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**NOTE**

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**From:** General Secretariat of the Council  
**To:** Delegations  
**Subject:** Frontex Vulnerability Assessments of European border control 2025

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Delegations will find enclosed the Frontex Vulnerability Assessments of European border control 2025.

## Eastern borders

External developments and increasing risks at the Eastern borders of the Schengen area, notably on the borders with Russia and Belarus, resulted in the Member States of this region experiencing very dynamic changes in border-control capacities in 2024. Challenges posed by the actions of Russia and Belarus, as well as those stemming from Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine on the Ukrainian-EU border, led to rapid infrastructural developments and the prioritisation of security-related policies in the affected Member States. While Vulnerability Assessments did point to deficiencies in border-control systems, predominantly staffing gaps, they are more limited in scope compared to Member States in other regions.

### Surveillance infrastructure developments at the land borders reflect Member States' response to threats posed by Russia and Belarus

The **most visible change** at the Eastern borders is a significant enhancement of land-border surveillance infrastructure, also noted in past years' assessments. A rapid increase in coverage of stationary surveillance infrastructure took place along most of the external border with Russia and Belarus. In some Member States, all border sections are already covered, while in others enhancements should be finalised in the coming years. Investments in mobile equipment to monitor the land border have also been made, with Member States in the region increasingly investing in surveillance drones as well as extending their fleets of patrol cars. These developments are a response to the growing hybrid threats posed by Russia and Belarus. Continued instrumentalisation of migration, which significantly impacted Poland in 2024, intentional damage to critical infrastructure in the Baltic Sea, and continued hostilities in Ukraine all contribute to increased alertness and decisive actions of Member States along the Eastern borders.

These actions go **beyond investments in infrastructure**. For several Member States, border-control budgets reported in 2024 are the highest since Vulnerability Assessments were launched, highlighting Member States' commitment to sound border control. Budgetary commitments are accompanied by increasingly fit-for-purpose contingency plans vis-à-vis the changed realities. Although certain gaps re-

main, including one addressed by a newly recommended measure, Member States in the region have generally well-developed plans. Beyond contingency plans, temporary measures, such as establishing asylum reception points at selected BCPs, aim to respond to novel threats.

### Military support for border control exemplifies the hybrid nature of threats at the borders

The **gravity of threats** posed by neighbouring third countries has led many Member States to consider military support for border-control authorities. A joint Baltic states defence line and the Polish East Shield programme are examples of security developments that not only increase the military security of Member States, but also mitigate threats such as irregular migration, which traditionally have been addressed in the framework of border control. Instrumentalisation of migration by third countries blurs the distinction between the military and border-control domains. The contribution of military actors to border-control activities is ongoing along the Eastern border and supports surveillance of the most affected border sections. These deployments also highlight the potential for an expansion of border guard competences aimed at responding to these novel threats. On the other hand, in some cases border-control responsibilities have been transferred to armed forces en bloc. For example, in Estonia, the responsibility for maritime surveillance was transferred from the border guard to the navy. Although this may enhance Member States' resilience, such developments carry the risk that staff might not be trained for border control. For example, a vulnerability in the availability of border-control training for the Estonian navy personnel in charge of sea border surveillance was recorded in 2024.

### Gaps in staffing remain a challenge for border-control authorities on the Eastern border

Human resource support by military actors is not only a symptom of a changed security landscape, but also a manifestation of the most exigent challenge for border-control authorities in the region. For several Member States along the Eastern border, insufficient human resources featured

