

The economic impact of internal border controls

The Schengen Borders Code and the Single Market

KEY FINDINGS

Success story. The Schengen Agreement is a success story, covering 29 Schengen states, 128 border pairs, 4 million km², 450 million inhabitants, 33 million enterprises and 1.25 billion journeys per year.

Economic benefits. The Schengen Agreement generates substantial economic benefits by reducing barriers to the movement of people, goods and services, thereby strengthening trade, labour mobility, tourism, investment and cross-border regional development. At the same time, it embodies the sense of the European Union to many citizens: free mobility.

Border controls. At the same time, the number of reintroduced internal border controls has increased significantly, particularly since the 2015 migration crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, internal border controls are increasingly used for migration and terrorism/security related concerns.

Economic impact. Border controls have imposed significant economic costs through delays, higher transport and administrative expenses, disruptions to cross-border commuting, and reduced business efficiency. These negative effects are most visible in highly integrated border regions and transport corridors, where congestion and uncertainty affect workers, companies and local economies. The impact depends on the intensity, duration and (a)symmetry of border controls, as well as the geographical sensitivity and levels of mobility of a region.

Alternative measures. Recent court rulings as well as the Opinions of the European Commission emphasise the importance of alternative measures and the use of internal border controls as a measure of last resort. The legality and proportionality of border controls are critically assessed. While border controls are increasingly becoming a recurring feature of the Schengen landscape, the briefing concludes that internal border controls can have significant economic and social costs, highlighting the importance of proportionality, stronger external border management, and the use of alternative police and security measures that preserve free movement within Schengen.



Executive Summary

The Schengen Area, celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2025, is one of the most tangible achievements of European integration. With 29 participating states, 450 million citizens, 33 million enterprises and approximately 1.25 billion journeys annually, Schengen has reduced barriers to the movement of people, goods and services across Europe. Through the removal of physical internal border controls, it has strengthened trade bilaterally and internationally, labour mobility, tourism, investment and cross-border regional development, while also contributing to increased cooperation in safety and security. Finally, it embodies one of the most visible benefits of European Union (EU) membership: free movement.

Despite these achievements, the reintroduction of internal border controls has become increasingly common. Since the migration crisis of 2015 and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, Member States have relied more frequently on temporary controls, often citing migration management, public security and public health concerns. Between the beginning of 2006 and the end of August 2026, about 500 notifications of internal border controls were registered. Most were issued since 2015, particularly since 2020. Migration and COVID-19 together account for the overwhelming majority of these measures, leading many observers to describe internal border controls as a "new normal" within the Schengen Area.

The 2024 revision of the Schengen Borders Code was aimed at balancing security concerns with safeguarding free movement. The revised framework strengthens procedural safeguards, emphasises proportionality and stimulates the use of alternative measures. Therefore, it reinforces the principle that internal border controls should remain a measure of last resort. Importantly, the revised legislation requires consideration of the impact of border controls on cross-border regions and the free movement.

The literature reviewed in this briefing confirms that Schengen generates substantial value, boosting economic, social and territorial cohesion. Research consistently finds that the removal of internal border controls lowers trade costs, increases bilateral trade, stimulates labour mobility and contributes to regional growth and cross-border cooperation. The removal of internal border controls can equal a reduction in tariff-equivalent trade costs. Also in terms of figures, Eurostat statistics show positive trends for GDP, mobility, trade and jobs over the last decade. Cross-border regions, in particular, have benefited from increased economic integration, stronger labour markets and enhanced cooperation. This has led to an improved territorial development. Evidence from Bulgaria and Romania, which recently joined Schengen, suggests significant gains for transport, logistics, tourism, exports and GDP growth.

At the same time, the reintroduction of border controls may result in the partial annulment of the previously described positive effects. Economic consequences and other effects are very much dependent on the precise nature of border controls. Given the range of practices across Member States, a standard effect is impossible to identify. Nevertheless, costs may arise both from the administration and enforcement of controls and from the disruption of the four freedoms underpinning the Single Market.

Impacts are particularly pronounced in highly integrated cross-border regions and along major transport corridors. Peripheral regions, which depend on longer supply chains, also may be more sensitive due to the accumulation of controls at multiple borders. The transport and logistics sector is especially vulnerable. Delays at internal borders can generate significant additional costs for freight operators, affect supply chains and reduce competitiveness. Estimates from previous studies suggest that a widespread reintroduction of border controls could cost the road haulage sector billions of euros annually. Recent experiences on German borders demonstrate that stationary controls create substantial congestion and economic losses for neighbouring countries and regions. Cross-border workers are similarly affected. Approximately 1.9 million people commute across European borders for work. Although current statistics do not indicate a significant decline in cross-border commuting, recurring delays, reduced predictability and increased travel times

negatively affect the attractiveness of cross-border employment, particularly in regions highly dependent on daily commuting flows.

Beyond economic effects, internal border controls also affect social cohesion and perceptions of European integration. Data from the Eurobarometer show the importance of free movement to EU citizens. Although support for Schengen and free movement remains strong among European citizens, recurring controls risk undermining the sense of a borderless Europe that has developed over decades. Border regions report increased traffic congestion and nuisance. Cross-border institutions and regional stakeholders warn that the long-term effects on trust, cooperation and territorial cohesion may become more significant if controls persist.

The magnitude of these impacts depends on several factors, including the duration, intensity and symmetry of controls, as well as the degree of cross-border mobility, economic integration and geographical sensitivity of the regions concerned. Stationary and highly visible controls tend to have more significant effects than intelligence-led spot checks. Peripheral countries and regions dependent on international transport corridors may also face disproportionately high costs.

Finally, the briefing concludes that preserving Schengen's core principle of free movement should remain a priority. Effective implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, enhanced police and judicial cooperation and broader use of alternative security measures offer more proportionate solutions than routine internal border controls. Maintaining Schengen as an open and integrated space remains essential for the functioning of the Single Market, the competitiveness of the European economy and the cohesion of border regions.

Context and Scope

In 2025, the Schengen Agreement celebrated its 40th anniversary. With 29 Schengen states, 4 million km², and 450 million inhabitants, the Schengen Agreement is a strong success story for European integration and overall socio-economic development. At the heart of the EU lies the internal market, an area without internal borders.¹ Yet, over the last years there has been an increase in the reintroduction of controls at internal borders. The literature signals a trend since the migration crisis of 2015, where border controls are more commonly applied. Migration has become the main reason for Member States to argue for reintroducing internal border controls.

This briefing considers the impact of border controls in the Schengen Area. The first part will cover several aspects related to the Schengen Borders Code and the reintroduction of border controls. It includes a brief description of the history of the Schengen Borders Code, the core elements and more prominently the latest revision. Secondly, the briefing will examine in greater detail the reintroduction of border controls under the Schengen Borders Code. Here the system and requirements under the Schengen Borders Code and the legal context with the freedom of movement will be elaborated. Consideration of the legal dimension will be supplemented with descriptions of the political reality, including the evolution of internal border controls as registered with the European Commission. While there is only one legal definition of a border control, a brief discussion on the different methods applied by Member States with active border controls will be added.

A broader knowledge on the differences of these methods is essential to assess the economic impact of border controls, meaning more precisely the different impacts of different methods. The question is whether available data can show how the different types of internal border controls are limiting mobility within the Single Market and have spill-over effects on trade, foreign direct investment and growth, SMEs and job creation, as well as cohesion and quality of life.

In a second part of the briefing, the 'Schengen-effect' will be mapped. First, the trends with respect to certain indicators in the Schengen Area will be described, such as population, mobility, GDP, trade, foreign direct investments, consumers, SMEs and jobs. Secondly the briefing will discuss the added value of Schengen and non-controlled borders specifically in relation to the indicators of particular interest, based on a literature review. With respect to the functioning of the internal market, we can distinguish between the so-called macro-level (between Member States across the EU internal market/Schengen Area) and the micro-level interaction within certain cross-border regions. These cross-border territories can be considered laboratories of EU integration.² They have a special position vis-à-vis Schengen, since the assumption is that their economic benefits deriving from open borders are different in comparison to non-border territories. For instance, border controls could have a negative economic impact because they can disrupt integrated cross-border labour markets which are an essential element of the economy of certain cross-border territories.

In addition to the literature review and data collection, the briefing will search for recent anecdotal evidence and experiences of stakeholders in Member States. Bulgaria and Romania are used as case studies for discussing the value of Schengen, because they only recently joined Schengen (January 2025).

Thirdly, we will specifically discuss the literature available on specific costs of border controls related to the above-mentioned different methods. Again, we will look specifically at the indicators of special interest, where available. A substantial body of literature was produced around COVID-19 and the migration crisis of 2015, where border controls were prominently used.

¹ Art. 26(2) TFEU.

² European Commission (2021). EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration. COM(2021) 393 final.

Finally, we will conclude with an outlook on discussions at EU and Member State level, mainly also connected to the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and provide policy recommendations relevant to the EU decision-making.

The Schengen Borders Code

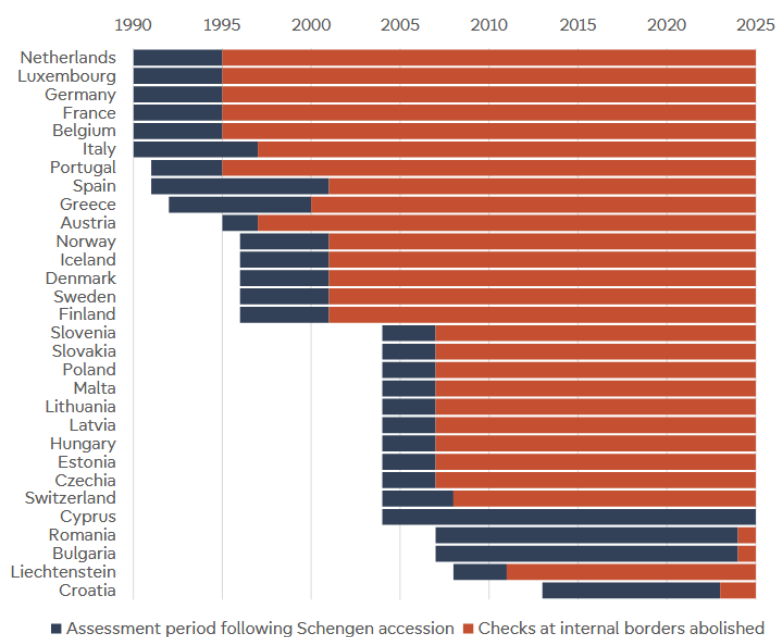
Brief History

It was already in 1960, that the three Member States of the Benelux Union signed the Benelux Agreement on "the transfer of identity checks to the external borders of the Benelux area".³ This Agreement was the foundation for the Schengen Agreement, signed on 14 June 1985 by the Benelux countries, France and Germany. Five years later the Convention implementing the Schengen Agreement was signed, including measures on the removal of checks on persons at the internal borders, a common set of rules for people crossing the common external borders, the harmonisation of entry conditions and rules on visas, enhanced police cooperation as well as judicial cooperation and, finally, the establishment of the Schengen Information System for information exchange on people and goods. The Convention entered into force on 26 March 1995, effectively removing internal border controls in the Schengen Area as of then.

With the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, the Schengen *acquis* became part of EU law and a cornerstone of the EU Single Market.⁴ The Lisbon Treaty made the Schengen *acquis* also subject to parliamentary and judicial scrutiny. It also confirmed the right of persons to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States. In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council adopted the Regulation (EC) No 562/2006 on a Community Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders, also known as the Schengen Borders Code (SBC). After several substantial amendments, the Regulation of 2006 was replaced by Regulation (EU) 2016/399 on a Union Code on the Rules governing the movement of persons across borders. This is the SBC as we know it today.

There are currently 29 Schengen states. It includes 25 of the 27 EU Member States as full members, excluding Cyprus and Ireland, and all members of the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland). Cyprus participates in the Schengen cooperation, but the Council has not yet decided on the abolishment of internal border controls. Ireland has chosen for an exceptional 'opt out' in the Protocol of the Treaty of Amsterdam. Bulgaria and Romania were the last countries to join the Schengen Area, as of 1 January 2025.

