Wim van Eekelen (NL), Robert Goebbels (LU), Catherine Lalumière (FR), Waldemar Schreckenberger (DE) and Paul De Keersmaeker (BE).

May 1999

Treaty of Amsterdam integrated Schengen cooperation into the legal framework of the EU

January 2000

Border controls abolished with Greece (agreement signed in November 1992)

March 2001

Border controls abolished with Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Iceland and Norway (agreements signed in December 1996)

December 2007

Abolition of land and sea border controls with the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia

March 2008

Abolition of border controls at airports with the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia

December 2008

Abolition of land border controls with Switzerland (agreement signed in October 2004)

March 2009

Abolition of border controls at airports with Switzerland

December 2011

Abolition of border controls with Liechtenstein (agreement signed in February 2008)



What next?

The EU is currently working on a 'Smart border' programme for the external border. It consists of an entry/exit system, which will improve border controls and combat irregular migration while making border crossing easier for frequent and pre-vetted travellers.

The EU is also working on modifying the visa procedure to make better links with other policy areas, such as tourism,

and to further facilitate procedures for frequent travellers. A new type of visa — the 'touring visa' — is also under consideration, which would allow a person to stay in the territory of two or more Schengen states for a duration of more than 90 days, but no more than 1 year (with the possibility of extension for an additional year).

More information ...

... on Schengen laws and rules can be found on the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs' website: ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/doc_centre/borders/borders_schengen_en.htm.

... on EU states' migration laws and rules can be found on the EU immigration portal: ec.europa.eu/immigration.

ec.europa.eu/home-affairs

ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/avramopoulos

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