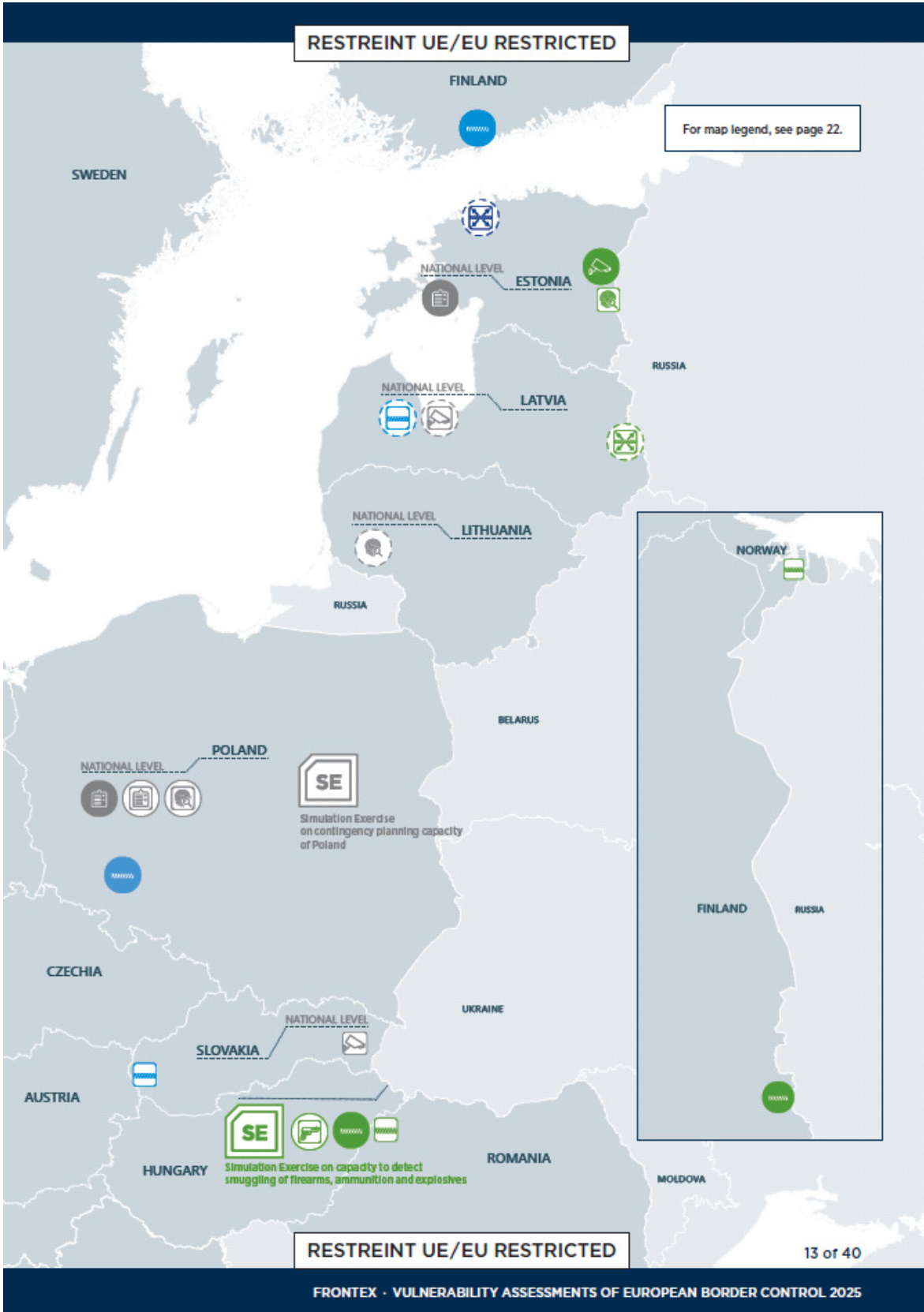
in this year's assessments. Some Member States have succeeded in increasing the number of border guards with more attractive job profiles, upscaled recruitment and long-term planning. In Estonia, a measure recommending more deployments at the land border with Russia was successfully implemented in the past year. Nevertheless, in some Member States, the issue of insufficient staffing persists.

### Tensions with Russia and Belarus have led to closures of multiple BCPs and redirection of human resources to border surveillance

Since surveillance of land borders has increased in priority, human resources have been moved to this task from border checks. Most Member States on the Eastern border have closed land BCPs in response to security threats from Russia and Belarus. In Finland, no land BCPs with Russia remain in operation. Entry of Russian and Belarusian citizens and their vehicles has been increasingly limited by all Member States in the region, translating into falling numbers of passengers at BCPs and allowing border guards to be redirected to surveillance duties.

### Polish contingency planning successfully tested in a VA Simulation Exercise, resulting in recommending the inclusion of clear thresholds for triggering the plan and for requesting European support

The multitude of risks faced by Member States bordering with Russia and Belarus requires **sound contingency planning** in the event of further deterioration of the situation. In July 2024, Poland was subject to a VA Simulation Exercise to test national preparedness in the event of large-scale irregular migration. The exercise revealed a high reliance on the Armed Forces for border surveillance activities. It moreover confirmed a persistent vulnerability concerning the lack of clear thresholds for triggering the contingency plan and requesting European support. A targeted measure addressing the gaps in contingency planning has been recommended to Poland. On the positive side, the broad participation of national authorities in the exercise provided for good inter-institutional information exchange.



