

## European Commission criticises border controls as Germany rules out their swift removal

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In an opinion published on 2 June, the European Commission criticised Germany – along with eight other Schengen states, including France, Italy and the Netherlands – for maintaining internal border controls. It called for a gradual shift away from fixed border checks towards mobile, temporary and risk-based spot checks, including in border regions, while accusing the countries concerned of submitting notifications belatedly and in an incomplete manner, failing to conduct detailed risk assessments and providing insufficient justification for controls along all borders with neighbouring states. Moreover, the Commission stressed that the entry into force of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum on 12 June should lead to a faster lifting of internal border controls. The pact aims to strengthen the management of the European Union's external borders and equip member states with more effective tools to respond to unauthorised movements within the Schengen Area.

During a meeting of the EU's interior ministers on 3 June, German Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt (CSU) ruled out any rapid change to Germany's border control regime. He argued that the controls were a "visible sign of a shift in Berlin's policy" and that irregular migration had been "effectively reduced not only in Germany but also in neighbouring countries, as Germany's pull factor has been curtailed". In addition, at a press conference on 3 June, a spokesperson for the Interior Ministry stressed that there were no plans to lift the controls and that "the Commission's opinion changes nothing in this regard". Germany has extended the measures until 15 September; controls at the border with Austria have remained in place continuously since 2015.

Despite the European Commission's criticism and German court rulings unfavourable to Berlin, the German government is likely to seek to maintain controls along most of the country's borders. In the longer term, the situation could change as a result of sustained pressure from countries bordering Germany (see: ['Germany: plans to lift permanent border controls with Luxembourg'](#)) and the effective implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

### Commentary

- **The German government takes the view that border controls should be maintained, as they have contributed significantly to reducing migration pressure.** Since the beginning of 2026, the number of asylum applications has fallen by 35% compared with the

corresponding period in 2025, with around 35,000 submitted to date. In 2025, the total number of applications fell by 51% year-on-year to 113,000. This trend primarily reflects a decline in the number of irregular migrants entering the EU. According to Frontex, migration pressure at the EU's external borders decreased by 26% in 2025 compared with 2024, reaching its lowest level since 2021. Since the beginning of 2026, it has fallen by a further 40% year-on-year.

- **Germany expects the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, together with stricter migration rules, including the establishment of deportation centres outside the EU known as return hubs, to further reduce the number of asylum applications.** When it introduced controls at all its borders in October 2024, Germany made their removal conditional upon the implementation of an effective EU asylum policy, a stance it maintains today. It supports both the implementation of the pact and the possibility of deporting individuals with no legal right to remain in the EU to third countries. The low rate of effective returns remains one of the principal challenges facing German migration policy. Although the number of deportations increased by 13% in 2025 compared with 2024, around 230,000 people without the legal right to stay still remain in the country. Around 80% of them hold tolerated status, meaning that their deportation is not currently possible due to factors such as poor health, a lack of identity documents, the receiving state's refusal to accept them, or family circumstances. Germany carried out 4,800 deportations in the first quarter of 2026, compared with 22,700 during the entirety of the previous year. The most common destinations for deportees were Turkey (2,297) and Georgia (1,690), while 1,162 individuals were transferred to Spain under the Dublin system. Overall, women accounted for 21% of those deported, while minors represented 16%.
- **The anti-immigration AfD is placing pressure on the government in Berlin to maintain border controls.** Given the party's lead in the polls (currently around 30%, compared with 22% for the CDU/CSU and 12% for the SPD) and its clear advantage over both the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats ahead of the state elections in eastern Germany this September (where the AfD could secure victory in both Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania), the swift lifting of border controls appears unlikely. According to an Infratest dimap poll conducted in June 2026 migration is the second most important issue for German voters after the economy, cited by 21% and 27% of respondents respectively.