



Council of the  
European Union

180541/EU XXVII. GP  
Eingelangt am 16/04/24

Brussels, 16 April 2024  
(OR. en)

9012/24  
ADD 1

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#### COVER NOTE

From:	Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director
date of receipt:	16 April 2024
To:	Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union
No. Cion doc.:	COM(2024) 173 final
Subject:	ANNEX to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions State of Schengen Report 2024 - <b>Annex 1</b> - The Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism: main developments and next steps

Delegations will find attached document COM(2024) 173 final.

Encl.: COM(2024) 173 final



EUROPEAN  
COMMISSION

Brussels, 16.4.2024  
COM(2024) 173 final

ANNEX 1

## **ANNEX**

*to the*

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

**State of Schengen Report 2024**

## The Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism: main developments and next steps

*In 2023, with the entry into operation of the new Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism (SEMM) Regulation<sup>2</sup>, a new generation of Schengen evaluations kicked off. The third generation introduces a more **strategic and integrated Schengen evaluation concept** with a **single evaluation team** composed of experts in different policy areas. The shift to a **country-centred evaluation** provides a more comprehensive picture of a Member State's overall performance in implementing the Schengen acquis and contribution to the functioning of the Schengen area without controls at its internal borders (“Schengen area”).*

*In line with the new concept, the Commission updated key tools underpinning the well-functioning of the Schengen evaluations. First, the new **Schengen Evaluation Guide** was adopted to reflect the principles of the new Regulation and to promote consistency throughout the process. The guide provides for increased transparency, in line with the requirements of the new Regulation<sup>3</sup>. Second, the standard **Schengen evaluations questionnaire**<sup>4</sup> was revised to cover new legal and operational developments related to the implementation of the Schengen rules.*

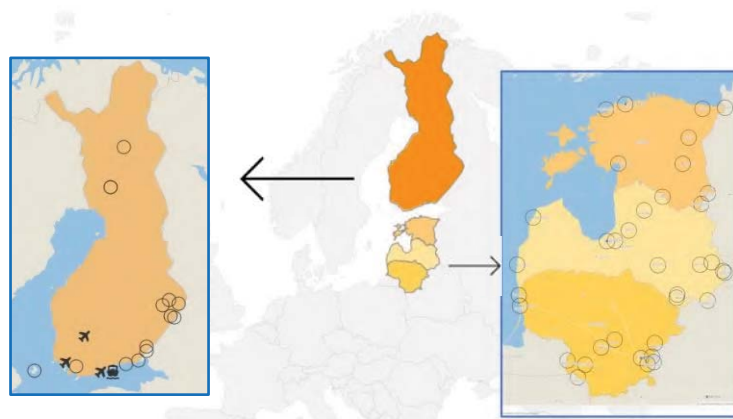
In 2023<sup>5</sup>, the Commission launched the third generation of Schengen evaluations with the periodic evaluations of Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The new approach on Schengen evaluations, rooted in the renewed Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism (SEMM)

<sup>5</sup> In addition, Spain (visa policy) and Portugal (visa policy and data protection) were evaluated. These periodic evaluations followed the second programming cycle of Schengen evaluations as they were initially planned to be carried out in 2020 and 2021 but were postponed due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Regulation, allowed for the first integrated and strategic assessment on how the evaluated Member States are applying the Schengen *acquis* overall.

#### Visited sites

- ✓ **Central authorities:** National Coordination Centres, Police Headquarters, relevant Ministries and the SIRENE bureaus as well as the data protection authorities.
- ✓ **Land borders with Russia and Belarus:** border crossing points of Vaalimaa and Nuijamaa, Medininkai, Silene, Paternieki, Narva and Luhamaa.
- ✓ **Airports:** Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, Vilnius, Kaunas, Palanga, Tallinn, and Riga.
- ✓ **Ports:** Tallinn, Paldiski, Liepaja, Ventspils, Riga, Neringa, Klaipeda, Uostas.
- ✓ **Detention and reception centres:** Metsälä, Joutseno, Tallinn, Soodevahe, Foreigner Registration Centre Pabradė, Rukla Refugee Reception Center, Detained Foreigners' Accommodation centre (DFAC) Mucenieki, Daugavpils.



During the evaluations, particular **focus** was paid to:

- Member States' **capabilities**, processes and tools to address migration and security risks at their external borders, while ensuring an adequate level of protection of fundamental rights, in particular in light of the instrumentalisation of migrants by Russia and Belarus.
- **Strategic governance** at national level as a pre-condition for an effective and integrated implementation of the Schengen *acquis*. This included national strategies, human resources and training (including on fundamental rights), risk analysis, contingency planning and implementation of EU tools.
- Effectiveness of **regional initiatives** to combat **cross-border crime** within the Schengen area.
- Implementation of the **large-scale IT systems** supporting the application of the Schengen *acquis* including the respect of the data protection requirements, notably the new functionalities of the Schengen Information System, and the level of preparedness for the entry into operation of the Entry-Exit System.