#### Use of drones for smuggling on the land border is a key challenge for border-control authorities

At the land borders, the *modi operandi* of criminals involved in smuggling continue to evolve. The use of drones, including for smuggling and possibly for intelligence collection, has risen exponentially along the land border. Member States are yet to implement effective procedures, with those countries on the Eastern borders at the forefront of these attempts. In some Member States, this is planned to be done in the framework of military security. This further increases interdependencies between the civilian border guard and army domains, but also highlights the need for an inter-institutional approach with the active involvement of border-control authorities to ensure a well-functioning, multi-purpose system.

#### South-Eastern borders

The Western Balkan migratory route continues to define the operational response of South-Eastern Member States. The prevention of illegal border-crossings remains at the top of the agenda of the border-control authorities in the region. Continuously enhanced infrastructural capacities at border sections subject to attempts of illegal entry contrast with weaker capacities at sections predominantly affected by irregular exits. Like the Eastern borders, the South-Eastern borders face the challenge of insufficient human resources. The full accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Schengen area expanded the area of free movement and, at the same time, allowed for a reallocation of resources in several Member States. However, it also presents the challenge of potential rapid relocation of migratory flows. The redirection of the main route from the Hungarian to the Croatian border in 2024, for example, confirms the volatility of irregular movements in the region.

#### Development of surveillance infrastructure continues at land borders with Türkiye as they remain a key entry point for irregular migration to Europe

The Schengen area's land border with Türkiye remains one of the main entry points for migrants irregularly travelling to Europe. While the number of illegal border-crossings on the Greek section of the border remained stable in 2024, a considerable rise was noted on the Bulgarian section.

#### VA Simulation Exercise on contingency planning

- Table-top exercise conducted with the involvement of Member State representatives and Frontex experts in the tested Member State over several days.
- Three-stage scenario prepared by Frontex experts, presenting progressively more difficult circumstances affecting various aspects of border control, developing over the course of several weeks.
- Simulated Frontex support in the form of EBCG Standing Corps deployment and surveillance services is available upon a Member State's request.
- Answers provided in a questionnaire by the Member State form the basis for the assessment and potential recommended measures.

tion. However, at the same time there was a drop in recorded attempts at crossing. In line with the ongoing risk, surveillance infrastructure at both border sections continues to be developed. A combination of stationary surveillance and physical obstacles spans the Turkish border, and Bulgaria and Greece aim to complete their integrated surveillance systems on this border in the coming years. Infrastructure developments are coupled with investments in surveillance equipment. In Bulgaria, 2024 saw a major increase in the number of patrol cars deployed for surveillance of the Turkish and Serbian borders.

#### Weaker capacities to detect irregular migration persist at border sections predominantly used to exit the Schengen area to Western Balkan third countries

Further along the route, capacity to detect illegal border-crossings on the borders with Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia is deteriorating. The Albanian and North Macedonian authorities recorded a much higher number of illegal border-crossings than the number of exits prevented by Greece on this route. This is due to a lack of stationary surveillance infrastructure coupled with less frequent patrolling of these border sections in 2024 compared to 2023. Progress on recommendations made under the Vulnerability Assessment and the Schengen Evaluation and Monitoring Mechanism is yet to be made. On Bulgaria's border with Serbia, an improvement was recorded. An increase in preventions of exit on the Bulgarian side, and a major drop in detections of illegal border-crossings by Serbia is a positive development. This can be attributed to an increased number of border guards and terrestrial means deployed at the border, as well as the interinstitutional cooperation on border control launched in 2023. Nevertheless, despite the progress, the

