

FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT

JO Flexible Operational Activities 2018 Land on Border Surveillance Operational Response Division Field Deployment Unit

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[signed]
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Table of Contents

1. Background information	3
1.1. Brief Risk assessment	3
1.2. Operational aim	3
1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas	3
1.4. Participants	4
2. Achievement of objectives	4
3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices	5
3.1. JO Focal Points 2017 Land / Coordination Points 2018 Land	5
3.2. Rapid Border Intervention Exercise 2018	5
3.3. Flexible Operational Activities 2018 Land on border checks	5
4. Operational Results	6
5. Financial information	6

1. Background information

1.1. Brief Risk assessment

1.1.1. South Eastern land border

The total number of irregular migrant apprehensions during the implementation of the JO FOA 2018 Land (SE) at all border sections was 16 337 in 2 011 incidents. In addition, the national authorities arrested 313 people smugglers. These figure represent a sharp increase compared to the same period of 2017, when 1 615 incidents with the apprehensions of 8 588 irregular migrants were reported. The main nationalities apprehended for illegal border-crossing during the implementation of the JO in 2018 were Turkish (7 460), Syrian (3 497), Iraqi (1 997), Afghan (982) and Pakistani (691).

1.1.1. Western Balkans

During the implementation of the JO FOA 2018 at the Hungarian, Croatian and Romanian land borders with Serbia, 2 295 migrant apprehensions were registered. This represents a sharp decrease of about 63% compared with the JO in 2017, when 6 064 migrants were detected. The national authorities arrested 43 people smugglers.

The main nationalities of migrants detected for illegal border-crossings were Iranian 655, Afghan 609, Pakistani 374, Kosovar¹ 179, and Syrian 120.

1.2. Operational aim

The operational aim of the joint operation was to implement coordinated operational activities at the EU external land borders in order to control irregular migration flows towards the territory of the MS of the European Union (EU), to tackle cross-border crime and to enhance European cooperation.

The operational aim was implemented in full compliance with the relevant EU and international law, guaranteeing the respect for fundamental rights in particular the access to international protection and the compliance with the principle of non-refoulement and taking into account the recommendations of the Frontex Consultative Forum and the reports and observations of the Fundamental Rights Officer.

1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

The joint operation was implemented from 31 January 2018 till 30 January 2019.

The operational activities were implemented in two separate locations, at South Eastern external land borders and the Western Balkan area; International Coordination Centres were established for each of the two areas:

South Eastern external land borders:

- International Coordination Centre (ICC SE)
- Greek - Turkish land border
- Greek - North Macedonian land border
- Greek - Albanian land border
- Bulgarian - Turkish land border
- Bulgarian - Serbian land border

¹ 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

- Bulgarian - North Macedonian land border

Western Balkans area:

- Croatian - Serbian land border
- Hungarian - Serbian land border
- Romanian- Serbian land border

1.4. Participants

The Joint Operation was hosted by Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia and Romania with the participation of 25 Member States and SACs and namely Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria (Home MS regarding deployment to Hungary), Croatia (Home MS regarding deployment to Hungary), Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece (Home MS regarding deployment to Hungary), Hungary (Home MS regarding deployment to Greece and Bulgaria), Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

In addition, 6 cooperating Third Countries participated with 47 observers in total namely Georgia, North Macedonia, Kosovo², Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine.

Each MS participated with one authority, with the exception of Portugal, which participated with Guarda Nacional Republicana and Policia Segurança Publica; Spain, which participated with Cuerpo Nacional de Policia and Guardia Civil and Italy. The number of participating authorities reached 31, including Hellenic Police and Bulgarian Border Police and IND (Immigration and Naturalization Service) from Netherlands, which participated with the deployment of interpreters, apart from the participation of the Royal Marechaussee concerning the deployment of Screeners, debriefing experts and green border surveillance experts.

Within the JO, a total of 1809 TMs were deployed. Deployments per profile of experts were: 1358 border surveillance officers, 81 dog handlers, 30 officers crew for aerial means, 82 Frontex Support Officers, 13 Frontex Support Officers for Logistics and deployments, 68 debriefing experts, 30 screening experts. Additionally 105 interpreters/cultural mediators and 42 observers from Third Country authorities participated in the JO.

Internal redeployment co-financed by Frontex is also included in the figures reported above. Namely 312 Bulgarian Border Police officers with 156 Bulgarian Border Police patrol cars in the Bulgarian Turkish border. In addition one Hungarian helicopter, co-financed by Frontex, was internally deployed in Hungary performing 50 flight hours.