This strategic approach allowed the evaluation teams to establish a holistic understanding on the key issues affecting the good governance and management of the Schengen area in each of the evaluated Member States. The **Schengen Country Reports**, replacing the previous six

thematic reports per Member State, identified common issues across these four Member States, reflecting the fact that they are facing similar challenges:

At the **external borders**:

- The overall performance of **border control** and resilience during crisis situations in Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia is currently adequate. However, the number of staff is at the minimum level to ensure the effective implementation of border management and return activities, and any possible change in the current situation would put under pressure the reaction capacities for border and return tasks.
- The evaluated Member States encountered challenges to guarantee the respect of **fundamental rights**, especially the principle of *non-refoulement*, when applying border-policing measures.
- The quality of **land border surveillance** carried out is at an overall adequate level although there are still gaps related to lacking detection equipment and human resources.
- The quality of **border checks** is inconsistent.

Measures **within the Schengen area** to combat irregular migration and cross-border crime:

- While Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have made important changes at strategic, legal and operational level to address the increased arrivals of irregular migrants, challenges still remain in the effective enforcement of **return decisions**. In particular, the lack of monitoring of returns in case of non-compliance with the voluntary departure period, and the issuance of multiple return decisions to the same person negatively impacts the possibilities to carry out returns. The increased use of the mutual recognition of return decisions by the Latvian authorities was considered a best practice and can support in addressing some of the identified issues
- The **national internal security strategies** in the four evaluated Member States are not consistently connected with the EU priorities and strategies for internal security<sup>6</sup>, which prevents an effective allocation of national resources, hindering the implementation of common European security instruments and functions.

As regards the **exchange of information** through the Schengen IT-systems and related data protection requirements:

- Not all the **functionalities of the renewed SIS** have been implemented, especially in Latvia where a verification visit will be organised. Furthermore, in the four evaluated Member States searches in the **SIS-AFIS** (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) are not rolled out to all end-users.
- There is an overall lack of resources and insufficient capacity building for the **SIRENE Bureaus**, leading to difficulties in efficiently managing timely information exchange.

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<sup>6</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Security Strategy, COM(2020) 605 final.

- The authorities managing and using the Schengen Information System and the Visa Information System do not always respect the data protection requirements due to unclear assignments of responsibilities, inadequate access management and data security, incorrect retention periods of logs, lack of monitoring and insufficient staff training. In addition, the data protection authorities do not always supervise the lawfulness of processing of personal data in a timely and comprehensive manner due to a lack of financial and human resources.
- In some Member States, data subjects face issues in exercising their rights (e.g. rights of access to data) due to disproportionate requirements set for requests they wish to submit.

As regards the **external dimension** of Schengen:

- While the **examination of the visa** applications by the evaluated authorities in the visited consulates was overall solid, and decisions were well-founded, it is still necessary to streamline the cooperation with the external service providers in the four evaluated Member States as well as its monitoring.
- The ongoing issue of long waiting times for **Schengen visa appointments** persists, though to a lesser extent than in 2022.

Besides the 2023 periodic evaluations, , Cyprus underwent its **first-time Schengen evaluation** assessing their use of the Schengen Information System in October 2023 following its connection to the SIS in July 2023. The evaluation confirmed that this core IT-system is well integrated into the working procedures of the different competent authorities. Best practices were also identified related to the training of the competent authorities. Improvements should be made to provide sufficient human resources for the **SIRENE** Bureau and to make effective use of the SIS data.

Furthermore, in September 2023, the Commission also organised two **unannounced visits** to **Italy** and **France** in light of the risk analyses and vulnerability assessments carried out by Frontex.

France's vulnerabilities in the conduct of border control, in particular border checks was considered a serious deficiency. The French authorities are taking immediate measures to address the shortcomings. The Schengen Coordinator is closely following-up with the French authorities and the Commission services actively monitor the situation.

### ***2023 thematic Schengen evaluation: combatting drug trafficking into the EU***

Thematic Schengen evaluations provide a unique opportunity to assess the state of implementation of the Schengen *acquis* at a given time across Member States and across policy areas. The transversal nature of these evaluations gives an unparalleled view on how the Schengen area is doing in relation to particular issues of focus, presenting a rich basis to define and implement policy choices and for peer-to-peer learning between Member States.



In 2023, all Member States fully applying the Schengen *acquis*<sup>7</sup> were evaluated in the thematic Schengen evaluation to identify best practices in their national capabilities to **fight against drug trafficking**, with a particular focus on trafficking into ports. All Member States were evaluated through a targeted questionnaire and on-site visits took place in the ports of Rotterdam, Antwerp, Marseille, and Hamburg.

The thematic evaluation found that the EU and Member States only have a partial threat picture on drug trafficking since only a small percentage of the drugs trafficked into the Schengen area is detected and seized. To address this vulnerability, best practices related to risk analysis, interagency cooperation, including with private stakeholders, and information exchange were identified.

