European Parliament

Schengen: enlargement of Europe's border-free area

Map of the Schengen zone

EN

Directorate General for Communication
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

1 | 5
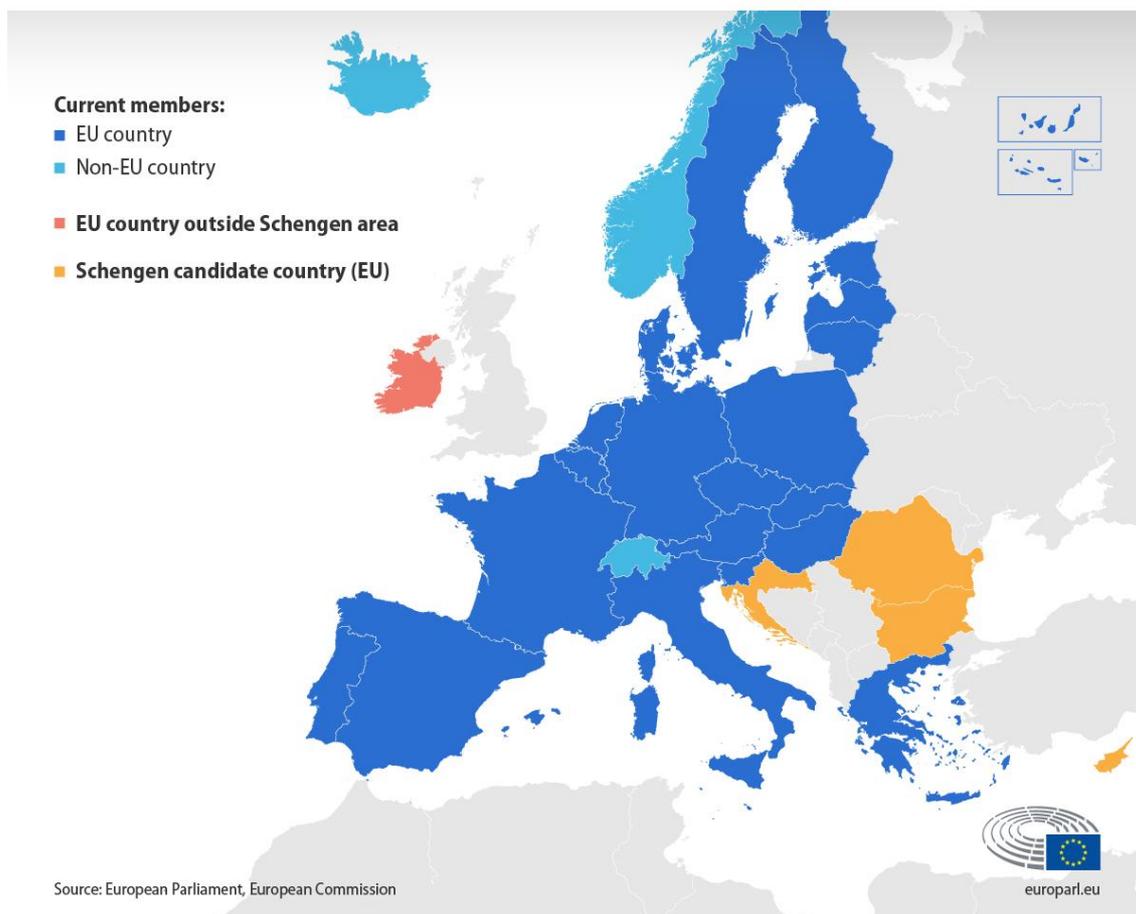
Schengen, the EU's passport-free travel area, covers 26 countries. Read on to learn which countries are members and who is likely to join next.

Free movement – the right to live, study, work and retire anywhere in the EU – is possibly the most tangible achievement of European integration. With the establishment of the Schengen area in 1995, checks were abolished at the EU's internal borders.

Today, the Schengen area encompasses most EU states, except for Ireland, which maintains an opt-out and operates its own common travel area with the UK, as well as Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Romania, which are obliged to join Schengen.

Four non-EU countries - Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein - have also joined the Schengen area.

Enlargement of Schengen

Despite Bulgaria and Romania fulfilling the necessary criteria and repeated calls from the European Parliament to let them join, the Schengen area has not been expanded to these two countries yet as EU national governments must unanimously decide to allow new states to enter the border-free zone.

The process regarding Croatia's entry is ongoing, while Cyprus has a temporary derogation from joining the Schengen area.

The future of Schengen was the focus of a hearing of the civil liberties committee on 20 February 2018. Speaking at the meeting, Portuguese EPP member Carlos Coelho said of Bulgaria and Romania's entry to Schengen, "We pushed you. You did your homework but the problem is the unanimity in the Council." Coelho wrote Parliament's report on the revision of the Schengen Information System.

