

**FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT 2018**

# **JO Alexis 2018**

**Operational Response Division  
Field Deployment Unit**

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*[signed]*  
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## 1. Background information

### 1.1. Brief risk assessment

The use of forged, counterfeit or frequently obtained passports and documents as well as the irregular/illegal use of authentic and false documents represents one of the major threats at airports associated with irregular migration. Combating counterfeiting not only requires law enforcement actions but also an important effort from manufacturers and issuers. The sheer volume of passenger air traffic inevitably means that a large number of persons will successfully manage to avoid the existing pre-departure document checking, board a flight and arrive in the EU.

Smugglers and traffickers move migrants by air across the globe using genuine, authentic and false documentation. They plan complex and circuitous routings to disguise the true identity, provenance and indeed the nationality and intentions of their customers/victims.

Collective responses to these challenges are required to seek to identify embarkation airports, routes and airlines associated with a high risk of irregular migration. Also required is the adoption of systems to develop useful profiles to identify high risk passengers from manifests or API/PNR data and the establishment of a close cooperation with the airlines.

Systematic checks at the external borders will provide us with a means to address potential risks. In that regard, and following the proposal of the European Commission, the Council adopted a regulation amending the Schengen borders code to reinforce checks against relevant databases at the external borders<sup>1</sup>. The amendment obliges member states to carry out systematic checks against relevant databases on all persons, including those enjoying the right of free movement under EU law (i.e. EU citizens and members of their families who are not EU citizens) when they cross the external borders.

The databases against which checks will be carried out include the Schengen Information System (SIS) and Interpol's database on stolen and lost travel documents (SLTD). Obviously, bearing in mind that this procedure could lead to a disproportionate impact on traffic flows, one should carry out only targeted checks against databases for a transitional period of 6 months, which can be extended up to 18 months in exceptional cases.

### 1.2. Operational aim

Joint Operation Alexis 2018 was implemented in line with the provisions of the Frontex Single Programming Document 2016-2019 in a series of 4 phases focusing on airport vulnerabilities as perceived and communicated by Member States<sup>2</sup>. Identified objectives were prioritized and the operational areas were established with the participation of EU international airports that experience similar vulnerabilities.

The main aim of the Joint Operation Alexis was to contribute to meeting the needs of Member States by setting up operational procedures and deploying border guards in order to strengthen the capabilities of EU international airports.

Concurrently, the aim of JO Alexis 2018 was to enhance EU airport border guards document expertise and their operational capabilities to detect document fraud in a limited time frame

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2017/458 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 as regards the reinforcement of checks against relevant databases at external borders (COM(2015)0670 – C8-0407/2015 – 2015/0307(COD))

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of the present document, the term "Member State" includes also the States participating in the relevant development of the Schengen acquis in the meaning of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and its Protocol (No 19) on the Schengen acquis integrated into the framework of the European Union.

and thus to combat People Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings, thus contributing to the reduction of any vulnerabilities at EU airports.

The organization into four phases introduces an element of flexibility in order to achieve the specific operational aims and targets. This allowed for a swift and tailored response to new and emerging phenomena through constant situation monitoring and focus to the first results of the vulnerability assessment exercise conducted by the Agency (see Art. 13 of Regulation 2016/1624).

### 1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

Joint Operation Alexis 2018 was implemented in four different phases at 37 airports of Member States as follows: Phase ONE between 20 February and 22 March, phase TWO between 26 April and 30 May, phase THREE between 28 August and 27 September and phase FOUR between 30 October and 28 November.

### 1.4. Participants

In total 23 Member States, 7 Third Countries and 37 participating airports took part in the implementation of Joint Operation Alexis 2018. To support operational activities in the course of Joint Operations Alexis 2018 Interpol deployed five IBMTF (*Integrated Border Management Task Force*) coordinators within the Phase TWO between 14 and 18 May 2018 and Phase THREE between 10 and 14 September 2018

During the joint operation **87 officers** (including 11 Third Country observers) were deployed at different airports (95 Officers were deployed in JO Alexis 2017) according to the operational needs covering the profiles of Second-Line Airport Officer and/or Advanced-Level Document Officer.

### 1.5. Financial information

The planning phase provided an initial budget of €653,400 which has slightly increased during the year to reach finally €678,670.

## 2. Achievement of objectives

1. Enhance exchange of knowledge among officers. ACHIEVED.
2. Enhance border security. ACHIEVED.
3. Enhance efficiency of border security. ACHIEVED.
4. Enhance operational cooperation. ACHIEVED.

## 3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices

All activities within Joint Operation Alexis 2018 were designed to allow parallel or complementary operational actions and to take advantage of other Frontex projects, especially the ones implemented by Field Deployment Unit.

As mentioned above, in several cases team members and seconded team members deployed under the umbrella of parallel or partially parallel running air border joint operations (*Joint Operation Focal Points Air 2018, Joint Operation Pegasus 2018 or Joint Operation Vega Children 2018*) facilitated the EU operational cooperation during JO Alexis by supporting the starting up and reinforcing of the Alexis activities and the implementation of the requested countermeasures and reporting tasks. Following the conclusion and recommendations made after JO Alexis 2017, during JO Alexis 2018 Frontex repeated the organization of dedicated document training courses,

known as “**Road Shows**”. The concept of Road shows aims at providing Member States with professional seminars to establish common standards for first and second line border checks.

The Road Shows were highly appreciated and welcomed by the **12 hosting airports**, what was also reflected by the high number of border guard officers trained by the deployed document experts being supported by the Centre of Excellence for Combating Document Fraud<sup>3</sup> (CED). Almost 900 officers were trained in the Road Shows organised in the framework of JO Alexis 2018.

## 4. Operational Results

By applying the Vega Countermeasures Handbook and the Standard Operational Procedures provided in the annexes of the operational plans, specific countermeasures were implemented during the Alexis operational activities.

Document fraud allows migrants to enter the territory of the Member States illegally and to enjoy free movement in Europe, which also allows freedom of movement to members of criminal networks. Frontex has seen an increase in cases of impersonation in Member States. Moreover the detection of counterfeit and forged passports or ID cards has also increased significantly in recent years.

All these activities were performed at the participating airports where different structures, organisation, traffic and national law led to different results.

During JO Alexis 2018 11,878 specific countermeasures were implemented at the participating airports.

The implemented countermeasures as well as the high number of participants (23 Member States, 37 participating airports and 7 Third Countries) and the **2,690 man-days** deployed in the course of the joint operations contributed to the enhancement of border security.

During this operation, main threats as well as new and emerging aspects regarding irregular migration flows were also reported. The information provided by the participating airports greatly assisted Frontex Risk Analysis Unit in highlighting new and emerging trends.

### 4.1. EU added value of the operational activity

Joint Operation Alexis 2018 provided:

- Tailored operational support and capacity building strengthening Member States operational capabilities in order to overcome perceived vulnerabilities.
- Effective and efficient operational response to perceived vulnerabilities meeting current threats (European Situational Awareness) in order to enhance the security of external air borders.
- Increased response capacity to emergency situations.

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<sup>3</sup> Management Board Decision 18/2017 of 14 June 2017 on the new organisational structure of the Agency in place since the 1st February 2018.