One of the common challenges that affect all major ports is the need for **coordination** among all relevant actors involved in the operations of the ports. Coordination and cooperation among law enforcement, police, border guards, and customs services as well as private partners is fundamental to combat drug trafficking effectively at the national, European, and international levels. Several best practices were observed in this area, including on effective public-private partnerships and on measures to combat corruption along the drug supply chain.

Furthermore, the evaluation revealed that it is necessary to strengthen barriers to **intra-Schengen drug flows** through efficient cross-border operational cooperation. Some Member States have adopted bilateral or multilateral agreements with special provisions facilitating the cooperation for drug trafficking. Other best practices in this area relate to participation in EMPACT (the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats) and the related Europol Operational Task Forces.

The findings of the thematic evaluation also underline the need for a close and extensive **international cooperation** with third countries. Several Member States have specific operational and strategic cooperation agreements in place with countries of origin or transit and the EU is working to enhance operational collaboration with key Central and South American countries impacted by drug trafficking.



On the basis of the thematic evaluation report, in March 2024 the Schengen Council adopted a Council Decision setting out a recommendation to implement the best practices identified<sup>8</sup>. All

<sup>7</sup> The evaluation did not cover Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ireland and Romania.

<sup>8</sup> Council Implementing Decision 7301/24 of 4 March 2024 setting out a recommendation on the implementation of the best practices identified in the 2023 thematic Schengen evaluation of Member States' capabilities in the areas of police cooperation, protection of the external borders, and management of IT systems to fight against drug trafficking into the Union.

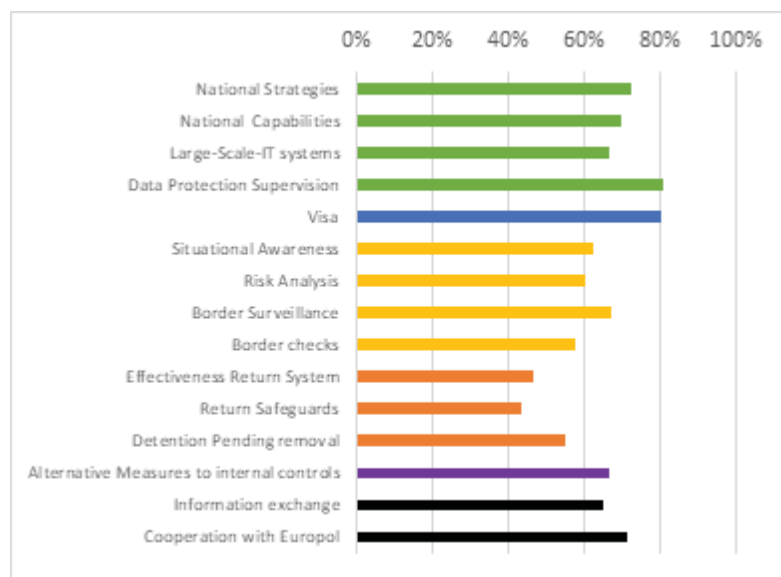
evaluated Member States are invited to submit their action plans detailing which best practices would be useful for their specific national situation to implement and how they will do so.

### ***Leveraging the full potential of Schengen evaluations through effective implementation and monitoring***

The monitoring phase is the crucial operational arm of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism, allowing the findings of the evaluation teams to be turned into a concrete response by the evaluated Member State towards a better application of the Schengen *acquis*. Much of the positive impact of the mechanism for the entire Schengen area depends on the effective implementation of the individual recommendations issued following the Schengen evaluation.

Since the launch of the first Schengen cycle in 2022, the Schengen Scoreboards, handed over to Ministers at the Schengen Council, give them a good overview of the key deficiencies in their national management of the Schengen area. The development of a common methodology for the **Schengen Scoreboard** in 2023 allows to better visualise the level of implementation of the Schengen evaluation recommendations and to identify areas requiring urgent attention at national and European level. The Scoreboard is essential in bridging the gap between the political and operational dimensions of Schengen by providing a clear understanding of the implications of non-application of Schengen rules. The increased visibility of the results of Schengen evaluations, notably for the responsible Ministers meeting in the Schengen Council, can support effective follow-up on Schengen evaluation activities.

The 2024 Schengen Scoreboard confirmed that the Schengen *acquis* is overall adequately applied although progress varies among Member States and across the different parts of the *acquis*. However, the monitoring activities under the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism revealed that in many Member States, the implementation pace is slow, leading to widespread **persistent deficiencies**, including on core aspects of the Schengen architecture.



*2024 Schengen Scoreboard per key indicator*

The evaluation and monitoring activities carried out in the second Schengen cycle, as visualised in the 2024 Schengen Scoreboards, reveal that **priority remedial actions** are needed across



the Schengen area to improve the quality of border checks, step up the limited capacities for return, address challenges in identifying security threats through the Schengen Information System, and to remove obstacles to the cross-border exchange of information, particularly linked to ineffective and non-automated Single Points of Contact.

