

# 2.4. Enhancing border management

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Section 2.4 External borders

The discourse on international protection in 2025 often circled around the effective management of borders. Amidst the continued and evolving pressures on the EU's external borders, the pursuit of an intricate balance between robust responses to external emergencies and threats, and effective access to protection for people in need, generated heated discussions on ethics.

The external borders of the EU experienced less pressure in 2025 than in previous years, with a 26% drop in detections of irregular border crossings at the EU's external borders, according to preliminary data from Frontex. This was the lowest level since 2021.46

The Central Mediterranean remained the most active route into the EU, with unchanged numbers compared to 2024. The Eastern Mediterranean route experienced an overall decrease, with a caveat: crossings from eastern Libya to the island of Crete almost tripled, indicating how pressure patterns can shift quickly, even when the overall regional picture shows a decrease. The Western Balkan and the Eastern Land Border routes experienced substantial decreases of 42% and 37% respectively, while the Western African route saw a remarkable decrease of 63%. The only route that experienced an increase (by 14%) in 2025 was the Western Mediterranean. 47

The number of initiatives that have been undertaken over the past years show the importance accorded to effective border management in the EU. Key efforts to increase capacity in border management in Europe include the four EU Action Plans for the Western Balkans, Central Mediterranean, Western Mediterranean and Atlantic, and Eastern Mediterranean routes; the New Schengen Borders Code; the updates of existing information systems on borders and security, and the work toward their interconnection and interoperability; and the overall multiannual Strategic Policy for European Integrated Border Management.

A key development in this area was the provisional political agreement reached between the European Parliament and the EU Council in September 2025 on a regulation proposed by the European Commission in 2023 to strengthen Europol's role against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. The regulation will improve information-sharing between Europol and national authorities; provide additional human and financial resources to the Agency; and

reinforce the Agency's biometric capabilities. Importantly, it establishes a permanent European Centre against Migrant Smuggling, which will serve as a hub for cross-border cooperation and intelligence-sharing and allow for Europol's closer cooperation with national authorities, Eurojust and Frontex.48

Another significant development was that EU+ countries started introducing the Entry/Exit System (EES) in October 2025 at their external borders to electronically register the data of non-EU nationals crossing external borders for short stays. The EES allows national authorities to have real-time information on who enters the EU and when, which represents an important step in modernising and streamlining external border management and security. The roll-out progressed over a period of 6 months, and as of April 2026, it is operational at all external border-crossing points.49 In October 2025, FRA issued guidance to help border guards apply the new rules in line with EU fundamental rights, offering practical tips on informing people, collecting biometric data and supporting people with specific needs.50 At the same time, FRA issued guidance for managers overseeing the operation of the new system to help ensure compliance with EU fundamental rights, by covering topics such as clear communication, dignified biometric data collection and data protection.51

In December 2025, the EU Council endorsed a 2027-2028 roadmap to roll out the interoperability architecture for EU border and security systems, including revised milestones for the Visa Information System (VIS).52 The roadmap outlines how the EU's large-scale IT systems will continue to evolve in 2027-2028 to further operationalise interoperability components. Interoperability is a catalyst for efficient border management and asylum procedures, enabling authorities to consult several EU systems quickly and securely.53

To increase expertise in this area, in 2025 Frontex published practical guides for authorities and practitioners working in border management. The Reference Architecture for European Border Surveillance is a comprehensive blueprint to guide future decisions on harmonised, fully-synchronised, state-of-the-art and efficient European border surveillance. It will help Europe's border-surveillance systems to work better together and maximise investments, while fostering easier information-sharing, smoother coordination and stronger situational awareness. The Handbook on Contingency Planning for Border Management and Return offers practical guidance to EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries on how to address situations of high migratory influx and crisis situations at the EU's external borders. In July 2025, FRA issued a position paper examining how the EU can counter the instrumentalisation of migrants and refugees while upholding fundamental rights. The paper proposes practical measures for Member State, such as sanctions, border controls and cooperation with private operations.54

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  European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). (15 January 2026). Irregular border crossings down 26% in 2025, Europe must stay prepared.

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  European Commission. (13 October 2025). The new Entry-Exit System went live on 12 October; European Commission. (2 December 2025). EU's new Entry/Exit System will make Europe safer for all.

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