



Consolidated annual activity report 2019

Frontex

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Glossary

ABC	automated border control
ABN	annual bilateral negotiations
AECGE	annual European coast guard event
AFIC	Africa–Frontex intelligence community
AMF	Asylum and Migration Fund
AOF	alternative office facilities
API	advance passenger information
AST	assistant (staff grade)
BCP	border crossing point
BCU	border control unit
BFCS	budget, finance and corporate services
BSRBCC	Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation
Carpol	network of EU law enforcement contact points for tackling cross-border vehicle crime
CCC	common core curriculum
CCWP	Customs Cooperation Working Party
CED	Centre of Excellence for Combating Document Fraud
CELBET	Customs Eastern and South-Eastern Land Border Expert
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
CGGS	Coast Guard Global Summit
CIRAM	Common Integrated Risk Analysis Model
CPB	coastal patrol boat
CPV	coastal patrol vessel
CRO	collecting return operation
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy

CVAM	common vulnerability-assessment methodology
DCP	direct contact points (in return matters)
DG	directorate-general
DIS	document inspection system
DPO	data protection officer
EaP	Eastern Partnership (countries)
EASA	European Aviation Safety Agency
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
EC	European Commission
EBCG	European border and coast guard
EBCGT	European border and coast guard team(s)
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECGFF	European coast guard functions forum
ECGFO	European coast guard functions officer
ECN	Eurosur communication network
ECRet	European centre for returns
ED	executive director
EDA	European Defence Agency
EDPS	European Data Protection Supervisor
EES	entry-exit system
EEZ	exclusive economic zone(s)
EFCA	European Fisheries Control Agency
EFE	European firearms experts
EFS	Eurosur/Copernicus Fusion Services
EJMSBM	European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management

EMPACT	European multidisciplinary platform against criminal threats
EMSA	European Maritime Safety Agency
EPSO	European Personnel Selection Office
ERRIN	European return and reintegration network
ESTA	electronic system for travel authorisation (United States)
ETIAS	European travel information and authorisation system
EUBAM	EU border assistance mission
eu-LISA	European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice
EUMSS	European Union maritime security strategy
Eunavfor Med	European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (also 'Operation Sophia')
Eurint	European return initiative
EURLO	European Union return liaison officers
Europol	European Union Agency for Law-Enforcement Cooperation
Eurosur	European surveillance system
EURTF	EU regional task force
FAR	Frontex application for return
FASS	Frontex aerial surveillance services
FER	Frontex evaluation report
Fields	Frontex Interpol electronic library document system
FISRoP	Frontex internal structure and rules of procedure
FLO	Frontex liaison officer
FOAR	Flexible operational activities in return
FOSS	Frontex one-stop shop
FRE	forced-return escort

FRM	forced-return monitor and: fundamental rights monitor
FRO	fundamental rights officer
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
FSC	Frontex situation centre
FSO	Frontex support officer
FWA	fixed-wing aircraft/aeroplanes
FWC	framework contract
GIS	geographical information system
HoU	head of unit
HR	human resources
IAS	Internal Audit Service
IBM	integrated border management
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organisation
ICC	international coordination centre
ICF	internal control framework
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICMPD	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
ICS	internal control system
ICT	information and communications technology
ILO	immigration liaison officers
IMS	integrated maritime services
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IRMA	integrated return management application
ISA-CBC	Investigation Support Activities for Cross Border Crime
ISF	Internal Security Fund
IT	information technology
ITEPA	International training centre at the Egyptian police academy
JAD	joint action day

JHA	justice and home affairs
JO	joint operation
JO FOA	joint operation flexible operational activities
JORA	joint operation reporting application
LCC	local coordination centre
LEG	legal services sector
Legnet	legal expert network
LPU	legal and procurement unit
MALE	medium-altitude long-endurance
MAS	multipurpose aerial surveillance
MCGFF	Mediterranean coast guard functions forum
MFF	multiannual financial framework
MIC-RAN	Maritime Intelligence Community Risk Analysis Network
MMO	multipurpose maritime operation
MoU	memorandum of understanding
MPR	media and public relations
MS	Member State(s)
NACGF	North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum
NCC	national coordination centre
NFPoC	national focal point of contact
OA	operational action
ORD	operational response division
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PAD	public access to documents
PAM-DIS	performance assessment methodology for document inspections systems
PeDRA	processing personal data for risk analysis
PNR	passenger name record
PRAN	pre-return activities network
PROC	procurement sector (LPU)

PRU	pooled resources unit
RAU	risk analysis unit
Recamas	return case management system
REX	rapid intervention exercise
RIU	research and innovation unit
RPAS	remotely piloted aircraft system
SAC	Schengen associated country/ies
SAR	search and rescue
SAS	statistical analysis software
SEM	Schengen Evaluation Mechanism
Seesac	South-eastern and Eastern Europe clearinghouse for the control of small arms and light weapons
SIENA	Secure Information Exchange Network Application
SIS	Schengen Information System
SLA	service level agreement
SOP	standard operating procedure
SQF	specific qualification framework
STM	seconded team members
TC	third (non-EU) country
TCN	third-country national
TE	technical equipment
THB	trafficking in human beings
TRU	training unit
TSC	technical sub-committee
TWA	tripartite working arrangement (Frontex, EMSA and EFCA)
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VA	vulnerability assessment
VAU	vulnerability assessment unit
WB	Western Balkans
VIS	visa information system
WCO	World Customs Organisation

Introduction

Article 106(4)(d) of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation⁽¹⁾, stipulates that each year the Executive Director shall prepare the consolidated annual activity report on the agency's activities and submit it to the Management Board. Article 100(2)(j) of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation states that the Management Board shall adopt an annual activity report of Frontex for the previous year and forward it, by 1 July at the latest, to the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors.

To guide the readers and recipients of the information the report has been divided into three main parts, the first two of which form the Annual activity report 2019.

To guide the readers of this report, the information has been divided into three main parts, as described below.

The first part (1. *Developments*; and 2. *Strategic action areas*) of the annual activity report contains comprehensive and easily understandable information regarding Frontex's work. It outlines:

- the situation at the external borders in the course of 2019,
- developments at policy and agency level,
- the new and enhanced mandate of the agency; and
- the main activities in each of the strategic action area during 2019.

It also reports on:

- cooperation with third countries,
- the way in which fundamental rights underpin Frontex's coordinated activities,
- public access to documents (PAD) and the management of sensitive operational information.

As stated in Article 47 and Article 50(7) of the European Border and Coast Guard Regulation, the main activities in each of the strategic action areas also provide a comparative analysis of the results of evaluations of core operational activities with a view to enhancing the quality, coherence and effectiveness of future activities.

As stated in Article 48 of the Frontex financial regulation⁽²⁾, the authorising officer shall report to the Management Board on the performance of his duties in the form of a consolidated annual activity report and submit it for the assessment of the Management Board. No later than 1 July each year the report, together with its assessment, shall be sent by the Management Board to the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors.

The second part (3. Key results and progress towards the achievement of general and specific objectives; 4. Budgetary and financial management; and 5. Management and internal control) represents a major instrument for accountability management and constitutes the basis on which the Executive Director as the authorising officer takes his responsibility for:

- the management of human and financial resources with reference to the general and specific objectives set out in the work programme;
- the efficiency and effectiveness of the internal control systems, including an overall assessment of the costs and benefits of control activities;
- the accounts and the report on budgetary and financial management;

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard (OJ L 295, 14.11.2019, p. 1).

⁽²⁾ Management Board Decision No 19/2019 of 23 July 2019 adopting the Frontex Financial Regulation.

- the indication of the results of the operations with reference to the set objectives and the associated risks.

The third part contains additional detailed information in reference to the previous parts of the report.

Mission Statement

The European Border and Coast Guard Regulation entered into force on 4 December 2019. The extended and enhanced mandate drove the need to revise the mission, vision and values applied by the agency. The process of reevaluating the mission statement took until the end of 2017. When adopting the Programming document 2018-2020 the Management Board also adopted the revised mission, vision and values of the Agency.

Mission

Together with the Member States, we ensure safe and well-functioning external borders providing security.

Vision

The European Area of Freedom, Security and Justice.