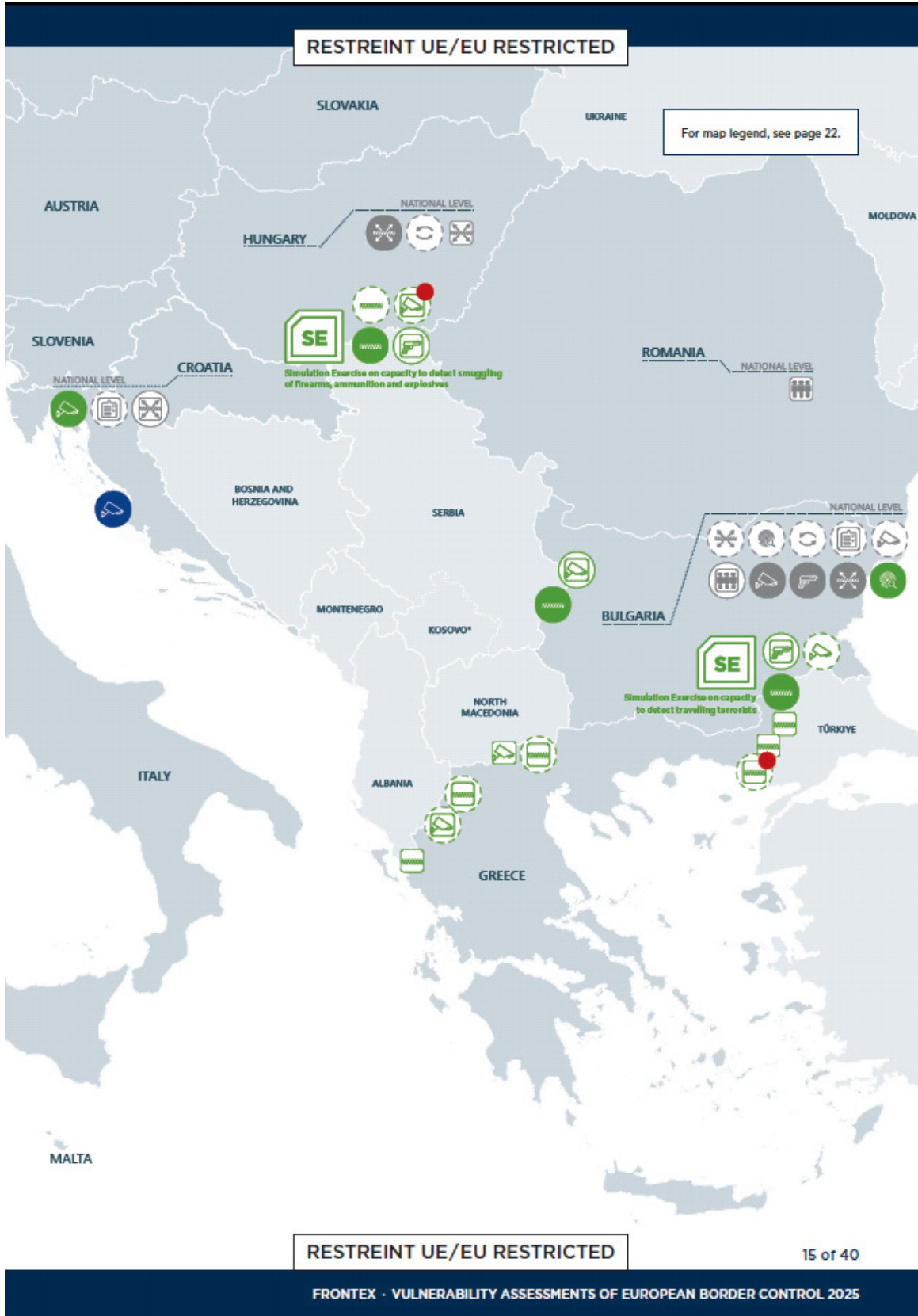
number of illegal border-crossings remains high and a measure targeting this vulnerability has been recommended.

#### Croatia emerges as the main entry point for irregular migrants crossing the Western Balkans, while detections of secondary movements further on in the Schengen area underline continued migratory pressure along the route

A major development in terms of illegal border-crossings in the region took place further north along the Western Balkan migratory route. Serbian operations against people-smuggling networks launched in late 2023 on the border with Hungary resulted in a redirection of the migration flow towards Croatia. The resulting 97% drop in Hungarian detections of illegal border-crossings was accompanied by a spike in arrivals at the Bosnian-Croatian border. Surveillance capacities on the Croatian border improved and a related recommended measure was closed by the Frontex Management Board in September 2025. Moreover, Croatia doubled its accommodation capacity for migrants at the land borders, expanded its training on screening and debriefing, and is on track to implement a measure recommending improvements in its contingency planning. Nevertheless, the migratory challenge in the region is highlighted by a very high number of secondary movements detected by Slovenia.

#### Strong surveillance infrastructure on the Hungarian border contrasts with a lack of security checks of persons apprehended for illegal border-crossing

On the Hungarian-Serbian border, the decrease in migratory pressure did not alter Hungary's policies on border control. The border section remains well protected in terms of surveillance infrastructure, and physical obstacles cover the entire



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border section. Further improvements, including a camera system, are being introduced. A measure recommending the closure of the staffing gap in border control was considered implemented by the Frontex Management Board in July 2025. Another measure, addressing Hungary's non-compliance with the requirement to check persons apprehended for illegal border-crossing in security databases was notified by Frontex Management Board to the European Commission and the Council of the EU in late 2024, following the non-implementa-

tion of a related Frontex Management Board Decision.

