

# Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency: cooperation with third countries in 2019

*Report to the European Parliament,  
the Council and the Commission*



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# Foreword



In recent years, Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has experienced tremendous change and growth. Through the extension of its mandate and increase in resources, the Agency has been transformed into a fully-fledged operational arm of the EU in the area of border management and return. As such, the Agency is increasingly playing a stronger and more proactive role in the external dimension, with an aim to promote EU standards for integrated border management in the European neighbourhood and develop partnerships for joint operational activities. We are aware that internal and external security are interdependent and that our shared borders are safer when we work together with our non-EU partners.

Today's challenges require a global border management community, built on trust and cooperation. Therefore, developing a strong network based on mutual support and long-lasting partnerships among border and coast guard authorities around the world has been an integral part of our work. The year 2019 was full of important developments for the Agency's international cooperation. Let me highlight a few examples.

In May 2019, Frontex marked a historic moment – the launch of its very first fully-fledged Joint Operation outside of the European Union. Our joint efforts with the Albanian authorities have already demonstrated concrete results, supporting our mutual efforts to tackle illegal immigration and cross-border crime, such as migrant smuggling or trafficking in human beings.

Throughout 2019, Frontex continued to strengthen further our operational collaboration with neighbours in the Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership regions. We have also advanced dialogue with partners in the Southern

Neighbourhood and in West Africa. In this regard, I was honoured to host and co-chair the Frontex-Morocco *Comité Mixte*, held for the first time in October.

Last October, Frontex gathered the border and coast guard executives of nearly 100 countries coming from five continents, as well as a broad range of institutional partners in Warsaw at the 24<sup>th</sup> International Border Police Conference. I believe, this conference was symbolic as to the extent the Agency can offer a unique platform for the international border management community.

Within the EU as well as outside, the Agency benefits from a strong network of the EU family. Our cooperation with third countries is therefore implemented in close coordination with the European Commission, the European External Action Service, our sister agencies as well as the wide networks of the EU Member States. I would like to particularly acknowledge and thank them for this cooperation, as together we can reinforce each other and find more effective solutions in cooperation with our partners in third countries.

In the spirit of cooperation, transparency and accountability, I am pleased to present the report on the Agency's cooperation with third countries in 2019, as requested in the Article 73(7) of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation<sup>1</sup>.

Fabrice Leggeri  
*Executive Director*

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1052/2013 and (EU) 2016/1624

# 1. International cooperation

## Regional priorities

The **Western Balkan** region remains a priority for the Agency, as reflected by the cooperation that spans across all areas of Frontex' mandate, from risk analysis, operational activities to capacity building. With the launch of the first fully-fledged joint operation in Albania under the EU status agreement, in May the Agency opened a new chapter for cooperation with the Western Balkans.

To use the momentum and to bring the Western Balkan authorities ever closer to the European border and coast guard family, in June the Agency for the first time organised a high-level meeting between the Frontex Management Board and the Chiefs of Western Balkan border authorities. This meeting was an opportunity for both sides to exchange views on common challenges, such as fights against cross-border crime and illegal immigration, and explore areas for even closer cooperation, particularly in view of the future implementation of the Status Agreements. The meeting and subsequent consultations helped to map further areas for enhanced cooperation that the Agency followed throughout the year.



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Figure 1: **Frontex Management Board-Western Balkans high-level meeting. Warsaw, June 2019**

Engagement with **Turkey** continued through the Frontex Liaison Officer based in Ankara and the participation of Turkish representatives in several Frontex events and activities. Negotiations of the Cooperation Plan for 2020-22 were concluded in 2019, ahead of its subsequent signature in January 2020. Additionally, a high-level delegation from the Turkish National Police, led by the Deputy Director General, visited Frontex to explore common areas of interest.

In 2019, Frontex also worked towards advancing dialogue with countries in the **Silk Route** region, most notably with the first formal visit of the Agency to Pakistan with the view to explore potential areas for future cooperation.

Other forms of engagement with the region were carried out in tandem with other EU-led initiatives (see page 7) and multilateral fora.

Strengthening the dialogue with partners in **North and West Africa** is among the core priorities of the Agency's international cooperation. In addition to the implementation of two capacity-building projects (see page 17), a number of familiarisation visits and high-level exchanges were held in 2019. Over the course of the year, Frontex Executive Director visited Morocco and Senegal. The launch of the Frontex-Morocco *Comité Mixte* in Warsaw marked an important milestone for the dialogue with the border management authorities of the country. Frontex and Morocco explored areas of mutual interest and discussed possibilities for cooperation, including on risk analysis, technology and innovation as well as coast guard cooperation. A joint roadmap for follow-up technical activities was agreed upon to be conducted throughout 2020, with an intention to convene another meeting of the Frontex-Morocco *Comité Mixte* in autumn 2020 in Morocco.

At a regional level, Frontex actively engaged with multilateral organisations, particularly the Arab Interior Ministers'



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Figure 2: **Frontex-Morocco Comité Mixte. Warsaw, November 2019**



Council (AIMC) and the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL). Enhanced dialogue with these organisations was instrumental in facilitating and broadening the outreach of Frontex activities through various joint regional events organised under the umbrella of the EU4Border Security project.