In terms of implementation of the Rapid Border Intervention Exercise - REX 2018, 39 additional TMs were deployed, namely 22 Border Surveillance officers, 11 debriefing experts and 6 screening experts.

2. Achievement of objectives

- Enhance border security - The objective was partially achieved.
- Enhance operational cooperation - The objective was partially achieved.
- Enhance exchange of information - The objective was partially achieved.
- Identify possible risks and threats - The objective was achieved.
- Establish and exchange best practices - The objective was achieved.

² 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.

3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices

3.1. JO Focal Points 2017 Land / Coordination Points 2018 Land

Communication between team members deployed to Frontex JOs must be seen as an important part of information exchange and information gathering. During the implementation phase of the JO Coordination Points 2018, the TM deployed as debriefers in the area collected and exchanged information with officers deployed to different focal points (FP) within the JO Focal Points or Coordination Points (CP) 2018 Land.

Data provided in JORA during the activation period of CP served as a useful tool to better understand migratory flows in specific areas, e.g. the Western Balkan region or the Eastern Land border area. In addition, it complemented the analytical products developed by the analyst.

The support provided by TMs was valued and proved useful for exchanging information and carrying out daily tasks and activities. It also created a sense of collegiality amongst them. It is worth highlighting that all stakeholders contributed to the exchange of information, thus, the level of cooperation was at a sufficient level.

3.2. Rapid Border Intervention Exercise 2018

Based on the experience from previous Rapid Border Intervention Exercises (REX), activities were implemented in accordance with the established rapid border intervention mechanism based on a fictional scenario simulating a crisis situation at the EU's external borders. The aim was to gradually reinforce the overall capacity of MS/SAC to ensure the required operational response in case of a rapid border intervention. This general goal was ensured through specific testing and enhancing the response capacity of Frontex and the Member States in circumstances requiring increased technical and operational assistance at the external borders of the European Union.

Integration proved to be very successful as the entire command and control, as well as reporting structure of FOA BCU, was used with small adaptations also for REX 2018. This enabled common reports and comparable operational results.

All deployed Members of the EBCGT and technical equipment were fully integrated into the work of Border control units (BCU) with the experts deployed under JO FOA 2018 BCU.

3.3. Flexible Operational Activities 2018 Land on border checks

Migration pressure along the EU's land borders with the Western Balkans was affected by irregular migration flows from Turkey to Greece and further via North Macedonia or Albania to Serbia and Montenegro as well as from Turkey to Bulgaria and further to Serbia and then to Hungary and/or via Serbia to Bosnia and Herzegovina and further to Croatia and Slovenia with the goal of reaching either Italy, Germany or Austria.

Operational analyst worked closely together and shared information and intelligence collected in both operational areas WB and SE. The migration situation was jointly evaluated and updated assessments, ad hoc or regular weekly/biweekly reports, were provided to ORD as well as to Frontex senior management. Operational analysis, when required, was drawn up and shared amongst analysts and, if relevant, with the national authorities in the host countries.

4. Operational Results

The operational results of the JO FOA 2018 land SE refer to incidents, which occurred at the “green borders” of Greece with Turkey, the North Macedonia and Albania, Bulgaria with Turkey, North Macedonia and Serbia. The operational results of the JO FOA 2018 Land WB refer only to the incidents that occurred at the “green border” of Hungary, Croatia, and Romania with Serbia.

Border checks and clandestine detections were not part of the JO and all the operational activities related to border checks were dealt with within the framework of the JO Focal Points 2018 Land.

During the implementation of the JO, the following results were reported (according to JORA/Fran):

Year	Total number of incidents reported in JORA (FOA SE)	Total number of migrants apprehended (FOA SE)	Total number of people smugglers apprehended (FOA SE)
2018	2 011	16 337	313
2017	1 615	8 588	277

The figures reported in 2018 in JORA represents an increase of 24% in the total number of reported incidents, an increase of 90% in the total number of migrants apprehended in the whole operational area and an increase of 19% concerning the number of people smugglers apprehended compared with the previous year.

Year	Total number of incidents reported in JORA (FOA WB)	Total number of migrants apprehended (FOA WB)	Total number of people smugglers apprehended (FOA WB)
2018	486	2 295	43
2017	934	6 243	48

5. Financial information

The final budget assigned to this operation amounted to 11,536,515 EUR