



Council of the  
European Union

**Brussels, 30 June 2022  
(OR. en)**

**10868/22**

**LIMITE**

**JAI 985  
FRONT 274  
COMIX 351  
RELEX 930**

**NOTE**

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From: General Secretariat of the Council  
To: Delegations  
Subject: Report on cooperation between Frontex and third countries in 2021

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Delegations will find enclosed a report from Frontex related to the cooperation between the Agency and third countries in 2021.



# Cooperation between Frontex and third countries in 2021

Report to the European Parliament, the Council  
and the Commission

 **EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY**



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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

Print TT-09-22-766-EN-C  
PDF TT-09-22-266-EN-X  
PM 22.0077

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## Foreword: assessment of cooperation with third countries in 2021

Since the beginning of 2021, the world has been facing a number of unprecedented challenges, from the continued COVID-19 pandemic to the crisis in Afghanistan and most recently - the Russian invasion of Ukraine. All of them have had an immediate effect on the EU's external borders and thus required our response to be closely coordinated with partners and stakeholders within as well as outside of the European Union (EU).

Thanks to trusted relations with border and coast guard authorities in a number of third countries, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, has proved it can reinforce its operational activities with effective action outside of the EU, carried out in cooperation with key countries of origin and transit for illegal migration. As a prime example of quick reaction, in the aftermath of the Afghanistan crisis, Frontex deployed officers to Tbilisi airport to support evacuation operations from Kabul to EU Member States, in cooperation with Georgian authorities.

2021 also marked a major shift in the migration patterns from the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, with geopolitical developments leading to human suffering of immense scale. First, the instrumentalisation of migration by Belarus prompted to strengthen the Agency's support to the frontline Member States, but also heavily

affected cooperation with the Eastern Partnership region as a whole, where contacts with Belarus had to be put on hold. The crisis at the Eastern land borders further exacerbated in 2022, with an unprecedented number of people fleeing Russia's war on Ukraine.

These developments have led the Agency to quickly refocus its priorities in terms of urgent operational response and offer immediate support to the Member States bordering Ukraine as well as to Moldova. While outside of the scope of this report, it is important to note that in March 2022 the EU concluded a Status Agreement with Moldova - the first of its kind in the Eastern Partnership region - enabling Frontex to immediately follow with the launch of a joint operation with executive powers in support of the significantly strained border management capacities in Moldova. The Agency has been supporting national authorities dealing with refugee flows, but also addressing cross-border crime that often accompanies human tragedies, including trafficking in human beings and smuggling of small arms and light weapons.

Important work also continued in the Western Balkans, where Frontex offers a wide range of services and cooperation platforms to jointly address illegal migration and cross-border crime. Within the framework of EU Status Agreements, in

2021 Frontex continued joint operations in Albania and Montenegro, but also launched a new joint operation in Serbia.

In the Southern Neighbourhood, Frontex maintained its objective to build trusted and mutually beneficial partnerships with relevant authorities - a task that remains demanding and challenging at times. To that end, the Agency continued exploring avenues for engagement that could lead to sustainable cooperation in the medium- to long term. Engagement mainly took place through capacity building activities, including a series of workshops and trainings on health and safety at work, trafficking in human beings and other topics of interest, and culminated in the first Euro-Arab Border Security Conference held in Amman, Jordan.

With geopolitical developments continuing to shape the EU's external borders, also in 2022 Frontex continues working along the above priorities, closely coordinating each step with the overall EU's external action policy, and carefully considering fundamental rights implications of our work in the external dimension.

# 1. Highlights

- Renewed working arrangement signed with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia
- Renewed working arrangement signed with the Ministry of Interior of Albania
- Deployment of the second Liaison Officer to the Western Balkan region
- Launch of the new joint operation under the Status Agreement in Serbia (JO Serbia Land) and the joint maritime operation in Albania (JO Albania Sea)
- Support with evacuation operations from Kabul to EU Member States through the deployment of officers to the Tbilisi Airport
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> high-level meeting between the Frontex Management Board and the Western Balkan partners held in November 2021
- Increased engagement of third countries in the Joint Action Days coordinated by Frontex
- Launch of a pilot project with Montenegro on the establishment of a Coordination Centre under the EUROSUR framework
- A new Cooperation Plan with Moldova concluded for the period of 2022-2024
- High-level visit by the authorities of Pakistan to Frontex
- 1<sup>st</sup> Euro-Arab Border Security Conference held in December 2021 in Amman, Jordan
- Service Level Agreement signed between Frontex and the European External Action Service
- Conclusion of the IPA II project on "Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey, Phase II"
- Strengthened activities in the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community



## 2. Dialogue and cooperation frameworks

In 2021, Frontex continued strengthening its engagement in the external dimension. The Agency invested into dialogue and trust-building measures, developed operational and capacity building activities with priority third countries, and where possible, engaged partners to strengthen structured cooperation frameworks.

### 2.1. Developing dialogue and structured cooperation

#### 2.1.1. Western Balkans and Turkey

2021 was the third year in a row when Frontex launched a new fully-fledged joint operation (JO) in the region, this time in Serbia, following previously launched operations with executive powers in Albania (2019) and in Montenegro (2020).

To support operational activities, Frontex also worked to strengthen institutional ties and frameworks for structured

cooperation. In early 2021, the Agency concluded a revised working arrangement with the Ministry of Interior of Albania. In addition, Frontex worked with the Albanian Ministry of Interior and with its Ombudsman on respective Memoranda of Understanding on the complaints mechanism, aiming to sign both documents in 2022.

Strategic dialogue with the Western Balkan authorities continued via a series of events, culminating in the high-level meeting between the Frontex Management Board and the Western Balkan partners.



Figure 1: The 2<sup>nd</sup> high-level meeting between the Frontex Management Board and the Western Balkan partners



Figure 2: The 1st Euro-Arab Border Security Conference in December 2021

In the area of capacity building, 2021 marked the conclusion of the EU-funded IPA II project on “Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management, Phase II” (see section 4.3.1). Over the last phase of the project, Frontex implemented 20 trainings and other capacity building activities on screening, debriefing and interviewing, EUROSUR and National Coordination Centres, detection of falsified documents, non-voluntary return as well as on fundamental rights for border guards. These activities gathered almost 300 participants from national authorities of the six Western Balkans partners and Turkey.

Building on the results of the project, Frontex also worked to prepare the next phase of capacity building activities in the Western Balkans under the new Instrument of Pre-Accession (IPA III). The Agency conceptualised two technical assistance projects in the Western Balkans for the funding of the European Commission. Subject to the conclusion of grant agreements under IPA III, the projects will take place in the 2022-2026 period and will cover:

- 1) follow-up work on protection-sensitive migration management; and
- 2) a separate project on border security, including support to the implementation of Status Agreements, strengthening the overall integrated border management (IBM) architecture in the region and tailored activities supporting the development of EUROSUR Coordination Centres in the six Western Balkan beneficiaries.