Timeline of Schengen enlargement



Source: [European Parliamentary Research Services](#), 2025.

³ Overeenkomst tussen het Koninkrijk België, het Groothertogdom Luxemburg en het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, inzake de verlegging van de personencontrole naar de buitengrenzen van het Beneluxgebied, available at: https://www.benelux.int/files/7913/9230/2794/19600411_BUITENGRENZEN_NL.pdf.

⁴ Protocol integrating the Schengen *acquis* into the framework of the European Union.

Schengen and the Single Market

The Single Market is one of the greatest achievements of the EU, created in 1993. With the Single European Act adopted in 1986, the 12 EEC Member States expressed the political will to work on a 'Europe without borders'.⁵ Nowadays, the Single Market lies at the heart of the EU. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Treaty on European Union (TEU) (hereafter: Treaties) provide the constitutional framework, with a strong legal foundation for elimination of internal borders:

*"The internal market shall comprise an area without internal frontiers in which the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital is ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Treaties."*⁶

Indeed, the Single Market aims to ensure the free movement of goods, services, capital and people, being the cornerstone of this market.⁷ To effectively support this freedom, the Schengen framework is crucial. By abolishing routine internal border controls in the Schengen Area, it facilitates the free movement of people, goods and services as envisioned in the Treaties. While primary law provides the legal foundations for free movement, it is the SBC that operationalises it as an implementing instrument. Thus, Schengen can be regarded as a practical enabler of the Single Market and as a key pillar to European integration.

On the other hand, the freedoms under the Treaties are not absolute. Derogations from this principle are allowed only in exceptional circumstances, strictly for safeguarding internal security and always in line with the principle of proportionality.⁸ The SBC, as a central piece of EU secondary legislation, also acknowledges this Member State discretion in cases of serious security threats. Any restriction on movement, however, must be exceptional, justified and proportionate. With this, it aims to strike a balance between the two core objectives of ensuring internal security and public order and safeguarding the right to free movement of persons.

The 2024 Revision

The Schengen Borders Code was most recently amended in 2024 by Regulation (EU) 2024/1717. This revision introduced significant changes to the structure and operation of the SBC. Regarding external border controls, Member States may now limit the number of border crossing points or reduce their opening hours. Also, they may apply enhanced border surveillance with the aim to combat the instrumentalisation of migration, following Article 5(4) SBC. A new transfer procedure will also allow Member States to return third-country nationals apprehended near the border and staying illegally to the Member State from which they directly arrived.

Many changes are particularly interesting regarding internal border controls, also following the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The revised SBC restructured and clarified the measures that may be taken to reintroduce or prolong border controls, clearly distinguishing between measures for unforeseeable and foreseeable threats. In Article 25(1) SBC, the revision distinguished the types of threats that may constitute a "serious threat to public policy or internal security". In this respect, large-scale unauthorised movements of third-country nationals, public health emergencies, and terrorism are explicitly mentioned. Furthermore, the revised SBC specifies in Article 25a the maximum duration for which internal border controls may be maintained. The revision also introduced additional measures that can be initiated not only by Member States but also at the EU level through Article 28, on the basis of a proposal from the European Commission and a Council implementing decision. These measures aim to provide a coordinated EU response to joint threats, such as public health crises – drawing lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. Another important

⁵ Wassenberg, B. (2020). The Schengen Crisis and the End of the 'Myth' of Europe Without Borders. *Borders in Globalization Review* 1 (2). Victoria, British Columbia, Canada:30–39. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18357/bigr12202019599>.

⁶ Article 26, paragraph 2 TFEU.

⁷ Articles 21 and 67(2) TFEU.

⁸ Following Article 72 TFEU and Article 5(4) TEU.

addition is the Schengen safeguard mechanism, captured in Article 29 SBC, in case there is threat that affects most Member States. This mechanism allows the Council to authorise the reintroduction of internal border checks in response to such shared threats.

Several updates are particularly relevant for cross-border regions and free movement. Through Article 26(1)(b) SBC, Member States are required to assess the possible impacts of border controls on the free movement of persons and the specific effects on cross-border regions. Even more, Member States need to ensure measures that mitigate these effects. More importantly, the SBC promotes the use of alternative measures, referring to, among others, intensified and more operational police checks within border areas. In addition, transparency and oversight obligations have been strengthened via Article 27a SBC. Member States need to submit detailed notifications and periodical reports on the effectiveness and impact of the controls. The European Commission must also publish an annual State of Schengen report summarising the use of internal border controls and their assessments across the EU.

Reintroduction of internal border controls

The Legal Context

The guiding principle of the SBC is that internal borders may be crossed at any point without a border check on persons.⁹ Guided by the Treaties, internal border controls should be an exception. Here, the SBC defines a border control as "the activity carried out at a border, in accordance with and for the purposes of this Regulation, in response exclusively to an intention to cross or the act of crossing that border, regardless of any other consideration, consisting of border checks and border surveillance".¹⁰ Following this definition, there are two instrumental measures:

1. *Border surveillance*: the surveillance of borders between border crossing points and the surveillance of border crossing points outside fixed opening hours, including preventative measures, to prevent or detect unauthorised border crossings or the circumvention of border checks, to contribute to raising situational awareness, to counter cross-border criminality and to take measures against persons who have crossed the border illegally.
2. *Border check*: checks carried out at a border crossing points, to ensure that persons, including their means of transport and the objects in their possession, may be authorised to enter the territory of the Member States or authorised to leave it.

Next to border controls, the revised SBC supports alternative measures, such as checks within the territory. These include the exercise of police or other public powers based on national law, by the competent authorities of the Member States in their territory, including in their internal border areas. However, this may not have an effect equivalent to border checks. The exercise of powers shall not be considered equivalent to border checks, when:

- They do not have border control as their objective;
- They are based on general police information – or, where the aim is to contain the spread of an infectious disease, on public health information – and on the experience of the competent authorities regarding possible threats to public security or public policy. Such measures may in particular aim to combat cross-border crime, reduce illegal immigration, or contain the spread of infectious diseases;
- They are designed and implemented in a manner clearly distinct from systematic checks on persons at the external borders.¹¹

Regarding measures at internal borders other than monitoring and surveillance, the SBC lays down rules governing their implementation. A distinction is made between border controls initiated by Member States, as a reaction to a serious threat, whether unforeseeable or foreseeable, and measures initiated on the proposal of the European Commission and with the advice of the Council, namely in response to public health emergencies and other exceptional situations.

Based on Article 25 SBC, Member States may reintroduce temporary internal border controls in exceptional situations, where there is a serious threat to public policy or internal security. Such threat may, in particular, be considered to arise from:

- terrorist incidents or threats posed by serious organised crime, or;
- large-scale public health emergencies, or;

⁹ Article 22 SBC.

¹⁰ Art. 2(10) SBC.

¹¹ Art. 23 SBC.

- sudden large-scale unauthorised movements of third-country nationals, putting a substantial strain on the overall resources and capacities of well-prepared competent authorities and is likely to put risk to overall functioning of an area without an internal border control, or;
- large scale or high-profile international events.

In all cases, such border controls must be a measure of last resort. The scope and duration of the temporary reintroduction of border controls shall not exceed what is strictly necessary to respond to the serious threat identified.¹² The proportionality test includes evaluation of the appropriateness of the measure, taking into account the nature of the threat identified and to what extent the reintroduction of internal border controls will adequately remedy the threat or could also be achieved by alternative measures.¹³ In the proportionality test, the border control should be evaluated against the free movement of persons and the functioning of the cross-border regions, taking into account the strong social and economic ties between them.¹⁴

When Member States introduce or prolong temporary internal border controls, they must notify the EU institutions as well as other Member States. The notification of the border controls needs to include information such as the reasons for the reintroduction or prolongation, including all relevant data. Article 27(1) SBC prescribes that the notification should entail the description of the serious threat to public policy or internal security; the names of the authorised crossing-points; the date and duration of the planned reintroduction or prolongation; the assessment of the necessity and proportionality; and where appropriate, the measures to be taken by other Member States.¹⁵

A further distinction is made between immediate and unforeseeable threats on the one hand and foreseeable ones on the other hand. A border control may last no longer than one month, when they are introduced in response to an unforeseeable and immediate serious threat. If the serious threat persists beyond this period, the Member State may prolong the border control for a maximum total duration of three months.¹⁶

In case of a foreseeable threat, the Member State must make a notification ultimately four weeks before the planned reintroduction of border controls, or as soon as possible. The maximum period is six months. If the threat persists, the border control may be renewed for additional periods of six months, subject to a new notification of the prolongation. In any case, the total duration may not exceed two years.¹⁷

Proportionality assessment

The 2024 revision of the SBC emphasised the use of internal border controls as a measure of last resort, and only temporary in nature. The Court of Justice of the European Union has confirmed that internal border controls must be based on new threats and cannot be indefinitely prolonged on the same grounds, and that derogations from free movement must be interpreted strictly.

The strict nature of proportionality was also highlighted by recent rulings of the Bavarian Higher Administrative Court as well as the Administrative Court of Koblenz, referring that the alleged serious threat should be linked to the border control in question in a sufficiently specific, current and verifiable manner.

Source: Case C-368/20 NW v Landespolizeidirektion Steiermark, ECLI:EU:C:2022:55, BayVGH, 9.4.2026 – 10BV25.901, VGH München, 17.03.2025 – 10 BV 24.700 & VG Koblenz, 27.4.2026 – 3K650/25.KO.

¹² Art. 25 SBC.

¹³ Art. 26(1) SBC.

¹⁴ Art. 26(1)(b)(ii) SBC.

¹⁵ Art. 27 SBC.

¹⁶ Art. 25a(1)–(3) SBC.

¹⁷ Art. 25a(4)–(5) SBC.

Only in the case of a major exceptional situation, the two-year period may be prolonged with an additional six months. This notification must include a risk assessment that:

- Substantiates the continued threat to public policy or internal security,
- Demonstrates that alternative measures to address the threat have been deemed or found ineffective at the time of notification,
- Presents the mitigating measures to accompany the internal border control, and
- Outlines, where appropriate, the means, actions, conditions, and timeline considered for lifting the internal border control.¹⁸

Within three months of receiving this notification, the European Commission should issue a new opinion on the necessity and proportionality of the prolongation. The European Commission may initiate a consultation process, or a Member State may request the European Commission to do so.¹⁹ Finally, there could be one final prolongation of another six months, subject to a renewed risk assessment and a Commission recommendation on the compatibility of such a prolongation with the Treaties. Therefore, when there are major exceptional situations, the maximum duration of temporary internal border controls could total three years.²⁰

The SBC also foresees two specific mechanisms, initiated by the EU. One is in case of a large-scale public health emergency, that puts the overall functioning of the area without internal border control at risk. The border controls can be reintroduced for 6 months and may be renewed, upon proposal from the European Commission, for further periods of up to 6 months as long as the large-scale public health emergency persists.²¹ The other specific procedure concerns exceptional circumstances, when the overall functioning of the area without internal border controls is put at risk as a result of persistent serious deficiencies relating to external border controls. The border controls may be introduced for a period of six months and can be prolonged no more than three times, each time for a further period of up to six months.

¹⁸ Art. 25a(6) SBC.

¹⁹ Art. 27a(1) SBC.

²⁰ Art. 25a SBC.

²¹ Art. 28 SBC.

