



Council of the
European Union

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LIMITE

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NOTE

From: Services of the Commission
To: Delegations
Subject: Overall state of the Schengen area – Schengen Barometer +

DOCUMENT PARTIALLY ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC (14.12.2023)

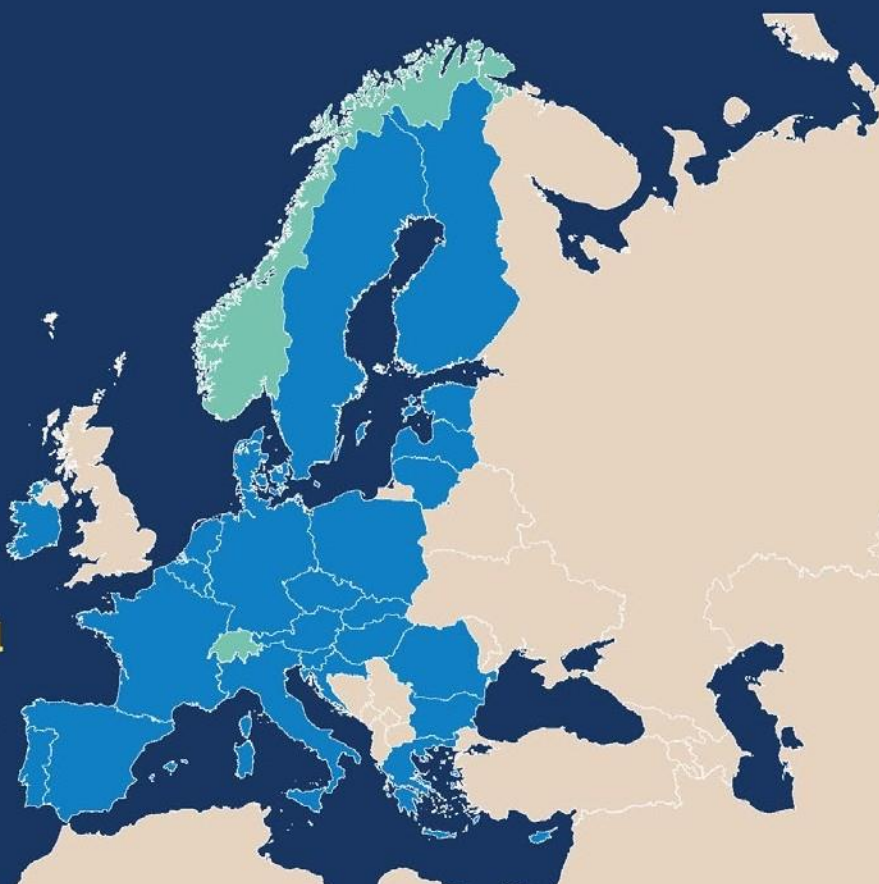
Delegations will find in the Annex the Schengen Barometer +, as provided by the services of the Commission, with a view to the meeting of the Working Party for Schengen Matters on 3 October 2023 and the meeting of the Schengen Council on 19 October 2023.

Sensitive - Contains confidential information



SCHENGEN BAROMETER

Schengen Council
19 October 2023



October 2023

SCHENGEN BAROMETER+

The Schengen Barometer+ is a key tool of the Schengen governance cycle, steering political coordination of Schengen matters and enhancing facts-based policy making in the Schengen Council. It provides a comprehensive situational picture of the drivers having an impact on the stability of the Schengen area by presenting an overview of the recent developments in and emerging threats for the Schengen area, using the most up-to-date data¹. As such, the Schengen Barometer+ allows to identify vulnerabilities, risks, and operational gaps, which require a timely and coordinated EU response. The identified focus areas allow the Schengen Council to enhance policy coordination and endorse actions in the form of operational cooperation.