Due to the geopolitical situation and COVID-19 related restrictions, the Agency was not in a position to implement the Cooperation Plan 2020-2022 with Turkey, which has been put to a large extent on hold. Nevertheless, through its liaison officer deployed in Ankara, Frontex kept the channels open for technical dialogue with the Turkish authorities in relation to situational awareness.

#### 2.1.2. Africa and the Middle East

Throughout 2021, the Agency continued its efforts to build dialogue and cooperation in Africa and the Middle East. In the framework of the Commission funded EU-4BorderSecurity project, Frontex continued its engagement with authorities in the Southern Neighbourhood through a set of familiarisation and capacity building activities (see section 4.3.2).

In the framework of the project, in December 2021 Frontex held the first-ever Euro-Arab Border Security Conference in Amman, Jordan. The conference was a joint initiative of Frontex and the General Secretariat of the Arab Interior Ministers’ Council (AIMC) of the League of Arab States (LAS) and was held under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Jordan. The event brought together senior representatives from over 40 states, relevant EU and LAS bodies, as well as representatives of international organisations.

The Agency also pursued cooperation with other priority third countries in Africa, particularly focusing on West Africa. In this regard, a scoping mission, facilitated



by the EU Delegation to Mauritania, was organised to Nouakchott in November 2021. During the mission, the Frontex delegation held meetings with the Director-General for Territorial Administration, the Director-General for National Security, the Head of the Mauritanian Navy, as well as with representatives of EU Member States and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) present in Mauritania.

With an aim to support capacities in the area of risk analysis, Frontex also continued the implementation of the Commission-funded capacity building project "Strengthening Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC)". The project's capacity building activities focused on reducing facilitated illegal migration and other types of cross-border crime, including terrorism via a series of trainings, joint analytical work as well as support via Risk Analysis Cells established in a number of partner countries in Africa (see section 4.3.3).

### 2.1.3. Eastern Partnership

In 2021, abrupt developments at the borders the EU shares with Belarus have been observed, followed by unprecedented security and humanitarian challenges triggered by the Russian invasion to Ukraine in 2022. As a result, considerable attention both at the EU level and globally was channelled towards the Eastern Partnership region. This also shifted Frontex's international cooperation priorities towards the region. In line with the broader EU's external action policy, cooperation with Belarus was put on hold, whereas the Agency continued engaging through bilateral initiatives with the rest of the Eastern Partnership countries.

For example, in Ukraine, Frontex kept up support to the national authorities in the implementation of the national IBM Strategy and Action Plan, contributed to EU technical assistance through the Steering Group for the EU4IBM project

and supported the programming of future Commission funds for technical assistance in the area of IBM. In December 2021, a TAJEX Workshop on new mechanisms and development of joint programmes of international cooperation in the field of migration was held with relevant EU and Ukrainian stakeholders. A new Cooperation Plan for 2022-2024 between Frontex and the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine was also elaborated with an intention to sign it in the beginning of 2022, which regrettably could no longer take place.

In parallel, the Agency continued strengthening bilateral relations with Georgia and Moldova. The revised working arrangement with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia was signed in February 2021. Frontex also worked with the Delegation of the EU in Tbilisi on the application of relevant national legislation in the area of border management.



Figure 3: Visit of Moldovan delegation to Frontex Headquarters

A new Cooperation Plan with Moldova for the period of 2022-2024 was concluded, and subsequently further cooperation opportunities discussed during a high-level study visit by Moldovan counterparts to Poland, which was organised in cooperation with IOM. Since then, these efforts have been significantly reinforced through the Status Agreement between the EU and Moldova signed in 2022.

#### 2.1.4. Silk Routes countries

Similar to the Eastern Partnership region, the further destabilisation of Afghanistan brought the response to the developments in and around the country to the centre of global attention. To aid preparedness at both the Agency and EU levels, Frontex intensified situational monitoring and awareness related to Afghanistan and the potential migration movement towards the EU. In line with the Statement of the JHA Council of 31 August 2021, Frontex committed to provide systematic support to the 10th phase of the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) and thereby contribute to the further capacity building of the relevant national services.

Frontex also continued intensifying dialogue with Pakistan. In August, the Agency hosted a delegation of representatives of the Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports and the National Database and Registration Authority of Pakistan, as well as the Ambassador of Pakistan to Poland. The visit served to provide Pakistani counterparts with a comprehensive overview of the mandate of Frontex and to identify areas of common interest where further cooperation could be explored, including the potential deployment of a Frontex Liaison Officer to Pakistan. The Agency is working to build on the results of the visit.

#### 2.1.5. Strategic partners

With an aim to exchange expertise and good practices, the Agency continued strengthening collaboration with strategic partners, particularly in areas such as risk analysis, vulnerability assessment, returns and training.

In cooperation with IOM, in November 2021 a workshop was held on Quality Control for IBM with the participation of a number of third countries from the Asia-Pacific region, including Australia. Frontex also organised a workshop with Australia on returns and, in the context of developments at the Eastern borders, hosted a visit by the US State Department for an exchange of operational updates. With Canada, negotiations continued on a new Cooperation Plan.

#### 2.1.6. Latin America

In view of strengthening cooperation on cross-border crime, the Agency continued exploring dialogue and exchange with law enforcement counterparts in Latin America. To that end, Frontex continued engagement with relevant authorities through Commission funded projects in the region, namely EUROFRONT and SEACOP.

### 2.2. Frontex Liaison Officers to third countries

Strengthening its outreach to key partners outside of the EU, the Agency further consolidated and developed the network of Frontex Liaison Officers (FLOs) in third countries. In 2021, the network of FLOs in third countries consisted of five deployments covering the Western Balkans region, Turkey, Senegal and Niger. The FLOs continued

supporting the implementation of a wide number of activities in their respective countries, enhancing cooperation with authorities in charge of border management and return, in close coordination with EU Delegations, Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions as well as other European immigration liaison officers.

In parallel, Frontex continued to plan and prepare future deployments, covering other priority countries and regions, namely:

- In January, a new FLO to Western Balkans, based in Tirana, took up her duties. With this development, there are now two FLOs operational in the region, one in Belgrade (with a regional mandate covering Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro) and another in Tirana (with a regional mandate covering Albania, North Macedonia and Kosovo \*).
- The FLO to the Eastern Partnership region joined the Agency in 2021. With a pre-deployment phase in the Headquarters completed, the FLO was envisaged to be co-located in the EU Delegation in Kyiv, Ukraine in early 2022. The deployment could not yet take place due to the Russian invasion.
- The Agency's Management Board endorsed priorities for further FLO deployments, covering North, West and the Horn of Africa, as well as the Silk Route region as priorities for 2022.

To facilitate FLO deployments, Frontex finalised the negotiations for the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the EEAS, which entered into force in December

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on the status, and in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



and will serve as an overarching legal framework for the deployment of FLOs in third countries. This SLA will be complemented by Office Hosting Agreements concluded in connection with the individual co-locations in EU Delegations and both will replace the previous Administrative Arrangements in place for that purpose.