Summary: measures and procedures to control internal borders

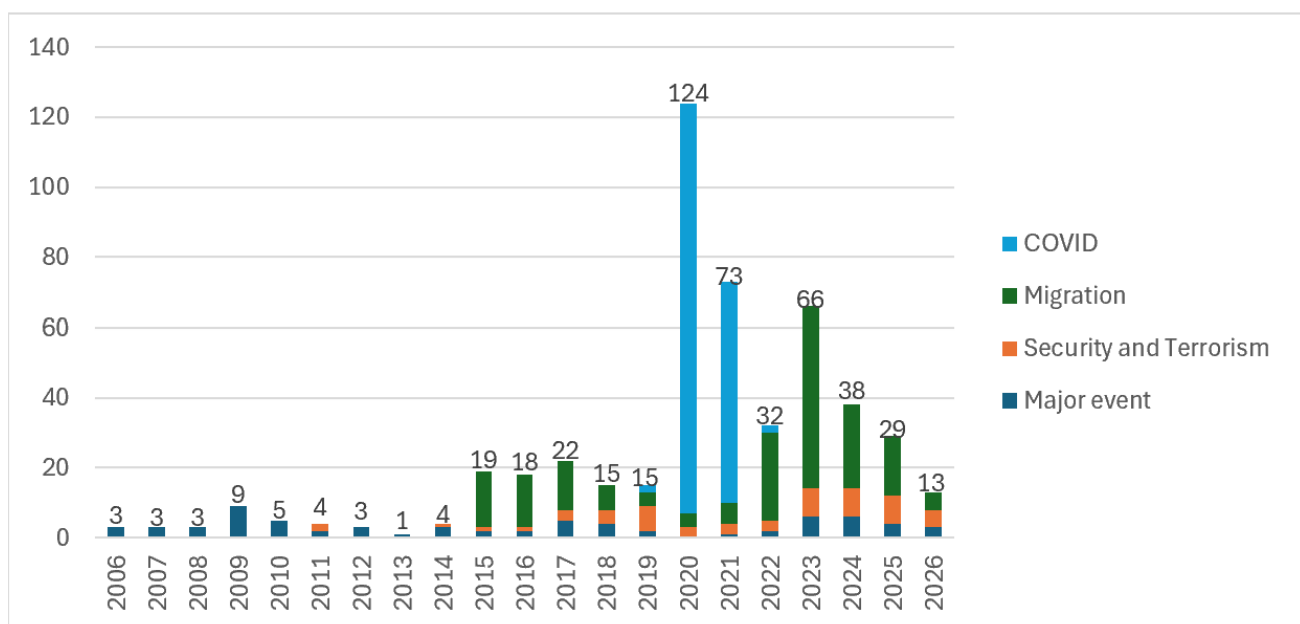
	Measure	Initiated by	Requirements (simplified)	
No Internal Border Control	Monitoring at internal borders Art. 23	Member States	Permissible when not considered as border check or border control, i.e. when:	
			- they do not have border control as an objective, and - they are based on general police information OR here the aim is to contain the spread of an infectious disease, possible threats to public security or public policy and aim, in particular to combat cross-border crime, reduce illegal immigration, or contain spread of an infectious diseases, and are devised and executed in a manner that is clearly distinct from systematic checks.	
Reintroduction of Internal Border Controls	Temporary re-introduction of border controls at internal borders Arts. 25-25a	Member States	- Measure of last resort; shall not exceed what is strictly necessary and proportional to respond to the identified threat (proportionality test): - Legitimate objective: suitable measure to reach that objective - Necessity: no less restrictive measure can achieve the same objective - Balancing of rights vs interference - A serious threat to public policy or internal security: - Terrorist incidents or threats, or - Large-scale public health emergencies, or - Exceptional situation of large-scale unauthorised movement of third-country nationals, or - Large scale or profile international events. - Unforeseeable or foreseeable threat	
			3a. Unforeseeable: - Notification - Control up to one month - Renewable to maximum total of three months	3b. Foreseeable: - Notification as soon as possible (min. 4 weeks before), - Control up to 6 months - Renewable with another 6 months but maximum total of 2 years Major exceptional situation: beyond 2 years only with extra 6 months when justified risk assessment; opinion of European Commission; another 6 months (total 3 years)
	Public health emergency Art. 28	Proposal by EC	- Large-scale public health emergency which puts at risk the overall functioning of the area without internal border control 6 months, extendable by another 6 months as long as the large-scale public health emergency persist	
	Exceptional circumstances Art. 29	Proposal by EC	- Risks for the overall functioning of the area without internal border controls 6 months, extendable by 6 months up to 2 years total if the exceptional circumstances persist	

Source: Mertens, Unfried & Sivonen (2025), p.14.

Evolution and drivers of internal border controls

Reintroductions of internal border controls have to be indicated to the European Commission by the Schengen states. The European Commission updates the list of Member States' notifications of the temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders.²² Since 2006 and up to August 2026, 499 notifications of temporary border controls were registered. In total 34,613 days of internal border controls were notified in the period 2006–2026, an average of 69 days per notification. About 40% of the notifications were related to migration, entirely or partially with other motivations (such as security and COVID). Another little 40% can be attributed to COVID-19. Also literature signals that the reintroduction of internal border controls is primarily based in arguments around COVID-19 and migration.²³ The former also was labelled 'Covidfencing'.²⁴

Registered notifications between 2006 and 2026, by theme



Source: European Commission, Notifications Border Controls. Own analysis.

In quantitative terms, the EU's migration crisis with unprecedented inflows of refugees of 2015 and 2016 resulted in a sharp increase of notifications. Indeed, for the first time, migration-related arguments were put forward in the notifications. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the notifications to peak in 2020. Higher levels of notifications continued in 2021. Since COVID-19, multiple scholars have argued that internal border

²² European Commission, Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control, available at: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen/schengen-area/temporary-reintroduction-border-control_en.

²³ Wille, C. (2025). On the Reintroduction of Temporary Controls at EU Internal Borders. UniGR-CBS Working Paper Vol. 24; Chilla, T., Bertram, D., & Hippe, S. (2026). Re-bordering Schengen? Explaining the spatial patterns of border control measures. *Regional Science Policy & Practice*, 18(7), 100315. <https://zenodo.org/records/15575146>; Votoupalová, M. (2026). Schengen in crisis? Positions of member states reimposing internal border controls. *Journal of European Integration*, 1–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2026.2652994>.

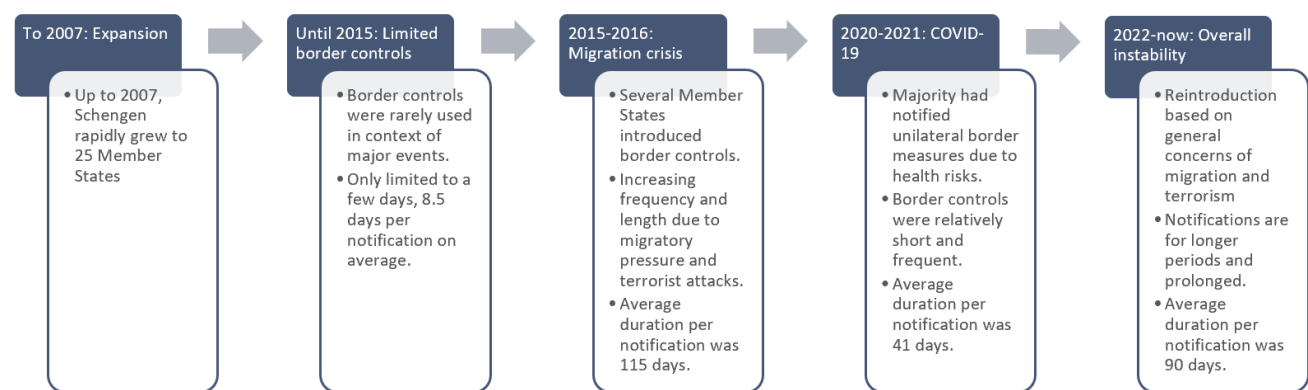
²⁴ Novotný, L. (2022). Effects of 'Covidfencing' on cross-border commuting: A case of Czech-German borderland. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* 30 (4), 590–607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1986470>; Öberg, M. L. (2025). The legality of 'covidfencing' measures under EU free movement law: Nordic Info BV v Belgische Staat. *Common market law review*, 62(4); Medeiros, E., Guillermo Ramírez, M., Ocskay, G., & Peyrony, J. (2021). Covidfencing effects on cross-border deterritorialism: the case of Europe. *European Planning Studies*, 29(5), 962–982.

controls can no longer be regarded as exceptional in the Schengen Area but constitute 'a new normal'.²⁵ Indeed, the number of notifications remain higher than before the pandemic. Again, migration-related arguments were placed at the forefront, often together with geopolitical concerns and threats. Developments as the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the developments in the Middle East were frequently referred to in 2024.

The reintroduction of internal border controls in the Schengen Area is referred to as the 'new normal', or at least with increasing frequencies and length. However, it cannot be concluded that the support for Schengen or the EU is decreasing. In fact, research on the notifications of Member States and national documentation shows commitment to European integration, but understood towards defensive integration.²⁶ Reintroductions of border controls are framed as an exceptional measure to compensate for insufficient external controls. The latter is also raised in the 2026 State of Schengen Report, which prioritises the work on an effective return system and integrated external border for a secure Schengen Area.

"To keep Schengen both open and secure, we must modernise how we manage mobility and security risks.", Henna Virkkunen, Executive Vice-President for Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy.²⁷

Evolution of internal border controls in the Schengen Area, portrayed in four periods



Source: European Commission, Notifications Border Controls. Own analysis.

²⁵ Wille, C. (2025). On the Reintroduction of Temporary Controls at EU Internal Borders. UniGR-CBS Working Paper Vol. 24; Javel, F. (2025). Wie die Regierung vor den deutschen Grenzkontrollen klein beigt. Luxemburger Wort, 08/04/2025, pp. 2–3.; Bornemann, J. 2024. "Competing Visions and Constitutional Limits of Schengen Reform: Securitization, Gradual Supranationalization and the Undoing of Schengen as an Identity-Creating Project." *German Law Journal* 25 (3): 407–426. <https://doi.org/10.1017/glj.2023.99>; Guild, E. 2021. "Schengen Borders and Multiple National States of Emergency: From Refugees to Terrorism to COVID-19." *European Journal of Migration and Law* 23 (4): 385–404. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718166-12340111>.

²⁶ Pettersson Fürst, J. (2024). Defensive integration through cooperative re-bordering? How member states use internal border controls in Schengen. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31(2), 478–500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2162104>; Votoupalová, M. (2026). Schengen in crisis? Positions of member states reimposing internal border controls. *Journal of European Integration*, 1–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2026.2652994>.

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_26_1015.

In general, six Schengen states, Norway (9% of all notifications), Sweden (5%), Denmark (6%), France (6%) and in particular Germany (11%) and Austria (14%), have a long track of notifications of internal border controls – mainly based on arguments about migration and terrorism.²⁸

While there is one legal definition of an internal border control under the SBC, the methods applied by Member States may differ. In 2025, ten Schengen States prolonged and maintained the reintroduction of internal border controls. These were primarily motivated by migration and security concerns.²⁹ This included six borders that were bilaterally controlled (AT-SK, NL-DE, SE-DK, DK-DE, FR-ES, PL-DE) and 27 unilaterally controlled borders. So-called asymmetric controls, where border controls are introduced unilaterally or persist longer in one country, are more common than symmetric ones.³⁰

The majority of the internal border controls are conducted in a flexible manner, meaning that no stationary controls at the border are constructed. Instead, the majority of border controls are taking place through non-systematic, risk-based spot-checks.³¹ The significance of border controls and risk-based spot-checks is often related to the national or local investments in enforcement capacities. For instance, there used to be French stations at authorised crossing points at the French-Spanish border, but these have re-opened.³² Germany was the only Member State with stationary border controls by the *Bundespolizei*. As of May 2025, German border controls have been intensified including the installation of stationary checkpoints at border crossings, with speed and traffic regulation measures.

Border control versus national alternatives

In the 2026 State of Schengen Report, the European Commission urges Member States to make use of alternative instruments of the revised SBC and to phase out internal border controls. Furthermore, alternative measures are laid out in the Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/268.

Romania's operational approach with Hungary and Bulgaria were referred to as an exemplary model that combines intelligence-led joint operations, targeted risk-based police checks, joint patrols and fully functioning Police Cooperation Centres.