**Main deficiencies in border check capacities relate to insufficient staffing and gaps in infrastructure**

In 2024, the numbers of passengers crossing BCPs on the South-Eastern borders were generally stable. A good rate of consultations of security databases contrasts with insufficient numbers of document experts at some BCPs. At some South-Eastern land

BCPs, insufficient resources result in deficiencies in capacity to detect document fraud. Moreover, at the land borders with Albania and North Macedonia, clandestine border-crossings have been identified as a security issue. On the Greek-Turkish border, insufficient infrastructure at the Kipi BCP affects border check procedures and prevents fluid passenger flows. The implementation of a related recommended measure continues to be monitored by the Frontex Management Board.



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**VA Simulation Exercise at Hungarian BCPs confirms border guards' capacity to detect cases of weapons smuggling**

In Hungary, a VA Simulation Exercise on capacity to detect weapons smuggling was conducted in February 2025 at two BCPs on the Ukrainian and Serbian borders. While the Ukrainian border was selected due to the potential threat of weapons smuggling stemming from the ongoing war, the Serbian border was chosen due to continued smug-

gling attempts from the territory of Serbia and the Western Balkans more broadly. The exercise confirmed Hungary's capacity to detect firearms and ammunition during border checks, as most of the simulated cases of smuggling were identified well. Besides security training at the Ukrainian border, the assessment pointed to the harmonisation of border check procedures between the Border Police and Customs, and joint risk products and training of both agencies as areas where improvement can be made.

**VA Simulation Exercise at Bulgarian BCPs evaluated the capacity to detect travelling terrorists**

Border guards' capacity to detect travelling terrorists and other subjects of interest during border checks was assessed during a VA Simulation Exercise at the Bulgarian land BCPs of Kapitan Andreevo and Lesovo in November 2024. While the border guards succeeded in identifying most of the simulated cases as potentially involving subjects of interest, simulated cases of *bona fide* travellers were also overwhelmingly classified as suspicious. The assessment pointed to deficiencies in specialised training and the limited availability of risk profiles and information exchange with other authorities as root causes of the vulnerability.



**VA Simulation Exercise on capacity to detect smuggling of firearms, ammunition and explosives**

- Conducted at pre-selected BCPs, prepared in cooperation with Frontex experts, involving vehicles prepared for the exercise by Frontex.
- Assessing capacities of selected BCPs relating to detection of cross-border crime, risk analysis, specialised training and interagency cooperation.
- Questionnaire and interviews with participating officers, testing knowledge on firearms components and procedures at the BCP.
- Live simulation of first- and second-line checks on vehicles entering and exiting the Schengen area. First-line officers identify potential cases of smuggling and decide on referring them to the second line where cases are examined in an extended timeframe.

**VA Simulation Exercise on capacity to detect travelling terrorists and other subjects of interest**

- Assessing the capacity to detect cross-border crime, in particular travelling terrorists and other subjects of interest, when carrying out first- and second-line checks.
- Conducted at selected BCPs of the assessed Member States.
- First-line module combines a survey with a simulation of passenger checks at the booth involving a combination of bona fide passengers and potential subjects of interest.
- Second-line module consists of interviews with officers who focus on cases referred by the first-line officers and take decisions regarding referral of cases to relevant authorities.

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**Southern borders**

Irregular migration over the **Mediterranean Sea** remains the dominant challenge for Member States in the South of the European Union. Dynamic shifts in migratory routes require border control authorities to be well prepared. In 2024, maritime surveillance infrastructure continued to be upgraded across the Southern borders and efforts of Member States to detect and intercept migrant boats continued with Frontex support. Nevertheless, the Southern borders remain the region with the highest number of vulnerabilities identified. Vulnerabilities in border surveillance systems, contingency plans, and screening and registration procedures continue to challenge border-control systems in a region characterised by a volatile migratory situation.