The Commission calls on all Member States and Schengen associated countries to ensure an effective follow-up to the results of the 2024 Schengen Scoreboards, including through active engagement with the Schengen Coordinator. In particular, there is an urgent need to address the persisting serious deficiencies in France and Greece as well as the grievances related to ongoing **infringement** processes<sup>9</sup>. The Commission will work closely with Member States to ensure the swift implementation of remedial measures. In cases of recommendations with financial implications for the Member States, the Commission invites Member States to prioritise their implementation within the national programmes of EU funds<sup>10</sup>.

During the second Schengen Cycle, the Commission has stepped up its efforts towards a more efficient monitoring of the implementation of recommendations. It has monitored the situation on the ground in several Member States where serious deficiencies were found, through revisits and verification visits in line with the new tools under the new SEMM Regulation.

#### 2023 revisits

- ✓ **Netherlands** (June) in the field of visa policy
- ✓ **Spain** (July) in the field of management of the external borders
- ✓ **Iceland** (September) in the field of police cooperation

Given the good progress made by these Member States, the evaluation teams concluded that the serious deficiencies were adequately addressed.

#### 2023 verification visits

- ✓ **Belgium** (January)
- ✓ **France** (November)

Both visits aimed at monitoring remedial actions related to the quality of border control. While some progress was observed in Belgium, there are still important deficiencies in both Member States, including on national governance, that need to be urgently addressed.

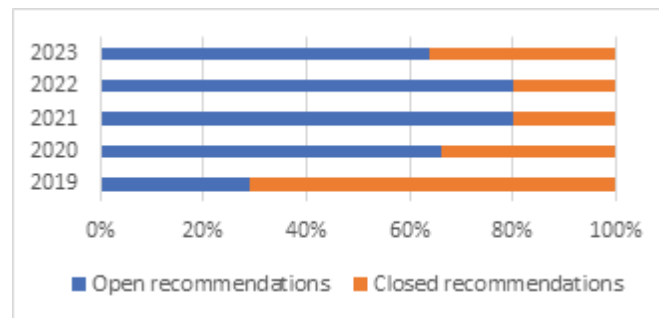


Furthermore, in many cases, Member States are not effectively **reporting** in line with the legal requirements and deadlines under the SEMM Regulation and in several instances action plans submitted to the Commission are inadequate and need to be revised. The effective implementation of recommendations stemming from Schengen evaluations is still inconsistent,

<sup>9</sup> The Commission has launched infringement proceedings addressed to Belgium, Germany, Greece and Spain on their application of the return *acquis* on the basis of Schengen evaluation findings.

<sup>10</sup> In accordance with Article 13 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1148 (the ‘BMVI Regulation’), Article 16 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1147 (the ‘AMIF Regulation’). Furthermore, Article 16 of the Regulation (EU) 2021/1149 (the ‘ISF Regulation’).

hampering the full potential of the mechanism to contribute to a strong and well-governed Schengen area.



Against this backdrop, the Commission has strengthened its monitoring capacities and facilitated Member States' efforts to comply with their reporting obligations through the digitalisation of the monitoring phase via the **KOEL-SCHEVAL application**, in place since May 2023. It has allowed a centralisation of all exchanges regarding the implementation of the recommendations in one platform, creating a better overview for both the Commission and the evaluated Member States on the state of implementation of recommendations. This platform has led to procedural simplifications and increased transparency, notably in relation to the development of the yearly individual Schengen Scoreboards.

Following the latest assessments of follow-up reports submitted by Member States, **the Commission hereby closes the action plans related to the 2015 evaluation of Belgium on data protection aspects of the Schengen *acquis*, the 2018 evaluation of Switzerland on return, the 2018 evaluation of Lithuania on police cooperation, the 2019 evaluations of Poland on the common visa policy and the management of the external borders, the 2019 evaluation of Hungary on the Schengen Information System and the 2022 evaluation of Malta on the common visa policy** following the full implementation of all recommendations, in line with Article 21(3) of the SEMM Regulation.

**In addition, the Commission also technically closes the action plans** related to the 2016 evaluations of Greece on its **management of the external borders and data protection aspects of the Schengen *acquis***, the 2016 evaluation of Luxembourg on **data protection aspects of the Schengen *acquis***, the 2017 evaluation of Denmark on its **management of the external border and the Schengen Information System**, the 2017 evaluation of Iceland on its **management of the external borders and return**, the 2017 evaluation of Norway on its **management of the external borders, data protection aspects of the Schengen *acquis*, return and police cooperation**, the 2017 evaluation of Portugal on its **management of the external borders, return and the Schengen Information System and police cooperation**, the 2017 evaluation of Spain on its **management of the external borders, the Schengen Information System and return and police cooperation**, the 2017 evaluation of Sweden on its **management of the external borders and return**, the 2018 evaluation of Switzerland on the **Schengen Information System and the 2018 evaluation of Lithuania on police cooperation, data protection aspects of the Schengen *acquis* and the Schengen Information System**. This closure is, however, technical since it relates to action plans that are not fully implemented. The outstanding recommendations need to be reported on in the

framework of the action plan submitted by the Member States after the new evaluation to prevent duplication of reporting obligations.