In its recent [Opinions on temporary internal border controls in the Schengen Area](#), the European Commission highlights making use of bilateral (police) cooperation, information exchange and technical surveillance and risk-based spot checks under Article 23 SBC.

Source: European Commission, [2026 State of Schengen Report](#).

²⁸ As also acknowledged by the European Commission in the Impact Assessment Report for the proposal of the Revised Schengen Borders Code, SWD(2021) 462 final.

²⁹ European Commission (2026). 2026 State of Schengen Report. COM(2026) 150 final.

³⁰ Chilla, T., Bertram, D., & Hippe, S. (2026). Re-bordering Schengen? Explaining the spatial patterns of border control measures. *Regional Science Policy & Practice*, 18(7), 100315. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1757780226000363>.

³¹ As was also noted in by the European Commission in its [opinions on temporary internal border controls in Schengen Area](#) of June 2026, issued to nine Member States.

³² European Commission (2026). Commission Opinion on the necessity and proportionality of the reintroduction of border control by France at its internal borders in accordance with Article 27a(3) of Regulation (EU) No 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code). C(2026) 3559 final.

The impact of 'Schengen' with and without internal border controls

The Schengen Area in numbers

The Schengen Area is the world's largest area without systematic internal border controls, developed to an area of 29 Schengen states and 128 land and maritime border pairs.³³ The Schengen Area covers more than 4 million km² and over 450 million people. The Schengen Area comprises approximately 42,000 km of internal land borders between these states. The common external Schengen border extends over approximately 50,000 km.³⁴

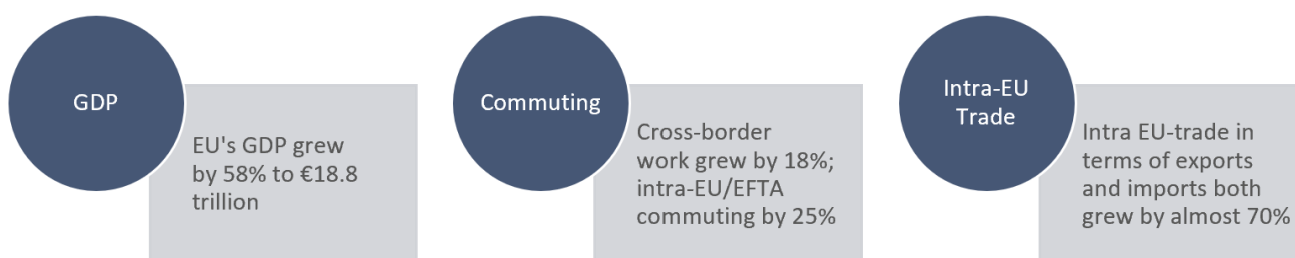
In terms of mobility, there are estimated 1.25 billion journeys within the Schengen Area per year and 3.5 million people crossing the internal borders every day. When asked, the most frequent (four in ten) purpose for traveling to countries inside the Schengen Area is tourism.³⁵ This is followed by shopping (one in five), visit family or friends (both 18%). Work (9%), services (6%) and education (5%) are less common. Regarding work, European statistics show that the number of working-age EU mobile citizens was approximately 10.1 million in 2024. There were 1.9 million cross-border workers in the EU, meaning that they live in an EU country and work in another EU/EFTA country.³⁶ In total, there were 2.2 million EU/EFTA workers, who commuted to another state. Intra-EU trade of goods is worth over EUR 4 trillion imports as well as exports. Each year, over 13 billion tonnes in total volume of goods is carried via road within the EU, about 14 million tonnes via air and 450,000 to 500,000 tonnes via inland waterways. Eurostat data cannot aggregate transport of goods by rail at EU-level.

Fast Facts

- 29 Schengen states, 128 border pairs
- 4 million km²
- 450 million inhabitants
- 33 million enterprises
- 1.25 billion journeys per year

Source: European Commission & Eurostat.

Growth in the EU from 2014 to 2025



Source: Eurostat. Own analysis.

³³ Chilla, T., Bertram, D., & Hippe, S. (2026). Re-bordering Schengen? Explaining the spatial patterns of border control measures. *Regional Science Policy & Practice*, 18(7), 100315. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rsp.2026.100315>.

³⁴ Council of the European Union (2023). Schengen. Your gateway to free movement in Europe. ISBN 978-92-824-9188-1.

³⁵ European Commission (2024). Citizens' attitudes towards the Schengen Area. Special Eurobarometer 549.

³⁶ European Commission (2026). Annual Report on Intra-EU Labour Mobility 2025 Edition. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

In the Schengen Area, there are more than 33 million enterprises active, worth a net turnover of EUR 6,541.5 billion and employing 167 million people.³⁷ The vast majority of the enterprises are micro-enterprises (<10 people employed, about 94%).³⁸ Just over half of the value added by EU's business economy were SMEs. The economic contribution made by SMEs within a Schengen state is particularly significant in Estonia and Iceland, providing more than 75% of the value added in the business economy. The joint GDP at current market prices of the Schengen states accounted for EUR 19,595.8 billion.³⁹

³⁷ Eurostat, sbs_sc_ovw.

³⁸ Eurostat (2026). Key figures on Europe – 2026 edition. ISBN 978-92-68-39878-4.

³⁹ Eurostat, nama_10_gdp.

The Value of Schengen

General findings

Abolishing internal border controls in the Schengen Area saves costs in multiple dimensions. The economic rationale behind this is straightforward: border controls increase the costs of moving people, goods and services. Additionally, increased operational costs and indirect effects such as changes to investments in infrastructure and enforcement capacities, quality of life and cohesion could be relevant. By eliminating these barriers, Schengen contributes to deeper economic integration, greater competition, more efficient allocation of labour and capital, and stronger regional development. It reduces costs to trade, possibly increasing trade by 2.81%.⁴⁰ To frame this in an alternative way, the removal of controls acts like a drop in tariffs of 0.46% to 1.02%.⁴¹ The cost savings are generally the highest for countries at the periphery of Schengen, up to 1.28% to 1.59%. Yet even, non-Schengen countries benefit from Schengen, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, followed by Russia and Turkey.

The potential trade costs savings from Schengen for intracontinental trade of goods and services, in percentage points and per country (2011)



Source: Gröschl, Steinwachts & Felbermayr, 2016.

Zooming into cross-border regions, another study quantified that the opening of national borders, by Schengen- and EU-membership, is associated with nearly 2.7% increase in regional gross value added (GVA)⁴² per capita.⁴³ Even more, Schengen has promoted cross-border cooperation and trust in border regions.⁴⁴

Regarding the effects on bilateral trade between neighbouring countries, studies conclude that these countries trade more when they are both signatories to Schengen. There may be ten percent lower trade frictions, equalling an average ten percent higher bilateral trade per year.⁴⁵ Even more, Schengen may ease mobility of persons, which again positively affects trade. Every percent growth of mobility can expand trade by an almost equivalent amount.⁴⁶ Also in terms of both inward and outward foreign direct investments (FDI), Schengen is relevant. While not solely to be attributed to Schengen but also the EU as such, the Single

⁴⁰ Felbermayr, G., Gröschl, J., and Steinwachs, T. (2018) The Trade Effects of Border Controls: Evidence from the European Schengen Agreement. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 56: 335–351. doi: [10.1111/jcms.12603](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12603).

⁴¹ Ibid. Or in another study quantified as 0.7%: Gröschl, J., Steinwachs, T., Felbermayr, G. (2016). Trade costs of border controls in the Schengen Area. Available at: <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/trade-costs-border-controls-schengen-area>.

⁴² Gross value added (GVA) is an indicator for measuring the contribution to the economy, showing how much value is created by a business or by industry.

⁴³ Basboga, K. (2020) The role of open borders and cross-border cooperation in regional growth across Europe, *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 7:1, 532–549, DOI:10.1080/21681376.2020.1842800.

⁴⁴ Mertens, P., Sivonen, S., Unfried, M. (2025). *The revised Schengen Borders Code – an ex-post evaluation in times of border controls: Effects of internal border controls across European cross-border regions*. ITEM. Available at: <https://crossborderitem.eu/en/publications/the-revised-schengen-borders-code-an-ex-post-evaluation-in-times-of-border-controls-item-tein-joint-study/>.

⁴⁵ Davis, D. & Gift, T. (2014). The Positive Effects of the Schengen Agreement on European Trade. *The World Economy*. doi: 10.1111/twec.12158

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Market increased FDI inflows from non-EU countries increased by 60% and by approximately 50% between EU countries.⁴⁷

Schengen thus positively influences the mobility of persons. In Croatia, the tourist sector had a record season after joining the Schengen Area. Despite the impact of global inflation and the conflict in Ukraine, Croatia's tourist season of 2023 performed very well, about 8% more than 2022.⁴⁸ About 80% of tourists came from the Schengen Area in 2023. The increase of weekend tourists from neighbouring countries was noted as a direct effect of Croatia's accession to Schengen.⁴⁹ Positive effects were also registered for labour mobility. In the case of Hungary, the lifting of border controls by Austria with Hungary led to an increase in the number of Hungarians commuting to Austria for work – from 20,000 to 100,000 in ten years.⁵⁰ In the case of Switzerland, it was estimated that the Schengen Agreement has increased the probability of cross-border commuting by 3 percentage points from a neighbouring region to Switzerland.⁵¹

The magnitude of effects varies across studies and countries. Yet, in general the consensus is that Schengen constitutes an important component of the EU's Single Market, providing benefits that extend beyond merely eliminating passport checks. It is also one of the most tangible aspects of European integration and a Europe without borders. A Eurobarometer poll of 2018 shows that four in five Europeans support free movement in the EU.⁵² Another poll by the University of Oxford confirmed that respondents see the freedom of movement as the most important benefit of the EU.⁵³ It is regarded as so important that nearly three quarters of respondents indicate that the EU 'would not be worth having' without it.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Dura, P. & Pasimeni, P. (2025). The Economic Impact of the European Single Market. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁴⁸ Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (2023). CROATIA: Tourism to keep economy afloat. Forecast report autumn 2023.

⁴⁹ Euractiv (2023). Croatia eying record tourist season after joining Schengen Area. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/news/croatia-eying-record-tourist-season-after-joining-schengen-area/>.

⁵⁰ Körösi, I. (2012) A magyar-osztrák kapcsolatok fejlődése a rendszerváltás óta, jelenlegi helyzete és kilátásai. *Külügyi Szemle*, Vol. 11., No. 4., pp. 3–37. Reizer, B. (2021) A magyar munkavállalók foglalkoztatása Ausztriában a koronavírus járvány előtt és alatt. *Munkaerőpiaci Tükör* 2020, pp. 121–123.

⁵¹ Parenti, A., Tealdi, C. (2019). Does the Implementation of the Schengen Agreement Boost Cross-Border Commuting? Evidence from Switzerland, *IZA Discussion Papers*, No. 12754, Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), Bonn.

⁵² European Commission (2018). Europeans' perceptions of the Schengen Area. Special Eurobarometer 474.

⁵³ University of Oxford (2021). EU not worth having without free movement: say 74% of Europeans in Oxford survey. Available at: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-01-26-eu-not-worth-having-without-free-movement-say-74-europeans-oxford-survey>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

The benefits of Schengen Area membership

Direct benefits	Indirect benefits
• Reduced costs of transportation services, with consumer and business benefits, and sectoral contribution to a more efficient road traffic and road freight flows; • Reduction in CO2 emissions; • Reduced costs of access to Schengen labour markets, both for employers and employees; • Increase in trade, bilateral and international; • Better consumer prices as result of reduced costs, higher competition and increased trade; • Potential increases of GDP and foreign direct investments, due to the economic activity boost; • Increase in mobility (consumers, labour, tourism) and spillover effects to other sectors such as tourism and travel; • Reduction of direct budgetary spending on internal EU border control and other administrative measures.	• Opening of new cross-border job opportunities within travel time, labour market integration; • Wellbeing effects, due to savings as result of elimination of time delays; • Reduction of traffic jams and living conditions of border villages; • Increase in cross-border cooperation and trust; • Tangible benefit of European integration for citizens; • Socio-economic development of border regions and peripheral areas; • Diminished investment risk perception and facilitation of foreign direct investors in the domestic economy; • Cross-border supply chain optimization, EU business cycle synchronisation incentives, and better positioning in the European value chains; • Increased cross-border supply and demand / European trade integration.