Values

- **we are professional**

we have the knowledge, skills and competencies needed to fulfil our mission efficiently with high ethical standards and we continuously strive for excellence to improve our performance;

- **we are respectful**

we recognise people, institutions and their roles and demonstrate respect by treating these as valuable and important;

- **we seek cooperation**

together with the Member States' relevant national authorities and with participation of other stakeholders we manage the EU external borders together and seek cooperation with third countries;

together, we cooperate and collaborate across the organisation as well as with external stakeholders in order to accomplish common goals and objectives;

- **we are accountable**

we are trusted with a shared responsibility to implement European integrated border management (IBM);

we are trustworthy in fulfilling our responsibilities in our work, its timeliness and quality;

- **we care**

as European public agents we serve the interests of citizens because we care about people and believe in European values;

Mandate of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency

Main Tasks

Standing corps

The European Border and Coast Guard standing corps will be composed of Frontex border guards and national officers from EU Member States and Schengen-associated countries. The corps is a unique service that will carry out border control and migration management tasks to assist EU member states. These will include identity and document checks, border surveillance and return of people who are illegally staying in the European Union.

Risk analysis and vulnerability assessment

The Agency collects data on the situation at and beyond Europe's external borders. The data is used to identify trends in irregular migration and patterns in cross-border crime. The Agency conducts annual simulation tests to assess the ability of each EU Member State to face challenges at their external borders, and the Executive Director may issue recommendations to the Member States.

Operations

The Agency deploys border and coast guard officers along with vessels, aircraft, helicopters and other equipment to assist countries requiring support at their borders. In emergency situations it can quickly deploy border and coast guard officers from the rapid reaction pool of at least 1500 officers.

Returns

The Agency assists the Member States in the return of migrants who are ineligible to stay in the EU. The decision as to who should be returned remains the exclusive responsibility of the national authorities of the EU Member States and Schengen associated countries. A pool of monitors, escorts and return specialists support these activities. The Agency may also play a role in the organisation of voluntary departures.

Situation monitoring

The Agency enables swift data exchange between border authorities of the EU Member States and Schengen associated countries, the European Commission and other agencies. It provides situation and crisis monitoring, delivering early alerts and updates about the events at the external borders. To assist in this task, the Agency deploys liaison officers to the individual Member States.

Coast guard functions

The Agency supports the cooperation of law enforcement authorities, EU agencies and customs at maritime borders. Vessels and aircraft deployed in its operations also collect and share information relevant to fisheries control, detection of pollution and compliance with maritime regulations.

Cooperation with third countries and international organisations

The Agency develops cooperation with a broad range of partners within the EU family, as well as with international organisations and third countries. Together with partners, we exchange information for better situational awareness, join efforts in operational activities, and support mutual learning through capacity building and training. The Agency can carry out fully-fledged joint operation also on the territory of a third country, provided it has signed a Status agreement with the EU. To support various cooperation areas, the Agency deploys liaison officers within as well as outside of the EU.

Combatting cross-border crime

The Agency focuses on preventing smuggling, human trafficking and terrorism as well as other forms of cross-border crimes. The Agency shares intelligence gathered at the borders on persons suspected of involvement in criminal activities with national authorities and European agencies.

Research and Innovation

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency facilitates cooperation between border control authorities, research and industry. The Agency assists the Member States and the European Commission in identifying key border security technologies and draws up and implements the EU framework programmes for research and innovation activities in the border security area.

Training

The Agency develops harmonised curricula and training standards for border guards in all EU countries. It conducts various courses to share knowledge and best practices, including capacity building programmes in third countries.

The agency delivers training on integrated border management and the coast guard functions to border and coast guards across the EU. It also trains experts who will carry out vulnerability assessments.

Respect for fundamental rights

Reinforcing the promotion of fundamental rights by providing advice and tools on fundamental rights compliance as well as managing a complaint mechanism to handle complaints concerning possible violations of fundamental rights in the course of activities carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

1. Developments

1.1. The situation at the external borders in 2019

The total number of reported detections of illegal border-crossing along the EU's external borders fell in 2019 to the lowest level since 2013. Member States indicate a total of 141,846 detections of illegal border-crossing along the EU's external borders in 2019, which represents a 4.9 % decrease compared with the number of detections recorded in 2018 (and a 92 % decrease compared with the 1.8 million detections at the height of the migration crisis in 2015). The observed irregular migration patterns did not deviate greatly from those in previous years, so grouping illegal border-crossings into chiefly the western, central and eastern Mediterranean routes continues to be instructive.

On the EU's eastern borders as well as on the circular route from Albania southwards into the EU, the lowest numbers of irregular migrants were reported since Frontex Risk Analysis Network started collecting data. However, the relative decrease in 2019 compared with previous years was mostly due to a drop in migrants intercepted and rescued in the central and western Mediterranean. In contrast, detections on the eastern Mediterranean, Western Balkan and western African routes (+105 % compared with 2018) recorded significantly higher numbers of detections when compared with 2018.

The reversal in the long-term trend of growing migratory pressure on the western Mediterranean route, which occurred in the spring of 2019, was perhaps the least expected and arguably the most consequential factor as regards the EU's external border overall. As a result, a 57 % decrease in arrivals compared to the peak year of 2018 was reported.

The spotlight once again returned to the Eastern Aegean in 2019, where migratory pressure rose during the spring and it peaked in September 2019, after which period the arrivals started falling chiefly due to weather conditions. In the second half of the year, arrivals on the Eastern Mediterranean Sea route were the highest since the signing of the EU-Turkey Statement. Migrant smugglers managed to provide for the increased demand, in particular for the Afghan and Syrian migrants, coordinating their simultaneous departures. Push factors throughout many key countries of origin and long-term host countries intensified as the year progressed. The pressure on Turkey's land border with the EU subsided slightly in 2019. Cyprus experienced a significant increase of migrants crossing the green line and, in the latter half of the year, sporadically arriving by sea. Compared with 2018, in 2019 almost 27,000 more migrants (+47 %) on the Eastern Mediterranean route were reported by Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria overall.

Irregular migration towards the EU along the two main migratory corridors through the Western Balkans – the Greek-Albanian corridor and the Serbian-centred corridor – continued throughout 2019. The Western corridor into Albania reported mounting detections after the start of Frontex joint operation in May. In the second half of the year the pressure from the region northwards focused on the EU borders with Serbia. Detections on this route grew by 158 % when compared to 2018.

On the Western Mediterranean route, in 2019 a 57 % decrease in arrivals compared to the peak year of 2018 was reported. After January 2019 departures from Morocco on the Western Mediterranean route decreased significantly (by 57 % compared with 2018 as regards the sea route). Meanwhile departures from Morocco on the Western African route increased again slightly. Migration pressure on the Algerian corridor to the EU seasonally ticked up in the autumn, as in previous years.

The Central Mediterranean in 2019 recorded its lowest yearly number of irregular migrants since before the Arab Spring. A 40 % decrease in migrants compared with 2018 denotes the third year in a row of reduced arrivals in this region. The Libyan corridor saw relatively little activity throughout 2019. Of the main nationalities departing from Libya, Eritreans saw the largest relative and absolute decrease. Detections on the other corridors that make up this migratory route also decreased compared with 2018.

On the Eastern land border in 2019, illegal border-crossings from each of the EU's Eastern neighbours decreased. However, refusals of entry on the Eastern green border on the other hand continued to rise. On the circular route from Albania southwards into the EU, detections decreased significantly (-57 % compared to 2018). No significant migratory incidents took place in the Black Sea.

The overall demographics of migrants in 2019 shows an increase in the share of vulnerable groups, including a slight growth in the share of women and children. Europol has received particularly worrying reports about the kidnapping of vulnerable irregular migrants, including unaccompanied minors, once they arrive in the EU.

Member States reported an increase in the detection of clandestine entries on both land and sea routes, the latter showing a stronger relative growth. As regards land borders, most clandestine entry attempts in 2019 were again in the Western Balkans region. According to the demographics of the migrants involved, those who are detected attempting to enter clandestinely (a risky *modus operandi*) are 97 % male. Organised crime groups continue to focus on specific nationalities, as evidenced by the fact that 65 % of all detected cases of clandestine entry attempts concern a single nationality (Afghan).

