



Romania and Bulgaria Join Schengen Zone

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Why in News?

Bulgaria and Romania will join the [European Union's Schengen zone](#) on 1st January 2025. Both nations, which have been EU members since 2007, will finally be able to join the borderless area, allowing for seamless travel and movement across Europe.

What is the European Union's Schengen Zone?

- **About:** The Schengen Zone is named after a small village in Luxembourg, where the **Schengen Agreement (1985) and Schengen Convention (1990)** were signed.
 - These agreements **abolished internal border checks** between participating countries, allowing for **free movement of people across most EU states and some non-EU countries**.
 - The Schengen Area is the **world's biggest area without internal border controls**, and now covers **29 countries** (25 of the 27 EU member states (excluding Cyprus and Ireland), as well as **four non-EU countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland)**).
- **Key Features of the Schengen Zone:**
 - **Free Movement:** The Schengen Area guarantees free movement for over **425 million EU citizens and non-EU nationals** legally residing in or visiting the EU.
 - By abolishing internal border checks, it allows seamless travel, living, and working across participating countries.
 - A uniform visa policy allows short-term stays of **up to 90 days** for tourists, business travelers, and other visitors.
 - **Cross-Border Cooperation:** The Schengen Area includes provisions for **police cooperation, judicial collaboration, and the Schengen Information System (SIS)** to ensure security.
 - SIS is the most widely used and largest information sharing system for security and border management in Europe.
 - **Temporary Border Controls:** In exceptional circumstances, countries can temporarily reintroduce border controls for security reasons, but they must inform other member states and the European Commission.
 - **Schengen Evaluation:** Countries wishing to join the Schengen Area must meet specific criteria, including **effective border control, visa issuance, and law enforcement cooperation**.

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The Schengen Area

The Schengen Area signifies a zone where 29 European countries have abolished their internal borders for free and unrestricted movement of people.

The 25 EU member states part of the Schengen Area marked with Red

Austria
Belgium
Bulgaria
Croatia
Czechia
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Italy

Latvia
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Netherlands
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden

The 2 EU member states not part of the Schengen Area marked with Yellow

Cyprus, South Cyprus
Ireland

The other 4 states that are a part of the Schengen Area marked with Light red

Iceland
Liechtenstein
Norway
Switzerland

Special areas marked with Blue

Monaco, San Marino, Gibraltar, and the Vatican City have opened their borders but are not members of the visa-free zone.

The Azores, Madeira, and the Canary Islands are special members of the EU and part of the Schengen Area, even though they are located outside the European continent.



Key Facts About Bulgaria and Romania

■ Bulgaria:

- **Capital:** Sofia.
- **Geography:** Bulgaria is located in the [Balkans](#) in Southeastern Europe. It borders the [Black Sea](#) and lies between Romania and Turkey.
 - Bulgaria is bounded by Romania to the north, Turkey and Greece to the south, North Macedonia to the southwest, and Serbia to the west.
- **Political System:** Parliamentary Republic.
- **Foreign Relations:** Bulgaria is a member of the [United Nations \(UN\)](#), [North Atlantic Treaty Organization \(NATO\)](#), the [European Union](#), and the **Schengen Area**.

■ Romania:

- **Capital:** Bucharest.
- **Geography:** Romania is bounded by Ukraine to the north, Moldova to the northeast, the Black Sea to the southeast, Bulgaria to the south, Serbia to the southwest, and Hungary to the west.
- **Political System:** Semi-Presidential Republic.
- **Foreign Relations:** Romania is a member of the UN, NATO, EU, [Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council](#), and [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#).



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