Cooperation with the **Eastern Partnership** countries continued through bilateral initiatives. For example, in response to the request by the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine, Frontex, in close coordination with the European Commission and EU Assistance Mission to Ukraine, supported the national authorities in the development of the new IBM Strategy and Action Plan for Ukraine. Operational collaboration with Georgia was intensified, and new cooperation plans were concluded with the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine for the years 2019–2021 and with the State Border Committee of Belarus for 2020–2022.

Frontex also further strengthened collaboration with **its strategic partners**. Building on the existing long-term cooperation with the authorities of the United States, a high-level meeting was held with the US Department of Homeland Security to discuss common challenges and areas of interest. In particular, constructive exchanges were intensified with the US Customs and Border Protection in a number of key areas of the mandate of Frontex. Collaboration also continued with the relevant authorities of Canada, in particular, in relation to the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). Gradually expanding its engagement with other partners, the Agency signed a Joint Declaration of Intent with the Home Affairs Department of Australia, to take the first steps in exploring cooperation in a range of areas. Initial exchanges were also held with New Zealand, and, on

the margins of the International Border Police Conference 2019, a high-level bilateral meeting was held with the National Immigration Administration of China.

With the aim to reach out to third countries, the Agency regularly hosts **familiarisation visits** in its headquarters and Joint Operations. These familiarisation visits help to raise awareness of the Agency's mandate, promote EU best practices and to build trust. In 2019, Frontex received delegations from Albania, Australia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Iraq, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Lebanon, Moldova, New Zealand, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States of America and Vietnam.

### Frontex Liaison Officers to third countries



Figure 3: **Frontex Executive Director visits Senegal to introduce the FLO. Dakar, December 2019**

The Agency continued to further develop its network of Frontex Liaison Officers (FLO) in third countries, most notably, with the preparation of two new deployments - to Senegal and to the Western Balkans region. The FLO to Senegal was recruited, trained and introduced by the Executive Director during his visit to Dakar in December, with the official start of the deployment in January 2020. The FLO to Albania has also been recruited in 2019 and joined the

Agency in March 2020. With the main seat in Tirana, the FLO will reinforce the FLO based in Belgrade and will cover Albania, Kosovo<sup>2</sup> and North Macedonia.

The FLOs to Turkey, Niger and the Western Balkans (main seat in Serbia) consolidated their presence in their respective countries or regions in support of the overall cooperation with the Agency, and contributed to the European Immigration Liaison Officers Network in their respective host country or region.

### Promoting and upholding fundamental rights

All bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements and activities are concluded or organised within the framework of the external action policy of the Union, including with regard to the strict adherence to fundamental rights. As such, the respect for fundamental rights is a prerequisite and a premise of collaboration between Frontex and third countries. In cooperation with its Fundamental Rights Officer, the Agency ensures that projects and operational activities have practical safeguards and mitigating measures in place to ensure fundamental rights and the principles of international protection.

In 2019, the Fundamental Rights Officer provided assessments of the Agency's planned cooperation with several third countries, promoted fundamental rights in border management through familiarisation visits of third country authorities, and delivered dedicated training sessions and other activities within the framework of technical assistance projects.

Particular attention and effort were given to consider potential fundamental

<sup>2</sup> \* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

rights implications in the first Frontex Joint Operation outside of the EU – in Albania. The Agency took the necessary steps to ensure the accountability for any potential fundamental rights violations in the operational areas, *inter alia*, by means of national and Frontex' complaints mechanisms.

In preparation for revised EBCG Regulation<sup>3</sup>, the Agency worked together with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) to prepare for the deployment of the future Fundamental Rights Monitors. As part of this collaboration, Joint missions to operational areas, including to Albania, were undertaken. Engagement with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), as well as international organisations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), contributed to the promotion of fundamental rights-compliant border management practices, including through capacity building activities in third countries.

### Enhancing synergies with the EU community

Frontex has strived to identify synergies with and support EU-led initiatives in the external dimension, a case in point being the Agency's participation in the Steering Committee and Advisory Board of the **EU-funded project** on integrated border management for the Silk Route countries that was launched in 2019<sup>4</sup>. Strong involvement in **EU efforts on return** is also evident, such as participation in European Commission-led missions to third countries, as well as in all Joint Readmission Committee and Joint

3 Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1052/2013 and (EU) 2016/1624

4 DG DEVCO project MIGR/2018/402-027



Figure 4: **Frontex and Belarus sign Cooperation Plan 2020-2022. Warsaw, October 2019**

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Working Group meetings. Reflecting the importance of a coherent EU approach towards the efficient implementation of the Union's external policy on returns, the Agency continued the planned transfer of activities of return-related EU-funded networks and programmes, such as Eurint, EURLO and ERRIN, with a strong emphasis on building cooperation with third countries in the field of return from different angles.

