



# Schengen area

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Schengen guarantees free movement to more than **450 million EU citizens**, along with non-EU nationals living in the EU or visiting the EU as tourists, exchange students or for business purposes, anyone legally present in the EU.

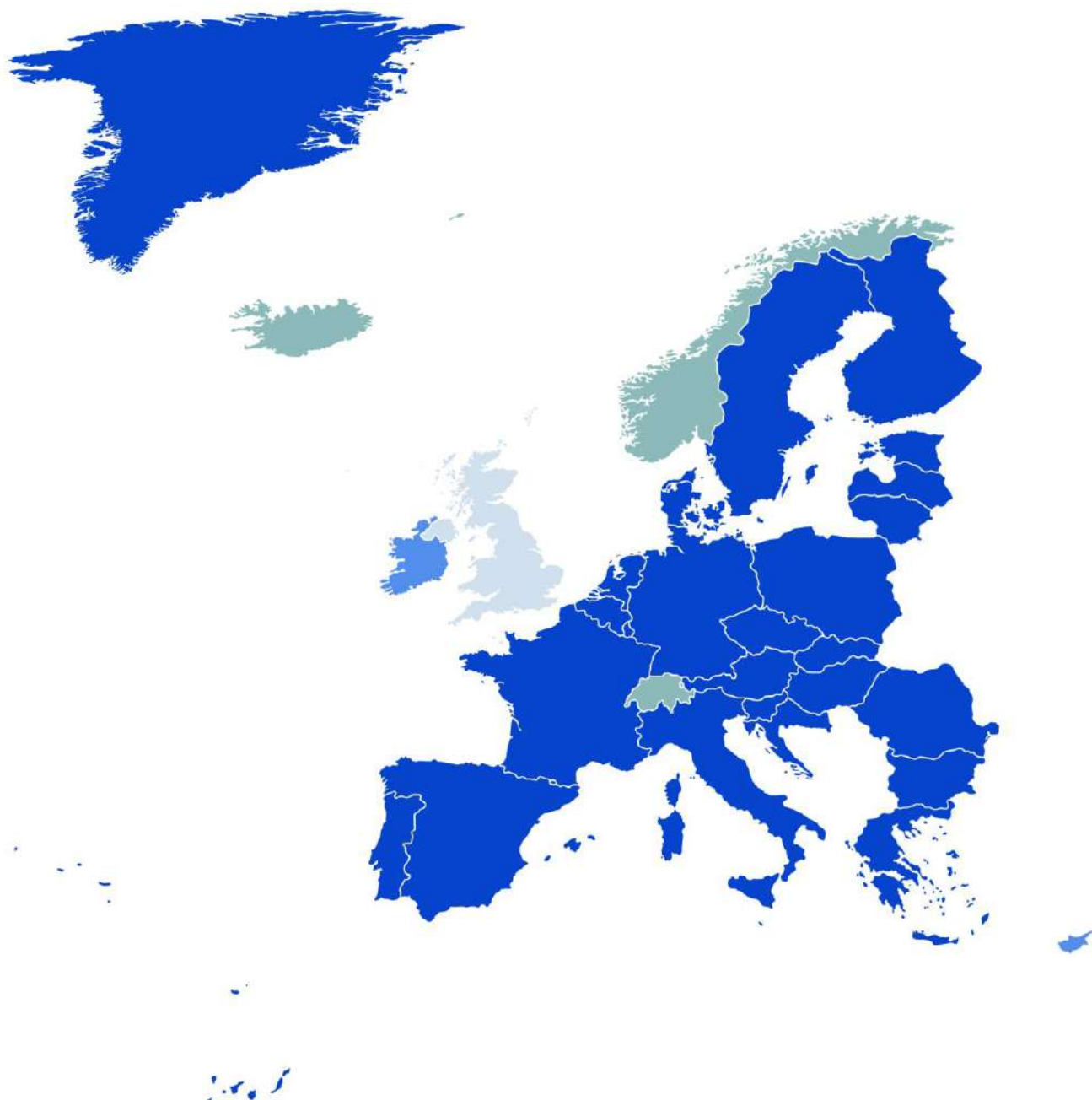
Celebrate 40 years of Schengen

Over the years, the Schengen area was expanded multiple times, with Bulgaria and Romania being the last countries to join on 1 January 2025.