Secondary movements remain sizable in 2019 judging by, for instance, the rising number of detections of illegal stay and by the fact that applications for international protection collected by EASO have also increased. Further evidence of the rise in secondary movements in 2019 is that the number of discoveries of such movements inside the EU/Schengen area increased in 2019 for the third year in a row. The reported figures grew by almost 38 % compared with 2018 and reached the highest level since Frontex started collecting data on this indicator. In addition, high numbers of people smugglers continue to be detected inland. Secondary movements by sea also grew in 2019.

Beyond migration, the results of Frontex joint operations and EU joint action days as well as Member States' data for 2019 shed some light on the sizable extent of cross-border crime. Smuggling of firearms, drugs, stolen vehicles and other illicit goods, as well as people smuggling and trafficking in human beings is happening every day on the EU's external border. The complex character of cross-border crime threats necessitates a comprehensive operational response at the borders.

As in previous years, the number of effective returns in 2019 fell short of the return decisions issued by Member States. Around 139,000 migrants who were not granted refugee status or subsidiary protection were returned to their countries of origin, less than half (approximately 47 %) the total number of return decisions issued in the same period. While the number of return decisions increased by around 5 %, effective returns dropped 6 % (both compared to 2018) to the lowest level since data has been collected on this indicator. This finding of course does not take into account the fact that many third country nationals receive multiple return decisions, and in many cases voluntary returns are not properly documented or reported. Southern Asian and Western Balkan citizens saw significant decreases (both in relative and absolute terms) in the number of effective returns, whereas there were considerably more returns to South America.

1.2. Developments at policy level

2019 was marked by a high level of legislative and policy developments in the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) domain. As 2019 was the final year of the 5-year mandates of both the European Commission and the European Parliament, many pieces of legislation could be finalised during this legislative timeline. The most important initiative in relation to the Agency was the new **European Border and Coast Guard Regulation** – Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of 13/11/2019 (published in the Official Journal of the EU L295 of 14/11/2019) and repealing Regulations (EU) 1052/2013 and (EU) 2016/1624, which entered into force on 4/12/2019.

The European Border and Coast Guard proposal should also be viewed in conjunction with the proposal for the **new multiannual financial framework (MFF) for 2021–2027**. The European Commission proposed to significantly reinforce the EU budget for the management of external borders, migration and refugee flows, totalling nearly EUR 33 billion, compared to EUR 12.4 billion for the period 2014–2020.

The EUR 33 billion is made up of the planned budgets for JHA Agencies, as follows: Frontex, eu-LISA, and EASO, as well as the Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF) and IBM funds. The future MFF holds much importance for Frontex and its potential development. Frontex is proposed to have a budget of EUR 9.06 billion (in 2018 prices) over the period 2021–2027 in order to finance the 10,000 strong European Standing Corps and its equipment. This would represent a central element of a fully integrated EU border management system. Unanimous agreement amongst all MS is needed on the MFF and it is aimed to be reached before the end of 2020 in order for it to enter into force in January 2021.

Additionally, in 2019 there was progress on the negotiation of the sectoral legislative texts: Border Management and Visa Instrument, Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF) and Internal Security Fund (ISF)), where the European Parliament adopted its first reading position in Plenary in March 2019. On the basis of the partial general approaches, the Finnish Presidency started the inter-institutional negotiations with the European Parliament at the end of September 2019. These inter-institutional negotiations will continue under the Croatian Presidency.

Adopted legislation in 2019:

- The Interoperability package, featuring a framework of interoperability between EU information systems by 20/05/2024, was adopted as follows: Regulation (EU) 2019/817 of 20/05/2019 in the field of borders and visa; Regulation (EU) 2019/818 of 20/05/2019 in the field of police and judicial cooperation, asylum and migration;
- Regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of 20/06/20 amending Regulation (EC) 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code), which shall apply from 2/02/2020; It should be noted that of specific relevance for Frontex activities is the introduction of a new mechanism for using the application of certain rules as a leverage to improve cooperation with a third country on readmission (article 25a). Frontex, via the IRMA, will support the data collection which will partially form the evidence basis for the Commission's annual assessment on the level of cooperation of third countries in the area of return.
- Regulation (EU) 2019/1157 of 20/06/2019 on strengthening the security of identity cards of Union citizens and of residence documents issued to Union citizens and their family members exercising their right of free movement, which shall apply from 2/08/2021. It provides for a phase out of old ID cards in two years after adoption, meaning that by this date all new documents must meet the new criteria. This will have a direct impact on Frontex relevant work on fraudulent documents detected at the external borders – knowledge, practice and modus operandi.
- Regulation (EU) 2019/1240 of 20/06/20 on the creation of a European network of immigration liaison officers, aiming to ensure better coordination and use of the European assets deployed in third countries, as well as the establishment of a formal governance mechanism ("Steering Board"). Significantly for Frontex, the liaison officers deployed abroad by Frontex constitute ILOs in the meaning of the Regulation and can be included within the ILO networks. Frontex is now represented in the ILO Steering Board with the first meeting having taken place in late 2019.

Frontex took the necessary operational steps towards the implementation of the Regulation (EU) 2018/1240 of 12/09/2018 establishing a **European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)** and the connection with the Schengen Information System (SIS) III, which new features will enter in force by 28/12/2021, as follows: Regulation (EU) 2018/1860 of 28 November 2018 on **the use of SIS for the return of illegally staying third country nationals**; Regulation (EU) 2018/1861 of 28 November 2018 on **the establishment, operation and use of SIS in the field of border checks**. Specific deadline of 28/12/2019 was mentioned in the legal basis for EBCG teams to have access to data in the current SIS solution (SIS II) and a technical interface to be set up and maintained by Frontex, which shall allow direct connection to Central SIS II.

A new proposal for a Regulation (EU) **on the false and authentic documents online ('FADO') system** and repealing the Joint Action 98/700/JHA was proposed late 2018, negotiations took place throughout 2019 and were concluded in 2020. Frontex will take over the administration, the operation and technical management of the FADO system from the General Secretariat of the Council.

The proposal amending Regulation (EC) 862/2007 on **Community statistics on migration and international protection**, tabled by the European Commission in 2018, reached a final compromise agreement between the European Parliament and the Council in late 2019. The revision seeks to improve completeness, accuracy, timeliness and certainty with respect to the existing voluntary transmissions of data by national authorities.

A proposal for **strengthening the Visa Information System (VIS)**, tabled by the European Commission in 2018, reached a final compromise agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on 13/03/2019. By the end of the Finnish Presidency eight technical meetings and two political informal sets of negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the Commission were held, resulting in good progress on the file. Once adopted and in order to allow better monitoring of the use of VIS to analyse trends concerning migratory pressure and border management, eu-LISA should be able to develop a capability for statistical reporting, available to Frontex. Duly authorised Frontex staff shall have access to consult the data for the purpose of carrying out risk analyses and vulnerability assessments.

The proposal for a **recast Directive on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals** ('Returns Directive'), tabled by the European Commission on 12/09/2018, reached a partial General Approach of the Council on 7/06/2019. As it is only partial, Council still must find agreement on certain elements in the file (notably Art 22 on the border procedure, related to the asylum package). As the LIBE committee was unable to find an agreement on the text in the last European Parliament mandate, negotiations are continuing in 2020 to find a Parliament position to enable inter-institutional negotiations to begin. The recast proposal and the Council position include the obligation on MS to set up, operate and maintain national return management systems which shall be set up in a way which ensures technical compatibility allowing for communication with the platform established in accordance with Article 50(2) of EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896.

Eurosur/Copernicus input

In accordance to the Eurosur Regulation (EU) 1052/2013 and Copernicus Delegation Agreement, Frontex provided 17 tailored close-to real-time and real time services under the Copernicus/Eurosur Fusion Services framework to support internal and external (including MS and EU institutions) stakeholders.

JORA 2 development has been finalised and rolled out to end users (both internal and external) in the Member States. The background infrastructure was consolidated and upgraded to meet performance expectations. JORA2 will replace JORA completely throughout 2020.

In 2019 the establishment of a central hub of Earth Observations Products and Geodata has been completed. The implemented system for processing and cataloguing data facilitates data search, browsing and access. The hub allows Frontex internal users for efficient data organization and management. It also enables all internal and external users of Eurosur/Copernicus Fusion Services to find relevant data and information products in support of decision making.