The October Schengen Barometer+ in short

Key takeaways

- The Schengen area continues to be the most visited destination in the world, but international travel has not yet reached pre-pandemic levels. More than 99% of third-country nationals enter the Schengen area legally.
- The Schengen area attracts extensive legal migration, both for short-term travel and for longer stays. In 2022, the EU issued more first residence permits than ever before.
- Enhanced cooperation between Member States has been observed at some internal border areas to limit the impact of the reintroduced controls.
- Irregular migration continues to be an issue of concern. In the Central Mediterranean route irregular crossings almost doubled (+96%) with respect to last year. Compared to 2022, the overall pressure on most other routes is stable or lower. Nevertheless, there are recent increasing trends of irregular arrivals by sea on the Eastern Mediterranean and the Atlantic route.
- EU law enforcement needs further tools and make further efforts to have a deterring impact on migrant smuggling.
- Drug traffickers are redirecting cocaine imports to smaller ports in the light of (perceived) less rigorous controls, in parallel to the traditional ports of arrival.

Focus areas for an enhanced EU response

- Enhanced cooperation with third countries, including to prevent departures.
- Update of the legal framework and strengthen cooperation to fight migrant smuggling.
- Increased joint efforts on return for priority third countries.
- Action Plan on anti-drug trafficking and a European Ports Alliance.

¹ Data from Frontex, EUAA, Europol, Eurojust and eu-LISA is provisional and may differ from validated data published by Eurostat or national authorities. The figures in this document only give an estimation of the current situation in as near to real time as possible. Data from Europol and Eurojust are only a partial picture since they can only reply on the cases referred to them for support as a basis for their statistics and analysis.

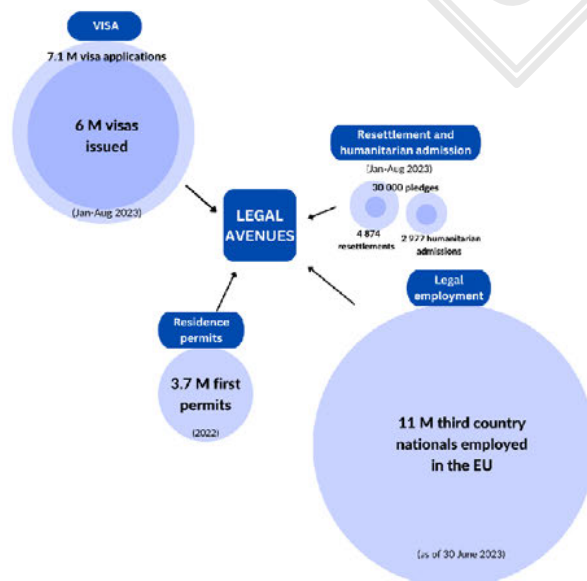
1. SCHENGEN: THE LARGEST AREA OF FREE MOVEMENT WITHOUT INTERNAL BORDER CONTROLS

Key messages

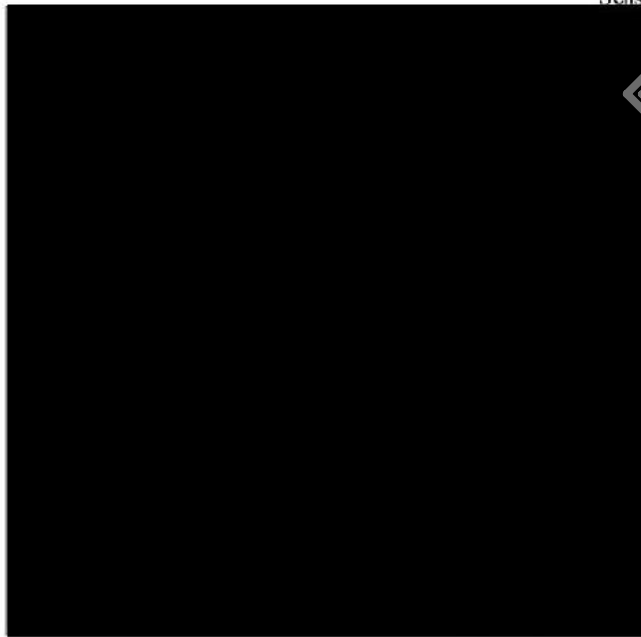
- The Schengen area continues to be the **most visited destination**, with the number of Schengen visa applications lodged and visas issued continuously rising, though not yet at pre-pandemic levels.
- In 2022, EU Member States issued **more first residence permits** than ever before.
- There are six Member States with long-lasting border controls concerning some or all of their internal borders.