In line with the European Agenda on Security<sup>5</sup>, Frontex enhanced cooperation with several **civilian CSDP missions** offering expertise on migration and border management, namely to EUAM Iraq, EUBAM Libya, EUBAM to Moldova and Ukraine, as well as EUCAP Sahel Niger. For example, Frontex supported the training of approximately 265 officers as part of the Border Module carried out in Niamey. The Agency is also supporting the re-launch of the EUBAM to Moldova and Ukraine Task Force Arms, whereas the Mission has joined the Frontex Working Group on the handbook for detection of firearms for Customs and Border Guards.

5 [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu\\_agenda\\_on\\_security\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/basic-documents/docs/eu_agenda_on_security_en.pdf)

### Multilateral fora

Frontex promotes the principles of European integrated border management through a variety of conferences and events, bringing together border and coast guard authorities of the EU Member States as well as third countries.

In October 2019, Frontex held the 24<sup>th</sup> **International Border Police Conference** under the theme of “Cross-border security through preparedness, prevention and response”. The purpose of the event, which Frontex organised for the fourth time, is to promote dialogue at strategic level, discuss common challenges and solutions, and to build further a strong network of mutual support and equal partnerships among relevant authorities around the world.

The conference featured a number of high level speakers, among them - the Acting Deputy Secretary of the US Department of Homeland Security, Mr Pekoske; Wāli/Governor and Director-General of Migration and Border Surveillance of Morocco's Ministry of the Interior, Mr Khalid Zerouali; Commissioner of the Australian Border Force, Mr Michael Outram; and Deputy Commissioner of the National Immigration Administration of China, Mr Zhao Changhua. Discussions

continued in interactive panel debates, and two side events - on Combatting Document and Identity Fraud as well as on ETIAS. To benefit from the networking opportunities the event provided, a multitude of bilateral and multilateral meetings were also organised. As a result, over two full days, experiences and knowledge on policies and strategies at national, regional and global levels were shared, new partnerships were established and existing ones strengthened.

Other key international events organised by Frontex in 2019, included the **International Conference on Biometrics for Borders: Morphing and Morphing Attack Detection Methods**, the **Operational Heads of Airports Conference** and the **European Border and Coast Guard Day**. On the margins of the latter, the Agency organised a side event on “Integrated Border Management and the European Neighbourhood: Cooperation across borders”. The event brought together the authorities from the Eastern Partnership

and Western Balkan regions, in order to exchange expertise and best practices in the development and implementation of integrated border management strategies.

Frontex also continued to contribute to multilateral **platforms for dialogue on migration** such as the Budapest and Prague processes. These served to raise additional awareness of the Agency’s work and promote EU standards in the different areas of border management.



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Figure 5: **International Border Police Conference. Warsaw, October 2019**



## 2. Situational awareness and monitoring

The Agency remained actively engaged in cooperation with the competent authorities of third countries in the area of situational awareness and monitoring, aiming at the further development of a common pre-frontier intelligence picture. Key components of collaboration in this area are the regional risk analysis networks with third countries: the Western Balkans Risk Analysis Network (WB-RAN), the Eastern Partnership Risk Analysis Network (EaP-RAN), the Turkey-Frontex Risk Analysis Network (TU-RAN)<sup>6</sup> and the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community

(AFIC)<sup>7</sup>. In addition to serving as platforms for exchange of information, the networks bring together analysts from border management authorities in third countries and in some cases also from EU Member States.

In 2019, most of these networks held regular meetings to discuss the main trends in the field of illegal immigration and other developments affecting the regions. Regular and ad hoc trainings were also carried out for the members of the networks. As a result, Frontex produced periodical analytical products

such as annual risk assessment reports, analytical reviews, and quarterly and monthly reports related to the regions.

The Agency continued to reach out to accession countries in the Western Balkans, as well as relevant authorities in the Middle East and North Africa region, to promote the importance of counter-terrorism efforts within the border dimension. In this respect, Frontex is collaborating with regional partners, such as the WB Counter-Terrorism Initiative in support of the Western Balkan partners' authorities.

6 After the work of this network had been temporarily suspended, discussions to resume TU-RAN activities have been carried-out throughout 2019.

7 For more information on AFIC activities please consult section 6 on technical assistance projects.

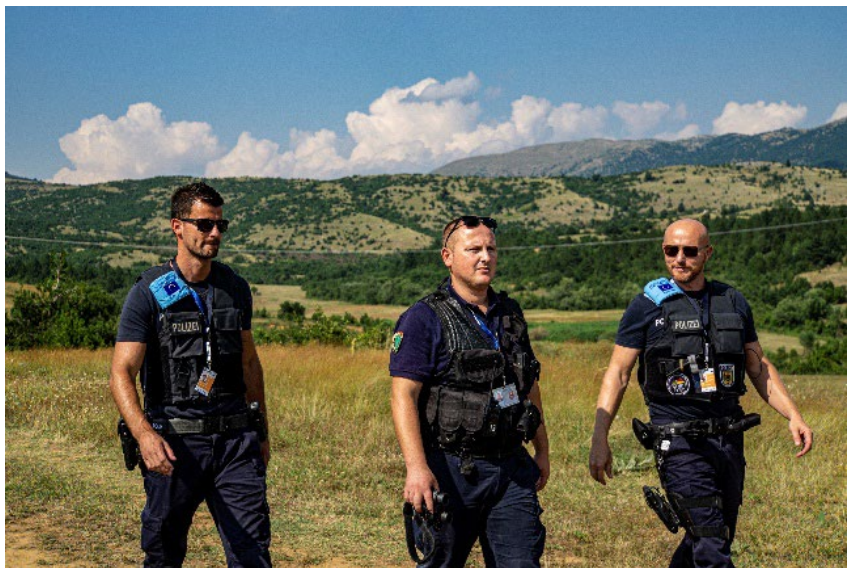
### 3. Operational cooperation at the external borders