EU policy cycle/EMPACT

According to the EBCG Regulation, contributing to addressing serious crime with a cross-border dimension is part of Frontex mandate to ensure a coherent European integrated border management at the external borders. One of the main contributions of Frontex in this area is its engagement and active participation in the EU policy cycle/EMPACT. Frontex has further enhanced its contribution and active role with regard to the EU Policy cycle as stipulated in the Council conclusions 8654/17 on setting the EU's priorities regarding the fight against organised and serious international crime between 2018 and 2021. The agency participated in the drafting of the annual operational action plans and took a leading role in numerous operational actions throughout 2019. For the first time, the agency supported several activities within the operational action plan for cannabis and cocaine and heroin drugs EMPACT priority.

In 2019, Frontex led, co-led and participated in 70 operational actions across various EMPACT priorities, gradually increasing not only the number of engagements, but also its quality and relevance.

In 2019, Frontex organised five joint action days (JADs), and supported or even co-led a number of others, coordinated by Europol or EU Member States. The organisation of JADs is especially reliant on the cooperation with the Field Deployments Unit, which activates focal points throughout the duration of the JAD within the framework of JO focal points-land, Themis, Poseidon, flexible operational activities land, and focal points-air. Consistent active support by CED to EMPACT JADs is as well to be noted.

The active involvement of Frontex in the prevention and detection of cross-border crime not only contributed to the objectives of the EU Policy cycle/EMPACT against organised and serious international crime, but also resulted in several examples of successful multiagency cooperation.

2. Strategic action areas

2.1. European integrated border management

Summary

The first Technical and Operational European Integrated Border Management (IBM) Strategy was adopted in March 2019 in accordance with Article 3(2) of the Regulation. Based on strategic steer of the Council and Commission, it sets the vision of smooth and lawful transit of persons and goods across safe, secure and well-functioning external borders of the EU.

- It further paves the way for the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG) to work in a more proactive way in order to predict and prevent challenging situations from emerging at the external borders.
- In case they do surface at the external borders, the EBCG shall be able to react and stabilise the situation.
- This shall be enabled by ensuring that the EBCG is capable of responding to the challenges of today and prepared for to counter those of tomorrow.

With the new Regulation, the strategic steer will be formalised through the establishment of the Multiannual Strategic Policy Cycle for IBM and once it is running the Technical and Operational Strategy will be revised accordingly.

On the basis of shared responsibilities between the EU Member States and Frontex within the European Border and Coast Guard, Frontex continued to support and coordinate the implementation of the European integrated border management through various operational activities in 2019. By far the largest operational activities were the 16 joint operations at the external land, air and sea borders while the main operational focus for Frontex in 2019 was on the Central, Eastern and Western Mediterranean areas which experienced the most significant migratory pressure.

In 2019, Frontex significantly enhanced the border control activities of the EU Member States and Schengen associated countries (SAC) by providing technical and operational support totalling over 433,137 operational days and 126,605 asset days.⁽³⁾

The number of operational days committed to operational activities decreased by almost 6 % when compared to 2018 (from 263,833 in 2018 to 249,313 days in 2019), supported by additional coordinating staff from the host countries who contributed to additional 63,520 working days (an increase of 14 % when compared to 55,787 in 2018). In addition to this, crew members performed around 17 % fewer operational days in 2019 during joint operations when compared to 2018 (120,304 in 2019 and 145,616 in 2018).

In 2019, Member States' and Schengen associated countries' border management activities required 11,519 asset days of heavy technical equipment. The number of patrolling hours performed by aerial and maritime means for surveillance purposes amounted to 53,475, which decreased by almost 29 % when compared to 69,130 patrolling hours in 2018. In terms of land means (patrol cars, thermo-vision vans and light equipment such as surveillance cameras, detectors and cameras) MS and Frontex activities required 36,310 asset days. In addition to that, out of the total contribution of 78,776 asset days falling under the portable technical equipment category, Frontex provided 55,456 asset days of its own technical resources for border control for the purpose of joint operations. The portable technical equipment included binoculars, document checking devices connected to a computer, fingerprinting kits, heartbeat

⁽³⁾ As per data generated via ABNet in mid-March 2020.

detectors, night vision binoculars, night vision goggles, radiophone/communication equipment and thermal/infra-red cameras.

The budget dedicated to the activities of the Operational Response Division in 2019 amounted to EUR 190,517,833 (including EUR 67 410,191 for the activities of ECRet). This represents 58 % of the overall budget of the Agency for 2019 (EUR 330,107 000) and is almost 9 % higher compared to the budget for operations in 2018. Frontex developed also several new tools for the management of resources and a more precise and extensive reporting of deployment information.

Thus, 2019 was a year of significant change, challenges and readjustments in the implementation of activities. At the same time Frontex continued to assist Member States and Schengen associated countries in developing their own capacity and effectiveness in the area of border control through the exchange of good practices, expanding its network of contacts both in the MS/SAC and third countries.

In the framework of Frontex joint operations in 2019, the operational activities resulted in detection of 1,188 facilitators and human smugglers and a fight against a wide variety of other types of cross-border crimes, such as smuggling of illegal goods and substances: 23,483 litres of alcohol, 200,551 pieces of ammunition, 764 kilograms (kg) of cocaine, more than 124.4 tons of hashish and marijuana, 31 kg of heroin and approximately 218 kilograms of other types of drugs. Furthermore, 390 stolen vehicles were detected and 581 cases were reported involving the detection of parts and pieces of stolen cars. Enhancing the operational effectiveness, five EMPACT (European multidisciplinary platform against criminal threats) operations (joint action days) were successfully implemented by Frontex as a part of joint operations.

Within the joint operations, Frontex has ensured the running of the EURTF (EU regional task force) platform for the European Migration Management Teams as well as it has supported the Member States in the management of the flows of disembarked migrants, including proper referral mechanisms, by enabling reliable identification and registration of persons as well as identification of persons in need for international protection. Moreover, referral to law enforcement authorities in cases of security threat (in particular concerning suspected terrorists) or other criminal activities and necessary collection of personal data to be shared for the purpose of criminal investigation was implemented. Finally, ensuring full compliance with fundamental rights has been an integral part of all the activities.

Frontex maritime surveillance operations have significantly increased the search and rescue capacities of Member States. The vessels in maritime operations helped to rescue more than 28,670 migrants during their patrolling activities. Cooperating with all relevant MS authorities in the planning of operations and in particular during their implementation, Frontex operations proved to be a concrete platform for inter-institutional cooperation between the national authorities, Frontex, and other EU Agencies. The operational coast guard and law enforcement/cross-border crime activities implemented as a part of joint operations brought European and national authorities and organisations together in order to cooperate under the same operational concept. Operational reporting during the activities provided significant data for risk analysis and for the management of Eurosur (European surveillance system) situational picture.

Joint operations also provided a practical framework for implementing Frontex working arrangements with third country partners. Third country observers deployed in Frontex joint operations enabled sharing the best European practices and skills to third country officers in border crossing points and border control units thus improving the practical cooperation between the competent authorities involved in controlling of irregular migration flows and tackling cross-border crime. Within different operations. Intense use of the platform to exchange information between focal points and police customs cooperation centres is to be noted which ultimately contributed to the Member States and EU agencies fight of cross-border crime and terrorism.

Highlights: joint operations 2019

Highlights of land border joint operations in 2019

The first fully-fledged Frontex joint operation in Albania (JO flexible operational activities Western Balkans in Albania 2019)

Successful launch of the first Frontex fully-fledged joint operation outside the EU starting from 22 May 2019 resulted in the deployment of officers and technical equipment from seventeen EU Member States to support Albania in border control and tackling cross-border crime.

Establishment of a new international coordination centre (ICC) in Frontex headquarters (JO flexible operational activities land 2019 and JO flexible operational activities Western Balkans in Albania 2019)

On 15 May 2019, a new international coordination centre (ICC) was established in Frontex headquarters with the aim to have a more effective monitoring of the operational scenarios of JO flexible operational activities - land and the JO flexible operational activities - Western Balkans. The smooth exchange of information and best practices ensures Frontex capability to respond in a rapid and effective way to any emergency situation at external borders of EU.