### 2.3. Promoting a common European approach

#### Promoting IBM Standards

In order to promote a coherent approach to the European IBM, the Agency continued supporting the Commission in programming and implementing IBM related interventions in third countries. In this context, Frontex has been providing advice and expertise to several Commission funded technical assistance projects in the Southern Neighbourhood (EUROMED police and CT-MENA), the Western Balkans (SeaGate), the Silk Routes countries (IBM project), the Eastern Partnership region (IBM support in Ukraine) as well as in Latin America (EUROFRONT and SEACOP). The Agency contributed to the Steering and Advisory Committees of the projects and provided ad hoc support to EU delegations on projects in third countries. Examples of such cooperation include regular contributions assessing projects in the external dimension, such as input to evaluations of grant applications for the Eastern Partnership related projects under the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF), or ad hoc initiatives, such as the peer-review mission on IBM to Montenegro in support of the respective EU Delegation.

#### Cooperation with CSDP missions and operations

Frontex's international cooperation is set in the overall framework of the EU's external action, and therefore implemented in close coordination with EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, as well as EU Member States. In that spirit, the Agency continued coordinating its work in third countries with the respective EU Delegations, and where available, CSDP missions, thereby exploring synergies in the implementation of the CSDP compacts.

Following the decision of the Frontex Management Board, the Agency prioritised cooperation with EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUAM Ukraine and EUBAM Libya, aiming to develop working arrangements with these missions in line with the mandate of the Agency.

#### Aligning within the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCC)

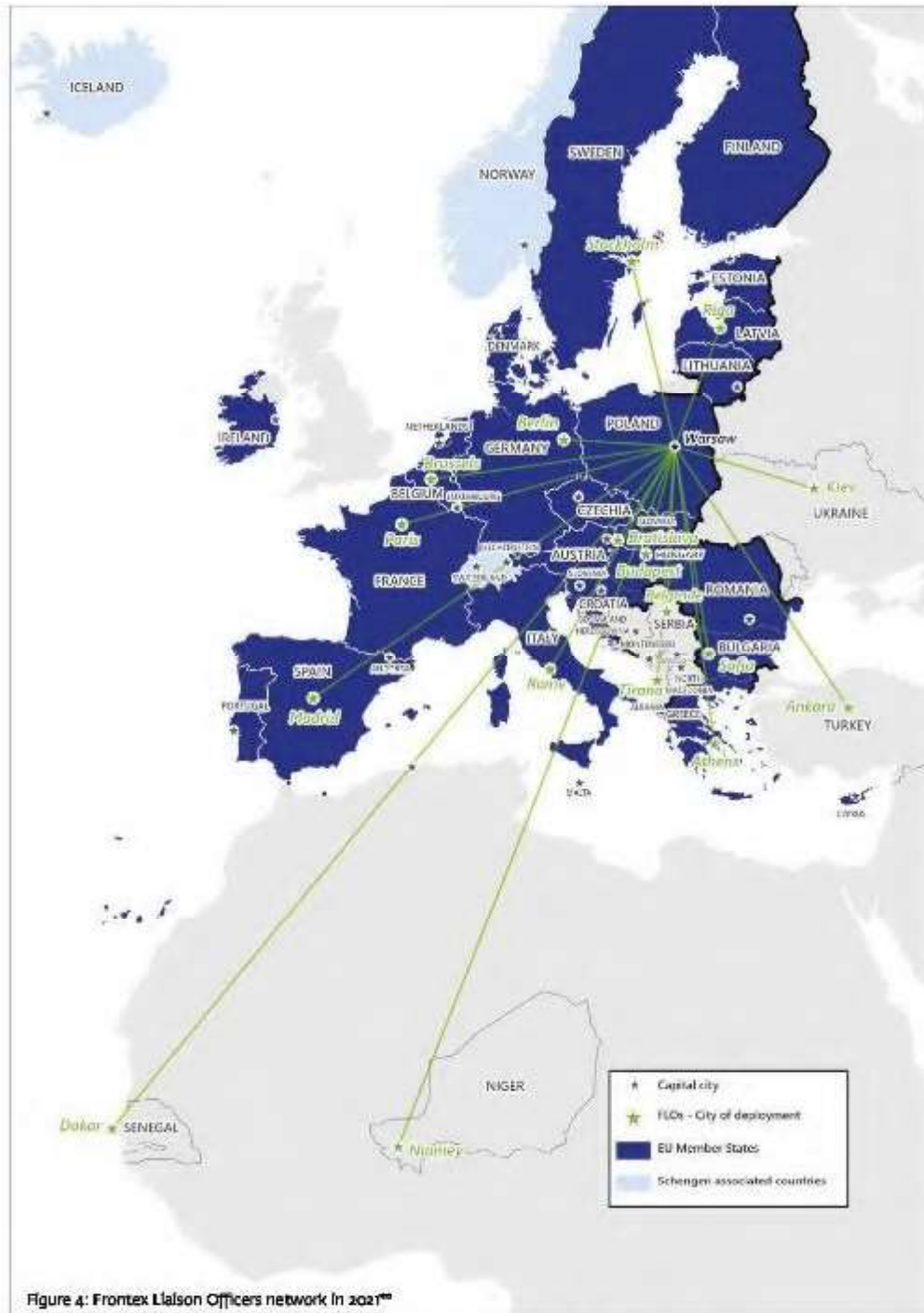
With an aim to coordinate its efforts in the external dimension within the EBCC family, Frontex further elaborated and consolidated the work of the informal expert group on capacity building in third countries. The Agency organised four rounds of regional consultations with Member States and Schengen Associated Countries, bringing together practitioners in charge of IBM related capacity building projects in third countries to exchange best practices and coordinate efforts in the areas of mutual interest. Dedicated round table discussions were held with a specific focus on capacity building activities in Africa and the Middle East, the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership countries as well as the Silk Routes, including Central Asia.

### 2.4. Fundamental rights and data protection

As outlined in Article 80(4) of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, throughout the year the Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO) continued providing support to the Agency counterparts in their activity within and outside of the territory of the EU. In 2021, Frontex Management Board adopted the Fundamental Rights Action Plan which among others, serves as a vehicle for reinforcing rights-based cooperation with third countries, including through structured fundamental rights impact assessment of Frontex cooperation activities, practical safeguards for third country officers involved in Frontex joint operations and other measures.

Over the course of the year, FRO provided analytical and advisory support to Frontex entities by issuing Opinions and Recommendations with regards to fundamental rights implications of the Agency's involvement in third countries, in particular by arguing for strong fundamental rights safeguards in the Frontex joint operations in Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. As part of the FRO's due diligence and advisory role, the FRO supported the Agency in analysing the implications of return operations to countries with increasingly challenging fundamental rights record, such as Belarus and Afghanistan, which subsequently resulted in the suspension of return operations to both third countries.