The Schengen area is composed of **29 countries**: 25 EU Member States and 4 non-EU countries (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein). These countries engage in closer cooperation allowing them to achieve greater benefits that would be impossible to attain individually, considering that checks at internal borders between them have been abolished.

**Cyprus** participates in the Schengen cooperation. Nevertheless, internal borders controls have not yet been abolished by the Council. The integration process into the Schengen area is currently underway.

**Ireland**, on the other hand, is exceptionally allowed by the [Schengen Protocol](#) not to apply the Schengen rules ('opt out') so it continues to enforce its own visa and border policies. Still, given the benefits of Schengen cooperation, Ireland has requested to participate in some Schengen areas, including the Schengen Information System as well as judicial and police cooperation.



## Benefits of Schengen

Schengen is a fundamental part of the European identity. By removing internal borders, it has transformed the way people live, work, and travel.

Every day, over **3.5 million people cross internal borders** for work, study, or to visit family and friends, without any additional paperwork and, in the vast majority of cases, without

additional waiting times. This is not just about saving time at the border – it also reduces costs, fosters talent mobility, and brings Europeans closer together.

The benefits of Schengen extend beyond EU citizens. Third-country nationals can also experience its advantages through a Schengen visa, which allows them to travel to the Schengen area and move freely within for up to three months within a six-month period – whether for tourism, business, or work.

Schengen is also a major driver of competitiveness for [32 million European businesses](#), contributing significantly to the Single Market. By eliminating internal border controls, it reduces administrative costs and streamlines supply chains. At the same time, it facilitates the free movement of workers, goods and services enabling companies to operate efficiently, benefiting from larger markets and smoother processes. Through Schengen, the EU broadens access to a wider talent pool, making it easier for companies to recruit skilled workers from across Europe.

## Travelling to and within the Schengen area

**EU citizens** have the right to enter and exit the Schengen area through any Schengen country. To ensure the security of external borders, they undergo a limited number of checks upon entry and exit, which are carried out efficiently with the help of automated border gates.

**Nationals from third countries** that require a visa to enter Schengen need to apply for a [Schengen visa](#). These visas are processed and issued by Schengen States, in accordance with harmonised standards and requirements. Holders of Schengen visas can enter the Schengen area and are subject to entry and exit checks. These checks, which rely on systems like the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the Visa Information System (VIS), are carried out at the external border where the person is entering but are done on behalf of all Schengen States. These systems will soon be complemented by the Entry-Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) to further strengthen security while making travel to the Schengen area easy, efficient and safe.

While the Schengen area has a wide range of tools to guarantee security, without limiting freedom of movement, countries may **temporarily reintroduce internal border controls** as a measure of last resort in cases of a serious threat to public policy or internal security. If such controls are reintroduced, the country concerned has to inform the Council (and thus, other Schengen countries), the European Parliament and the European Commission as well as the public.

**More information on the current reintroductions of internal border controls:** [Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control](#).

# Well-functioning Schengen

The Schengen is governed by common rules that regulate:

## External border management and short stay visa

Rules for crossing the EU's external borders, including the types of required visas, procedures for issuing and checking visas, and security checks at the border.

## Entry conditions and short-stay visas

Conditions for entry into the Schengen area, including eligibility criteria and regulations for short-stay visas (up to 90 days within a 180-day period).

## Cross-border police cooperation

Mechanisms enabling law enforcement authorities to collaborate across borders, including the right of cross-border surveillance and hot pursuit to enhance security and combat transnational crime.

## Judicial cooperation

A streamlined extradition system and mutual recognition of criminal judgments to strengthen legal cooperation across member states.

## Large-scale IT systems

The Schengen area relies on advanced IT systems such as the Schengen Information System (SIS), the Visa Information System (VIS), the Entry-Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). These databases facilitate information sharing on security threats, border controls, visa applications, and law enforcement cooperation.

## Travel document requirements

Rules on the documents needed for movement within the Schengen area, ensuring consistency for residents, travellers, and third-country nationals.

## Schengen governance

A [framework](#) ensuring the effective functioning of Schengen, including through [monitoring and evaluation](#).



## History of Schengen

The Schengen project started 40 years ago in 1985 on board of a vessel on the River Moselle, a territory shared by Luxembourg, Germany and France and highly symbolic for European cooperation.