Deployment of first Frontex-owned patrol cars (JO flexible operational activities - land 2019 and JO flexible operational activities - Western Balkans in Albania 2019)

Since May 2019 Frontex has started deploying its own patrol cars in the framework of JO flexible operational activities - land and JO flexible operational activities - land in Western Balkans - Albania. This relevant strategic leap forward gives the Agency more self-sufficiency and flexibility in terms of securing adequate technical resources, especially in light of the upcoming standing corps.

Highlights of air border joint operations in 2019

Joint activity with Georgian authorities and EU MS (JO coordination points 2019 - air and JO focal points 2019 - air)

On 22 May 2019, Frontex launched a joint activity with Georgian authorities and EU MS to mitigate the flow of irregular Georgian migrants toward EU/SAC airports within the framework of the joint operation coordination points 2019 - air and joint operation focal points 2019 - air. Frontex deployed a team composed of EU Experts at Kutaisi Airport in each rotation period and Georgian officers were deployed at different EU airports. Frontex joint activity became part of a wider joint action plan drafted by the EU Commission to decrease the irregular migration and security challenges linked to the travel of Georgian nationals to the EU. The patrol police of Georgia along with the support of Frontex-deployed EU experts performed pre-boarding checks at Kutaisi airport. Based on this activity, it was possible to provide advice to airlines which was taken in consideration to assess whether travellers can be permitted on board or not.

As a complementary activity, Georgian officers were deployed at the most affected EU airports in terms of refusal of entry for Georgian nationals in order to support the verification of entry conditions. Georgian officers effectively provided support in advising relevant national border guard services during further examinations of individuals who do not immediately qualify for entry, by providing, whenever possible, specialist advice and guidance on cultural and social norms.

Ice hockey world championship (JO focal points 2019 - air)

On the request of Slovakia, hosting ice hockey world championship in 2019, Frontex provided operational support with the contribution of MS and Canada. There were four team members deployed and one Canadian observer who were deployed at Bratislava, Kosice and Vienna airports.

VEGA children activities at air borders (JO focal points 2019 - air and JO coordination points 2019 - air)

Fifteen awareness/informational sessions (airport seminars) involving Frontex law enforcement partners were organised and implemented at several MS/SAC and third country airports in order to raise awareness about the children at risk while on the move and to introduce and promote VEGA handbook: 'Children at airports' and another VEGA handbook: 'Countermeasures at airports'.

Document roadshows (JO Alexis 2019)

Seventeen dedicated document training workshops, known as 'roadshows' have been organised at EU airports, hosting the joint operations, in cooperation with Frontex Training Unit and Frontex Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud. The concept of roadshows aims to provide the Member States with professional seminars/workshops to establish common standards for the first and second-line border checks.

JO Alexis 2019 offered a good opportunity to make use of INTERPOL databases. Thus INTERPOL deployed five IBMTF (Integrated Border Management Task Force) coordinators at the airports in Lisbon, Genève, Zurich and Munich.

Highlights of maritime joint operations in 2019**Illegal border crossing – sailing vessel 'TATOO' (JO Themis 2019)**

On 8 April 2019, ICC Rome was informed about a suspicious sailing vessel. Portuguese FWA (fixed-wing aircraft), dispatched to the area, detected and monitored the mentioned sailing vessel 'TATOO' (with a Greek flag). As a result of the close cooperation between ICC Rome and ICC Piraeus, Hellenic Coast Guard reported to ICC Rome that this sailing vessel had been stolen in Greece and that probably some migrants could have been travelling with falsified identity documents on board. Soon after, Guardia di Finanza coastal patrol boat intercepted the sailing vessel with 18 people on board. Five falsified identity documents were seized and one suspected facilitator (Turkish national) was arrested.

Illegal border crossing – motor yacht 'ANGELO BIANCO' (JO Themis 2019)

On 22 November, two Italian maritime assets intercepted a rubber boat with 45 migrants on board. Following information received by migrants, ICC Rome dispatched a Latvian fixed-wing aircraft outside Themis operational area to detect the motor yacht 'Angelo Bianco' (suspected to be involved in the event) and informed ICC Piraeus. Promptly, one Hellenic Coast Guard coastal patrol boat intercepted the target and escorted it to Corfu Island. The three Turkish citizens on board were arrested. The fast and accurate information exchange and the effective cooperation between ICC Rome and ICC Piraeus were a key factor to the successful development of this event.

Illegal border crossing – sailing vessel 'SELANIK 1' (JO Themis 2019)

On 11 December 2019, Montenegrin border police informed Guardia di Finanza that they were in possession of evidence that the sailing vessel 'SELANIK 1' (with a Turkish flag), docked in Bari port, and that it could have been used for smuggling people. On the same day, the sailing vessel started sailing south, declaring Turkey as a destination. ICC Rome dispatched on Guardia di Finanza FWA in the area, which detected the sailing vessel near the Albanian coast sailing south towards Greece. ICC Rome shared all gathered intelligence with ICC Piraeus and Hellenic Coast Guard. On 16 December 2019, ICC Piraeus informed that Hellenic Coast Guard had intercepted the sailing vessel near Igoumenitsa (Greece) with 33 migrants on board and that two Russian citizens had been arrested as suspected facilitators and that the sailing vessel had been seized. The fast and accurate information sharing between Montenegrin Border Police, Guardia di Finanza and Hellenic Coast Guard and the close and effective cooperation between ICC Rome and ICC Piraeus were key factors to the successful development of this event.

Smuggling of drugs – speedboats (JO Poseidon 2019)

On 25 September 2019, a large-scale operation took place at the sea area of Lesvos to search for two speedboats suspected of smuggling drugs from Turkey. Several Hellenic Coast Guard assets, one Romanian helicopter and a Frontex fixed-wing aircraft participated in the patrolling activities. One speedboat was detected by the Frontex fixed-wing aircraft and later on by a Romanian helicopter, while it was trying to escape. After the pursuit, the speedboat with three suspected smugglers on-board was apprehended by the Hellenic Coast Guard assets. On 29 September 2019, the second speed boat was detected close to the Aegina Island with a smuggler on board. Later on, the Hellenic Coast Guard discovered and seized 1.172 kg of cannabis, hidden in a cave.

Illegal border crossing/search and rescue – aerostat (JO Poseidon 2019)

On 31 July 2019, Frontex assets (Maritime Surveillance Aerostatic TC 350 and Portuguese Maritime Surveillance System, both part of the Maritime Surveillance Aerostatic project) detected a rubber boat, adrift and in distress, inside of the Greek territorial waters at Karlovasi area (Northern part of Samos Island). This information was instantly passed to LCC Samos and then to the Latvian off-shore patrol vessel crew who intercepted the boat at 04.15 a.m. and rescued 51 migrants.

Illegal border crossing – sailing vessel 'DURU' (JO Poseidon 2019)

On 11 June 2019, the ITA Guardia di Finanza helicopter detected a sailing yacht south of Peloponnese area. Due to the low waterline, the upper windows opened and the high infrared imprint from the inside, it was considered as a suspicious vessel possibly involved in illegal immigration activity. This information was passed to the ICC Piraeus and ICC Rome as an operational alert. On 12 June 2019, the Hellenic Coast Guard intercepted sailing vessel 'DURU' with 75 irregular migrants and two Russian facilitators.

Smuggling of drugs – pleasure boat (JO Indalo 2019)

On 06 October 2019 the Icelandic fixed-wing aircraft detected a suspicious pleasure boat and informed ICC Madrid accordingly. Spanish coastal patrol boat intercepted the pleasure boat. The pleasure boat was transferred to the port of Almeria. As a result of the operation, 3.100 kg of hashish were seized. Four persons were arrested.

Drugs smuggling of – (JO coordination points 2019 - Sea)

On 16 September an Italian expert deployed to the seaport of Durres found, together with the Albanian border police 11 kilograms and 200 grams of pure heroin inside a car-boarding ferry heading towards Italy. On 23 September they found 583 grams of pure heroin inside another car boarding a ferry to Italy.

The concept of the IBM has been also practically complemented by the contribution of Frontex to EU Policy cycle/EMPACT. In 2019, Frontex further enhanced its substantial contribution to the EU Policy cycle/EMPACT Priorities defined under the Policy cycle. The operational activities of the Agency were related to supporting eight priority areas/operational action plans, namely: facilitation of illegal immigration as the co-driver; trafficking in human beings; excise goods; firearms; organised property crime; environmental crime; drugs (cocaine, cannabis and heroin) and the horizontal priority area of document fraud.