1.1. Avenues for legal migration

- **Visas:** more than 7 million Schengen visas applications were lodged (January-August 2023), over 40% more than in the same period in 2022. 5.994 million visas were issued, a significant increase from the 4.07 million issued visas in January-August 2022. *[eu-LISA]*
- **2023 Resettlement and humanitarian admission scheme:** of the 30 000 pledges made for 2023, 31% of the resettlements pledges and 22% of the humanitarian admission pledges have been realised in August 2023. Main countries of departure: Türkiye, Lebanon and Iran. *[HOME]*
- **First residence permits:** in 2022, more than 3.7 million first residence permits were issued (26% more than in 2021).² Germany issued most permits (15%), followed by Spain (12%), France and Italy (each 9%). *[EUROSTAT]*
- **Legal employment:** over 11 million third-country nationals were employed in the EU (30 June 2023), representing over 5% of the total EU workforce. Most of those were employed in Germany (3.5 million), followed by Spain, Italy and France. The employment rate for third-country nationals remained stable at 62% in the first quarter of 2023. *[EUROSTAT]*



² Data is missing from Croatia and Iceland. Data from Spain and France is provisional. Italy reported a break in the time series.



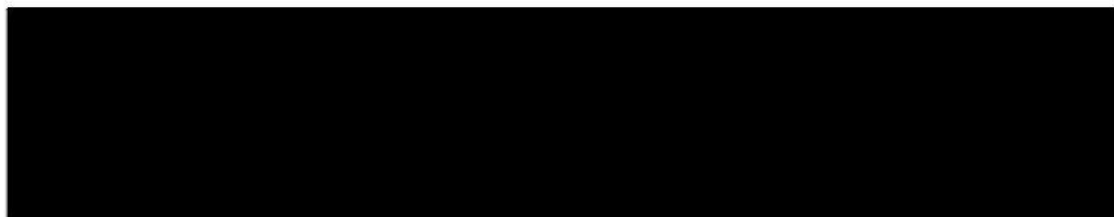
Schengen is the most visited destination

- 255 million regular border crossings (entry + exit)³ in the first semester of 2023

[Frontex]

1.2. Limitations to free movement within the Schengen area: situation at the internal borders

Notifications of the temporary reintroduction of border control		
Member State	Duration	Reasons/scope
France	01/05/2023 – 31/10/2023	New terrorist threats, increasing risk of terrorist organisations present on national territory targeting the Rugby World Cup taking place in September and October 2023, increase in irregular entry flows at the external borders (from the Central Mediterranean and the Western Balkans); internal borders with Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain.
Austria	12/05/2023 – 11/11/2023	Pressure on the asylum reception system, high migratory pressure at the EU's external border to Türkiye and the Western Balkans, threat of arms trafficking and criminal networks due to the war in Ukraine, human smuggling. Land borders with Hungary and Slovenia.
Denmark	12/05/2023 – 11/11/2023	Islamist terrorist threat, organised crime, smuggling, Russian invasion of Ukraine, irregular migration along the Central Mediterranean route. Land border with Germany and ports with ferry connections to Germany



		(during 3/08/2023-22/08/2023, at all internal borders)
Germany	12/05/2023 – 11/11/2023	Increase in irregular migration from Türkiye through the Western Balkans, strain on the asylum reception system, human smuggling. Land border with Austria.
Norway	12/05/2023 – 11/11/2023	Threat to critical on-shore and off-shore infrastructures. Russian intelligence threat in Norway. Ports with ferry connections to the Schengen area.
Sweden	12/05/2023 – 11/11/2023	Islamist terrorist threat. All internal borders (exact borders to be determined).
Spain	28/09/2023 – 07/10/2023	Summit of the European Political Community and Informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government in Granada (5-6 October 2023). Land borders with France and Portugal, internal air borders of Alicante, Almeria, Barcelona, Granada, Madrid, Málaga, Murcia, Sevilla and Valencia; internal maritime borders of Barcelona and Málaga.

