

FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT

Joint Operation Focal Points 2017 Land

Operational Response Division
Field Deployment Unit

Approved at Warsaw

[Signed]
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Table of Contents

1. Background information	3
1.1. Introduction	3
1.2. Operational aim	3
1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas	3
1.4. Participants	3
2. Achievement of objectives	4
3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices	4
3.1. JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on border surveillance	4
3.2. JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on border checks (FOA 2017 BCP)	4
3.3. JO Coordination Points 2017	5
3.4. JAD Danube II and JAD Dual	5
3.5. Land Border Sector product: Focal Point Staff Exchange	6
3.6. Land Border Sector product: Information exchange between Focal Points and Police and Customs Cooperation Centres	6
3.7. Land Border Sector product: VEGA Land Handbook	7
4. Operational results	7
5. Financial information	7

1. Background information

1.1. Introduction

The concept of the Joint Operation (JO) Focal Points¹ is specific when compared to other joint operations in respect of the following criteria: the duration of the deployment and the length of the implementation process. These elements provide a long-term strategic value to the operation.

The *operational areas* of this JO are Border Crossing Points (BCP) at the external land borders of the European Union / Schengen Associated Countries. The Focal Points were established not only as an operational response to the pressure of irregular immigration but also as a coordinating and monitoring tool which supports other Frontex coordinated operational activities and the Member States.

The *deployment of team members (TM)* is planned, based on the area's regional or local characteristics, such as: the volume and composition of traffic, the size of the BCP, the nationality of passengers, the purpose of travel, the seasonality, the means of transportation, the situation of the border security and common *modus operandi*. The request for the deployment of *team members* covered not only the operational and tactical aspects mentioned above but also seasonal variations identified in irregular migration trends. To further enhance the operational capacities at the Focal Points, seconded team members (STM) were deployed within JO FOA BCP, which ensured prolonged deployments and greater flexibility in terms of redeployments in accordance with the emerging operational needs.

EU Member States / Schengen Associated Countries continued to recognise the benefit of hosting a Focal Point and therefore, the joint operation in 2017 continued the support thus far provided to EU Member States / Schengen Associated Countries. Furthermore, the coordination of other Frontex operational activities planned in the area of Focal Points and the collection of relevant data continued as well.

1.2. Operational aim

The operational aim of the joint operation was to implement coordinated operational activities at the external land borders of the host Member States in order to control irregular migration flows towards the territory of the MS and to tackle cross border crime.

1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

The joint operation was implemented from 1 February 2017 till 31 January 2018. During the operation 46 Focal Points were established.

1.4. Participants

JO Focal Points 2017 Land was hosted by Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Estonia, Hungary, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania and Slovakia (12 Host Member States). Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland (25 Home Member States) and participating Third Countries deployed in total 357 experts with advanced level document officer, stolen vehicle detection officer, first-line officer, second-line officer, dog handler and observer profile. Technical means such as heartbeat detectors, CO2 probes and service dogs were deployed in total for 2540 man-days.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have deployed their observers during the implementation of the operation in order to enhance information and experience exchange.

¹ Focal Points are located at the Border Crossing Points (BCPs) assessed as hot spots for irregular migration and border security at external EU land borders. Deployment of team members and seconded team members from MSs, supporting and assisting the hosting Border Guard Authorities, is taking place at the Focal Points.

Cooperation with Europol took place within the framework of the JAD Danube II, JAD Dual, JAD Firearms Western Balkans, Magnum II, Navigator I and Navigator II, linked to the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT). Exchange of operational information was ensured via the Coordination Centres established for each operation.

2. Achievement of objectives

Enhance border security - The objective has been fully achieved.

Enhance operational cooperation - The objective has been fully achieved.

Enhance exchange of information - The objective has been partly achieved.

Identify possible risks and threats - The objective has been fully achieved.

Establish and exchange best practices - The objective has been fully achieved.

3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices

Focal Points establish a permanent system at external land borders, operating also as platforms for joint operations and other initiatives.

3.1. JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on border surveillance

In accordance with the supportive role of Focal Points to all joint activities coordinated by Frontex, the Team Members (TMs) deployed to Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Hungary supported the implementation of JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on Border Surveillance (JO FOA 2017 BCU) in information gathering and reporting process, interviews of passengers, irregular migrants or facilitators, also in providing any necessary operational support.

Reporting flow of the Focal Points was channelled in the framework of JO FOA BCU. Focal Points TMs deployed in the same operational area participated in the JO FOA BCU Briefing and Debriefing Meetings and were also regularly reporting to Frontex Supporting Officers, who were deployed within the framework of JO FOA BCU. Regular exchange of operational information was ensured through the JO FOA BCU ICC meeting, where a representatives of Focal Points took part on weekly basis.