Frontex coordinated five joint action days in 2019, which took place under the umbrella of existing joint operations held in the land, sea and air domains. The operational results of joint action days constitute a real added value with regard to the fight against cross-border crime and fulfil the expectations of the guidelines given by the EU IBM in conjunction with the intra- and interagency, as well as international co-operation.

On 18 October 2019, the Law Enforcement Working Party of the Council of the EU (LEWP), recognising the important role and support of Frontex in the law enforcement domain, invited the Agency to attend the LEWP meeting. Frontex contribution to the work of LEWP will further enhance the European cooperation and is in line with the EU IBM framework. In addition to that, Frontex continued to cooperate with the European firearms experts (EFE), an expert network of LEWP, including the elaboration of the handbook for detection of firearms for customs and border police officers under the EU Policy cycle (firearms priority OA 3.3). Furthermore, the Agency also enhanced operational collaboration with Carpol, another expert network of LEWP of EU law enforcement contact points for tackling cross-border vehicle crime. This resulted in the participation of Carpol in the Frontex-led joint action days 'Mobile' and Frontex support to JO FINCAR 2 in September 2019.

The co-operation with the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to Moldova and Ukraine has further increased in 2019. During a meeting in September 2019, Frontex Executive Director and the Head of EUBAM exchanged views on cooperation modalities between Frontex and EUBAM to Moldova and Ukraine. EUBAM has benefited from the existing cooperation with Frontex, including within the framework of EUBAM joint operation Orion 2019 and Frontex-coordinated JO coordination points. The mission promotes EU standards and Frontex tools such as CIRAM in the region. This collaboration will develop further in order to contribute to strengthen border management in the region. Consequently Frontex is supporting the re-launching of the EUBAM Task Force Arms and in return, the Mission has joined the working group on the handbook for detection of firearms for Customs and Border Guards.

In the light of the increasing international engagement of Frontex in supporting MS on fighting cross-border crime, co-operation with the Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation (BSRBCC) has also expanded. Frontex has been supporting the BSRBCC for a considerable time and thus it is an important partner for the participating ten Member States, not only with regard to the maritime domain but also to cross-border crime. An example of intensified collaboration between this regional forum and Frontex against cross-border crime is the organisation of a recurring seminar on stolen vehicles for the experts of the BSRBCC countries.

Highlights: law enforcement activities 2019

Further development of the ISA-CBC pilot project

Following its successful launch in 2018, the ISA-CBC pilot project (Investigation Support Activities for Cross-Border Crime) started to result in concrete operational outcomes throughout 2019. The project supports the Member States in cases of illegal trafficking via the EU external borders by combining the analytical and surveillance tools by the Agency with equipment and financial support. ISA-CBC started running in the operational area 'Poniente', covering the Atlantic side of the EU external borders and focusing on operations against the cocaine route from Central and South America and the hashish route from North Africa. This pilot project proved to be a major step for the Agency in the law enforcement arena, enhancing Frontex recognition as an important partner in the maritime domain and in tackling cross-border crime by several stakeholders. The operational activities within the project are also aligned with the involvement of the Agency in the EU policy cycle/EMPACT actions.

Cooperation with EU customs services

In accordance with the EU IBM Strategy and Frontex mandate, the Agency continued to increase its operational interaction with EU customs services. The development of customs operational cooperation is key to successful and modern protection of borders and at the same time essential to prevent, detect and investigate cross-border crime. Frontex has proven to be a reliable partner for the EU customs services and bodies and increased the strategic and operational collaboration in particular with CCWP (Customs Cooperation Working Party), DG TAXUD and its Customs Eastern and South-eastern Land Border Expert Team (CELBET 2). In 2019, the Agency also supported initiatives which have the customs enforcement component included, such as the Police Customs Cooperation Centres (PCCCs), the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to Moldova and Ukraine and the South Eastern and Eastern Europe clearinghouse for the control of small arms and light weapons (Seesac).

The Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud (CED) expanded considerably by reinforcing the multipurpose character of Frontex operational activities, enhancing the grip of the Agency on document and related identity frauds.

Highlights: Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud Activities 2019

Frontex quick-check brochure

In the course of 2019 Frontex developed a quick check leaflet, which is distributed regularly to the hotspots in order to allow document experts to recognise special documents or breeder documents presented by irregular migrants during the identification sessions at arrival. The quick-check brochure is a tailor-made help tool for the frontline and second line border control, which helps in the identification of migrants intercepted and transported later to the hotspot areas.

In 2019, there was a high level of expectations and developments in the field of return. With an increasing number of cases in the MS/SAC, Frontex increased both its capacity as well as the catalogue of supporting activities in order to assist the MS/SAC in effectively implementing returns.

As one of the last parts of the migration management chain, the cooperation between national, European and third countries stakeholders in the return area remain crucial. The Agency facilitated this through its initiatives supporting digitalisation which can provide common framework for current and future cooperation, for example by delivering and publishing the model of the Return Case Management System (model-Recamas), functioning as a model for MS on how to align their national case management systems with it. Through cooperation with internal and external stakeholders (such as EU-funded projects, third countries) over 1,193 cases were reviewed to support identification and documentation of returnees, leading to over 816 confirmed identifications and the issuance of over 530 travel documents.

Frontex continued to support strengthening MS' capacities to implement effective returns. This was achieved by expanding scheduled flights mechanism which allowed MS to successfully return third country nationals by making use of the special agreements Frontex has concluded with a number of airlines. In addition to that, the Agency continued to organise and coordinate return operations by charter flights, including conducting return operations requiring close cooperation with third countries. Frontex continued to enhance its role in promoting standards and developing guidelines for forced-return operations. Such guidelines seek to harmonise procedures during operations while ensuring full respect of fundamental rights. All these achievements contribute to the strengthening of the European integrated border management concept, with the area of returns as one of its key domains.

Highlights: Pre-return assistance 2019

Return Case Management System

Frontex published and made available to all MS and SAC its model Return Case Management System (model-Recamas), which serves as a model to align functionalities of national systems, as well as it carried out four gap analyses in collaboration with the MS.

Highlights: Return operations 2019

Frontex scheduled flights mechanism

On 11 March 2019, the pilot project on returns by scheduled flights became a permanent activity of the Agency. It was based on the extensive interest from the Member States as a new form of support.

Throughout 2019, Frontex scheduled flights mechanism exceeded its performance goals. Twenty-five Member States carried out returns by scheduled flights with Frontex support returning 4,776 third-country nationals to 81 destinations, including 34 new countries of return. Among the returnees, 893 were escorted, 3,728 unescorted and 155 departed voluntarily. The smooth running of the mechanism has been largely possible due to special agreements Frontex has achieved with various airlines which cooperate with the Agency with favourable fares and operational conditions.

Research and innovation

In the research and innovation field, the tasks developed to support IBM aim at contributing to a uniform and high level of control of the EU external borders, the Agency works together with MS/SAC on the development of standards for maritime, terrestrial and aerial technical equipment to be acquired and/or deployed in the operational activities by the Agency. The standards may also be used as a reference for MS equipment acquisitions under the Border Management and Visa Instrument. In 2019, the working groups established for this purpose finalised the document on standards for selected maritime assets, produced an advanced draft of the standards for aerial equipment and initiated the work on the documents relevant for the terrestrial equipment.

In addition to the standardisation activities, the Agency contributed to the IBM with its efforts in the domain of technology pilots assessing the advantages and challenges regarding the use of remote piloted aircraft systems in border control and coast guard maritime surveillance tasks, including search and rescue operations and the prevention of serious crime with a maritime cross border dimension.

2.2. European cooperation on coast guard functions

Summary

Strategic level

Interagency cooperation was strengthened following the annual strategic plan 2019 of the tripartite working arrangement (TWA) on coast guard functions between the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), including the successful work conducted within Frontex-chaired technical subcommittee on capacity sharing and legal issues.

The technical committee's meetings were held in Lisbon and Warsaw and focused on the preparation of the second annual coast guard event and finding a common statement on the European multipurpose maritime activities concept.