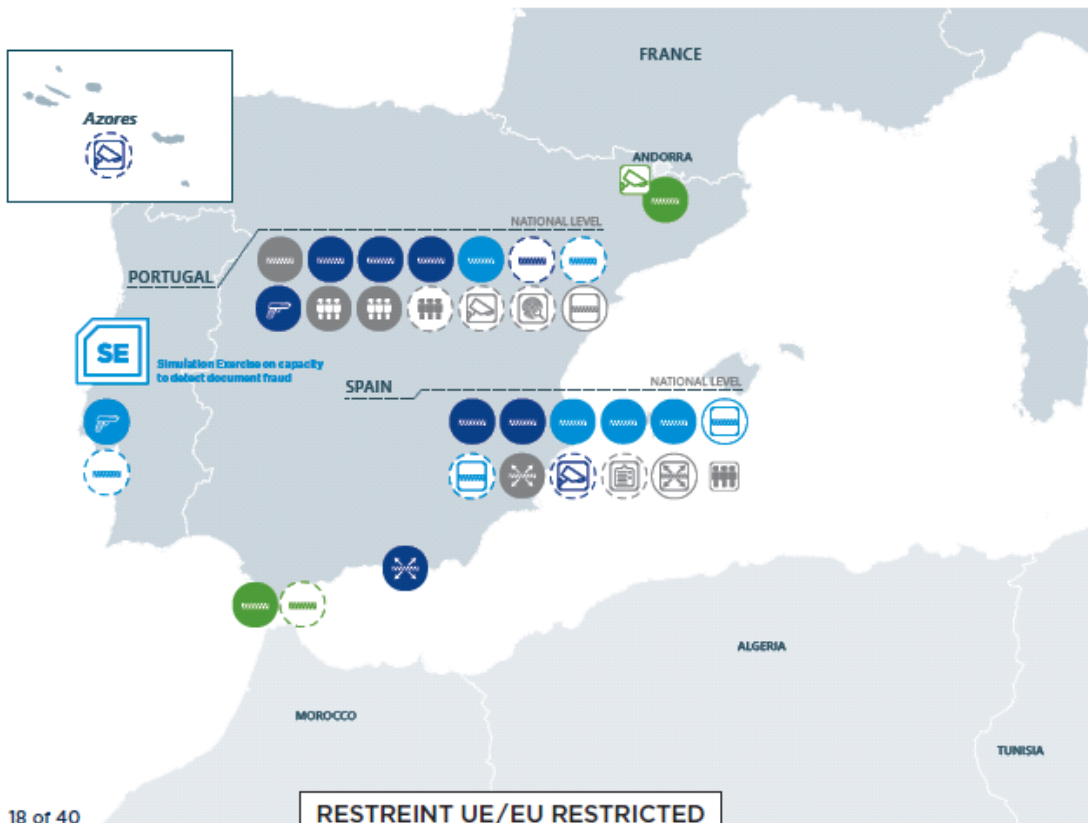
**Lower migratory pressure on the Central and Western Mediterranean migratory routes is accompanied by an increase in arrivals on the Western African and Eastern Mediterranean routes, with Crete affected by the steepest spike**

In 2024, the Mediterranean Sea saw dynamic shifts in irregular seaborne migration flows. There was a major drop in the number of illegal crossing attempts on the **Central Mediterranean** migratory route. The decrease of almost 60% can be attributed in part to the intensified efforts of the Tunisian authorities to combat illegal border-crossings, including the dismantling of migrant camps. Although lower in total number than last year, departures from Libya now account for the majority of crossings on this route. A minor drop in the number of crossings was also noted on the **Western Mediterranean** route following the implementation of preventive measures by the Moroccan authorities. In 2024, crossings on this route, departing from Algeria, espe-

cially impacted the Balearic Islands. On the **Türkiye-Italy corridor**, through the Aegean and Ionian Seas, the number of crossings halved in 2024. The lower number of arrivals on these routes was accompanied by a spike in crossings in other locations. In 2024, **Crete** emerged as a destination increasingly chosen by migrants trying to reach Europe through the Mediterranean Sea, departing from eastern Libya. The Greek authorities recorded almost a four-fold rise in arrivals on the island compared with the previous year. Arrivals in Greece through the Aegean Sea also rose, by over 30%. Finally, the Western African route recorded the highest number of arrivals since the record year 2006, and land crossings to Ceuta more than doubled in 2024.

**Deficiencies in the functioning of Eurosur National Coordination Centres persist in Member States on the Central Mediterranean route**

The **situational awareness** of Member States regarding these developments should



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be ensured by information exchange in the framework of Eurosur National Coordination Centres (NCC). In 2024, the functioning of some NCCs remained insufficient. In Malta, the NCC still does not operate 24/7, while the Italian NCC does not provide a single situational picture as interoperability issues between different authorities persist.