EN **Directorate General for Communication**
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

2 l 5

▶ **Video**
https://www.europarltv.europa.eu/en/programme/security/strengthening-security-in-the-schengen-area

Romanian S&D MEP Emilian Pavel said: "Prolonging this situation, this uncertainty, brings a negative image of the EU, people see that we are treated as second class citizens."
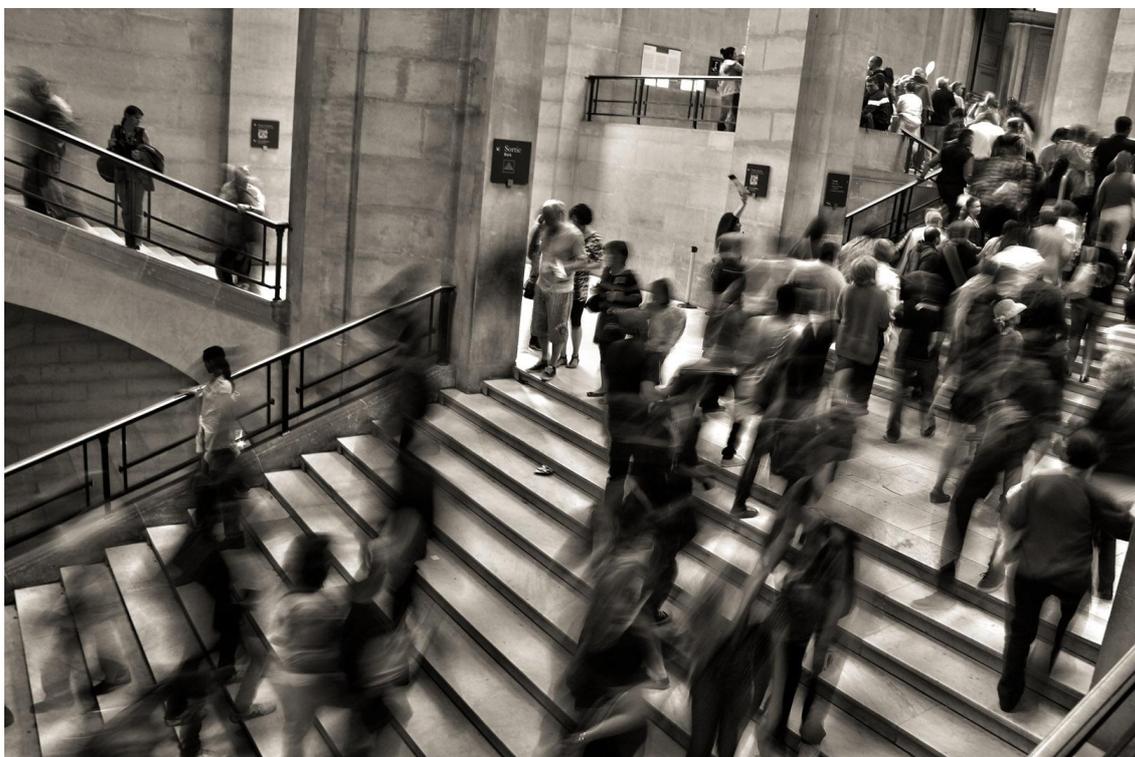
Bulgarian EPP member Emil Radev added: "The Commission has repeatedly said that both Romania and Bulgaria have fulfilled all technical criteria but because some countries object, we are not members. It is sad that we allow politics to stand in the way of rules." Fellow Bulgarian Asim Ademov, also a member of the EPP group, spoke of "a lack of solidarity" and "double standards".

What are the conditions for joining the Schengen area?

• Countries must take responsibility for controlling the EU's external borders.

• They must apply a common set of Schengen rules, such as controls of land, sea and air frontiers, as well as the issuing of uniform Schengen visas

• To ensure a high level of security within the Schengen area, states must cooperate with law enforcement agencies in other Schengen countries and operate the Schengen Information System (SIS).

European Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos also spoke at the civil liberties committee hearing. He referred to Schengen as "the core symbol of our unity" and called on "the Council to finally decide for Bulgaria and Romania to join the Schengen family – and of course Croatia, as soon as it is technically ready".

Parliament gave its green light for Bulgaria and Romania to join the Schengen area in June 2011. The final decision on whether a country can join the free-travel zone has to be taken through a unanimous vote by EU governments in the Council.

EN **Directorate General for Communication**
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

3 I 5

Travellers at a train station: 1.25 billion journeys are made within the Schengen area every year © José Martín Ramírez C on Unsplash

Temporary reintroduction of border controls

Since 2015, in the wake of the migration crisis, as well as the increase of cross-border terrorist threats, a number of Schengen states reintroduced internal border controls. These controls were prolonged on a number of occasions and in some countries have applied ever since.

Slovenian S&D member Tanja Fajon is the MEP responsible for the revision of the Schengen borders code. Speaking at the civil liberties committee hearing, she said: "Internal border controls should not be politically driven. The governments should stop these measures as soon as possible."

Portuguese EPP member Carlos Coelho said: "Schengen has been turned into the scapegoat of the failures of security and asylum policy." However, Finnish ECR MEP Jussi Halla-Aho

Directorate General for Communication
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

defended the internal controls: "There are very few alternatives to internal border checks if we want to reduce secondary and other irregular movement."

More than 1.25 billion journeys are made within the Schengen area every year.

Find out more on the issues of the Schengen area and the measures taken to strengthen it

Find out more

Video of the civil liberties committee hearing (20 February 2018)
Parliament's civil liberties committee
Schengen: smart borders for stronger protection (video)
Press release: extending the Schengen zone to include Bulgaria and Romania (11 December 2018)

This article relates to a debate that took place in February 2018. Some parts were updated in 2020 to reflect the fact that the UK is no longer a member of the EU.

EN **Directorate General for Communication**
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

5 | 5