As the chair of the TWA steering committee, Frontex organised and hosted the second annual European coast guard event in Świnoujście, Poland from 15 to 17 April 2019. The annual European coast guard event is the main forum for discussions with stakeholders and partners, and it's used to identify possible activities for the future cooperation among the agencies to support national authorities in carrying out coast guard functions. An interagency booklet on European cooperation on coast guard functions was published as a follow-up of the event.

Frontex took part in the third steering committee meeting between the Executive Directors of the three agencies organised in Lisbon on 15 May during which the annual strategic plan 2020 was adopted.

EFCA, EMSA and Frontex organised an interagency stand at the European Maritime Day on 16-17 May 2019 in Lisbon, promoting European cooperation on coast guard functions. Frontex actively participated and contributed with its expertise to several coast guard functions events at the European level: Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation (BSRBCC), European coast guard functions forum (ECGFF), and Mediterranean coast guard functions forum (MCGFF) and the international level: North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum (NACGF), Coast Guard Global Summit (CGGS), as well as in other regional initiatives related to the coast guard functions.

Furthermore, from 2-4 April 2019, the ECGFF's chair and Frontex organised a joint workshop on the coast guard functions in the framework of maritime security at Guardia di Finanza's Economic and Financial Police School premises in Rome – Lido di Ostia. The general objective of this workshop was to share the best practices among various relevant national and regional stakeholders and to stimulate discussion on the training priorities to be identified and key challenges in maritime security, maritime border control functions, illegal trafficking, from the perspective of two overarching themes of risk assessment and education and training.

During ECGFF plenary conference under the Italian chairmanship in November 2019, Frontex took part in a quadrilateral meeting with European Defence Agency (EDA) and EFCA and EMSA. Following the European Union maritime security strategy (EUMSS), its action plan (revised in 2018) and building on the existing bilateral and trilateral cooperation, the meeting was organised to assess further cooperation options, identify possible synergies and the areas of mutual interest between the four agencies.

Operational level

Frontex continues to promote the multipurpose maritime operation (MMO) in 2019 as follows:

Frontex took part in the operation 'Baltic tracking 2019', a multipurpose maritime operation carried out by the BSRBCC MS in ports, at sea and in the air, with the support of EFCA and EMSA. The implementation period was from 27 May – 7 June 2019. The aim was to uncover the present maritime situational picture in the Baltic Sea region, through the monitoring and reporting of the daily activities across the Member States. Frontex supported the operation by Eurosur/Copernicus Fusion Services (EFS), including the multipurpose aerial surveillance (MAS) and the joint operation reporting application (JORA) as an information exchange and visualisation platform for situational awareness and for the purpose of improving reaction capabilities.

The MMO Black Sea 2019 was implemented under the JO focal points 2019 - sea in Bulgarian and Romanian territorial waters, contiguous zones and exclusive economic zones (EEZ). The operational aim was to provide increased technical and operational assistance to Bulgaria and Romania by implementing coordinated operational activities in the areas at the external sea borders, which are not covered by regular maritime joint operations or complementing them in order to control illegal immigration flows towards the territory of the EU MS, and to tackle cross-border crime and to enhance European cooperation on coast guard functions and law enforcement activities. Frontex supported this operation by EFS, including the multipurpose aerial surveillance (MAS) and the joint operation reporting application (JORA) as an information exchange and visualisation platform for situational awareness and for the purpose of improving reaction capabilities.

In 2019, two search and rescue (SAR) drills were performed in different European basins in order to enhance coordination and cooperation among all operational actors involved in SAR operations, as well as to boost capacity in order to save lives at sea and improve the humanitarian response to those rescued at sea. The practical exercise was based on a scenario, as realistic as possible, inspired by the current challenges faced by the crews.

Frontex organised and implemented:

- Two SAR workshops respectively in Burgas (Bulgaria) and in Constanta (Romania) in the frame of multipurpose maritime operation (MMO Black Sea 2019) under the joint operation focal points 2019 - sea,
- SAR workshops within JO Poseidon in Kos and Chios.

In 2019, the European coast guard functions officer (ECGFO) profile continued to be developed by recruiting, training and deploying such officers in Frontex JOs/MMOs in cooperation with EFCA and EMSA.

Five iterations of ECGFO training were carried out for 70 participants from MS/SAC. The aim of the ECGFO course was to enhance the level of competence of the participants to operate effectively in host MS main operational structures or on board of assets supporting the implementation of coast guard functions. This advanced specialisation training focused on tasks, mandate, role and responsibilities of officers of a relevant national authority to prepare them to meet all demands they may face during their deployment in Frontex joint maritime operations.

EMPACT environmental crime activity

In 2019, Frontex took part in EMPACT environmental crime operational activities focused on the maritime domain on fisheries activity and protection of environment with the aim to prevent and to tackle cross-border crime within the Frontex coordinated MMOs and JOs.

A boarding working group meeting was organised by Frontex in Helsinki, Finland (17-18 January 2019) to work on updating the ‘Handbook in Frontex – coordinated joint maritime operations – best practices and guidelines’’, with the participation of 17 MS experts.

In 2019, a pilot activity assessing the existing maritime analysis tools – maritime ‘big data’ (e.g. maritime reporting systems data, information on ship ownership/management, historical movements of vessels and relevant open sources information) was carried out. The aim was to build capacity and to produce information of interest for border/coast guard and law enforcement authorities.

In the context of interagency cooperation and sharing of capacities, Frontex framework contract for aerial surveillance services supported EFCA activities in the central Mediterranean.

The highlights of the achievements in the frame of implementation of the tripartite working arrangement, related to coast guard functions activities during 2019, are depicted in the tables below.

Objectives 2019	Outcomes
Strategic/Horizontal	
To hold the annual joint European Coast Guard Event (AECGE) under the coordination of Frontex in line with the experience gained at the previous annual event.	In 2019, in accordance with the conclusions of the first AECGE, second AECGE was organised under the coordination of Frontex in cooperation with EFCA and EMSA in Świnoujście (15–17 April 2019) and focused on coast guard topics. The event was attended by 127 participants from different EU Member States (MS) and Schengen associated countries (SAC), from each Agency and the European Commission.
To promote further European cooperation with national authorities on coast guard functions considering the specificities of EU sea basins.	EFCA, EMSA and Frontex organised an interagency stand at the European maritime day on 16–17 May 2019 in Lisbon, where they delivered a joint workshop, promoting European cooperation on coast guard functions amongst European maritime community. EFCA, EMSA and Frontex participated in various regional initiatives related to the coast guard functions and especially in the frame of European coast guard functions forum, strengthening the cooperation with maritime community in the EU. Three joint workshops have been organised in 2019 under the Italian Chairmanship of the forum. The first one under the coordination of EMSA in Lisbon on ‘A new European environmental commitment’, the second one under the coordination of Frontex in Rome, Lido di Ostia on ‘Coast guard functions in the framework of maritime security’ and the third one, a practical exercise ‘Coastex 2019’ in Catania, under the coordination of EFCA.

To carry out coordinated communication/media activities related to the implementation of the European interagency cooperation on coast guard functions.

In 2019, the following communication activities have been performed:
Following the annual European coast guard event, an interagency video on cooperation on coast guard functions has been prepared by Frontex. The video presented and promoted the cooperation between the three agencies in maritime domain. The video had its premiere at ECGFF plenary conference in Venice in November 2019. In the framework of the AECGE, an interagency booklet on EU cooperation on coast guard functions, prepared by Frontex in cooperation with EFCA and EMSA, was published.

To harmonise the format and implementing modalities of the interagency service level agreements.

Interagency cooperation was strengthened following the adoption of the annual strategical plan 2019 of the tripartite working arrangement on coast guard functions. The three technical subcommittees (TSC), chaired by EMSA (TSC1 for area 1 and 2), EFCA (TSC 2 for area 3 and 4) and Frontex (TSC 3 for area 5), continued their regular activities.

Area 1 Information sharing

To further enhance cooperation among the agencies in the field of information sharing.

The first draft of an inventory with the data collected by all three agencies was developed with the objective to provide an overview of what data sets are available and to trigger the discussions for sharing this data with the Member States coast guard authorities. The agencies continued working on the development of the 'data sharing table' and promoted further sharing of data/services between the agencies.