Finally, FRO provided practical support to the ongoing partnerships with third countries by facilitating tailored fundamental rights training to border management officials, including in Georgia in mid-2021.



<sup>\*\*</sup> The deployment of the FLO to Eastern Partnership countries, located in Kyiv, was put on hold

## 3. Technical and operational cooperation

Technical and operational cooperation constitutes the most tangible core of Frontex's activities, where the Agency engages with its partners on various stages of intensity, yet with a tailored approach to cater for mutual needs.

### 3.1. Situational awareness and monitoring

#### 3.1.1. Strengthening cooperation in the framework of EUROSUR

In 2021, Frontex started the first steps to prepare the ground for cooperation with third countries in the framework of EUROSUR. The backbone of EUROSUR being a network of the National Coordination Centres in the Member States and Coordination Centres outside of the EU, Frontex started investing into the capacities of key third countries to set up and adapt such Coordination Centres, which could in the future exchange information within the framework of EUROSUR.

Considering the EU accession perspective of the Western Balkan partners, a meeting with EUROSUR experts from the Member States was organised to introduce the basic requirements of the future Coordination Centres in the region. A pilot project was then launched with Montenegro, to serve as a best practice for other third countries rolling out EUROSUR compatible Coordination Centres. The pilot project included an awareness session for Montenegro on EUROSUR and its Specific Situational Pictures, a fact-finding mission to the country to examine the existing internal structure of the Coordination Centre and a study visit to Romania for the Montenegrin border police authorities to familiarise with the functioning of an EU National Coordination Centre.

#### 3.1.2. Risk analysis networks and communities

The Western Balkans regional Risk Analysis Network continued supporting data and information exchange, even up to a daily frequency, and joint analytical activities between analysts from the border management authorities of regional partner countries, neighbouring EU Member States and Frontex. These activities sustain an enhanced situational awareness (beyond national borders) supporting strategic and operational decision-making in relation to regular *modus operandi* or to commonly identified threats.

In a similar fashion, authorities from the Eastern Partnership region, neighbouring EU Member States and Frontex continued cooperating in the framework of the Eastern Partnership Risk Analysis Network. The work of the network quickly adjusted to the geopolitical developments in relation to Belarus, with an empty seat policy applied in line with the EU's external action policy.

#### 3.2. European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)

With a view of making the ETIAS Central Unit operational from May 2023, Frontex has been in contact with the United States of America, Canada and Australia to learn from their experience in implementing and managing similar national systems.

### 3.3. Border control

Aiming to address different needs while adhering to the available legal instruments, cooperation with third countries in the area of border control takes place on different levels of intensity, namely through:

- fully-fledged joint operations under EU Status Agreements,
- joint operations without executive powers (JO Coordination Points),
- deployment of observers from third countries to Frontex operational activities,
- cooperation in the field of combating cross-border crime and coast guard functions,
- fighting document fraud.

#### 3.3.1. Operations with executive powers on the territory of a third country

While continuing to support the Member States in the management of the EU's external borders, 2021 also witnessed the expansion of the operational footprint of Frontex outside of the EU.

Firstly, the Agency launched a new Joint Operation (JO) in Serbia, the third of such kind in the Western Balkans following similar JOs ongoing in Albania and Montenegro. JO Serbia Land 2021 has been implemented at the land border between the Serbia and Bulgaria. The planning and implementation of the JO was characterised by the excellent cooperation and collaboration of the local authorities with Frontex and the participating Member States. The aim of the operational activities under the JO Serbia Land 2021



was to provide increased technical and operational assistance to the host third country by coordinating operational activities in the territory of Serbia and at the land borders of Serbia, neighbouring a Member State, in order to tackle illegal immigration or cross-border crime and to enhance European cooperation on law enforcement activities.

Secondly, Frontex extended its operational activities in Albania to the maritime border, launching JO Albania Sea 2021. The operation complements the Agency's operational activity at the Albanian-Greek land border which has been ongoing uninterrupted since 2019. The overall objective of the JO Albania Land 2021 was to establish and exchange best practices in four dimensions: border security, operational cooperation, exchange of information excluding personal data and identification of possible risks and threats.

The Agency also continued the implementation of the JO Montenegro Sea, active since 2020. The operational concept was



Figure 5: Launch of JO in Serbia under Status Agreement

further tailored to respond to the main risks and threats affecting the operational area, strengthening border surveillance and border checks in the operational area through the deployment of technical equipment and human resources. The JO also provided an opportunity to exercise selected coast guard and law enforcement functions

and acted as a platform for the implementation of other Frontex projects, services and products. The new cross border crime-oriented approach was highly appreciated by Albanian authorities, demonstrated also by the results achieved through the direct engagement of the units in charge of the prevention, detection and combating of cross border crime.



Figure 6: Second anniversary of the launch of the JO in Albania

Across the operational activities, the Agency fostered synergies between the maritime joint operations implemented in Albania, Greece, Italy and Montenegro, thus strengthening the regional co-operation in the Adriatic and Ionian Seas related to the prevention, detection and combating of cross-border crime.

All fully-fledged operational activities implemented on the territory of the above-mentioned host third countries were implemented in full compliance with the relevant EU and international law, and national law of the host state, guaranteeing the respect for fundamental rights in particular the access to international protection, the compliance with the principle of non-refoulement and data protection rules, and taking into account the recommendations of the Frontex Consultative Forum and the reports and observations of FRO.

### 3.3.2. Operations without executive powers in third countries

The operational concept of JO Coordination Points 2021 was to deploy members of the teams as 'EU experts' at different air, land and sea border crossing points outside the EU to strengthen the operational cooperation between the Member States and the third countries involved. The JO is implemented with the aim of providing Frontex with awareness of matters related to irregular migration and cross-border crime activities at the nominated border crossing points in the host third country which have a direct link to or influence on the Schengen area border crossing points.

The operational aim of JO Coordination Points 2021 was to enhance border security, operational cooperation as well as the exchange of information and best practises among Member States and third countries through the deployment of Standing Corps without executive powers as EU experts at the respective third country air, land and sea border crossing points.

Host third country	Number of participating Member States	Number of standing corps officers
JO Albania	19	362 (Land)
	6	58 (Sea)
JO Montenegro	6	12 (Land)
	9	230 (Sea)
JO Serbia	13	136 (Land)

Figure 7: Standing corps officers participating in joint operations with executive powers under the Status Agreement framework in third countries in 2021

Under this concept in 2021 and owing to the advanced cooperation with the third countries concerned, Frontex activated 13 airports out of 17 planned and 17 land border crossing points in nine host third countries, namely in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo\*, Serbia and Ukraine. Five land coordination points were active during the full operational cycle. In most Coordination Points locations, host third countries accepted increased hosting capacities and extended activation periods. While reflecting on lessons learned and reviewing the needs assessment, requirements for additional resources and new locations to be activated were identified and positively assessed by Frontex.