Source: Adaptation from Lovin, Voinescu & Munteanu (2025: 3).

The case of Bulgaria and Romania

The war in Ukraine has also had major economic implications for many Central Eastern European (CEE) countries, including Schengen Area members, in the context of the proximity to the conflict area and the energy dependence on Russia. During the crisis, the Schengen Area membership has acted as economic stabiliser. It was estimated that the full Schengen Area accession of Romania and Bulgaria could increase GDP growth by 0.24 percent annually. That is approximately EUR 850 million for Romania (based on figures for 2024).⁵⁵ Other voices, for instance the Romanian ministers for Finance and Economy, as well as in a plenary debate at the European Parliament, were even more positive, predicted an increase of 2% for Romania's GDP.⁵⁶ The main benefits would be attributable to the transport sector, industrial production, tourism and agriculture. Joining the three pillars of European integration (EU, Schengen and the Euro) allowed Romania and Bulgaria to have a strong convergence to the rest of the CEE countries. A gap in terms of GDP per capita is almost closed for Romania and significantly narrowed for Bulgaria. Negatively phrased, the European Economic and Social Committee of the EU estimated that it cost Bulgaria more than EUR 834 million per year and Romania EUR 2.32 billion to not be a member of the Schengen Area.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Horatiu Lovin, V. Voinescu, B. Munteanu (2025): The benefits of Schengen Area membership in the CEE countries. A synthetic approach. National Bank of Romania, August 2025, National Bank of Romania August 2025.

⁵⁶ Euractiv (2024). Full Schengen accession to boost Romania's GDP by 2%. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/news/full-schengen-accession-to-boost-romania-gdp-by-2/>.

⁵⁷ European Economic and Social Committee (2024). The cost of non-Schengen for the Single market – impact on Bulgaria and Romania. INT/1064-EESC-2024-01449-00-01-TRA-AC.

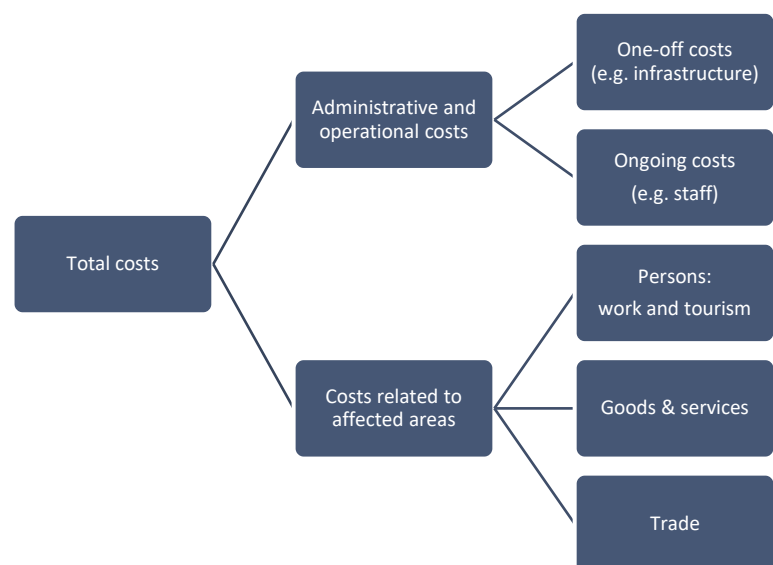
As far as the Bulgarian case, a study by the scientists from the Economic Research Institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences of early 2024 estimated that joining Schengen will result in a total financial effect of EUR 869.9 million per year.⁵⁸ This represents a little less than 1 percent of Bulgaria's 2023 GDP at current prices and is mainly due to the lifting of border controls at land borders. The majority of the benefits is for the road freight transport sector as well as for producers and exporters of goods, totalling about EUR 773 million. These can be mostly allocated to the north trade destinations, with Romania and Hungary (around 84%), and little less to the southern route with Greece. For citizens, the waiting time on the borders with Greece and Romania was estimated at 242,437 days per year, costing them the equivalent of EUR 12 million per year, based on the average gross wages of Bulgarian citizens. Also, the tourism sector benefits from shorter waiting times, where alternative revenues were estimated at EUR 62 million. Finally, the scientists emphasised the positive environmental effects, with lower CO2 emissions during waiting times (about 46,000 tonnes, equalling EUR 3.8 million). Transport is an important economic sector for Romania as well. The National Union of Road Transporters (UNTRR) has been advocating for Schengen membership over the last years, reporting a loss of EUR 2.41 million in 2023 due to queues of trucks at Romania-Bulgaria and Romania-Hungary border crossings.⁵⁹

Positive effects were reported in Bulgaria and Romania's neighbouring countries. In Hungary, cross-border mobility and work from Hungary to Romania is expected to increase, economically stimulating Hungarian border villages.⁶⁰ Transport between Hungary and Bulgaria is essential, especially in terms of energy and fuel transport.

The Impact of Border Controls

The academic and policy literature consistently finds that the reintroduction of internal border controls within the Schengen Area generates significant economic costs through increased transaction costs, delays, uncertainty, and reduced market integration. These effects are particularly pronounced for cross-border workers, trade-intensive sectors, SMEs, border regions, tourism and integrated European value chains. The total costs of a border control can be first seen as twofold: the administrative costs associated with enforcing border controls on the one hand and the impacted areas, hindered in its free movement (goods, services, citizens and capital) due to controls, queues and waiting time, on the other hand.

The Economic Impact of Border Controls



Source: Own illustration.

The actual costs of internal border controls are greatly dependent on the significance thereof. As earlier presented, the majority of the internal border controls conducted by Member States in the Schengen Area

⁵⁸ Bobeva, D., Nestorov, N., Pavlov, A., Stoilov, S. (2024). Evaluation of the Economic Impact of a Country's Accession to the Schengen Area – the Case of Bulgaria. *Economic Thought Journal*, 69 (2), 139–163. <https://doi.org/10.56497/etj2469201a>.

⁵⁹ UNTRR (2023). UNTRR în 2023 – realizări pentru creșterea competitivității pieței de transport. Available at: <https://www.untrr.ro/ro/untrr-in-2023-realizari-pentru-cre-terea-completiviti-ii-pie-ei-de-transport.html>.

⁶⁰ Vass, A. (2024). A distinct Hungarian achievement: the Schengen accession of Romania and Bulgaria. Hungarian Institute of International Affairs.

can be considered to be risk-based spot-checks. These have a different implication compared to stationary border checks as were visible at the French-Spanish border or at German borders. Indeed, the most notable effects were registered by the European Commission for the German-Belgian, German-Dutch and German-Luxembourgish borders.⁶¹ Furthermore, the capacities allocated to border controls and the significance and nature of cross-border integration, trade and mobility are relevant indicators for the actual economic impact of border controls.

Indicators relevant to the significance of economic impact

Indicator	Implication
Duration	Longer periods of border controls are related to more significant shares of costs. This is not only true due to the total duration, but also the degree of impact increases over time.
Intensity	The intensity of internal border controls is of course a relevant indicator for the impact. Stationary border checks, such as in place in Germany, have more impact than risk-based spot-checks. The intensity is also subject to the investments made in the enforcement capacities. Where the Dutch government did not significantly increase enforcement capacities when introducing border controls, the French government systematically did.
Symmetry	Symmetric border controls entail the situation when a border is bilaterally controlled. The impact may be greater when a border is bilaterally controlled as mobility is affected in both directions.
Mobility	In general, road transport and goods trade is mostly affected. Economies and companies strongly intertwined with these sectors may be greater affected by border disruptions. The same applies to Member States with higher degrees of mobility and cross-border integration.
Sensitivity	Peripheral countries may be impacted more by internal border controls in the Schengen Area than more centrally located countries. Peripheral countries often rely on longer supply chains, with multiple countries to be crossed. This may lead to an accumulation of national border controls.

Source: Own analysis based on literature review.

In the following, the different cost categories are discussed, based on findings in literature and casuistic evidence from different Schengen states over the last years. In terms of research reports, research to the impact of border controls has sparked around the year 2016, of which at least three commissioned by the European Parliament: from RAND Europe,⁶² Europe Economics⁶³ and the European Parliament's study with Transport & Mobility Leuven and the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.⁶⁴ These three reports will more often be referred to in the following section, together with publications of France Stratégie,⁶⁵ the Bertelsmannstiftung,⁶⁶ the Jacques Delors Institut⁶⁷ and the work of Felbermayr et al.⁶⁸ As will be shown, a

⁶¹ European Commission (2026). Commission opinion on the necessity and proportionality of the reintroduction of border control by Germany at its land borders in accordance with Article 27a(3) of Regulation (EU) No 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code). C(2026) 3557 final.

⁶² RAND Europe (2016). The Cost of Non-Schengen: Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs aspects. ISBN: 978-92-823-9958-3.

⁶³ Europe Economics (2016). The Cost of Non-Schengen: Impact of Border Controls within Schengen on the Single Market. PE 581.383.

⁶⁴ European Parliament (2016). Cost of non-Schengen: the impact of border controls within Schengen on the Single Market. PE 578.974.

⁶⁵ Aussilloux, V. and Le Hir, B. (2016). The Economic Cost of Rolling Back Schengen. Paris: France Stratégie.

⁶⁶ Böhmer, M., Limbers, J., Pivac, A. and H. Weinelt (2016). "Withdrawal from the Schengen Agreement: Macroeconomic Effects on Germany and the Countries of the European Union", Global Economic Dynamics Study by Prognos AG on behalf of the Bertelsmann Foundation.

⁶⁷ Auf dem Brinke, A. (2016). The Economic Costs of Non-Schengen: What the Numbers tell us. *Jacques Delors Institut – Berlin*. Notre Europe Policy Papers no. 162 / 20 April 2016. Available at: <https://institutdelors.eu/content/uploads/2025/04/costnonschengen-aufdembrinke-jdib-april16-4.pdf>.