**Gaps in stationary maritime surveillance systems are yet to be sufficiently addressed**

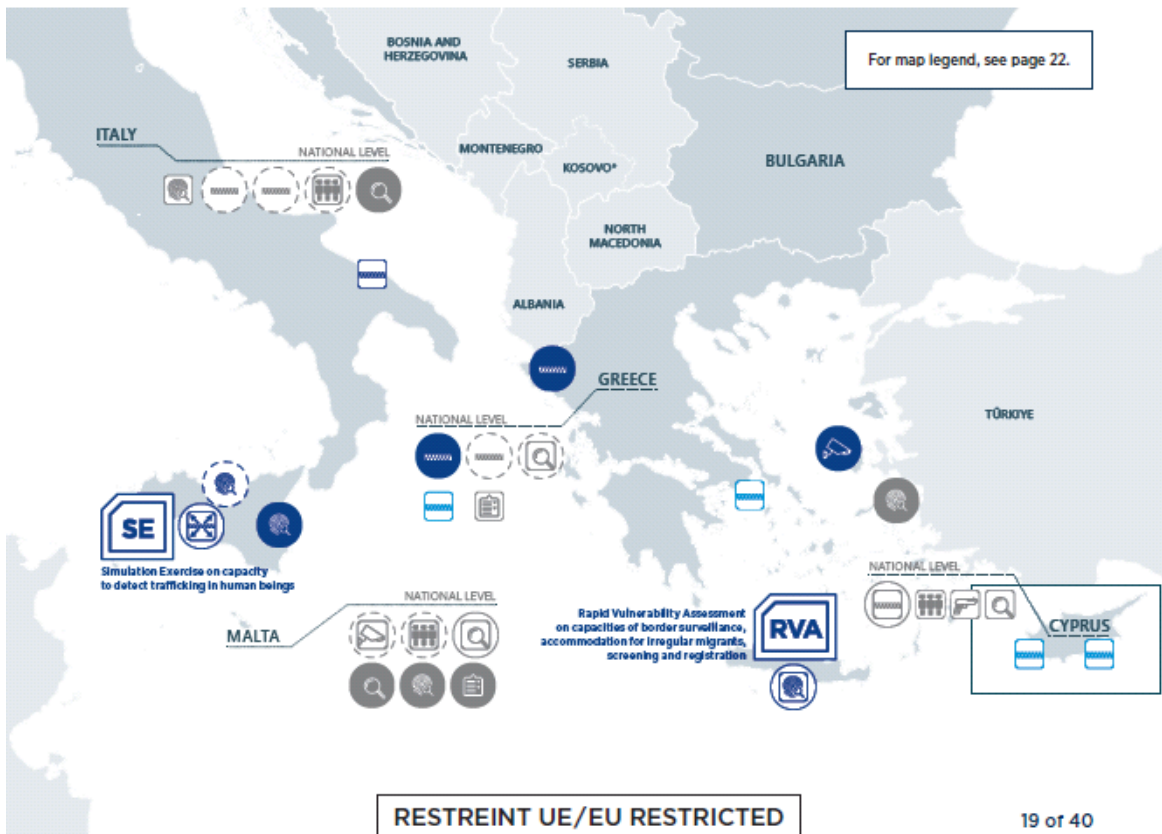
The persistent migratory pressure at the maritime borders prompts Southern Member States to continue prioritising investments in **surveillance infrastructure**. Integrated systems based on radar infrastructure support border surveillance along the Mediterranean coasts. The main challenge in this area relates to the limited coverage of the systems. In Greece, the system is expected to be completed by the end of this decade, seven years behind the initial schedule. Around the same time, the Maltese system, currently covering half its territo-

rial waters, is expected to be upgraded. The Spanish system, covering a similar percentage of the country's maritime border, is also being modernised with new radars expected to provide greater geographical coverage. In Portugal, a measure recommending an expansion of the stationary surveillance system aims at including the Azores in the system's coverage by 2028. Italy, on the other hand, has three systems supporting its sea surveillance, however their insufficient interoperability raises concern.

**Large numbers of migrants continue to reach European coasts by boat despite patrols**

To support the stationary surveillance and compensate for gaps in its coverage, Member States utilise mobile surveillance systems and sea patrolling. Italy has been **intercepting a growing percentage** of migrant boats heading in its direction. Still, a considerable number of boats reach Italian coasts. Lampedusa remains the region most affected by arrivals, with Apulia, Calabria,

Sardinia and Sicily also affected. On its Adriatic coast, Italian sea surveillance faces the risk of sea- and airborne drug smuggling from Albania, with the proximity of the Albanian coast posing a challenge to interception. Geographical proximity of the departure coast also affects maritime surveillance in the South of Spain. Simultaneous departures of small fibreglass and inflatable boats challenge border-control authorities, and a large number of boats succeeds in reaching the Spanish coast. In 2024, Spain ensured more frequent patrolling of its sea borders using mobile surveillance systems. Frontex supported Spanish surveillance efforts in the Balearic Islands with deployment of Multipurpose Aerial Surveillance (MAS) aimed at detecting boats. The MAS service also continued to enhance the situational awareness of Greece, Italy and Malta. It is paramount that MAS support is directed towards the most affected border sections, while the migratory pressure at these border sections is reflected by the proportionate assignment of the Eurosur impact level. Although it is not challenged by large irreg-



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ular migration flows, the Portuguese border surveillance system is affected by decreasing assets and insufficient training of officers, which may weaken the national capacity to detect cross-border crime, predominantly drug trafficking.

Undetected irregular migration and subsequent secondary movements in the Schengen area continue to translate into a high number of migrants trying to reach the United Kingdom by boat from France. In 2024, France dedicated more border guards to the surveillance of its sea border with the United Kingdom and the prevention of irregular exits. However, roughly half of the attempts to cross the English Channel are successful. A table-top VA Simulation Exercise testing Belgian and French contingency planning was held in October 2025 with positive results. Its findings and conclusions will be featured in the next annual report.

#### **A Rapid Vulnerability Assessment assessed Greece's capacity to address a steep increase in irregular arrivals on Crete and conduct screening and registration activities**

A spike in arrivals on Crete from Libya, with an over threefold increase in detections of illegal border-crossings compared to the previous year, has led Greece to sharply increase patrolling and Frontex to intensify surveillance support in the area. This emerging threat was subject to a Rapid Vulnerability Assessment conducted in Crete in September 2025. Although no vulnerabilities were attributed to maritime surveillance at the time of the assessment,

challenges in screening and registration capacity were encountered. Crete does not have the infrastructure to adequately conduct these activities, and migrants wait in temporary facilities pending transfer to the mainland where procedures are conducted. A corresponding measure targeting the vulnerability in screening and registration capacity was recommended following the BA 2025.

#### **Expansions of hosting facilities continue across Southern Member States**

Issues of timely screening and registration are not limited to Crete. Greek islands without established hotspots and the Italian island of Pantelleria are examples of locations where Eurodac registrations are not conducted within the required time due to distances to the closest screening and registration facilities. In Greek islands which host hotspot facilities, accommodation capacities reached their limit in 2024, while two new centres in Lesbos and Chios are under construction. Construction of new centres or the refurbishment of existing ones is also underway in Cyprus, Malta and Spain. Spanish efforts focus on the Canary Islands, where two new temporary reception centres are to be established. In Italy, accommodation capacity across the country visibly declined in 2024. Deficiencies in this regard persist in Portugal, where a measure recommending an increase in available accommodation capacity and the number of staff trained in screening and registration continues to be implemented.

#### **A VA Simulation Exercise on Italy's capacity to detect trafficking in human beings showed improvements are required in the availability of specialised training and risk profile updates**

To assess screening and registration capacities in Italy, a VA Simulation Exercise on the capacity to detect cases of trafficking in human beings (THB) was conducted in November 2024 in the hotspots of Porto Empedocle and Pozzallo. The exercise acknowledged border guards' experience facilitating their capacity to fluently screen and register irregular migrants. However, it pointed to gaps in the availability of specialised training on detection of THB and updates of risk profiles. A measure addressing these gaps has been recommended to Italy. Since then, Italy has successfully participated in a pilot for the screening border procedure under the New Pact for Asylum and Migration.

#### **Insufficient consultations of security databases and gaps in training affect several seaport BCPs**

While irregular seaborne migration remains the main challenge for border-control systems in Southern Member States, Vulnerability Assessments also point to deficiencies in the capacity to process regular migration through the seaports. At Bari and Lemesos ports, deficiencies in consultation of security databases during border checks were assessed as vulnerabilities, while Portuguese seaports suffer from insufficient expertise in document fraud and cross-border crime, limiting the capacity of the BCPs to detect cases of passengers using fraudulent travel documents.

### **Air borders**

In 2024, air travel continued to be the most frequently chosen way of entering and leaving the Schengen area. Half a billion passengers crossing the air borders constituted two-thirds of the passenger flow through the assessed BCPs. The volume of people crossing European air borders highlights the importance of sound border checks ensuring fluid passenger flows at airports.

#### **VA Simulation Exercise on capacity to detect trafficking in human beings**

- Capacity to conduct screening and registration, detect cross-border crime, and the functioning of the referral mechanism are examined.
- The Exercise consists of two modules conducted at the tested locations over the course of two days.
- The first module in the form of a questionnaire tests the training and experience of the screening and registration officers and examines their response to simulated cases of potential trafficking in human beings.
- The second module assesses debriefing officers' knowledge of interviewing techniques and of trafficking in human beings as well as their proposed handling of the cases identified in the first module.

#### **Rapid Vulnerability Assessment**

- Launched in response to an emerging threat affecting one or more Member States.
- Monitors immediate consequences of newly identified challenges.
- Shorter assessment and recommendation cycles facilitate faster response on the ground.