As set out in the 2023 State of Schengen Report⁵, the Commission launched a **formal consultation process under Article 27 of the Schengen Borders Code**⁶ with Member States with long-lasting internal border controls and with the Member States directly affected by those controls. In this context:

- Between May and July 2023, the Schengen Coordinator organised a number of meetings: with Slovenia and Austria (17 May), France and Spain (12 June), Denmark, Sweden and Norway (26 June) and Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, Switzerland and Hungary (12 July). He also attended a meeting organised by Slovenia and Austria (20 June), while Germany was approached at more technical level.
- Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland were also given the chance to present their views in writing.
- Moreover, the Schengen Coordinator held meetings with Hungary and Slovakia (14 September), Bulgaria and Greece (19 September) and Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Slovakia (25 September) to better coordinate efforts related to secondary movements affecting these Member States, in order to prevent new reintroductions.
- Meeting with partners from the Western Balkans are also envisaged, to explore ways to improve cooperation, notably on readmission, anti-smuggling cooperation and support in border management capacity.

As became clear during the formal consultation process, there is a genuine progress in information-sharing and use of measures that limit the impact of the reintroduced controls. Bilateral contacts between Member States have been visibly strengthened, in particular between Slovenia and Austria.

⁵ COM/2023/274.

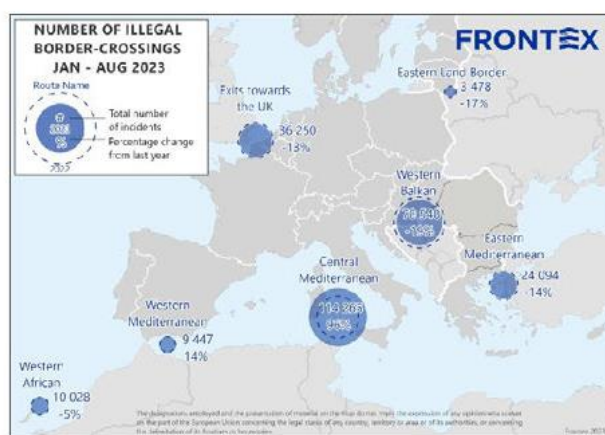
⁶ Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2016 on a Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code).

- The meetings helped to understand the measures taken by the Member States in the context of the reintroduced internal border controls. In principle, the controls are carried out in a non-systematic manner, in the vicinity of the internal borders. Systematic controls at fixed locations at the border are in the minority. Most of the controls are targeted by using technologies and other tools which can also be used in police measures, such as automated plate recognitions systems and passenger information in maritime traffic. The reintroduced controls often resemble police checks, except that refusals of entry are issued to irregular migrants attempting to cross the internal border.
- The Commission is currently analysing the consequences of the recent judgment of the Court of Justice in case C-143/22. To recall, the Court ruled that the legal possibility to refuse entry during the reintroduced internal border controls does not dispense the Member States from the obligations resulting from the Return Directive.
- The consultation process also revealed that the checks concern all means of transport (vehicles, trains, ferries, planes). Their impacts manifest the most in cross-border regions, for cross-border workers. This concerns in particular the border sections which have restrictions for the use of certain roads for cross-border transit traffic or the border sections where local roads are closed in order to direct the traffic to authorised border crossing points.
- Cross-border police cooperation functions well, in some cases providing intelligence determining the scope and intensity of the reintroduced border controls. The joint patrols are appreciated by all the Member States concerned. However, in some instances, Member States have different views as to the mandate of such patrols, not always agreeing that the checks should be targeted on the legality of stay of persons.
- The amendment of the Schengen Borders Code, which includes a new transfer procedure allowing for sending back irregular migrants apprehended in the context of cross-border police cooperation activities, as well as clarifications concerning the exercise of police powers in internal border areas, will provide further tools to the Member States, once adopted by the co-legislators.