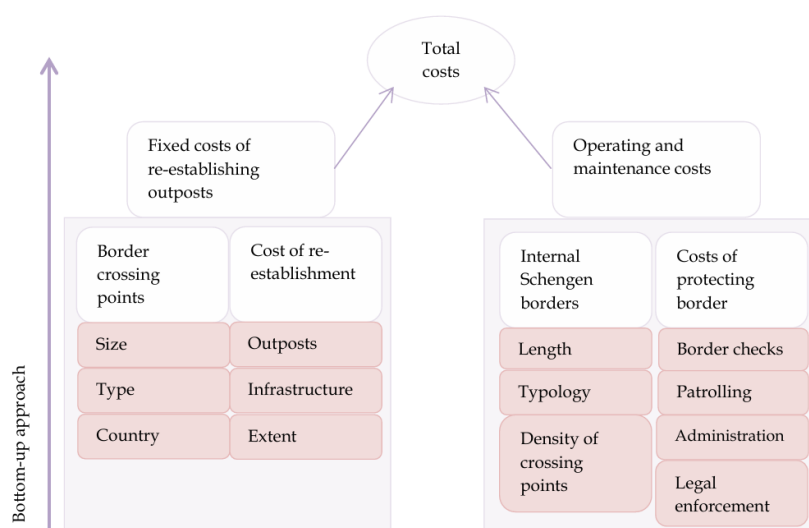
⁶⁸ Felbermayr, G., Groschl, J. and Steinwachs, T. (2017). The Trade Effects of Border Controls: Evidence from the European Schengen Agreement. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1-17. 10.1111/jcms.12603.

clear distinction should be made between what the economic impact could be according to research, which is often based on non-Schengen calculations (e.g. the full introduction of border controls), and what impacts were actually registered in the Schengen Area over the last decade. Economic and other impacts are very much dependent of the precise nature of border controls. Hence it is crucial to understand the legal categories described in the SBC and the different practices in the Member States. Since there is no "border control" as a harmonised standard, there is also no standard effect. Hence, effects are very much the result of very specific practices. However, in general, there is no real monitoring of all costs related to border controls, but remains anecdotal evidence or incidental predictions from stakeholders.⁶⁹

Operational costs

The first category of costs associated with border controls is the most direct one, namely the operational costs. The reintroduction of border controls may result in 'one-off' costs and operating, periodical costs. Under the one-off costs, one can understand the costs for infrastructure, border posts and other physical and digital costs associated to border controls. Operational and periodical costs include personnel costs for patrolling, administrative costs, legal enforcement and communication. A study by RAND Europe, commissioned by the European Parliament in 2016, made cost-estimations for the re-establishment of border controls under three scenarios: 1) a two-year 'suspension' of Schengen in five countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Norway and Sweden); 2) a two-year 'suspension' of Schengen by all countries and 3) an indefinite suspension of the Schengen Agreement. The first scenario would cost EUR 211.5

The operational costs of border controls



Source: RAND (2016: 63).

million over the two-year period at the selected borders. The second scenario would include a total budgetary cost for all countries over two years between EUR 4.39 to 7.4 billion. The third scenario would cost between EUR 29.31 and 56.26 billion over a ten year period. In summary, the operational costs could cost the Schengen states around EUR 0.1-19 billion of fixed costs (about 0.01-0.16% of the total GDP) and around EUR 2 to 4 billion in annual operating costs (about 0.02-0.03% of the total GDP). The study by the European Parliamentary Research Service (ERPS) arrived at an estimated cost of EUR 7.1 billion for physically establishing border controls in the entire Schengen Area. Costs of EUR 0.6 to 5.8 billion would have to be born annually by governments in terms of increased staff.

In Germany, the staff and exploitation costs associated with border controls in the period of September 2024 to the end of June 2025 were calculated at EUR 80.5 million. The spokesman of the German Police Union expressed that these estimations are probably too low – in the same period the additional mission-

⁶⁹ Mertens, P., Sivonen, S., Unfried, M. (2025). *The revised Schengen Borders Code – an ex-post evaluation in times of border controls: Effects of internal border controls across European cross-border regions*. ITEM. Available at: <https://crossborderitem.eu/en/publications/the-revised-schengen-borders-code-an-ex-post-evaluation-in-times-of-border-controls-item-tein-joint-study/>.

related costs alone amounted to EUR 37.9 million.⁷⁰ Operational costs were not only recorded for the Member State reinstalling border controls, but also its neighbouring countries. For instance, the Dutch central and local governments had to incur costs for additional traffic measures and communication campaigns. These costs for the German-Dutch border crossings accounted for more than EUR 8 million for 2025.⁷¹

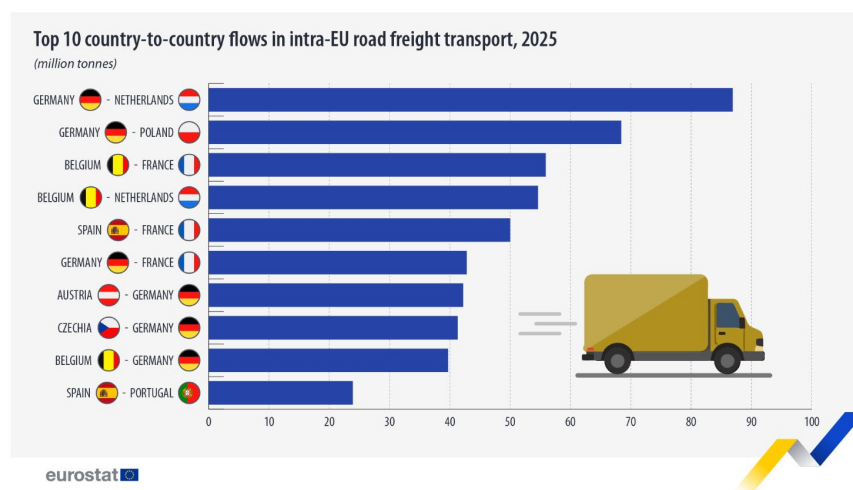
Costs related to the four freedoms

Transport

The highest and most immediate impact of border controls would be felt by the road haulage sector, as concluded in the majority of the research reports. According to estimations of the European Commission in 2016,⁷² the full reintroduction of border controls would confront the road haulage sector with an additional direct cost of EUR 1.7 to 7.5 billion per year. Another study by the European Parliament in 2016 quantified EUR 6.5 to 13 billion for the road freight sector.⁷³ In case of more limited border controls, by only a selection of Member States, the costs were estimated to EUR 0.7 to 1.3 billion. Another study looked specifically at the situation of France. With an almost equivalent volume of goods for export and import – 22 tonnes transported in both directions by three million trucks – an extra time of half an hour to cross the border induces additional costs associated with the volume of goods of EUR 6 million and a further extra cost for the carrier of EUR 56 million for both imports and exports.⁷⁴

Eurostat data⁷⁵ show that Poland has the highest volume (381.0 billion tonne-kilometres, about 20% of EU's total), followed by Germany and Spain. International, country-to-country transport accounted for 24.4% of EU's total, where the largest volume was transported between Germany and the Netherlands. Both in terms of total volume as well as intra-EU road freight transport, Germany plays a key role. As the majority of intra-EU road freight flows cross German borders, the reintroduction of border controls at the German borders

Top 10 intra-EU road freight transport (2025)



Source: Eurostat (2026).

⁷⁰ Tagesspiegel (2025). Einsatz gegen Migranten: Grenzkontrollen der Bundespolizei kosten mehr als 80 Millionen Euro. Available at: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/einsatz-gegen-migranten-grenzkontrollen-der-bundespolizei-kosten-mehr-als-80-millionen-euro-14174768.html>; Deutsche Polizeigewerkschaft (15. August 2025): Kosten für Grenzkontrollen, „Überstunden werden grundsätzlich durch Freizeitausgleich abgegolten“, press release, <https://www.dpolg.de>.

⁷¹ AD (2025). Duitse grenscontroles kosten Nederland 8 miljoen euro, weggebruiker heeft al 730 kilometer fileleed achter de rug. Available at: <https://www.ad.nl/buitenland/duitse-grenscontroles-kosten-nederland-8-miljoen-euro-weggebruiker-heeft-al-730-kilometer-fileleed-achter-de-rug~a921f437/>; De Gelderlander (2026). Nederland blijft miljoenen uitgeven om snelwegen bij Duitse grenscontroles veilig te houden. <https://www.gelderlander.nl/zevenaar/nederland-blijft-miljoenen-uitgeven-om-snelwegen-bij-duitse-grenscontroles-veilig-te-houden~a8d2851f/>.

⁷² European Commission (2016). Communication 'Back to Schengen – a Roadmap'. COM(2016)120, p. 4.

⁷³ European Parliament (2016). Cost of non-Schengen: the impact of border controls within Schengen on the Single Market. PE 578.974. p. 29.

⁷⁴ Aussilloux, V. and Le Hir, B. (2016). The Economic Cost of Rolling Back Schengen. Paris: France Stratégie.

⁷⁵ Eurostat (2026). EU road freight transport up by 0.9% in 2025. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20260731-2>.

may be in particular impactful. The Dutch transport sector estimated that every hour delay results in at least EUR 75 additional costs.⁷⁶ With about 375,000 Dutch lorries that cross the border on a daily basis, the costs of the German border controls totals up to EUR 1 million per month.⁷⁷ Indeed, costs of internal border controls were widely reported across the Schengen Area. Also at the Spanish–French border, mainly at the Irún–Biriátou border crossing, queues were reported. The National Federation of Transport Associations in Spain reported on the costs of French border controls since 2015 to 2019: on average, traffic jams counted up to 3.6 hours per day, costing about EUR 40,000 per vehicle per year.⁷⁸ The impact of internal border controls on the road freight transport sector was also earlier portrayed for Romania and Bulgaria, where queues at internal borders caused losses of millions of euros in terms of waiting time and missed other opportunities.

Labour mobility

There are 1.9 million cross-border commuters in the EU/EFTA. The main countries of origin are France, Poland and Germany. In the case of France, about half of the cross-border commuters work in Switzerland.⁷⁹ The main countries of destinations are Switzerland and Germany in absolute numbers and Luxembourg in relative terms. Incoming cross-border commuters account for 45% of the Luxembourgish labour market. Shares are also relatively high for Switzerland (9.1%), Austria (4.3%) and Belgium (2.7%).

Some studies quantified the costs of the reintroduction of border controls for cross-border commuters. Based on an estimation of 10 minutes delay per border control and a value of time of EUR 10 per hour, a cost of EUR 723 per commuter per year can be calculated.⁸⁰ Applied to the 1.9 million cross-border commuters, it totals an additional cost of EUR 1,373.7 million. Geographically these effects are likely to be concentrated, depending on the significance of cross-border work. Cross-border commuting in Europe is centred around the cross-border regions of the Greater Region (LU, FR, BE, DE), the Upper Rhine Region (DE, FR, CH), the Italo–Swiss border (IT, CH), the Centroepe area (AT, HU, CZ, SK) and the Meuse–Rhine region (NL, BE, DE). The length of border controls will have repercussions on labour mobility. Some studies warn about a reduction of cross-border job opportunities. For the case of France, a loss of 5,000 to 10,000 cross-border workers was estimated,⁸¹ and for Switzerland a potential decline of 27% to 62% with an additional waiting time of 45 minutes. Increases in commuting time have long-term effects when cross-border workers have job offers on their side of the border, which can make cross-border work in general less attractive.

⁷⁶ TLN (2024). Beperkte impact grenscontroles, maar TLN vraagt om evaluatie. Available at: <https://www.tln.nl/actueel/beperkte-impact-grenscontroles-maar-tln-vraagt-om-evaluatie>.

⁷⁷ TLN (2025). Grenscontroles Duitsland blijven groot knelpunt. Available at: <https://www.tln.nl/actueel/grenscontroles-duitsland-blijven-groot-knelpunt>.

⁷⁸ FENADISMER (2019). Las asociaciones de transportistas denuncian el colapso permanente en la frontera de Irún–Biriátou por la actuación de la gendarmería francesa provocando colas kilométricas de camiones en territorio español. Available at: <https://www.fenadismer.es/las-asociaciones-de-transportistas-denuncian-el-colapso-permanente-en-la-frontera-de-irun-biriátou-por-la-actuacion-de-la-gendarmeria-francesa-provocando-colas-kilometricas-de-camiones-en-territorio-e/>.

⁷⁹ European Commission (2026). Annual Report on Intra–EU Labour Mobility 2025 Edition. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁸⁰ Aussilloux, V. and Le Hir, B. (2016). The Economic Cost of Rolling Back Schengen. Paris: France Stratégie.

⁸¹ Ibid.

As shown, the majority of the internal border controls are unilateral, meaning that a border is controlled by one of the neighbouring Member States. Where studies mainly calculate on the basis of a scenario of bilateral controls, resulting in a border control on the outward and return journeys, the estimated effects have to be toned down. The statistics on cross-border commuting and intra-EU mobility in the EU show a rather consistent trend of small annual growth. There was only a small decline during the COVID-19 year of 2020. Therefore, EU-wide statistics do not report significant changes in cross-border mobility within the EU. Nor do the case studies of five cross-border regions, including Germany and Austria, part of a 2025 study, show major changes to cross-border labour mobility.⁸² Nevertheless, delays have been reported across the case studies, affecting the attractiveness and predictability of cross-border commuting as well as the mode of transport.