Operational cooperation at borders takes place at four different levels:

- a) On the basis of a Status Agreement, the Agency can carry out fully-fledged operational activities on the territory of a third country by deploying the European Border and Coast Guard teams **with executive powers**.
- b) Officers from third-country authorities can be deployed as **observers to Frontex operational activities** at EU external borders.
- c) European Border and Coast Guard team members can be also deployed as **EU Experts without executive powers** to Coordination Points established at the border crossing points between two third countries.
- d) Representatives from third countries can be involved in joint activities in the area of law enforcement cooperation, including within the framework of the **EU Policy Cycle/ European multidisciplinary platform against criminal threats (EMPACT)**.

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

Following the entry into force of the Status Agreement signed between the EU and Albania, in May 2019, the Agency launched its first fully-fledged joint operation outside the EU, carried out at the land border between Albania and Greece. Under the Status Agreement, EU Member States' officers deployed by Frontex have executive powers, meaning all necessary powers to perform the tasks required for border control conducted on the territory of Albania. Frontex officers perform their duties in the presence of an Albanian officer. The aim of the



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Figure 6: **First Joint Operation in Albania. July 2019**

“JO Flexible Operational Activities - Western Balkans 2019 in Albania” is to implement coordinated operational activities to control illegal immigration flows, to tackle cross-border crime and to enhance cooperation between Member States and neighbouring third countries in line with European integrated border management.

The first seven months of the operation strengthened cooperation among all stakeholders and demonstrated a clear operational added value. Frontex received the full support of the Albanian authorities in setting up the coordination structure and creating adequate working conditions.

Deployed officers have been directly involved on a daily basis in carrying out border control duties with concrete operational results. The joint operation has contributed to the Albanian operational capacities and resulted in increased detection and interception of illegal crossings at the border and in the vicinity of the border line.

Additionally, the debriefing activities, implemented in close cooperation with the Albanian authorities, have increased situational awareness of the movements of the migrants through Greece in an attempt to use the Western Balkan route as a transit towards the final destination to other Member States.

Joint Operation FOA Western Balkans 2019 in Albania	Total number of participating Member States during 2019	Total number of deployed officers in 2019
Land	16	265

Figure 7: **European Border and Coast Guard team members in Joint Operation in Albania**

Type of Joint Operation	Number of third countries participating as observers	Number of observer officers
Air	10	67
Land	9	121
Sea	1	5

Figure 8: **Third-Country observers in Frontex Joint Operations in 2019**

### Observers from third countries in Frontex operational activities

Based on the identified needs, the Agency invites **third country observers** to participate in its operational activities at air, land and sea borders. This offers a unique opportunity for third country partners to become acquainted with the Agency, contributes to capacity building efforts in their countries, helps to exchange best practices, and promote European border management standards.

In 2019, a total of 193 third country observers took part in Frontex operational activities at the external borders of the EU. These included representatives of Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Kosovo\*, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States of America.

Additionally, third country staff participated in **the Staff Exchange Activity** which consists of short-term (usually, two weeks) exchange visits to air and land border crossing points in the EU/third countries. The aim of the Staff Exchange is to strengthen cooperation and exchange of information as well as the sharing of best practices among the Member States and third country staff working in Focal Point and Coordination Point locations. In addition, familiarisation visits to International Coordination Centres and hotspots in Greece and Italy were organised to demonstrate the coordination structures of maritime joint operations at the central and local level. In total, 45 Staff Exchange visits were arranged in

cooperation with four Member States, and involved officers from Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Georgia, Kosovo\*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine.

### Operations in third countries without executive powers

In the framework of Joint Operation Coordination Points, Frontex can deploy EU Member State experts to dedicated border crossing points between two third countries. Differently from joint operations under the Status Agreements, EBCG team members take part in the Coordination points as observers, meaning they do not have executive powers to perform law enforcement tasks. The Coordination points are temporarily activated in the course of the year, depending on operational needs. They serve as a useful platform for information exchange on illegal immigration, and help to exchange good practices on border control and tackling cross-border crime.

In 2019, Frontex deployed 172 team members as EU experts to a total of 38 Coordination Points – mainly in the Eastern Partnership and the Western

Balkan regions, but also at the airports in Canada, the latter in connection with the travel flows to the 2019 Ice Hockey World Championship hosted by Slovenia.

In this framework, the Agency organised eight awareness sessions on children at risk on the move at airports. The sessions took place in Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Ukraine, focusing on:

- accompanied, unaccompanied and separated children;
- operational procedures to identify and protect children at risk on the move;
- dealing and interacting with children;
- national referral mechanism and protection.