2. SITUATION AT THE SCHENGEN EXTERNAL BORDERS: MIGRATORY AND SECURITY IMPACT

Key messages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased migratory pressure at the EU external borders due to increased arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route. The underlying push factors at play combined with the persisting conducive conditions will continue to make the Central Mediterranean the most dynamic migratory route at the EU external borders. To prevent irregular departures and support third countries, Frontex is expanding its engagement with third countries, including via the conclusion of working arrangements and status agreements. Asylum applications in the EU+ in 2023 are likely to surpass the 2022 levels. Asylum applications from Syrians and especially Turks are rising and applications by Latin Americans remained high (an increase of more than 50% between January-July 2023 compared to the same period in 2022 with a significant drop in July). The number of first instance decisions taken cannot keep up with the rising number of asylum applications, leading to an increased caseload. The situation on the other migratory routes has remained stable as compared to 2022. However, in August and September, arrivals are rising on the Eastern Mediterranean route, the Atlantic route and the Western Balkan route. Despite challenges with specific countries, acceptance rate of Dublin requests is overall on a continued rise, now at 71%. The effective return of third-country nationals without legal right to stay remains a challenge for the majority of Member States. Frontex is increasing its efforts to support return activities.

2.1. Irregular immigration to the EU



Impact of irregular arrivals in secondary movements [HOME based on EURODAC]:

Main destination countries of secondary movements in January-August 2023:

- Germany
- France
- Belgium

Main countries of origin:

- Croatia
- Greece
- Italy

Other developments:

- Hits from and especially to Austria have decreased significantly in the last months as compared to the same period in 2022.

Key figures:

- Approximately **232 350** irregular border crossings in January-August 2023 (+18% compared to 2022), the **highest total** since 2016.
- The **Central Mediterranean** remains the main migratory route and accounts for half of the **detections at EU borders**. Irregular crossings on this route almost doubled (+96%), while arrivals on all other routes remained stable.
- In August and September, arrivals are rising on the **Eastern Mediterranean route**. [REDACTED]
- Overall, in 2023 so far, according to data collected by Frontex, pressure on the route is 2% higher than the same period last year.
- Increased arrivals are also observed in the **Atlantic route**. [REDACTED]
- Around **2 700** standing corps officers and other Frontex staff are deployed in Member States and neighbouring countries to protect the EU's external borders.
- [REDACTED]
- In January to July 2023, Member States reported around **165 000** detections of people on illegal stay on the move, a notable increase compared to 2022. [REDACTED]

[Frontex]

	Cat. 1 – Cat. 1 ⁷	Cat. 1 – Cat. 2 ⁸	Cat. 3 – Cat. 1 ⁹	All ¹⁰
Eurodac hits in January – August 2023	181 767	63 506	111 504	356 777
Comparison to January – August 2022	+17%	+88%	+34%	+31%

⁷ This hit indicates that a third-country national has applied for asylum in more than one country.

⁸ This hit indicates that a third-country national applying for asylum in one country has previously been registered in another country after crossing the border irregularly.

⁹ This hit indicates that a third-country national found in illegal stay in one Member State has previously applied for asylum in another Member State.

¹⁰ These statistics cover all EU Member States and the Schengen Associated Countries.

Main developments per route:¹¹

- **Central Mediterranean:** the pressure remains intense. The top nationalities on this route are Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt and Guinea.
[REDACTED]
- **Eastern Mediterranean route:** in August 2023, total lower number of irregular border crossings as compared to 2022.
[REDACTED]
- **Western Balkans route:** total lower number of irregular border crossings in 2023 than in 2022, although in August there was a 113% increase as compared to July. The top nationalities on this route are Syrians, Afghans and Turks.
[REDACTED]
- On the Western Mediterranean and on the Atlantic routes, arrivals have slightly increased as of September 2023 compared to 2022, though the pressure in absolute numbers remains relatively low. The increased arrivals this year on the Atlantic route can be largely ascribed to September. [Frontex]
- In January-August 2023, a decrease was noted at the Eastern Land Borders compared to 2022. Despite numbers remaining far below those registered at the peak of the crisis in 2021, migratory pressure (number of attempts to cross the border) in 2023 so far saw a 50% increase compared to the same period of last year.
[REDACTED]

EU cooperation with third countries to prevent irregular migration and security threats

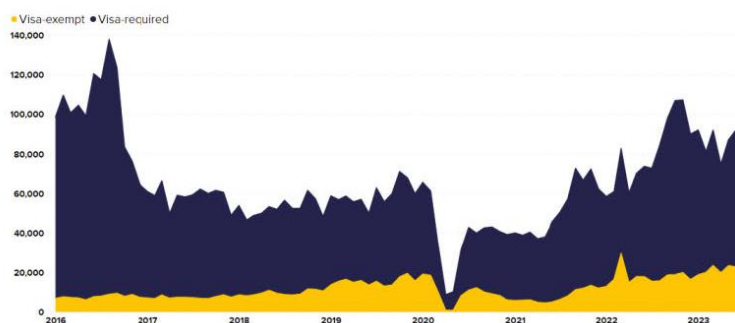
- [REDACTED]

¹¹ Unless stated otherwise, the developments reflect the situation at the end of August 2023.

- Frontex worked with **all Western Balkan partners** to conclude new working arrangements under its 2019 mandate. Frontex received approval to renew the arrangement with Georgia. The revised agreement with Albania will be concluded still this year. The EU concluded new status agreements with Moldova, North Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro in 2022 and 2023, and the Commission is currently negotiating a status agreement with Serbia and has a mandate to negotiate also with Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Frontex has taken steps to initiate new working arrangements with **Senegal and Mauritania** and Frontex received approval to conclude new arrangements with **Lebanon and Jordan**. A renewed working arrangement with Nigeria and new arrangements with Ukraine, Morocco, the United States and Pakistan are being considered. As concerns status agreements with the EU, there currently seems to be limited interest among African countries.

Asylum

- As of 26 September 2023, there are 4 212 715 estimated active temporary protection permits in the EU+.
- In the first seven months of 2023, around 600 000 asylum applications were lodged in the EU+¹², an increase of 27% compared to the same period in 2022 and at peak level for that period since 2016. As compared to the second half of 2022, figures remain stable. [EUAA]



- Germany continued to receive the highest number of asylum applications, around 30% of the EU+ total, while France and Spain received each around 15% of total asylum applications. In mid-September, Cyprus, Austria and Estonia received most applications per capita. [EUAA]
- Most asylum applications in January to July 2023 were lodged by **Syrians** (around 80 000) and **Afghans** (around 65 000), followed by **Venezuelans, Turks and Colombians** (around 40 000 each). Applications by Syrians and especially Turks are on a continued rise. While the EU+ average recognition rate for Syrians in 2023 remains at a high level of 94%, Turks only receive a positive decision in 28% of cases, at the lowest level since 2016.

¹² The EU+ covers all EU Member States and Norway and Switzerland.

- In 2023, during the first seven months of the year Latin American nationals have submitted over 111 000 applications, an increase of more than 50% compared to the same period in 2022. The highest number of applications was lodged in May (around 19 000) and since then monthly applications have declined slightly but remained high from a historical perspective. After record-high numbers in recent months, in July applications dropped significantly for several Latin American countries (Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Cuba, Ecuador and Argentina). Majority of the applications were lodged in Spain where recognition rate hovered around 4% during the first seven months of 2023. Nonetheless, many were granted a form of national protection. [EUAA]
- [REDACTED]
- The EU asylum caseload at first instance has reached its peak since 2017, with 700 000 cases pending, almost two thirds of those pending in Germany, Spain and Italy as of July 2023. [EUAA]
- [REDACTED]

Return of third-country nationals with no right to stay

- In the first half of the year, approximately 212 000 return decisions¹⁴ were issued in the EU¹⁵ to 140 000 people¹⁶. The nationalities which received most return decisions are Moroccans, Algerians and Tunisians. In particular:
 - Morocco (21 793 return decisions): eight Member States (AT, BE, BG, FR, IT, LU, SI, ES) issued the majority of the return decisions (94%). During the same period, 1 704 returns of Moroccan nationals were carried out.
 - Algeria (18 656 return decisions): five Member States (BE, FR, LU, ES, CH) issued the majority of the return decisions (91%). During the same period, 1 644 returns of Algerian nationals were carried out.
 - Tunisia (10 229 return decisions): the majority (84%) of the return decisions were issued by two Member States (FR, IT). During the same period, 1 616 returns of Tunisian nationals were carried out.
- Between April and June 2023, a slight decrease (-16%) in the number of return decisions was experienced as compared to the first three months of the year. An increase was nevertheless observed for Syria, Iraq and Senegal.