Unlike 2020, last year allowed the possibility to activate two Coordination Points in the sea borders domain planned in two host third countries, namely Odessa-Chornomorsk in Ukraine and Batumi in Georgia.

Domain type	Number of host third countries/partners	Number of standing corps officers
Air	10 <sup>1</sup>	200
Land	9	183
Sea	2	7

Figure 8: Standing corps officers participating in JO Coordination Points in third countries in 2021

### 3.3.3. Observers from third countries in Frontex operational activities

In total, 64 observers from third countries were hosted in the joint operations.

Specifically, 26 observers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine were hosted at the EU airports, whereas 38 observers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Georgia, Montenegro, Moldova, North Macedonia and Ukraine were hosted at the land borders. These deployments took place within JO Flexible Operational Activities Land 2021, JO Focal Points Land, JO Montenegro Land and JO Albania Land.

1 Planned for the hosting of the Standing Corps. However, due to the ongoing pandemic restrictions deployments at Canadian Airports, Toronto and Montreal were not implemented.



### 3.3.4. Tackling cross-border crime

Frontex cooperates intensively with third countries in a joint effort to address cross-border crime, including trafficking in human beings, firearms trafficking, drug smuggling and other. Cooperation takes place by means of operational activities, particularly via the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), as is deeply embedded in Frontex's operational response.

### 3.3.5. Cooperation within the EMPACT framework

For several years, EMPACT has acted as an excellent mechanism for the development of sustainable operational cooperation with several third countries. In 2021, Frontex coordinated 5 Joint Action Days (JAD) under EMPACT and co-led 2 others, four of them engaging third countries, namely JAD South-East Europe, JAD Danube 6, JAD Finestra and JAD Mobile 4.

- **JAD South-East Europe**, led by Spain and co-led by Frontex, aimed at tackling illegal immigration and the trafficking of firearms and drugs. The operation brought together 17 EU Member States and third countries, including the six Western Balkan partners, Ukraine, Moldova and the US, as well as Europol, Eurojust, INTERPOL and other international organisations.
- **JAD Finestra** focused on tobacco smuggling in the South-East region. Moldova and Ukraine participated and were represented in the Coordination Centre established at the Frontex Headquarters.
- **Danube 6 and Mobile 4** focused on migrant smuggling and stolen vehicles respectively. All six partners from the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) participated in at least one of these two JADs.

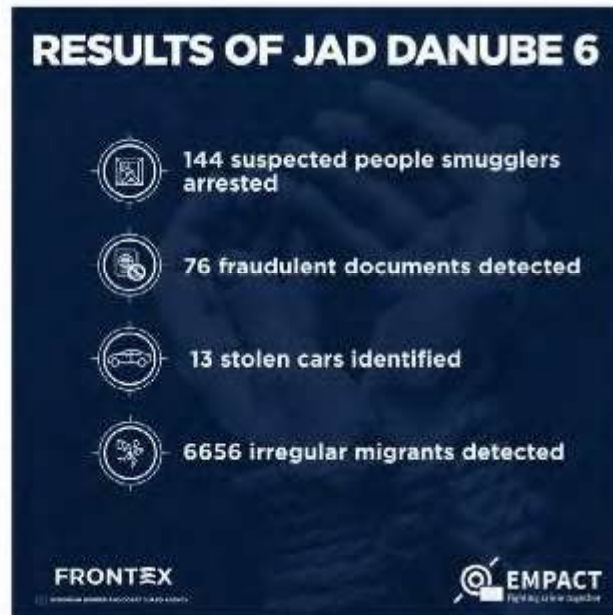


Figure 9: Results of JAD Danube

#### Handbook on Firearms for Border Guards and Customs

In the framework of EMPACT firearms, Frontex developed the EU version of the Handbook on Firearms for Border Guards and Customs and worked to further tailor the document to two specific audiences – the international law enforcement community as well as the specific needs of partners in the Western Balkans. The handbook aims to support border guards/police and customs officers with respect to tackling illicit firearms trafficking, thus improving detections of firearms and ammunition as well as facilitating the recognition of various types of firearms and their parts.

The international version is being developed inter alia with Europol and international partners but also in coordination with African countries via the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFC) and Latin American countries working under the so called "ARCO Network".

The regional handbook, focusing on land border crossing points is being developed in cooperation with all the Western Balkan partners and in close coordination with the South-Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNDP SEESAC). Frontex participated in numerous visits and meetings with the Western Balkan partners including police, border police and customs authorities to coordinate developments in this field.

Both documents are envisaged to be released in 2022.

#### ARMS Working Group in Moldova and Ukraine

To ensure operational synergies, Frontex also closely cooperated with Ukraine and Moldova under the ARMS Working Group coordinated by the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EU-BAM). The Group was established with an aim to counteract the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, explosives as well as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) material on the territories of both countries.

#### 3.3.5. Coast guard cooperation

In the area of coast guard functions, Frontex is part of several international networks with third countries, such as the Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation (BSRBCC), the Mediterranean

Coast Guard Functions Forum (Med-CGFF), the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum (NACGF) and the Coast Guard Global Summit (CCGS). Along with partners from outside of the EU, the Agency works to advance synergies on strategic priorities of coast guard functions, such as border control as well as maritime safety and security in various sea basins.

For example, within the framework of the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum (NACGF), where Frontex participates as an observer, the Agency contributed to four out of seven working groups, covering maritime security, search and rescue, illegal migration and illegal drug trafficking. The forum serves as a platform to develop and foster cooperation between a number of EU Member States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Working under the Japanese chair of the Coast Guard Global Summit (CCGS), Frontex, together with EFCA and EMSA, was part of the Core Group Members in charge of developing the activities in support of the Japanese Coast Guard. The 3 EU Agencies took active part in the 1st General Meeting of the Core Group Members meeting held virtually in September, the Pilot Program on Coast Guard Global Human Resource Development in March and delivered tailored presentations about maritime domain awareness in October with the participation of Standing Corps Officers. In the spirit of collegiality, Frontex also supported the development of the CCGS test website and shared its expertise on the use of aerostat systems for border surveillance.



Figure 10: Multipurpose Maritime Operation (MMD) Black Sea 2021



The Agency also continued cooperation with the EU's CSDP missions in the area of coast guard functions. In the framework of the Maritime Sub-Working Group, and alongside other EU and international actors, the Agency supported EUBAM Libya, in its role to advise the Libyan Coast Guard authorities in drafting their maritime strategy.

In terms of capacity building activities, observers from third country authorities took part in two SAR workshops organised by Frontex within the framework of the Multipurpose Maritime Operation (MMO) in the Western Black Sea region hosted in Constanta, Romania and Burgas, Bulgaria. Observers from Albania, Georgia, Lebanon and Ukraine participated in all or some of the events that were developed during the three days of activities, namely:

- A conference with an aim to discuss case studies and lessons learned, and exchange best practises and knowledge with regard to SAR; the event brought together participating EU agencies (Frontex, EFCA and EMSA) and national authorities responsible for SAR activities;
- A Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC) awareness and practical session for crews and boarding teams;
- A Multipurpose Maritime Exercise with the involvement of Romanian national authorities and Bulgarian representatives.