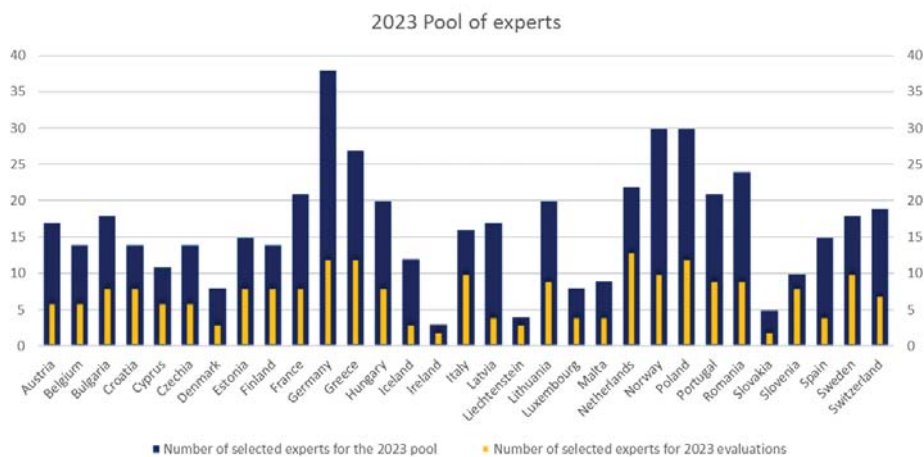
### *Tools supporting strategic Schengen evaluations*

The new concept of Schengen evaluations implies an overhaul of the tools supporting them. In line with the new Regulation, in 2023, the Commission has worked to upgrade the pool of experts, the Schengen Evaluation Guide, the Schengen standard questionnaire and the training concept for Schengen evaluations.

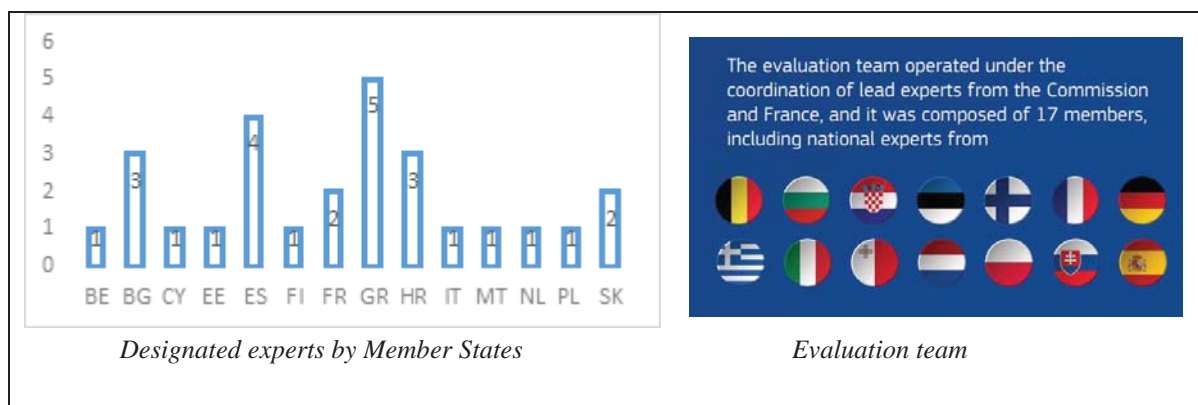
#### **The first pool of experts in support of 2023 Schengen evaluations**

The establishment of the **first pool of experts** for conducting Schengen evaluation and monitoring activities for the Schengen evaluations carried out in 2023 has proven beneficial in decreasing the administrative burden and simplifying the designation and selection of Member State experts. The single call for experts for all evaluations of the subsequent year, followed by a pre-selection of experts to the pool by the Commission, allowed for the necessary flexibility to easily select experts with the required expertise for unannounced evaluations and whenever selected experts were no longer available for a specific visit.

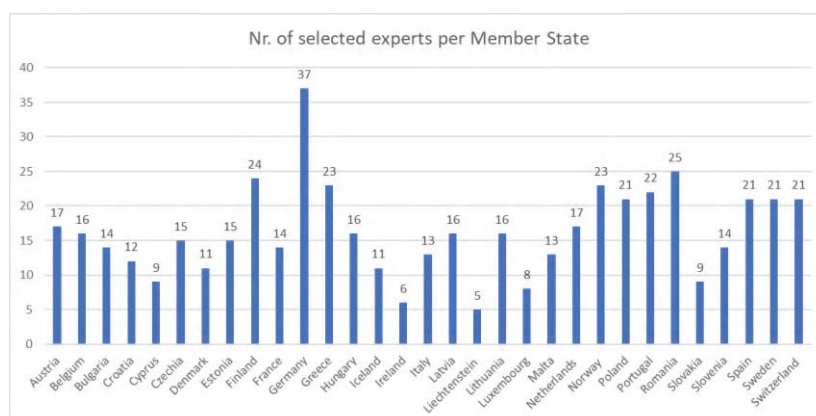
Following the establishment of the 2023 pool of experts, the teams to carry out the evaluations of Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Cyprus were established. Experts from 31 Member States and Schengen associated countries participated in the 2023 evaluations as follows:



With regards to the thematic evaluation on drug trafficking, a specific call was launched since specialised expertise and experience involving different policy areas with a special focus on drug trafficking was necessary.



In November 2023, the Commission established the **2024 pool of experts**. In line with the requirements of the Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism, nearly all Member States designated at least one expert per policy area. Only a few Member States refrained by invoking that the designation would substantially affect the discharge of national tasks<sup>11</sup>, and therefore were not able to nominate at least one expert per policy area<sup>12</sup>. In total, 526 national experts were designated out of which **505 national experts** were selected for the 2024 pool, taking into account the general and specific criteria defined in the Regulation and in the designation invitation to the Member States<sup>13</sup>.



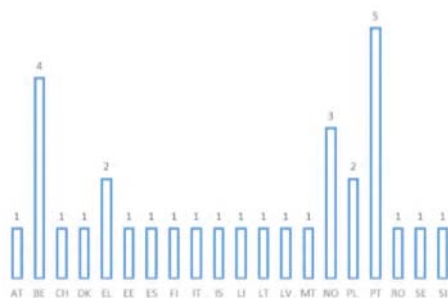
An additional call for experts was launched for the 2024 **thematic evaluation on return** to ensure the sustainable availability of experts throughout the year. Based on the 31 nominations submitted by 20 Member States, the team is composed of 15 experts. Frontex and the EU

<sup>11</sup> In accordance with Article 17(2) of the Regulation, ‘Member States shall not be required to designate experts in the areas in which, for objective reasons, they are not evaluated or, in exceptional situations, if the designation would substantially affect the discharge of national tasks. If a Member State invokes the latter, it shall provide in writing the reasons and information on the exceptional situation to the Commission’.

<sup>12</sup> France, Italy and Slovakia did not nominate an expert on data protection while Denmark did not nominate an expert on police cooperation.

<sup>13</sup> Article 15(1) of the Regulation stipulates that the experts ‘shall have appropriate qualifications, including a solid theoretical knowledge and experience in the areas covered by the evaluation and monitoring mechanism, along with sound knowledge of evaluation principles, procedures and techniques, and shall be able to communicate effectively in a common language’. In accordance with Article 17(5), Member States must designate experts who fulfil these conditions.

Fundamental Rights Agency support the team as observers while the EUAA and eu-LISA provide support on an *ad-hoc* basis.



*Designated experts by Member States*



*Evaluation team*

A critical component for the well-functioning of the pool of experts remains the national coordination of Schengen evaluations, in particular regarding the qualifications, commitment and availability of experts. On several occasions, pre-selected experts were no longer available at the time of the evaluation due to professional or personal reasons. These last-minute changes have complicated the timely organisation and adequate preparation of evaluation visits. The Commission calls on Member States to ensure the full commitment of their preselected experts to carry out Schengen evaluations, as a peer-to-peer mechanism equally to the benefit of the authorities sending experts.

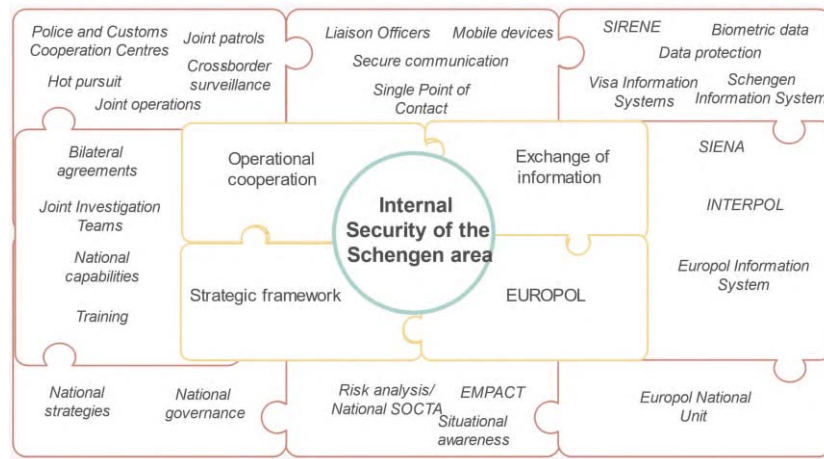
At the same time, the continuity between training activities and evaluation activities should be strengthened to ensure that recently trained experts are invariably designated for the pool by their authorities, in line with the requirements of the SEMM Regulation<sup>14</sup>. The information sharing processes via the national contact points on the establishment of the pool, including feedback to designated experts on the outcome of the process, could be further improved.