Cooperation through the Coordination Points as well as observer deployments from third countries in Frontex operations are closely interlinked and can reinforce each other. For example, in May 2019, in response to increased illegal immigration from Georgia towards EU and Schengen Associated countries' airports, Frontex launched a dedicated **Joint Activity** with the Georgian and EU Member States' authorities. In close coordination with the European Commission, Frontex deployed a team of EU Member State experts at Kutaisi Airport to advise the Georgian border management authorities on the requirements for entry to the Schengen Area. Targeted deployments of Georgian observers to the affected EU Member States and Schengen Associated countries' airports were carried out in parallel, within the framework of Joint Operation Focal Points 2019 Air.

Joint Operation Coordination Points domain	Number of host third countries	Number of European Border and Coast Guard team members deployed as EU Experts
Air	12	97
Land	9	70
Sea	2	5

Figure 9: **European Border and Coast Guard team members in Joint Operation Coordination Points in third countries in 2019**

Participation of third countries in Frontex operational activities is prepared in the framework of **Annual Bilateral Negotiations** – a coordination process with the Member States and Schengen Associated countries to establish pools of EBCG capabilities for the next operational cycle. As part of this process, Frontex organises a formal meeting with third countries, in order to assess their respective hosting capacity and the interest to deploy observers to Frontex operational activities. In 2019, the meeting was attended by 25 representatives from 14 countries<sup>8</sup> and informed further operational planning with the Member States and Schengen associated countries.

### Law enforcement cooperation, including in the framework of the EU Policy Cycle

In 2019, Frontex led, co-led and participated in a total of 70 Operational Actions across various priorities of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT). The Agency gradually increased the number of engagements from 55 in the previous year, but also their quality and relevance, with Frontex' operational support to the "Cocaine, Cannabis and Heroin" priority being a case in point. As part of Frontex contribution, the Agency also hosted a number of operational planning meetings, such as for the Operation 30 Days at Sea 2.0, with the participation of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Ukraine.

In the framework of the EU Policy Cycle, in 2019 Frontex organised five Joint Action Days (JADs), and co-led or supported a number of others coordinated by Europol or EU Member States. Cooperation with non-EU partners was paramount to bring about the results that were achieved, such as the detection of more than 8.400 irregular migrants/refusals/overstayers, 219 migrant smugglers, 381 document fraud cases, and the seizure of more than 460 stolen motor vehicles, 20 tons of tobacco, 23.7 million pieces of cigarettes, 61 firearms, 200.000 pieces of ammunition, and 27.4kg of cannabis. Most of the JADs organised by Frontex involved the participation of partners from the Western Balkan region, and some also counted on cooperation from the Eastern Partnership countries, notably Georgia and Ukraine. For example, this was the case of JAD Morpheus, which resulted, *inter alia*, in the identification of over 200 falsified or forged documents and the arrest of more than 80 suspects.

In the framework of EMPACT Firearms (OA 3.3 led by Frontex), Frontex is also working with the Western Balkan countries, through the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), for the development of a Handbook on Detection of Firearms for Border Guard and Customs Authorities. The handbook will serve as a useful tool to increase awareness among officers at the EU external land borders in relation to illicit firearms trafficking, thus enhancing detections

and the safety of the officers during the border control process.

Frontex' mandate and operational capabilities place the Agency in a unique position to support the EU Member States in tackling cross-border crime, complementing the work of other justice and home affairs agencies as well as regular Frontex Joint Operations. This translates into support to concrete operations either led by Member States or conducted within the framework of established Europol and INTERPOL operations.

To this end, the Agency has developed a pilot project, "Investigation Support Activities on Cross-Border Crime (ISACBC)", through which support is channelled to Member States using Frontex' analytical tools and equipment. For example, in this framework Frontex collaborated with partner authorities from Latin America, notably Brazil and Colombia, as well as Serbia and the United States in concrete operations, which sought to tackle common challenges in drugs and arms trafficking crossing the EU external borders. Following the successful results, some of the operations supported through ISACBC in 2019 are being incorporated in EMPACT 2020. For example, Operation Tayrona I, which was an operation led by Europol in 2019 to tackle trafficking of drugs, firearms, ammunitions and explosives in the triangle EU - United States - Colombia, will be continued in 2020 under the EMPACT Cocaine, Cannabis and Heroin priority.

<sup>8</sup> Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Canada, Cape Verde, Georgia, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.



## 4. Combatting document fraud

In 2019, Frontex Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud further enhanced cooperation with third countries through training and awareness raising activities. Dedicated workshops were developed in Armenia and Vietnam. The Agency was also particularly active in promoting EU standards and consolidating its network on document control with third countries, with the view to expand the global presence of the European Union in document security and document checks. To that end, informal exchanges with the National Forgery Desks of Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America were pursued, facilitating the broadening of the geographical coverage of information for combatting document and identity fraud.

Since 2016, Frontex has worked with INTERPOL to develop the FIELDS project (Frontex INTERPOL Electronic Library Document System), expected to be concluded by 2021. Once developed, the system will be available for national integration to all INTERPOL member



Figure 10: Documents Olympics. Warsaw, March 2019

countries via the INTERPOL's I-24/7 global police communication network and will support front-line law enforcement officers in travel and ID document checks. The project is currently in the technical development and testing

phase, where Frontex and INTERPOL are working together with an expert group in developing the system's Standard Operating Procedures. This expert group includes, along with some EU Member States, also Albania, Canada and Serbia.