Further steps were taken in contacts with Lebanon, through the first familiarisation meeting between Lebanese and Frontex's experts. Frontex also delivered an intervention during a SAR workshop organised in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) with the aim to share best practices with other countries from the Middle East that gathered at the event.

### 3.3.7. Fighting document fraud

Third countries are also among important partners in fighting document fraud, and hence have been involved in several activities by the Frontex Centre of Excellence for Document Fraud.

Frontex organised three online meetings with document experts from third countries within the framework of the Expert Group on Document Control (EXPD-DOC) and invited third country partners to create and validate the Frontex Quick Check Cards. The aim of this tool is to assist border guards to quickly identify key document features that indicate potential fraud. The Quick Check Cards are available for Member States, Schengen Associated Countries and strategic partners (Australia and Canada) in the Frontex Reference Manual Electronic Library.

Within the framework of the FIELDS Project - the Frontex-Interpol Electronic Library Document System - the Agency organised the 5th Policy Development Working Group. The FIELDS project aims to support border guards and other law enforcement officers in authenticating travel and identity documents.

In cooperation with the OSCE, the Agency continued strengthening document check capabilities in the Western Balkan region. Representatives of competent national authorities from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, as well as partners from international and regional organisations, were invited for an online meeting to discuss the strategic role of document check and necessary capabilities for document check in border control.

Frontex also contributed to Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) by providing expertise in the development and implementation of Train-the-Trainers course in document check for the representatives of Border Troops from Tajikistan.

## 3.4. Return

Despite ongoing travel restrictions, Frontex's engagement in return was stronger than ever before, with a record number of over 18 000 non-EU nationals returned to 102 destination countries in 2021.

Frontex started deploying a new profile within the EBCG Standing Corps: forced-return escort and support officers. Their main task is to escort persons who have received a return decision from national authorities, but also to identify and assist vulnerable groups or families with children. The officers are already present at four international airports: Rome's Fiumicino Leonardo da Vinci International Airport, Frankfurt Airport, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol and Vienna International Airport. The Agency plans to continue deploying return teams at other key EU international airports in the coming months. Frontex's support has grown significantly in line with the new mandate, with voluntary returns constituting 25% of all returns supported by the Agency, and through the deployment of forced return escorts.

### 3.4.1. Pre-return activities

Within the merits of its mandate, Frontex continuously supports Member States and third countries in the implementation of the EU's external policy on returns concentrating its efforts primarily on EU-wide Readmission Agreements and other return-related arrangements concluded with third countries.



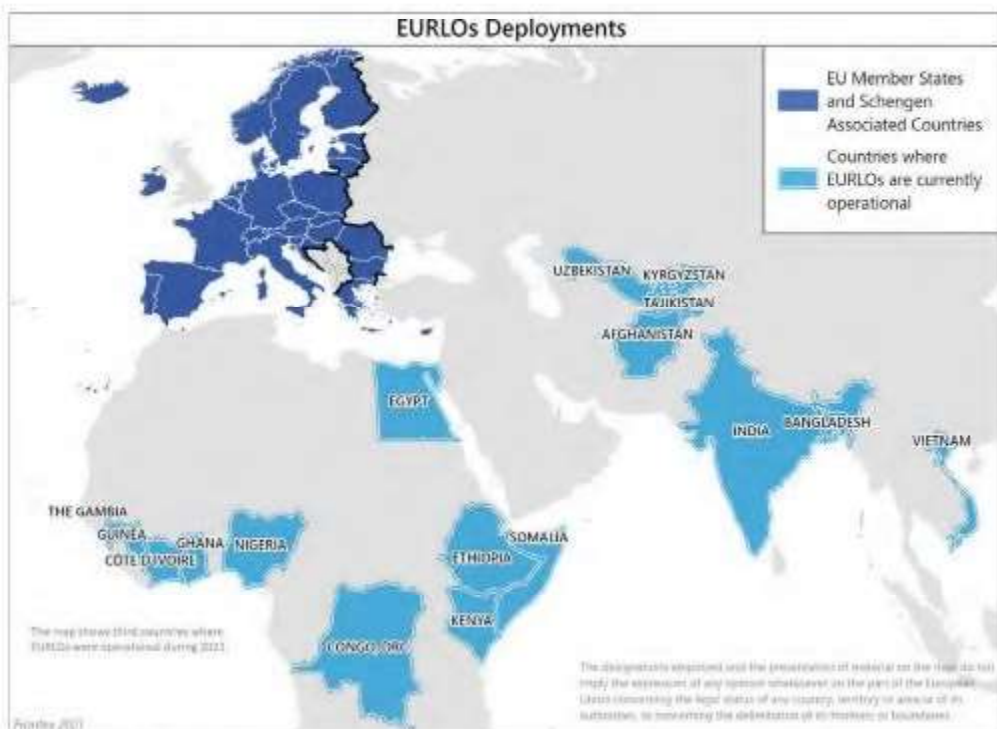


Figure 11: EURLOs deployed in 2021.  
EURLO deployment to Afghanistan discontinued on 1 October 2021

The Agency offers its assistance to enhance cooperation with third countries in identifying, documenting and ultimately readmitting their nationals who have exhausted all legal avenues to stay in the EU territory and consequently have become a subject of an enforceable return decision.

To address the challenges and obstacles Member States are facing, specifically in the identification of third country nationals and the acquisition of travel documents, in 2021 Frontex supported Member States with the organisation of 10 identification missions involving the authorities from 6 third countries and 7 Member States (3 long-term- and 7 short-term identification missions).

Following the takeover of the coordination of the European Return Liaison Officers (EURLO) Network, Frontex supported the deployment of 10 EURLOs to the following countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya (with a regional mandate also covering Somalia), Nigeria, Uzbekistan (with a regional mandate

also covering Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) and Vietnam. EURLO deployments to Ivory Coast (with a regional mandate also covering Guinea) and Democratic Republic of Congo, although funded from AMIF until the end of 2022 in line with an agreement with the Belgian Immigration Office, have also been coordinated by Frontex.

Frontex has been also actively engaged in assessing the implementation of the European return and readmission agreements and arrangements with third countries through the participation and contribution to Joint Readmission Committees and Joint Working Group meetings.

3 As a result of the political and security situation in Afghanistan, the deployment was formally discontinued

Despite COVID-related restrictions, the Agency assisted Member States in the implementation of return-related capacity building activities for the benefit of third countries. In addition, regular information activities regained their due course with 10 Country Working Group meetings, several ad-hoc workshops and a familiarisation visit organised in the course of 2021.

The Agency also continued supporting the development of different Readmission Case Management Systems (RCMS) set to allow the electronic processing of return and readmission requests of Member States and aiming at enhancing the effective and efficient implementation of the European readmission agreements or arrangements with third countries. The project is implemented by the EU Readmission Capacity Building Facility (EU-RCAP) of IOM.