The establishment of the 2024 pool of experts has followed the developments in the organisation of Schengen evaluations. Building on the innovations and the experience of establishing the first pool of experts, the Commission updated the composition of the evaluation teams by fostering the use of **mixed teams** with complementary profiles and competences. For the first time, the Commission established an **integrated pool of experts** and encouraged Member States to nominate experts with mixed profiles to support the establishment of these teams.

Against this backdrop, and in light of the high complementarity of profiles of police cooperation experts and large-scale information systems experts, the Commission, supported by Member State lead experts, merged both evaluation teams creating an **integrated Internal Security team**. This new concept, which involves a common planning, programming, and implementation of field visits, was successfully implemented in the 2023 evaluations.

<sup>14</sup> Article 17(6) SEMM Regulation.



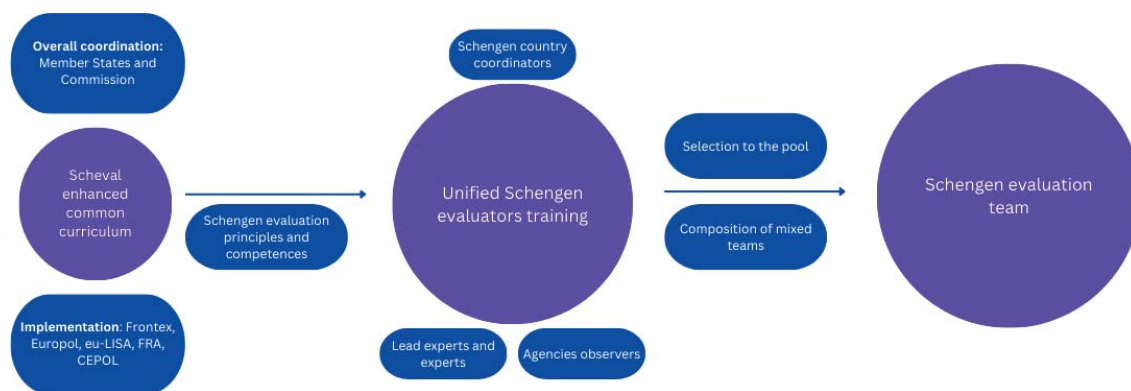


The Commission will continue to work towards a more strategic and coordinated use of teams with mixed expertise, taking also into account the needs stemming from the adoption on the new Schengen legislation, such as the Screening Regulation, as well as the implementation of the new IT architecture. The Commission will ensure that the composition of the pool is adapted accordingly.

To ensure a high-quality pool of experts for evaluation and monitoring activities, a **common and integrated training framework** for Schengen evaluators was established in 2023. The aim is to complement a solid theoretical knowledge with a good understanding of evaluation principles, procedures and techniques to ensure a consistent approach throughout the evaluation activities. The cornerstone of this harmonisation process is the establishment of the first **Common Curriculum**, which has been agreed on by the Commission, Member States training experts and EU agencies. This single common curriculum reflects the principles of the new SEMM Regulation and is applied in all training activities irrespective of whether Member States, Agencies or the Commission are organising the training. Since its establishment, **215 experts were trained** in April, September and October 2023 under this common framework.

Furthermore, the second **Country Coordinator and Lead Expert workshop** took place in January 2024, bringing together the Member States' and Commission Country Coordinators, designated Lead Experts for the 2024 evaluations as well as a selected number of country coordinators and lead experts of the 2023 evaluations. The training allowed the experienced experts to share their insights on the comprehensive evaluation process and allowed further reflections for improvement. Member State Country Coordinators play a crucial role in the design, planning, implementation and follow-up of the peer to peer Schengen evaluations, as well as in the closing of the existing gaps between the technical/operational and the strategic/political levels.





*Towards a single Schengen evaluation training framework, for a strong pool of Country Coordinators, Lead Experts and experts*

The principles behind the new integrated Schengen evaluation and monitoring mechanism were consolidated in the revised **Schengen Evaluation Guide**, adopted in October 2023. It serves as a practical guideline for all actors involved in Schengen evaluations for all steps of the process, from the initial planning stage until the closure of the action plan.

The **Schengen standard** questionnaire was also updated in July 2023 to fully cover the scope of evaluations as defined in the SEMM Regulation and the legislative changes in the Schengen *acquis* in the last years. Since it should serve as the basis for Schengen evaluations in the years to come, it already includes questions related to tools and legislation that will enter into operation on short term, such as the Entry/Exit System.

#### *Next steps: 2024 evaluation and monitoring activities*

In line with the **multiannual evaluation programme 2023-2029**, and the **2024 annual evaluation programme** adopted in December 2023, the periodic evaluations of Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic take place in 2024. Following the Council Decision on the full application of the Schengen *acquis* in Bulgaria and Romania as from March 2024, and in line with Article 23(6) of the SEMM Regulation, the multiannual evaluation programme will be amended and both Member States will be evaluated in 2025.