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- Member States carried out approximately **46 000 returns** between January-June 2023

The main nationalities of effective returns were Georgia and Albania. The number of effective returns per nationality remained overall stable throughout the year except for India¹⁷. [Frontex]

- **Frontex** supported with the return of over 20 000 third-country nationals in the first seven months of the year. Over half of those were voluntary returns. The most frequent destinations were Georgia, Albania, Türkiye and Tunisia. In addition, Frontex has 74 FRESO (Frontex Return Escort and Specialist Officer) and 30 return specialists deployed in 13 Member States. [Frontex]

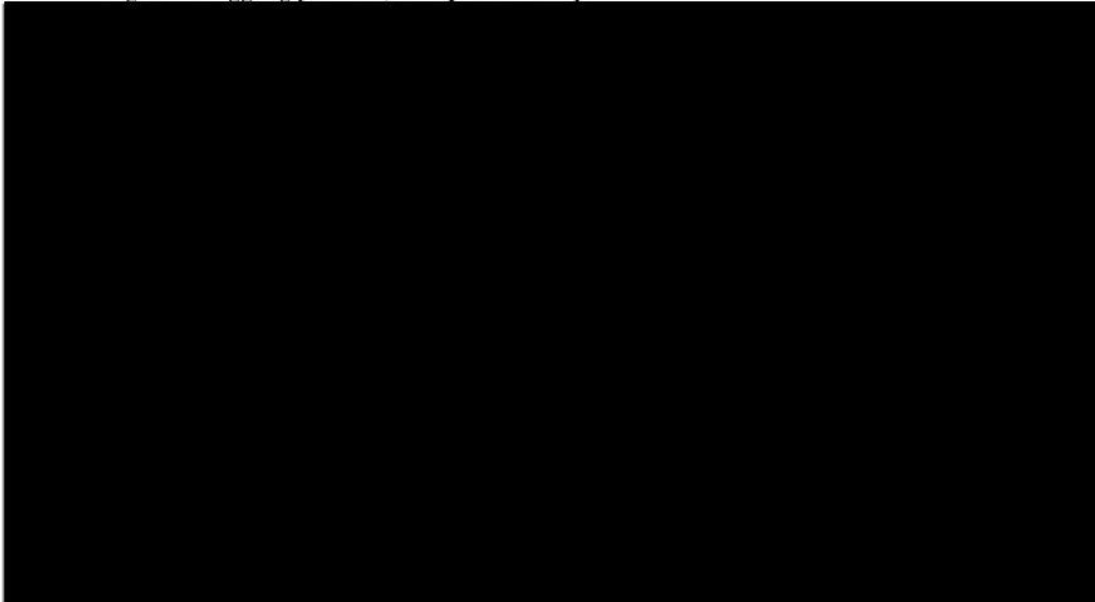


¹⁷ In the first quarter of 2023, 1 833 returns of Indians were carried out, whereas in the second quarter the effective returns decreased to 355. It should be noted that the number of return decisions issued to Indians also decreased in the second quarter of 2023 (5 722) as compared to the first quarter of 2023 (2 144).

2.2. Security dimension (migrant smuggling, drugs trafficking)

Key messages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Migrant smuggling criminal networks are well informed about loopholes in legislation related to entry and stay in the European Union and asylum legislation, consistently taking advantage of these in adaptable ways. [Europol]• [REDACTED]• Smuggling activities from Tunisia have increased over summer. Sub-Saharan Africans usually arrive in Tunisia legally, as they are visa-exempt, and stay in Tunisia before departing to Europe, months or years later.• Criminal networks are active in all migratory routes [REDACTED] smuggling activities by sea in the Eastern Mediterranean route continues to be at high level.• These smuggling operations pose a high risk to the life of the migrants smuggled due to the density of migrants per vessel and the low quality of the makeshift metal vessels.• Europol and Frontex have stepped up their efforts in addressing migrant smuggling, especially [REDACTED] and will continue to do so in coming weeks and months.• Member States are stepping up their operational police cooperation (e.g. joint patrols, joint operations) in accordance with the Council Recommendation, and are taking the necessary steps (e.g. roll out of Europol's Secure Information Exchange Network Application) to enhance cross-border information exchange in implementation of the Information Exchange Directive.
Outlook
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• [REDACTED] [Europol, Frontex]• In light of the recent natural disasters in Libya, an increased demand for smuggling services from Libya on the medium term could be expected. [Europol]

Migrant smuggling [Frontex, Europol GI-TOC]



- In June and July, Member States detected almost 2 000 facilitators of irregular border crossings. Around 2 500 people were detected using fraudulent documents. [Frontex]

• [REDACTED]

- Smuggling networks are also active on European soil, facilitating secondary movements within the Schengen area. Smugglers forge documents and frequently abuse legal frameworks (work permits) and business structures to arrange secondary movements. [Europol]

- Operational support provided to Italy:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

Drug trafficking

Key messages

- Criminal networks involved in drug trafficking are versatile in modi operandi and have recently redirected cocaine imports to smaller ports in the light of (perceived) less rigorous controls, in parallel to the traditional ports of arrival.
- Criminal are becoming increasingly violent, especially at the traditional ports of arrival, as hostility between criminal networks increases.

- Recent cocaine seizures hint at an increased use of smaller ~~secondary ports to traffic drugs into~~ the EU, as controls may be perceived to be less rigorous. [REDACTED]

- Violence linked to drug trafficking has increased in recent months, becoming especially visible in ports of arrival in the EU, as an outing of rivalry between criminal networks.
- No significant impact of Russia's invasion in Ukraine on drug trafficking routes has been reported, though criminal networks have been inventive to adapt to new realities.
- The heroin supply from Afghanistan has continued after the Taliban came to power, though the impact of the recent drop in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is still unclear. Land trafficking of heroin continues primarily via the Western Balkans, though the South Caucasian route is also used. Maritime heroin seizures occur at various ports around the EU.
- In the first half of 2023, Europol supported 30 Action days related to drug trafficking, resulting in 209 arrests and over 14 tons of seized drugs. As compared to the first semester of 2022, Europol is supporting Member States more in the fight against drug trafficking, with operational support up by 50% and operational reports delivered up by 25%.

3. SCHENGEN EVALUATIONS

Schengen evaluations 2023				
Periodic evaluations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finland (May-June 2023) Lithuania (June-July 2023) Latvia (Sept-Oct 2023) Estonia (Nov-Dec 2023) Spain (visa) Portugal (visa) Croatia -visa (Dec 2023) 	First-time evaluations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cyprus - Schengen Information System (Sept 2023) Ireland (judicial cooperation, drugs cooperation and Art. 26 Schengen Convention) 	Verification visits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> France -- management of the external borders (Nov 2023) 	Revisits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belgium (borders) Spain (borders) Iceland (police cooperation) Greece - return (Nov 2023) Cyprus - return (Nov 2023) The Netherlands (visa) 	Thematic evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> drug trafficking

- In 2023, the third cycle of Schengen evaluations (2023-2029) was launched with the **periodic evaluations of Finland and Lithuania**:
 - The draft Finnish and Lithuanian evaluation reports will shortly be presented to all Member States in the Schengen Committee.
 - Under the revised legal framework,¹⁸ the Commission will adopt a single comprehensive, integrated and strategic evaluation report per evaluated Member State.
- The **periodic evaluations** of Spain and Portugal in the field of the common visa policy took place in 2023. **Revisits** to Belgium (borders), Spain (borders), Iceland (police cooperation) and the Netherlands (common visa policy) took place already, while a revisit to Greece and Cyprus (return) is scheduled for November. A **verification visit** to France (borders) will take place in November too. The first-time evaluation of Cyprus after its connection to the Schengen Information System in July is taking place in October.
- The periodic evaluations of Latvia and Estonia are scheduled to take place in the last quarter of 2023.
- The **thematic evaluation** of 2023 on drugs trafficking is ongoing with on-site visits to the ports of Antwerp, Rotterdam, Marseille and Hamburg scheduled in October.
- Currently there are more than 100 action plans related to Schengen evaluations that took place between 2015 and 2022 pending implementation. Since 2015, over 80 action plans have been closed, including the most recent closures in the 2023 State of Schengen report.

¹⁸ Council Regulation (EU) 2022/922 of 9 June 2022 on the establishment and operation of an evaluation and monitoring mechanism to verify the application of the Schengen acquis, and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1053/2013, OJ L15 June 2022, L160/1.