### 3.4.2. Return operations

In 2021, a total of 18 301 non-EU nationals were returned with Frontex support by air. 10 193 persons were returned on 337 operations by charter flights to 33 countries of return. 8 108 persons were returned by scheduled flights to 107 countries of return.

Voluntary returns and departures were carried out mainly with the use of the Frontex scheduled flights mechanism. In 2021 returns in a voluntary manner constituted 57% of all returns by scheduled flights. The number of entities showing interest in cooperating with the Agency in voluntary returns increased along with the number of voluntary returns supported by Frontex.

Number of third country nationals by type of return activity					Total	No of destination countries
Charter flights	JRO <sup>3</sup>	CRO <sup>4</sup>	NRO <sup>5</sup>	VR/VD <sup>6</sup>	10 193	33
	2 323	2 015	5 756	99		
Scheduled flights	DEPA <sup>7</sup>	DEPU <sup>8</sup>	VD <sup>9</sup>	VR <sup>10</sup>	8 108	107
	349	3 173	597	3 989		
Readmissions <sup>11</sup>	Sea	Air			0	
	0	0				

Figure 12: Number of third country nationals by type of return activity

- 3 Joint return operations (JRO) – return operations in which two or more Member States jointly return third-country nationals by using the same means of transportation or provide mutual technical support (by sharing human resources and/or technical means).
- 4 Collecting return operations (CRO) – return operations in which means of transport and/or escorts are provided by the country of return. CROs can be implemented as joint or national return operations.
- 5 National return operations (NRO) – return operations carried out by a single Member State.

- 6 VR/VD – Voluntary returns and voluntary departures (VR and VD) where non-EU nationals return on a voluntary basis (with or without a return decision).
- 7 DEPA – Forced-return operation with accompanied returnees.
- 8 DEPU – Forced-return operation with unaccompanied returnees on board the scheduled flights
- 9 VD – Voluntary departure in line with Article 7 of the Return Directive.
- 10 VR – Voluntary return
- 11 Readmissions: Since 2016 the Agency has been supporting the implementation of readmission operations from Greece to Turkey in the framework of the EU-Turkey Statement.

#### Return by charter flights

The requests for technical support were on the rise as more Member States requested the Agency to charter an aircraft. Overall, in 2021 Frontex chartered 22 aircrafts for return operations.

	CRD	JRO	NRO	VR	Number of third-country nationals returned to top 10 countries
Tunisia	0	0	2 026	0	2 026
Albania	1 125	344	517	0	1 986
Georgia	890	148	157	0	1 195
Pakistan	0	239	315	0	554
Moldova	0	125	345	0	470
Serbia	0	50	398	0	448
Armenia	0	30	333	0	363
Nigeria	0	324	32	0	356
Afghanistan	0	135	167	0	302
Egypt	0	0	300	0	300

Figure 13: Top 10 countries of return by charter flights in 2021

#### Return by scheduled flights

	DEPA	DEPU	VD	VR	Number of third countries nationals returned to top 10 countries
Albania	18	651	33	240	942
Georgia	23	338	26	310	697
Iraq	12	124	33	513	682
Ukraine	23	328	81	177	609
Turkey	21	396	19	87	523
Serbia	12	229	13	183	437
China	0	4	2	376	382
Brazil	7	208	11	10	236
Moldova	6	152	4	62	224
Algeria	2	9	1	186	198

Figure 14: Top 10 countries of return by scheduled flights in 2021



## 4. Capacity building

Frontex is continuously providing capacity building activities related to border security for the benefit of third countries and promoting exchanges on the latest innovations in the area of border management.

### 4.1. Training

Pursuing its mandate, also in 2021 Frontex continued contributing to capacity and capability development of partner third countries via training. The Agency has a comprehensive approach for providing support to third countries based on long-term partnerships and mutual benefits. In this regard, last year, more than 300 participants were trained in falsified documents, screening/debriefing, fundamental rights for border guards, escort officers, escort leaders and forced return monitors.

### 4.2. Research and innovation

Exchange of expertise with the global border and coast guard community is an essential part of research and innovation. In this context, Frontex relied on partnerships with a number of third countries when developing concrete studies and pilot activities.

For example, in the context of the study "The Technology Foresight on Biometrics for the Future of Travel", Frontex conducted three expert consultation events, involving a broad group of stakeholders to exploit collective intelligence and stimulate consensus-oriented discussions. Participants included more than

40 experts representing the EBCG community, EU institutions (DG HOME, DG JRC, eu-LISA, Europol and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights), international organisations (INTERPOL and ICAO's New Technologies Working Group), as well as three third countries (the United States, the United Kingdom and Singapore).

The experts contributed to expand and deepen general scenarios of the EU in 2040, challenging and adapting them to incorporate aspects relevant to the travel and border checks; assessed the emerging future biometric technologies, selected a set of key technologies, contributed to technological roadmaps for selected key biometric technologies in 2021-2040 and identified key turning points in technological developments. The results of this project are planned for publication in 2022.

Another study - on "The Green Deal and the European Border and Coast Guard" - benefited from the insights and lessons learned shared by the US Department for Homeland Security (US DHS). The study aimed to support Frontex and the EBCG community in reducing the environmental footprints of their facilities, operations, and services in order to ensure a high level of environmental sustainability. Among other outputs, the final research study report includes case studies which represent the successful implementation of sustainability actions in border management and law enforcement, including the case study on the US DHS and their sustainability practices. More specifically, the US Coast Guard shared their significant experience in this area, provided additional materials and verified the final content of the case study. All of it served as a supporting foundation for developing recommendations for the EBCG to consider in its quest for environmental sustainability, thus enriching the final research report.



Figure 15: The banner of the research study on "The Technology Foresight on Biometrics for the Future of Travel"



Figure 16: The banner of the research study on "The Green Deal and the European Border and Coast Guard"

The Agency also provided practical assistance in the area of research and innovation to partner countries. In 2021, Montenegro requested technical advice concerning border checks and border surveillance at land and maritime borders. Several preparation meetings took place in Q3 and Q4 of 2021 and the site visits are planned for the beginning of 2022 to support Montenegrin authorities in the assessment of the current border checks and border surveillance systems in view of their alignment to EU legislation. Three areas of technical assistance were highlighted: border checks, land border surveillance and sea border surveillance.

Aside of this specific request, Montenegrin representatives also participated in various research and innovation events held in 2021, including Aerostat II Pilot Project showcase event in October 2021, Innovation Cells on Surveillance in October 2021, Industry Days in December 2021 and the International Conference on Biometrics for Borders.

#### 4.3. Technical assistance projects

In 2021, Frontex continued providing capacity building support to third countries, with the focus on Africa and the Levant, the Western Balkans, and Turkey through three Commission-funded technical assistance projects.