The impact of border controls on the Öresund Bridge

As of November 2025, Sweden has had internal border controls in place for the last 10 years. As a result, travellers are checked at locations including Hyllie railway station, Lernacken on the Öresund Bridge, and the ferry terminals in Helsingborg and Trelleborg. All trains from Denmark make a mandatory 6-minute stop at Hyllie, for border controls. This is regardless of whether checks are actually carried out. A report, produced by Greater Copenhagen summarised some impacts for the metropolitan area between Copenhagen and Malmö, comprising 4.5 million inhabitants and about 21,900 cross-border workers. The Öresund Bridge has both symbolic as well as economic meaning: cross-border labour was boosted by 4,300 one year after opening.

Summary of some economic and societal impacts:

- The border controls affect the capacity of train services across the bridge. Only 7 passenger trains and 2 freight trains can cross the bridge per hour. This could be increased by five additional passenger trains without border disruptions.
- The extra minutes at Hyllie accounts for an additional 510,000 hours on the train by passengers, estimated to cost 47 million SEK per year.
- With the delays, the number of Danish jobs that could be reached within an hour from Malmö decreased by 322,000. The introduction of border controls in 2015 led to a decrease of cross-border commuters by 6%. The numbers recovered over time.
- The South Swedish Chamber of Commerce calculated the cost of border controls between Denmark and Sweden to be between 1 and 2 billion SEK per year. This is the result of loss of income from work, transport costs and reduction in trade and competition. Other studies, also requested by Greater Copenhagen, confirmed this range.

Source: OECD (2025), Mobility and Integrated Labour Markets for Third-country Nationals in Greater Copenhagen, OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ba2a4777-en>; Greater Copenhagen (2025). 10 ÅR AV TILLFÄLLIG INRE GRÄNSKONTROLL. <https://www.oresunddirekt.se/media/jxpl3j0c/10-ar-med-tillfalliga-granskontroller-gc.pdf>.

⁸² Mertens, Sivonen & Unfried (2025), p. 146.

Trade & Economy

In the Communication 'Back to Schengen – a Roadmap' the immediate direct costs of a non-Schengen scenario for the EU economy were estimated in a range between EUR 5 and 18 billion annually. Indeed, another study concludes that import prices could increase between 1% and 3% if Schengen border controls were reintroduced.⁸³ Goods trade is generally more affected than services. Another study calculated that for the period of summer 2015 until April 2016, trade in goods and services has decreased by 1.3% compared to 2011, corresponding to an annual trade decline of EUR 70.19 billion and a loss of EUR 12.5 billion EU GDP (equalling 0.10% of EU GDP). It is clear from the literature that a decrease in trade will also result in a loss of GDP in the EU: RAND Europe estimated an annual GDP loss of 0.14%, worth EUR 230 billion, in case of full and permanent suspension of Schengen; France Stratégie calculated a GDP decline of 0.86% and 0.50% reduction for France specifically. In the case of Germany, the 2016 report of the Jacques Delors Institute mentions a cost to the German economy of EUR 4 to 24 billion per year if all borders were closed. In the same year, the Bertelsmannstiftung estimated a growth loss of EUR 77 billion between 2016 and 2025 for Germany if permanent border controls were reintroduced at the German borders. The same study also highlighted that the economic impact is not limited to the Schengen Area. The reintroduction of border controls may also impact the two largest non-European economies, namely the United States and China, with a loss of 0.01 to 0.04 percentage points in terms of GDP. A more recent estimation was done by Allianz, as response to the notification of internal border controls by Germany in 2024.⁸⁴ Border controls could decrease imports into Germany by 9.1% for goods and 7.8% for services (equal to an annual decline of EUR 1.1 billion). However, also the nine neighbouring countries are expected to be greatly affected due to their close economic ties to the German economy. Even more, the regional level may be affected more significantly. Evidence from COVID-19 showed that border regions in the EU were affected twice as much, regional GDP was lowered by 2.3 to 2.6 percent.⁸⁵

The actual impact of internal border controls, notified by Schengen states, is not structurally monitored across Schengen states, nor at EU level. As shown, the general trends for GDP in the Schengen Area still show annual increases. However, some economic stakeholders report impacts. The German-Luxembourg Economic Initiative reported strong impacts on cross-border trade due to the German border controls and related congestion. The surveyed companies in 2025 report restricted operational processes (53%), significant delays (72%) and financial losses (27.6%).⁸⁶ The Dutch-German Chamber for Trade (DNHK) calculated EUR 60 million of additional costs per month for businesses due to border controls.⁸⁷

Tourism & Consumers

The European Commission estimated in its 2016 Communication that at least 13 million tourist nights could be lost in the EU due to the reduction of intra-Schengen tourist trips caused by cumbersome border controls, with a total cost of EUR 1.2 billion for the tourism sector. For France, the 2016 study by France Stratégie estimated annual tourism losses of EUR 500 million to one billion. The 2016 study by the EPRS estimated in a scenario of border controls by five countries a EUR 5 to 18 million loss and EUR 18 to 49 million loss for a total suspension of Schengen by all its Member States. Due to trade frictions, consumers may be faced by higher prices. Under the benefits of Schengen, the trade tariff reductions were already quantified. When reintroducing border controls, the trade frictions may constitute a certain trade tariff again.

⁸³ Böhmer, M., Limbers, J., Pivac, A. and Weinelt, H. (2016). Departure from the Schengen Agreement. Macroeconomic impacts on Germany and the countries of the European Union. Bertelsmann Stiftung.

⁸⁴ Allianz Research (2024). Deutsche Grenzkontrollen verteuern Waren und verursachen wirtschaftliche Einbußen. Available at: <https://www.allianz-trade.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/deutsche-grenzkontrollen-vertuern-waren.html>.

⁸⁵ Capello, R. & Caragliu (2022). Analysis of the economic impacts of border-related measures taken by Member States in the fight against COVID-19. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

⁸⁶ Becker, Reiter & Welt, in: Mertens, Sivonen & Unfried (2025), p. 128.

⁸⁷ Mertens, Sivonen & Unfried (2025), p. 33.

How border crossers experience the border controls is also dependent of the mode of transport. In general, car passengers are impacted more regularly by traffic jams and delays. Impact on rail commuters is less broadly recorded, although they can cause delays (such as at the Öresund bridge) or missing connections. As a result, some citizens opt for alternatives, such as the bicycle, as reported in the case studies France–Germany–Switzerland, and Hungary–Austria in a 2025 study.⁸⁸

Internal border controls have generally not stopped leisure mobility, but they may have made cross-border travel less spontaneous, less convenient and more uneven across regions. The aforementioned 2025 study provided for some evidence from different cross-border regions.⁸⁹ The Hungary–Austria and Germany–Switzerland case studies show

that tourism flows and shopping tourism largely remained stable (with cycling tourism even increasing around Lake Fertő/Neusiedler See). Where disruptions occur, they are generally perceived as episodic inconveniences rather than structural barriers to mobility. However, in areas subject to more intensive or permanent controls, such as Perl on the Germany–Luxembourg border and parts of the France–Spain and Franco–German Rhine regions, controls have reduced the spontaneity of short leisure trips, caused missed connections and generated localised congestion that discourages cross-border visits.

The economic impact on border-area businesses varies considerably depending on location and reliance on cross-border customers. In many parts of the Rhine region and along sections of the German–Swiss border, businesses and chambers of commerce reported little or no significant economic effect. By contrast, retail businesses in border hotspots, including Kehl, commercial areas along the French–Spanish border and municipalities near Luxembourg, experienced noticeable declines in customer numbers. Some businesses reported turnover reductions of between 15% and 30%, largely attributable to lower levels of cross-border shopping. Along the Germany–Luxembourg border, stationary motorway controls reduced the inflow of Luxembourgish shoppers, lowered retail sales and created congestion that disrupted daily business operations.

Firms dependent on cross-border logistics were particularly affected. Businesses reported higher fuel costs, delivery delays, additional administrative requirements and reduced competitiveness. More than half of surveyed companies indicated that border controls constrained their operations, while nearly one-third reported financial losses. In the Austria–Hungary border region, changes in shopping patterns were driven primarily by price differentials rather than border controls themselves, although evidence suggests that longer-term shifts in the geography of shopping and service use may be emerging.⁹⁰

Retail sector in border areas

In the German city of Kehl, neighbouring the French city Strasbourg, the increased border controls on vehicles from France since May 2025 have been associated with a noticeable decline in French customers. These French customers represented half of the local economy, especially for shops, restaurants and service providers near the border and in shopping centres. The City Centre Kehl, a shopping centre attractive for French residents, has seen an estimated 30% drop in visitor numbers compared to the previous period.

Also a decrease of shopping from Luxembourg to Germany could be registered at places where stationary border controls are in place. Such as in the German city of Perl, often visited by Luxembourg residents.

Source: Kauber, Dannenhoffer & Schmid; Becker, Reiter & Welt, in: Mertens, Sivonen & Unfried (2025).

⁸⁸ Mertens, Sivonen & Unfried (2025).

⁸⁹ The following is based on Mertens, Sivonen & Unfried (2025).

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 146.

Impact on Cohesion and the Quality of Life

Economic impacts result from the reintroduction of internal border controls. Other impacts are linked to the political support for the EU.

Perception

This relates in the first place to the support of EU citizens for EU integration. The 'open border' and 'travelling without a passport' plays a vital role with respect to the understanding of the added-value of the EU in the Member States. This assumption is underlined by recent results from Eurobarometer on the importance of Schengen when it comes to the EU.

Perception of Schengen due to the reintroduction of border controls

- One in five Europeans said that their perception of Schengen changed due to the temporary reintroduction of border controls during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three quarters indicated that their perception has not changed.
- Highest scores were registered in Luxembourg, Austria and Belgium, the lowest in Greece, Spain, Finland and Denmark.
- In 11 EU Member States, the main reason that respondents gave for changing their perception of Schengen during the COVID-19 pandemic was that they realised the impact that free movement within the Schengen Area has on their daily life. Respondents in the Netherlands (48%), Slovakia (47%) and Germany (46%) were the most likely to give this reason.
- There was considerable variation between EU Member States in the proportion of respondents who say they have experienced temporary internal border controls when travelling to countries within the Schengen Area. This applied to around half of respondents in Austria (53%) as well as in Denmark, Croatia and Slovenia (all 48%).
- Just over a quarter of respondents (28%) said that the internal border controls negatively affect their life, as they often travel within the Schengen Area or live in a border region.
- Respondents in Poland (42%), Italy (41%) and Luxembourg (39%) were most likely to say that internal border controls negatively affect their life as they often travel within the Schengen Area or live in a border region.

Source: Eurobarometer 549, 2024.

The perception in particular is relevant with respect to citizens in border regions who are directly confronted with controls and extra waiting times. Certain effects of border controls are not evident from one day to another. However, Euroregions and cross-border institutes refer to the danger of 'normalisation'. Local politicians and administrators find it frustrating the European spirit.⁹¹ The negative aspects are especially to be observed in the cases of unilateral border controls and those with a long history of border controls.⁹² On the other hand, there may also be a certain understanding for the control of national borders as measure against migration or threats.⁹³ However, while there might be support for border controls, inhabitants generally do not want to be confronted with them.⁹⁴ Here, there is certainly a distinction between the

⁹¹ Schaefer, P. (2026). Borderlands — citizens turn to courts to save Schengen. The Parliament Magazine. Available at: <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/borderlands-citizens-turn-to-courts-to-save-schengen>.

⁹² As was also warned for in Herbig, L. J. (2026). The politics of borders: How intra-European border policies shape political attitudes in the European Union. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam]; and Lindemann, K. O. & Schramm, L. (2026). Public Attitudes Toward National Border Controls. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/yysje_v1.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

inhabitants of border regions confronted with border controls in person and those who are not. The latter are generally more supportive, as they are not affected by them to date.