3.2. JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on border checks (FOA 2017 BCP)

Within the framework of JO Flexible Operational Activities 2017 Land on Border Checks the deployments of seconded Team Members (sTMs) provided operational support at the selected Focal Points located in the operational areas, facing high irregular migration pressure and/or having the higher passengers traffic and/or high numbers of cross-border crime activities detected at the border crossing points. Furthermore deployment of sTMs was also used to cover deployment gaps within JO Focal Points 2017 Land.

STMs were working in close cooperation with TMs deployed in the framework of JO Focal Points 2017 on a daily basis and exchanged information and experience with local staff of activated Focal Points. While the reporting system remained exclusively under JO Focal Points 2017 land, sTMs were providing to Frontex Monthly Reports as well as daily activity reports. Both reports included information about sTMs daily/monthly performance, observations, recommendations and statistics.

STMs with three different profiles, in particular Second Line Officers, Advanced-Level Document Experts and Stolen Vehicle Detection Officers, were deployed and in case of a need redeployed to another Focal Points or their deployment was extended for a longer period. The secondments that took place lasted from 3 up to 7 months. Longer deployments allowed to respond faster to the border related challenges.

3.3. JO Coordination Points 2017

In the course of the implementation of JO Focal Points 2017 Land, deployed TMs exchanged information and experience with the EU Experts/Observers deployed to Coordination Points (Border Crossing Points in Third Countries), and vice versa. Exchange of information took place via the FOSS² platform. The relevant FOSS content of both operations had been made available for all TMs and EU Experts/Observers deployed to one of these two joint operations. Feedback received from the EU Experts/Observers deployed to JO Coordination Points 2017 Land clearly indicated that this kind of exchange was useful in their daily work and created network among TMs. As already recognized best practice, local coordinators of Coordination Points were deployed to Focal Points prior to the activation of their Coordination Point. This proved to be an excellent opportunity for the Coordination Points Local Coordinators to gain on site practical experience, as well as familiarize themselves with the workflow and skills necessary for the successful operation of the Focal Point or Coordination Point. Additionally several commanders and Local Coordinators of the Coordination Points were participating in Focal Points Staff Exchange programme to further strengthen the bonds between the two joint operations.

3.4. JAD Danube II and JAD Dual

Joint Action Day (JAD) Danube II was implemented with a Hungarian co-leadership in June 2017 within the framework of JO Focal Points 2017 Land. The JAD aimed at more efficient use of intelligence, the enhancement of the operational cooperation between the different Member States' respective authorities involved in the fight against cross border crime, especially in migrant smuggling and stolen property smuggling in the Western Balkans and at selected border crossing points at EU's Eastern land border. Apart from participating MSs, EUROPOL and INTERPOL supported the operational activity.

As a result, national police apprehended 7 people smugglers, detected 546 irregular migrants and 667 people without valid travel documents. 24 stolen vehicles were detected. In the course of this operation smuggled cigarettes, alcohol and drugs were detected along with illegal weapons and ammunition.

Joint Action Day Dual was implemented in October 2017. The operation targeted cross-border crime in the Western Balkans region and at selected border crossing points at EU eastern borders. Its specific aim was to enhance the cooperation between EU Member States and authorities at non-EU countries involved in the fight against cross-border crime. EUROPOL and INTERPOL also supported the operation. Beside of irregular migration and its facilitation, the JAD also focused to clandestine entries and smuggling of goods (e.g. excise goods).

Key operational outcome: 24 suspected people smugglers were arrested, 761 irregular migrants were detected and 119 people were refused entry. The authorities also recovered 19 stolen vehicles. During the operation also smuggled cigarettes, alcohol and drugs were detected, along with weapons and ammunition. The intelligence collected during JAD Dual will be used in investigations into criminal networks involved in migrant smuggling.

3.4.1. Support to the operations Navigator I, Navigator II and Magnum II

Within the framework of JO Focal Points 2017 Land, Frontex has supported the operation "Navigator I", which was organized by EUBAM focusing on countering firearms, nuclear and radiological materials and supported by several EU law enforcement bodies and projects such as DG TAXUD, Frontex, Europol, European Firearms Experts Groups, EMPACT Firearms. The operation was implemented in April 2017.

Frontex contribution to the targeted operation "Navigator" was to provide through exchange of information on the operational figures - incidents reported in JORA³ from the activated Focal Points along the EU external land borders. Frontex provided support to the continuation of the targeted operation called "Navigator 2", which was implemented in October 2017.

During the above operational periods the following incidents have been reported from the Focal Points:

- In total 359 falsified documents detected;

² Frontex One Stop Shop secured online platform

³ Joint Operation Reporting Application

- In total 44 incidents on stolen vehicles: 42 stolen vehicles and 44 stolen vehicle parts detected;
- Smuggling of goods: 47 l of alcohol, 5,821,190 pieces of cigarettes, 7 gr of marijuana and 978 gr of other drugs, 4 cases on smuggling of weapons and ammunitions.

Additionally Customs Officers have found 6-barrel anti-aircraft gun in a van and four persons were arrested.