##### 4.3.1. "Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive migration management in the Western Balkans and Turkey, Phase II"

At the end of 2021, the Agency finalised the implementation of the European Commission-funded project "Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey, Phase II" led by Frontex and implemented in cooperation with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), IOM, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The project significantly contributed to the development of protection-sensitive migration management systems in the Western Balkans. Among the key achievements are the so-called 'masterplans' for Montenegro and North Macedonia, done as a follow-up to the project's Phase I study 'Assessment of the IT and communication infrastructure to support the identification and registration process of mixed migration flows in the IPA II Western Balkan Beneficiaries'. The 'masterplans', once operationalised, will allow the two beneficiaries to ensure that the respective national systems for identification and registration of mixed migration flows have interconnectivity and interoperability with EURODAC at the time of their EU accession. The activity has been implemented

in close consultation with different Directorates-General of the Commission as well as with eu-LISA and followed a political agreement between the Commission and the two partner countries in 2019.

Throughout the 2,5 years of the implementation of Phase II, the Agency held 20 trainings and similar activities covering the following priority topics: fundamental rights for border guards; screening, debriefing and interviewing; EUROSUR and National Coordination Centres; detection of falsified documents, non-voluntary return by air for law enforcement officers and return monitors. These activities attracted almost 300 participants from national authorities of the six Western Balkans partners and Turkey.

In June 2021, Frontex and the Commission co-organised a workshop on the legal, policy and technical aspects of setting up National Coordination Centres in the region, aiming to exchange experiences in view of aligning Western Balkan partners with the EUROSUR legal and operational framework.

As a result, cooperation between Frontex, the implementing partners (EUAA, IOM and UNHCR) and the Western Balkan beneficiaries has been strengthened, setting the ground for a smooth transition into the next phase of the project (covering 2022-2025).





Figure 17: Participants of an IPA II training for escort leader and forced return monitors from the Western Balkans

#### 4.3.2. "EU4BorderSecurity in the Southern Neighbourhood"

The EU4BorderSecurity project completed its third year of implementation, building on the work done so far, particularly in the area of health security in border management following the extension of the project granted in 2020 to also cover this domain.

Although COVID-19 implications continued to restrict the project's outreach, the Agency nevertheless managed to implement seven main initiatives, thus increasing the awareness about Frontex, cooperation opportunities, and IBM operational concepts and practices among

Southern Neighbourhood authorities through a series of successful events, namely:

- The first-ever Euro-Arab Border Security Conference which was a joint initiative of Frontex and the General Secretariat of the Arab Interior Ministers' Council (AIMC) of the League of Arab States (LAS) that was held under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Jordan in Amman.
- A virtual workshop on Quality Control for European IBM for the benefit of the AIMC.
- A training course on evidence-based operational Occupational Safety and Health for the benefit of Jordanian border control personnel.
- The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and Frontex organised an online regional workshop "Entry/exit screening - science and practice" targeting mid- to senior-level representatives of relevant ministries and agencies responsible for public health and border control in the Southern Neighbourhood.
- Frontex, IOM and AIMC organised a regional workshop "Health and safety at the border: Arab, European, and international perspectives" bringing together over 70 experts and practitioners, with half of the participants taking part in Warsaw and the rest connecting remotely.



Figure 18: Study visit for Jordanian officers to the Madrid Airport

- Frontex together with the Spanish National Police organised a study visit for Jordanian border authorities to the services and facilities of the Spanish National Police in Madrid.
- The Agency organised a training on media, crisis, and public communications for ten officials from the Moroccan Ministry of Interior.

#### 4.3.3. "Strengthening Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community"

Sharing expertise and experience is at the heart of the Strengthening of the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC) project which has been implemented by Frontex with the support of the EU since 2017.

Throughout 2021, Frontex continued strengthening cooperation with the border management authorities of 31 African countries, participating in the AFIC Community, through various capacity building activities including meetings, field visits and training modules delivered both online and in-person. The project was extended by 12 months, until February 2023. The prolongation

will allow to implement the activities, which were postponed due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The project contributes to enhance cooperation on risk analysis within the AFIC Community, to further counter cross-border crime in Africa and to improve capacities of partners' border management authorities.

#### Plenary Meeting in Dakar

The 5th AFIC Plenary meeting was the first one organised since 2019. It was attended by nearly 70 high-ranking officials from 24 African countries, EU entities, including CSDP missions, and EU Member States.

The event provided an opportunity to exchange information related to the current cross-border crime situation at the borders of the participating countries. Migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings, drug trafficking and terrorism appeared to be the main challenges faced in AFIC partner countries.

#### Risk Analysis Cells

Risk Analysis Cells (RACs) are the backbone of the AFIC network to improve information and data collection on migratory flows, border security and cross-border crime including migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and terrorism. In 2021, 5 Risk Analysis Cells were operational, namely in Abuja, Accra, Banjul, Dakar and Niamey. RACs and stakeholders from RAC-hosting countries shared over 150 reports during the current reporting period and participated in AFIC activities as contributors and keynote speakers.

One of the achievements of 2021 was the upgrade of the AFIC online information exchange environment. The platform allows seamless collaboration on reports and documents as well as provides for secure and instantaneous communication for RAC analysts among each other and with Frontex analysts as well, which provides trusted and dependable means of communication.

#### Regional workshop on trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants

Under the auspices of the AFIC project, a regional workshop on trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants was organised and attended by around 55 participants from 19 countries of the AFIC network as well as other organisations, including Afpipol and Euro-pol. One of the main objectives was to present a specific case of THB which occurred between Sierra Leone and The Gambia and involved 13 victims (out of which 10 were minors) and discuss how the cooperation between national authorities led to dismantle the trafficking network. The panels also encouraged cross-learning and exchange of best practices amongst THB experts in Europe and Africa.



#### Online and in-person activities

Ten online pilot modules on risk analysis methodology, data collection, fundamental rights, information collection, and other topics were developed and will be further adjusted in the near future. Six trainings were implemented during the reporting period in an online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The trainings were each provided for separate beneficiary groups (with 72 participants in total) and held in either English or French. Additionally, one in-person training took place in the margins of a field visit in Niger.

#### Operational meetings with authorities from five AFIC countries

AFIC managed to bring together the Gambian and Senegalese authorities for an operational meeting. The main purpose was to exchange information on a specific case related to smuggling of migrants and facilitators operating between the Gambia and Senegal intercepted in June 2021. The case included 37 irregular migrants, 6 of them minors. AFIC facilitated another Operational Meeting in Senegal to further discuss the details of the case.

The project team also provided support to the Agency's Third Country Analysis Sector in the context of an operational meeting attended by AFIC analysts in Togo in late July 2021. This meeting facilitated cooperation on cross-border criminal investigations between Nigerian and Nigerian authorities.



Figure 19: The 5th Plenary Meeting of the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC) took place on 30 November-1 December in Dakar, Senegal

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Print TT-09-22-266-EN-C  
PDF TT-09-22-266-EN-N  
FPI 22.0072



Publications Office  
of the European Union

 **EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY**