



Press Release
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Schengen border control IT systems are well designed but need timelier and more complete data, warn EU Auditors

The border control authorities in Member States should focus more on entering complete data promptly in the EU's information systems that support surveillance of the Schengen area's external borders, according to a new report by the European Court of Auditors (ECA). The Schengen IT systems are a strong tool and increasingly used by border guards when performing border checks. However, some data is currently not included in the systems, while other data is either incomplete or not entered in a timely manner. This reduces the efficiency of some border checks, say the auditors.

The creation of the Schengen area, which abolished border checks between 22 participating Member States and four other European countries, reinforced the importance of effective control and surveillance of the area's external borders to prevent crime and terrorism and to control migration. According to the estimates, the EU budget provided over €600 million to set up the IT systems to facilitate the work of border guards.

The auditors examined how well the main IT systems for border control allowed border guards to check individuals entering the Schengen area at authorised border-crossing points – land, seaports and airports. The IT systems concerned checks on persons and objects, visas and asylum, fingerprint comparison and passenger records. The auditors carried out visits to Finland, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Poland.

“Border guards use the data in the IT systems as the basis for deciding whether to let a person through, but sometimes they do not get adequate information from the system to make that decision” said Bettina Jakobsen, the ECA Member responsible for the report. “Our audit aimed at identifying aspects in the design and use of these systems that can help border guards do their job more efficiently.”

The Schengen IT systems are generally well designed to facilitate border checks and the Member States visited generally complied with the legal requirements, say the auditors. However, some countries facilitated more efficient border checks than others, and Member States could use the information systems more systematically.

More than half of border guards surveyed by the auditors had at some point allowed people to cross borders without consulting the systems. In particular, the auditors found a discrepancy between the

The purpose of this press release is to convey the main messages of the European Court of Auditors' special report. The full report is on eca.europa.eu.

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number of Schengen visas issued and the number of visas checked, which could indicate that visas are not systematically checked at all checkpoints.

Border guards do not always get timely and complete data from the systems. When they check a name, they may receive hundreds of results – mainly false positives, which they must verify manually. This not only makes border checks less efficient, but also increases the risk of overlooking real hits, say the auditors.

Long delays in putting IT solutions for surveillance and passenger records into practice prevented border authorities from sharing important information. Delays also affected the exchange of information on the situation at the borders and the exchange of fingerprint data. The auditors warn that delayed transmission of fingerprint data can lead to the wrong country being made responsible for processing the asylum application. In addition, Member States take a long time to remedy the weaknesses identified during the systems' evaluations, which the auditors nevertheless found to be "thorough and methodical".

The auditors recommend that the European Commission promote further training on the IT systems, improve data quality procedures, analyse discrepancies in visa checks, reduce delays in data entry and shorten the time taken to correct identified weaknesses.

Notes to Editors

While each Schengen country is responsible for protecting its own borders, effective cooperation between them requires a certain level of harmonisation of border checks, as well as a common visa policy. In 2018, they issued over 14 million short-stay Schengen visas. Between October 2015 and September 2017, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Greece – the countries that issued the highest number of visas – issued nearly 18 million visas, but conducted fewer than 14 million checks. Schengen countries also use over 200 different types of national visas permitting travel around the Schengen area, which are not in the common IT system and thus not shared with other countries.

The number of third-country nationals refused entry at the external borders ranged from 440 000 in 2017 to nearly 500 000 in 2009. Between 2013 and 2017, the number of hits regarding wanted persons and objects based on alerts originating in other countries almost tripled, from 87 000 to 243 000. Monthly reports show around 3 million warnings of potential data quality issues out of some 82 million records.

The EU has set up five supporting IT systems: Schengen Information System; Visa Information System; European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database, European Border Surveillance System and Passenger Name Record. Member States made only limited use of EU funding available to improve border control IT systems.

Special report 20/2019 "EU information systems supporting border control - a strong tool, but more focus needed on timely and complete data" is available on the ECA website (eca.europa.eu) in 23 EU languages. The auditors previously published reports on related topics, such as on customs IT systems and controls, Schengen Info System and external migration.

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