Traffic jams in border areas

Across all regions compared in the 2025 study by ITEM of Maastricht University, traffic jams caused by internal border controls were clearly documented. Traffic at the Rhine bridges experienced 10–45-minute waiting times at peak hours; commuter trains between Strasbourg-Kehl and Strasbourg-Offenburg face systematic 5–15-minute delays; the Austria-Hungary motorway had queues lasting hours at times; and at the Luxembourg-Germany border, commuters report 15–25-minute increases in daily travel time. At the fixed border controls between Germany and the Netherlands, daily delays are also reported on average between 15 to 30 minutes. The case study reported many traffic jams since the intensification of the German border controls as of May 2025. Five border crossings between the Netherlands and Germany accounted for over 1.818 traffic jams in one year, attributable to border controls. This equals 4 million hours of traffic jams.⁹⁵

These delays not only disrupt work schedules but also spill over into social life, shopping patterns, access to health or education services, and local economies. Even more, it may create unsafe situations. Traffic accidents due to border controls are not widely registered nor mentioned. Nevertheless, several accidents were reported in the traffic jam between Germany and the Netherlands close to the border controls.⁹⁶ People sought to avoid these "hot spots" of traffic jams, leading many to take detours and use smaller alternative roads to cross the border. This, in turn, causes congestion and additional nuisance in villages at the border areas, leading to frustration and disturbances. For instance, the frustrations about the German border controls by Dutch municipalities were put forward at the periodic meetings between the local administration and mayors and the Minister of Asylum and Migration. The case of the Dutch village Beek, located at the border with Germany, is exceptional. As response to the nuisance of rerouting cars and lorries, the mayor decided to close its main roads from Beek to Germany. Irritation and frustration about the German border controls were also expressed by local and national politicians from Austria⁹⁷ and Poland,⁹⁸ for instance.

The cases also show the asymmetric effect of border controls: it is often the neighbouring region that registers the impact of a country's border controls.

⁹⁵ Mertens, Sivonen & Unfried (2025), p. 25.

⁹⁶ NOS (2026) Kettingbotsing met vijf voertuigen op A12 bij Babberich. Available at: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2604970-kettingbotsing-met-vijf-voertuigen-op-a12-bij-babberich>; NOS (2026) Drie gewonden bij ongeval met vier voertuigen op A12 bij Duitse grens. Available at: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2625043-drie-gewonden-bij-ongeval-met-vier-voertuigen-op-a12-bij-duitse-grens>.

⁹⁷ Heute (2026). "Ärgernis" – Ministerin für Ende der Grenzkontrollen. Available at: <https://www.heute.at/s/aergernis-ministerin-fuer-ende-der-grenzkontrollen-120253677>.

⁹⁸ Kozłowska, M. (2025). Grenzkontrollen zwischen Deutschland und Polen. Eine politische und gesellschaftliche Zwischenbilanz. *MIDEM-Policy Brief 2025-02*.

Outlook and recommendations

Discussions in the EU

The 2026 State of Schengen report of the European Commission acknowledged the negative consequences of border controls on border commuters and communities. The European Commission has commissioned an external study on the economic effects of internal border controls, which will be presented in autumn 2026.

In its State of Schengen report and in its recent Opinions to nine Schengen states, the European Commission stressed the importance of limiting negative consequences on cross-border commuters and mobility. For this reason it encourages structured dialogue of the Schengen Coordinator with the Schengen states in order to improve operation coordination and information exchange and limit waiting times at international borders. It especially encourages non-systematic police checks or mobile biometric identification and vehicle tracking technologies.

As mentioned, nine Member States (Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Slovenia and Sweden) were requested by the European Commission to gradually lift their internal border controls. In all cases, the European Commission raised concerns about formal requirements, detailed risk assessments and the use of alternative measures. At the same time, the European Commission acknowledged the concerns of the nine states in terms of deficiencies in external border controls, incoming migration and the pressure on the asylum system. Indeed, Germany, Poland and Austria have recently prolonged their internal border controls, referring to persistent migratory pressure. Following the events in Ceuta, Italy has temporarily introduced border controls with Spain, which introduced border controls with Italy in response. This shows the relationship between internal border controls and migration management, as well as between the open internal borders within Schengen and Europe's external borders.

As a result, the European Commission concludes in its Opinions, that a well-functioning Schengen area relies on the full and effective implementation of the migration and asylum acquis.⁹⁹ The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum entered into force on 12 June 2026, specifically addressing the situation at EU's external borders and asylum management within the EU. In short, the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum provides a common framework to manage migration, aiming for secure external borders, fast and efficient procedures and an effective system of solidarity and responsibility between Member States.¹⁰⁰ Thereby, the start of application of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum may be able to address national concerns about unauthorised movements of third country nationals and therefore give room for the relaxation of internal border controls in the Schengen Area. Nevertheless, it will require continuous efforts at EU and national level during the implementation of the Pact.

Following President von der Leyen's 2024–2029 Political Guidelines, in June 2026, a proposal was made to strengthen Europol,¹⁰¹ boosting its operational role and support more effective cross-border law enforcement cooperation. With Regulation 2022/1190, changes were already made to the Schengen Information Systems (SIS), by particularly fostering Europol's role in it. Here, Europol can also facilitate the introduction of information alerts within it.¹⁰² Altogether, it is aimed at achieving an improved framework for responding to current and future challenges and organised crime, cross-border investigations and

⁹⁹ European Commission (2026). Commission Opinion on the necessity and proportionality of the reintroduction of border control by Germany at its internal borders in accordance with Article 27a(3) of Regulation (EU) No 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code). C(2026) 3557 final, p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en.

¹⁰¹ Proposal for a Regulation on the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1726 and Regulation (EU) 2024/982, and repealing Regulation (EU) 2016/794, COM(2026) 580 final.

¹⁰² Tas, S. (2025). Europol and the Schengen Information System: A Dangerous 'Unsupervised' Extension of Powers. *European Papers – A Journal on Law and Integration* Vol. 10, No. 3.

information exchange. This in return should contribute to the political aim of keeping internal borders open whilst at the same time safeguarding security across borders.

Conclusions & Policy Recommendations

Internal border controls within the Schengen Area are costly in terms of economy, trade, cohesion and quality of life. This briefing summarised some impacts of internal border controls, but also emphasised the success of the Schengen Agreement for the European continent. The lifting of internal border controls has resulted in a series of positive developments: open borders result in more mobility, and these in turn result in more trade, more economic growth and (foreign) investments and more cross-border integration, cooperation and socio-economic development. Therefore, Schengen is a cornerstone of the EU's objective of social, economic and territorial cohesion. Furthermore, in the minds of many EU citizens, it is an embodiment of EU commitments to free movement within its area.

At the same time, there is an increasing use of internal border controls, visible since 2015. The majority of border controls are reasoned against the background of migration-related arguments. The reintroduction of border controls in the Schengen Area may have economic and social impacts, through delays, congestion, higher transport and administrative costs and reduced business efficiency. This affects, among others, transport operators, businesses, cross-border workers and regional economies. This briefing summarised various economic impacts that were estimated in literature. However, these estimations cannot directly be translated to the current situation in the Schengen Area, because the national practices of border controls are more diverse and have different implications.

The extent of the effects depends on the design, duration and intensity of the controls, the (a)symmetry and geographical sensitivity, as well as on the degree of economic integration in the affected regions. Border regions characterised by high levels of commuting, trade and institutional cooperation appear particularly sensitive to disruptions in cross-border mobility. This is particularly relevant for regions with vibrant cross-border labour markets.

While the aggregate economic impact at EU level remains difficult to quantify and there is no monitoring or structured collection of empirical data on EU or national level, available (anecdotal) evidence points to measurable costs associated with delays, administrative burden and reduced predictability for economic actors. The analysis also highlights broader territorial and societal dimensions. Recurrent controls may affect perceptions of cross-border connectivity and European integration, especially in regions where everyday life depends on the absence of internal borders.

A further finding concerns the relationship between internal border controls and migration management. The available evidence does not provide a clear basis for assessing the long-term effectiveness of internal border controls in addressing migration-related challenges. The literature reviewed by the authors did not show substantial direct effects of internal border controls on migration and asylum management, and the reduction thereof, so far.¹⁰³ Instead, many analyses underline the importance of broader EU instruments, including external border management, asylum procedures, information exchange and police cooperation. In this context, the implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum and the application of the revised Schengen Borders Code are likely to influence future discussions regarding the necessity and proportionality of internal border controls.

¹⁰³ See e.g. Algemene Rekenkamer, 'Focus op grenscontroles' 3.6.2025, accessed via: <https://www.rekenkamer.nl/documenten/2025/06/03/focus-op-grenscontroles>; RAND Europe (2016), Greater Copenhagen (2025), 10 ÅR AV TILLFÄLLIG INRE GRÄNSKONTROLL, available at: <https://www.oresunddirekt.se/media/jxpl3j0c/10-ar-med-tillfalliga-granskontroller-gc.pdf>; and Engler, M., Christinck, L., Cyrus, N. (2025). Expertise zu den Auswirkungen von Binnengrenzkontrollen, available at: <https://erik-marquardt.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/FINAL-Expertise-Grenzkontrollen.pdf>.

Based on the conclusions, the following policy recommendations can be formulated:

1. Preserve free movement as a core principle of the EU Single Market and Schengen Area.

Free movement is a cornerstone of European integration and underpins the functioning of both the EU Single Market and the Schengen Area. Although the temporary reintroduction of internal border controls does not formally suspend the freedoms guaranteed by the Treaties, it may affect the practical exercise of free movement and the objective of maintaining an area without internal frontiers. Preserving free movement contributes to economic growth, labour mobility, cross-border trade and territorial cohesion, while supporting the daily lives of millions of citizens, particularly in border regions where cross-border mobility is an integral part of economic and social activity.

2. Enhance the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and related external border measures, to address pressures at external borders. Strengthen external border management, return procedures and asylum governance. Expand police, judicial and information-sharing cooperation (e.g. Europol, SIS) to address security concerns without disrupting mobility.

The implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum may be an important factor in addressing the concerns that Schengen states have cited when reintroducing internal border controls. Indeed, the functioning of Schengen and the (perceived) need to install internal border controls depends to a certain extent on citizens and governments having confidence that external borders are effectively managed. Continued investment in integrated external border management, interoperable information systems, Frontex operations and risk-based border surveillance should therefore remain a priority. However, stronger external border management should not automatically translate into stronger internal border controls. Rather, effective external border governance should enable Member States to maintain open internal borders while safeguarding security.

3. Promote alternative measures such as intelligence-led policing, joint patrols, cross-border cooperation and risk-based checks, using internal border controls only as a measure of last resort.

The revised SBC rightly emphasises alternative measures, including police cooperation, intelligence-led checks, joint patrols, mobile surveillance technologies and information exchange. These options were also referred to by the European Commission in its recent Opinions. The experiences highlighted by the European Commission, including cross-border police cooperation models and Police Cooperation Centres, demonstrate that alternative approaches can enhance security while preserving free movement. In fact, in certain case studies of cross-border regions, it was shown that existing political and police cooperations were not (optimally) used during the reintroduction of internal border controls.¹⁰⁴

4. Apply strict proportionality assessments, particularly regarding impacts on border regions, transport, trade and commuters.

Given the significant effects, proportionality assessments should pay greater attention to economic and territorial impacts and the methods chosen. The revised SBC already puts more emphasis on the proportionality assessment, including the consideration of effects on cross-border regions and free movement. This requirement could be further operationalised through a clearer understanding of the design and significance of border controls, common indicators and reporting standards covering delays, economic costs, commuting patterns and effects on local communities.

¹⁰⁴ Mertens, Sivonen & Unfried (2025), p. 43, 92, 118.

5. Improve data collection on economic and social effects, not only in form of scenario analyses but also empirically.

One of the limitations shown in this briefing is the availability of reliable and empirical data. Estimations to the economic and social impacts of the reintroduction of border controls are often made on the basis of scenarios that do not reflect the reality in practice. Given that the impact depends on a wider range of factors, such as the design, duration and intensity of the controls, the (a)symmetry and geographical sensitivity, as well as on the degree of economic integration in the affected regions, the collection of empirical evidence and data could be promoted at EU and national level. The collection of empirical evidence could be fostered by common indicators and reporting methodologies at EU level, while drawing on data gathered by Schengen States, economic stakeholders (such as the transport sector), regional authorities and cross-border institutions.

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