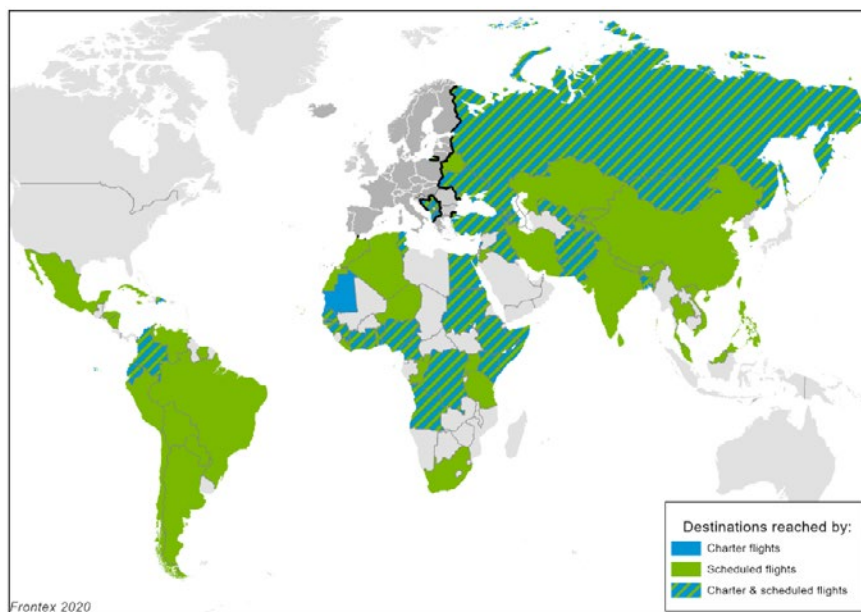
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## 5. Return

### Return operations

In 2019, Frontex continued to support Member States in the implementation of return decisions. In total, the Agency supported the return of 15.876 third-country nationals (13% increase from 2018) to a total of 82 destination countries (see Map 1 and Figure 11). The majority of third country nationals were returned using charter flights, whereas a steadily increasing number of returns were also carried out by scheduled flights.

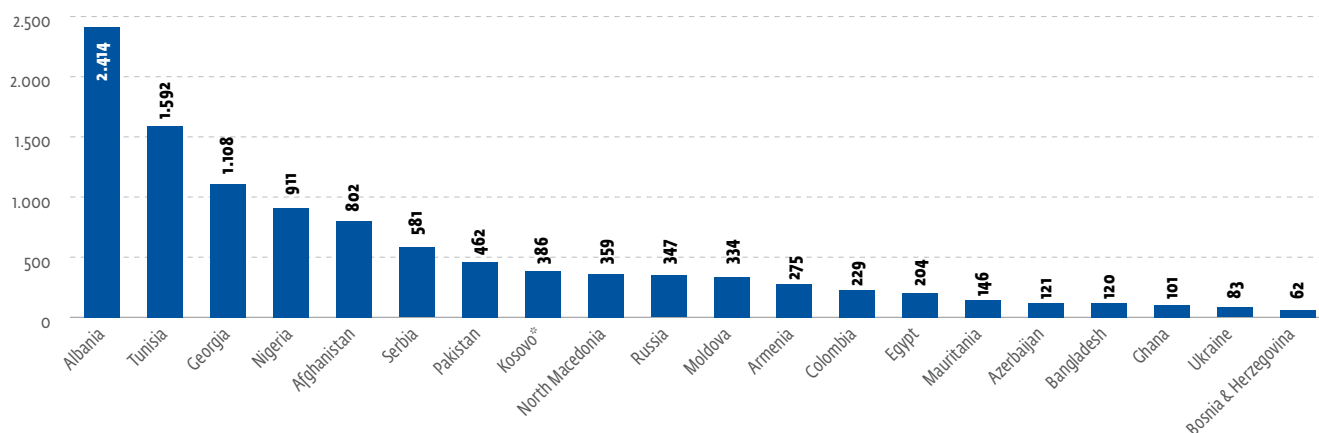


Map 1: Countries reached by charter and scheduled flights in 2019

	Type and number of operations			Total	No of destination countries
	JRO <sup>9</sup>	CRO <sup>10</sup>	NRO <sup>11</sup>		
<b>Charter flights</b>				10.903 returnees	40
	142	64	124	330 operations	
<b>Scheduled flights</b>	DEPA <sup>12</sup>	DEPU <sup>13</sup>	VD <sup>14</sup>	4.776 returnees	81
	719	2.795	99	3.613 operations	
<b>Readmissions<sup>15</sup></b>	Sea		Air	197 returnees	N/A
	31		5	36 operations	

Figure 11: Frontex Return Operations in 2019

- 9 **Joint return operations (JRO)** – return operations in which two or more Member States jointly return third-country nationals (TCNs) by using the same means of transportation or provide mutual technical support (by sharing human resources and/or technical means).
- 10 **Collecting return operations (CRO)** – return operations in which means of transport and/or escorts are provided by the country of return (CoR). CROs can be implemented as joint or national return operations.
- 11 **National return operations (NRO)** – return operations carried out by a single Member State.
- 12 **DEPA** – Forced-return operation with accompanied returnees
- 13 **DEPU** – Forced-return operation with unaccompanied returnees on board the scheduled flights
- 14 **VD** – Voluntary departure in line with Article 7 of the Return Directive
- 15 **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



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

Figure 12: Number of returnees per third country by charter flight in 2019 - top 20

In 2019, 330 return operations were organised by means of charter flights with Frontex support, returning 10.903 returnees and reaching 40 different third countries (see Figure 11). The vast majority of returns by charter flights was carried out to the Western Balkan countries, especially to Albania, where over 1/5 of all third country nationals were returned. The list of other frequent countries of return by charter flights includes Tunisia, Georgia, Nigeria and Afghanistan (see Figure 12).

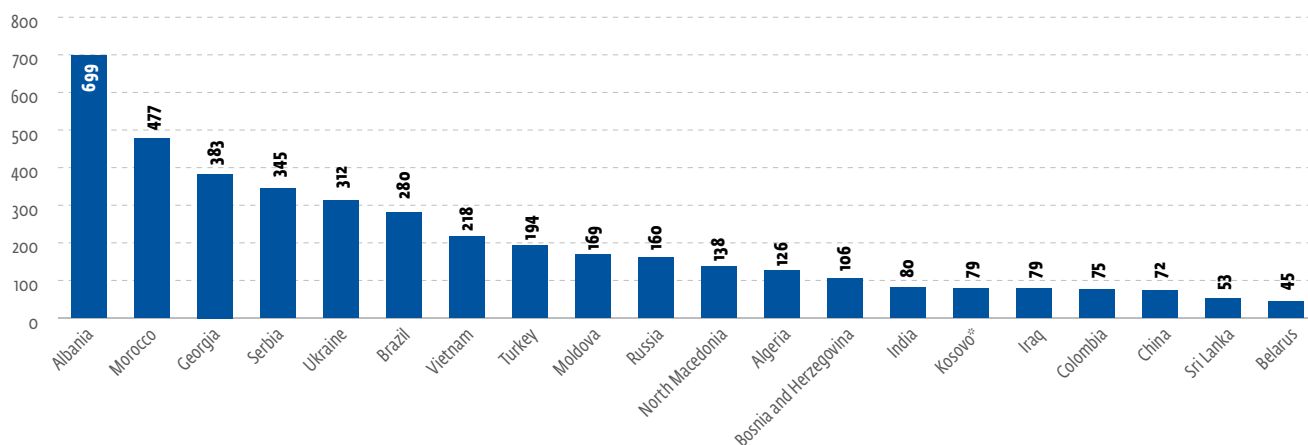
Collecting return operations amounted to nearly 20% of all return operations by charter flights. In total, 2.403 returnees were returned in the course

of 64 collecting return operations to 5 countries of return. Almost 57% of returnees were returned to Albania and 32% to Georgia.

In relation to scheduled flights, the mechanism grew rapidly throughout 2019. A total of 4.776 third country nationals were returned by 25 Member States, in 3.613 flights to 81 destinations. In comparison with 2018, the number of third country nationals returned using scheduled flights more than tripled and the number of third countries of return reached increased by 65% (from 49 to 81). Returns by scheduled flights were most frequently carried out to Albania (15%),

Morocco (10%), Georgia (8%), Serbia (7%) and Ukraine (7%).

In line with the Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard, the Agency has at its disposal a pool of forced-return monitors which includes experts who have been trained by the Agency and possess relevant expertise in fundamental rights. In 2019, 80% of all Frontex-coordinated return operations by charter flights had at least one monitor on board, which is a 13% increase compared to 2018. The Frontex Fundamental Rights Officer provided observations on the respect for fundamental rights with regard to all return operations.



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

Figure 13: Number of returnees per third country by scheduled flight in 2019 - top 20

The Agency also continued to support the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement by coordinating the deployment of human resources and providing technical assistance by chartering ferries, aircrafts and buses. In 2019, the Agency coordinated 36 readmission operations, which resulted in the readmission of 197 third country nationals from Greece to Turkey. The number of readmitted persons from Greece to Turkey decreased in the last year due to several factors, including an increased number of applicants for international protection, returnees filing multiple applications for international protection, and returnees absconding in greater numbers.

### Pre-return activities

Cooperation with third countries on returns is essential to ensure the effectiveness of returns and, in particular, in the identification and documentation of migrants in the return process.

The Agency, within the merits of its expanded mandate in the field of return during the last 4 years, has

been building synergies with various stakeholders and actively promoting the EU integrated approach on returns. Frontex provides tailored support in the operational implementation of EU return and readmission agreements and arrangements, thus contributing to the operational implementation of the Union's external policy on return and readmission.

In addition to the **familiarisation visits** to Frontex, a number of regular activities involving third country authorities are organised and supported by the Agency in the area of return. The aim is to facilitate Member States' efforts to implement their obligation to return the illegally staying third country nationals who are subject to an enforceable return decision, but also to support third country authorities to implement their international commitment. The Agency therefore works to support mutually trusted cooperation between Member States and third country partners. Owing to Frontex' expertise and knowledge in the area of return, Member States can request the Agency's support and presence in discussions with a specific third country Embassy on cooperation on returns.

In 2019, these activities included different types of activities. The Agency organised three **consular workshops** in the framework of EU readmission agreements and conducted a **mission** to Armenia to discuss the operational challenges that the country authorities were facing in the field of returns and identify possible ways for support. Frontex also organised 12 **identification missions** involving authorities from seven third countries and nine Member States and is supporting the use of videoconferencing identification tools with third countries and Member States, which is currently an activity managed by the EU-funded programme EURLO.

In addition to the regular activities, Frontex may also support third country partners in enhancing their knowledge and skills on return. For example, Frontex hosted Moldovan experts as observers in the Frontex-organised training on return-related matters, thus promoting EU standards in the field of return. Furthermore, in the course of 2019, Frontex made the necessary preparations for the transfer of the EU-funded EURLO programme to Frontex.

## 6. Promoting European IBM standards in third countries

Frontex continues to provide capacity building support in third countries, namely in Africa, the Levant, the Western Balkans and Turkey, through three regional technical assistance projects funded by the European Commission and a number of Frontex funded initiatives.

### Africa and the Southern Neighbourhood

In 2019, the Agency continued to implement the project “**Strengthening of Africa Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC) as an instrument to fight serious cross-border crimes affecting Africa and the EU**”<sup>16</sup>. In the framework of this project, Frontex opened four new Risk Analysis Cells, namely in Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and The Gambia. Three Operational Guidelines for the Risk Analysis Cells were also created together with the AFIC national authorities of Ghana, Niger and The Gambia. Furthermore, a Risk Analysis Training Guide was developed in French and 80 analysts from 16 AFIC countries were trained in risk analysis and border management. Frontex also conducted workshops and joint analytical field visit with the aim to consolidate the inter-agency information sharing among the AFIC network<sup>17</sup>.

16 Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace, €4 million for the period 2017-2020.

17 Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Cape Verde, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, The Gambia and Togo.



Figure 14: Risk Analysis Cell Senegal. Dakar, June 2019

All these activities sought to increase the capacity of beneficiary countries to produce strategic and operational risk analysis. They were essential in setting up communication channels with these partner countries and represented the basis for better exchange of information on migration and cross border crime.

Following its launch in December 2018, Frontex carried-out the inception phase of the regional project for North Africa and the Levant, “**EU4Border Security**”<sup>18</sup>. Synergies were identified with partners for the organisation of a number of regional events, such as a workshop on countering terrorism at airport border checks and traveller risk assessment, in cooperation with the Royal Netherlands

18 European Neighbourhood Instrument- €4 million for the period 12/2018-12/2021.

Marechaussee, the AIMC and the EU-funded CT-MENA project in Amsterdam. Other activities included a joint workshop on irregular migration and cross-border crime together with the AIMC and the CT-MENA project in Tunis, and a joint workshop on risk analysis and combating cross-border crime with AFRIPOL in Algiers.

### Western Balkans and Turkey

In June, the Agency concluded the Phase I of the IPA II funded project “**Regional support to protection sensitive migration management in the Western Balkans and Turkey**”<sup>19</sup>, and kicked-off its Phase II, which will last until

19 Phase I - €5.5 million for the period 2016-2019; Phase II -€3.4 million for the period 2019-2021.

July 2021. This project is implemented in cooperation with EASO, IOM and UNHCR. Its second phase is continuing to reinforce migration management capacities of the beneficiary countries in the areas of identification, registration, referral, asylum and return. As part of the project, the Agency provides support in the establishment of National Coordination Centres in the Western Balkans, and supports the development of national registration systems with the view to facilitate in the future their eventual interoperability with EURODAC in the context of the EU accession.

In view of EU accession prospects for the Western Balkan region, in addition to the technical assistance project, the Agency is also supporting partner authorities to develop ability to perform advance

risk analysis on travellers, with a view to achieving future interoperability. Based on the needs expressed by the partners, in 2019 Frontex organised two study visits on advance information to the Netherlands and Germany. These visits aimed to offer Western Balkans' experts the opportunity to get hands-on experience on advance passenger information systems in the EU with a view to support the implementation of Advance Information systems at national level. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\* and North Macedonia, attended both visits whereas Serbia attended the second.

Cooperation with third countries in the field of training was promoted through the **National Training Coordinators** and **Partnership Academies** network

aimed to promote excellence in border and coast guard education. Associated Frontex Partnership Academies were established in 2019 in Albania and Ukraine and the network is expected to further grow. The development, translation and promotion of common core curricula and training courses for border guards remained a priority. Moreover, Frontex continued to support the International Training Centre at the Egyptian Police Academy (ITEPA) - an EU-funded project led by Italy and Egypt set to deliver a series of trainings to border police officers from 22 African countries. In the maritime domain, two **search and rescue workshops** were organised with participation of Moroccan and Ukrainian observers.







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