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Periodic evaluation*	HR**		PL		HU				SK		CZ	
Thematic evaluation	All the Member States fully applying the Schengen <i>acquis</i>											

\* The periodic evaluations in the field of visa policy in Norway and Sweden will be carried out in January/February 2024 and in Denmark in December 2024, as they had been delayed by COVID-19 related travel restrictions.

\*\* The periodic evaluation of Croatia will start in December 2023 in the field of visa policy and will continue in January and February 2024 for other policy areas.

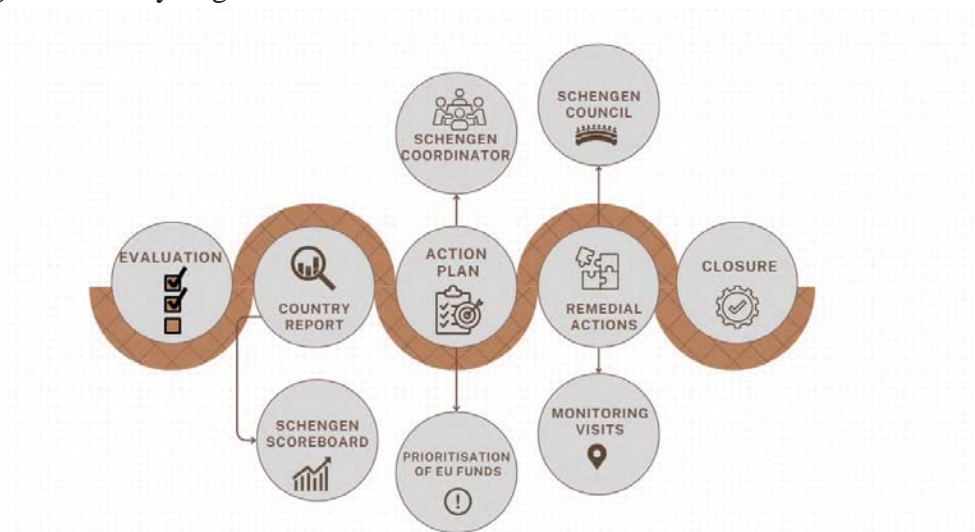
With regards to the **monitoring activities** to be carried out in 2024, the Commission is planning to carry out visits to Cyprus, France, Denmark, Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain. In the

cases of Cyprus and Ireland, these revisits will allow to verify progress in the implementation of the recommendations in view of advancing in the Schengen accession process.

In the framework of the 2023-2029 **multiannual evaluation programme**, the functioning of the national components of the European Border and Coast Guard remains a specific priority as well as the implementation of the Schengen Information System. Furthermore, the new evaluation activities will also cover new Schengen requirements stemming from the renewed legislative framework as well as the preparation and implementation of the Entry/Exit System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System.

In line with the comprehensive approach of the new evaluations, which is now reflected in the revised structure of the Schengen Scoreboard, the Schengen evaluations in 2024 and onward will pay particular attention to the situation at the internal borders, the effective cooperation with third countries on border, immigration and security activities, as well as to the functioning of the authorities, including safeguards to prevent corruption.

The **Schengen Scoreboard** will continue to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations stemming from Schengen evaluations and will be used to further boost the work of the Schengen Council by better identifying and monitoring horizontal priorities. In this context, the Schengen Coordinator will play an active role by further engaging with the national Schengen Senior Officials to support the implementation of the Schengen rules, including by ensuring increased synergies with EU funds.



*Schengen evaluations at the core of the Schengen cycle*

2024 signals the launch of the **monitoring phase of the 2023 thematic evaluation on drug trafficking**. Since the primary aim of the evaluation was to focus on the identification of best practices, Member States were invited to consider the added value and feasibility of implementing the best practices in their national frameworks. The Commission will monitor the implementation of this Recommendation<sup>15</sup> through national action plans to be submitted by June 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Council document 7301/24 of 5 March 2024.

At the same time, the Commission together with Member State experts has launched the **2024 thematic evaluation** to bridge national gaps towards an effective EU return system through common solutions and innovative practices. Following the establishment of the evaluation team and the agreement on the questionnaire, all evaluated Member States have to submit their replies by June 2024. On-site visits will follow in autumn 2024.

Looking ahead to 2025 and following a consultation process with Member States, the Commission puts forward three proposals for a **thematic evaluation** in 2025 in the 2024 State of Schengen report . These proposals aim to address priority areas and common challenges, including situational awareness, identification of security threats and effective capabilities to address risks associated with irregular migration.

Concerning training activities, the implementation of the **common curriculum** in the initial trainings in 2023 provided for a solid foundation on which the future trainings can be designed. Against this background, in 2024, the initial trainings will be further refined to achieve the goals of the common curriculum, which will contribute to the high-quality of Schengen Evaluators. The next initial trainings are scheduled in spring and autumn 2024.