Frontex support to the targeted operation “Navigator II” has been provided within the frame of the ongoing Joint Operation Focal Points 2017 Land, ensuring regular exchange of information (incidents reported in Joint Operations Reporting Application - JORA) with the Focal Points established at the land EU Border Crossing Points.

During the operational phase in October 2017 the following incidents have been reported from the Focal Points:

- In total 272 falsified documents detected;
- In total 15 incidents on stolen vehicles;
- Smuggling of goods - 72, 452,015 pieces of cigarettes, no incident related to firearms/ammunitions, nuclear and radiological materials.

In addition to above Frontex has been supporting the Joint Customs Operation Magnum II with Team Members deployment at the selected BCPs and with regular exchange of information within the framework of JO Focal Points 2017 Land. The operation took place in May and June and targeted smuggling of tobacco products transported by road and rail cargo into the EU territory.

3.5. Land Border Sector product: Focal Point Staff Exchange

The main objective of the Focal Points Staff Exchange was to further improve the existing Local Coordinators Network by putting in practice the recommendations from the meetings, the need for enhancement of cooperation and exchange of information as well as best practices among the Focal Points.

In 2017, the Staff Exchange was implemented as a part of JO Focal Points 2017 Land. Host MSs were requested to nominate BCP/FP Commander(s) and FP Local Coordinator(s) and at the same time to notify Frontex about their interest to host deployments from other Focal/Coordination Points. Based on the Member States / Third Countries needs and requests as well on operational aspects Frontex prepared a proposal for the deployments.

Deployments of the Local Coordinators lasted usually two weeks while for the Commanders for one week. During the deployment the Guest Local Coordinators worked together with the host Local Coordinator, supporting fulfilment of the daily tasks. Guest Commanders were involved in the general managerial tasks of the respective BCP with special attention to the cooperation with Frontex and the neighbouring Third Country, the management of resources on local level, including the human and technical resources deployed within the joint operation.

After each deployment the Local Coordinators as well the hosting Focal Point had to provide feedback about the exchange, which had been taken up as a base for further improvement of the project.

3.6. Land Border Sector product: Information exchange between Focal Points and Police and Customs Cooperation Centres

Focal Points are also a platform for exchanges of operational information and professional experiences, therefore the establishing of synergies between the different host Member States’ Focal Points and authorities is particularly important in this operation.

Following successful implementation of the pilot project on the information exchange between Police and Customs Cooperation Centres (PCCCs) and Focal Points under the frame of JO Focal Points 2016 Land, PCCC and Focal Points exchange of information have been fully integrated into JO FP 2017 Land. The core idea remained the same - to provide the Host MSs local staff and Team Members deployed in Frontex coordinated JO Focal Points 2017 Land with the possibility to check relevant information on persons and vehicles in the appointed PCCCs for the purpose to render more efficient the border check procedure and decrease the response time.

During the implementation phase in 2017 in total 350 inquiries were sent to PCCCs from nominated Focal Points (according the information received from the participating FPs and PCCCs evaluation reports).

Feedback from the Member States local staff working at the Border Crossing points and also TMs were very positive, as the "PCCCs/FPs product" provided them with the "tool" for more efficient deployments of TMs and gave the local authorities working at the BCPs a valuable support, especially when it comes to the requests sent to non-neighbouring MSs (instead of so called chained requests).

The product proved as added value to the JO Focal Point Land operation and shall be continued and further developed, including more MS and even Third Countries. It gave an extra option for information exchange - in addition to already established channels which have already proven to be functional. Direct contact form FP to PCCC and vice versa might be assessed as strong point of the product.

3.7. Land Border Sector product: VEGA Land Handbook

Among the other products and services, the Focal Points Land Operational team had been developing the VEGA concept for Land Borders in course of 2017 and drafting the VEGA Handbook for Land Borders. The document was elaborated in cooperation with the Frontex Consultative Forum of Fundamental Rights, Frontex Fundamental Right Officer, Host and Home Members States and Team Members who were deployed to Land Joint Operations. Main goals of this project is to increase border guard officers' awareness on children crossing the external EU land borders, unaccompanied or not. Moreover, VEGA Land Handbook provides a valid support in identification of children at risk, while ensuring respect for child rights and enhancing activities against criminal threat to their safety. Having in mind the possibly existing experience of the different actors related the topic, Host Member States, as well as Team Members and local Border Guards /Police Officers working along EU external land borders were requested to provide with their feedback, comments and proposals, which have been incorporated in the final version of the Handbook.

4. Operational results

Operational results of the JO Focal Points 2017 Land included the following: 3,192 false documents (incidents), 301 stolen vehicles (incidents), 981 clandestine entry (persons), 19,805 overstay (persons), 72,656 refusals of entry (persons) and 834 smuggling of goods (incidents).

5. Financial information

The final budget of the joint operation was 2,716,486.26 EUR