To provide a maritime awareness picture in customised interfaces that include/integrate all relevant data sources available across the policy areas.

Following the feedback received by the AECGE 2019, the agencies worked further on the inventory to describe the data sets with additional information (such as the technicalities including type of interfaces) and the access rights policies associated to each data set. The three EU Agencies provided further information related to the conditions associated with the use of the data sets (e.g. data update rate, reliability, technical issues and access conditions). The agencies committed to continue their work to further increase the awareness of user communities about the possible use of the available data sets.

To continue working on analysing information needs and any gap in dialogue with relevant national authorities, continuing to ensure a sound and secure implementation of data access rights.

The IMS maritime picture provided by EMSA, with vessel information and positions (including SafeSeaNet), secured-AIS and additionally vessel monitoring system received from EFCA) and automatic behaviours monitoring tools have been shared in 2019 with EFCA and Frontex. The IMS maritime picture has been further developed to integrate requirements from all coast guard stakeholders.
Frontex has continuously provided several EUROSUR fusion services applicable to the maritime domain throughout 2019 and contributed to the compilation of the European situational picture and supporting the establishment of the national situational pictures.

To further work on common tools for data mining and exploitation (such as automated behaviour monitoring tools and historical data analysis tools).

Growing requirements in machine learning at EMSA and how machine learning can be integrated into the processes of EMSA and the other Agencies should become a key question in the coming years. The Agencies will continue to explore machine learning options applied to the maritime surveillance.
In order to satisfy Frontex' needs in the domain of machine learning for analysing maritime big data, Frontex financed a proof of concept (machine learning for patterns of life) under the Frontex-EMSA service level agreement, which was carried out by EMSA.

Area 2 Surveillance and communication services

<p>To further enhance cooperation between the three agencies in the area of surveillance and communication services.</p>	<p>EMSA Earth observation services have increased for all coast guard stakeholders (both in numbers and quality). EMSA further developed and shared with the EFCA and Frontex near-real time and quasi-real time Earth observation services allowing for an essential and unique monitoring at sea by maritime authorities.</p>
<p>To analyse the possibility to increase specific surveillance and communication services to relevant stakeholders.</p>	<p>In 2019, EMSA provided to EFCA more than 300 Earth observation images under Copernicus maritime surveillance service to support operational fisheries control activity. EMSA also provided to Frontex two earth observation-based services: vessel detection service to detect non-reporting vessels (more than 1700 synthetic aperture radar images in 2019) and the activity detection service with information on border surveillance activities (more than over 630 very high-resolution optical images in 2019). Both agencies benefit from the sharing of images with each other and have access to all the EMSA's CleanSeaNet images taken regularly for pollution monitoring (over 7200 in 2019).</p>
<p>To follow up the developments of air traffic control rules for remotely piloted aircraft system (RPAS).</p>	<p>In the framework of RPAS operations, Member States shared their experiences regarding the developments of air traffic control rules for RPAS in their respective countries.</p>
<p>To avoid duplication and overlaps of surveillance and cross-sectoral communication services, in particular in the area of RPAS services.</p>	<p>The procurement procedures completed in 2018 increased the available portfolio of RPAS of the three agencies in 2019 and of the necessary contracting of satellite communication services. EMSA provided RPAS services to Frontex (in Portugal and Greece) and to EFCA (on board Lundy Sentinel) in support of the coast guard functions. New capabilities for satellite communication were used in all cases for the transmission of RPAS data in real time. At present, as a result of the continuous cooperation between the three agencies, RPAS data streams are integrated with other data layers of the IMS in the RPAS data centre which is shared with all users of RPAS services.</p> <p>Frontex supported EFCA via multipurpose aerial surveillance during the Mediterranean 'bluefin tuna' campaign in June and July 2019, and during MMO Black Sea operation in May 2019 and BSRBCC in Denmark at the beginning of June. During MAS missions, 149 sightings were reported to EFCA in 2019.</p>

Area 3 Capacity building

<p>To continue collecting and assessing cross-sectoral training needs of national authorities performing coast guard functions.</p>	<p>During AECGE 2019, the work of the three agencies was presented covering cross-function training on maritime safety and fisheries control, a joint video tutorial on the IMS for fisheries control, cooperation in the Frontex training on air crew-preparation for joint operations and briefings on fisheries control for Frontex joint operations.</p> <p>Each agency presented the objectives and ongoing work of the inter-agency cooperation and consulted its own community on possible future training needs (EMSA's consultative network on technical assistance, EFCA's steering group on training and exchange of experience, Frontex' annual training conference).</p> <p>Each agency usually invites the other two agencies to participate as observers in their annual training event, steering group or a conference.</p> <p>All business units in the agencies were made aware of the possibility to organise joint training programmes between two or three agencies.</p> <p>EFCA community referred to several possible joint training subjects such as safety of boarding of (fishing) vessels, risk assessment, engine power checking, vessel monitoring system and other on-board systems integrity.</p> <p>During AECGE 2019 a call for an increased inter-agency cooperation and collaboration, including regional approach (e.g. Black Sea) in conjunction with MS to deliver training courses (joint SAR training was supported) and capacity building programmes such as a European exchange programme addressed to officers involved in coast guard functions has also been identified.</p>
<p>To coordinate the preparation of the handbook on European cooperation on coast guard functions.</p>	<p>In March 2018, the European Commission prepared a concept note establishing the general scope of the handbook, recommending that the handbook should be developed in close cooperation with national competent authorities and requesting that the agencies coordinate the drafting process by setting up a cross-sectoral framework. The handbook should cover the five cooperation areas and focus on cross-sectoral cooperation.</p> <p>The agencies requested their governing boards to designate experts and a total of 43 experts were nominated to take part in the drafting process. A kick-off meeting was held in January 2019 with the participation of 32 experts. The handbook would have essentially three parts: 1) catalogues of services, training and best practices, 2) regional cooperation part and 3) Member States fact sheets. An information point was delivered during the annual coast guard event. In August 2019, the first draft of the handbook was circulated to the Member States designated experts. Feedback was received by October 2019 and a review meeting was hosted by EFCA in November 2019. The drafting process is expected to conclude in 2020.</p>
<p>To ensure consistency between the ECGFF sectorial qualification framework (SQF) and the relevant EU and international standards.</p>	<p>Representatives from the three agencies participated in the working group meetings of the project and supported the revision of the SQF tables. The agencies also supported the stakeholders' consultation through distributing a dedicated questionnaire to their communities. The three agencies participated and contributed to the final meeting and closing seminar of the ECGFA net project that developed the SQF for ten coast guard functions. EFCA started to host the coast guard training portal with the SQF visual tool.</p>

To provide joint cross-sectoral training by the relevant agencies related to coast guard functions.

Existing cross-function training activities: Training on 'Maritime safety and fisheries control rules applicable to fishing vessels' was delivered on 4–6 June 2019 in Vigo for the EMSA and EFCA communities. 'Air crew preparation for joint operations' training was delivered for the Frontex community. Representatives of EMSA and EFCA contributed to the course delivery. A total of four sessions were delivered in 2019, namely in February, May, August and October. EFCA contributed to the development of briefings for the Frontex joint operations – for the Frontex community. A total of 14 briefings were delivered in 2019.

To map the ongoing relevant cross-sectoral cooperation projects with third countries.

The three agencies are currently implementing capacity building sessions and projects independently with third countries. As the first step, the three agencies did an inventory and mapping of the current activities and specifically for 2019 they set up a map by quarter and region (EU enlargement countries, Black Sea and Caspian Sea, Middle East and North Africa and West Africa) to specifically analyse where synergies could be developed. The projects currently implemented are as follows:

Middle East and North Africa:

Frontex through:

- EU4Border security project.
- Cooperation with EU border assistance missions (EUBAM).
- SAR workshop in Greece (JO Poseidon) with Egypt participation.

EFCA through the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

- Pilot project - Strait of Sicily
- Pilot project - Ionian Sea
- Pilot project - Levant Sea

EMSA through the SAFEMED project:

- first union for Mediterranean ad-hoc senior officers' meeting on transport;
- training for maritime labour convention inspectors;
- International convention for the prevention of pollution from ships (MARPOL convention) – training with reference to Annex VI of MARPOL convention and the EU legislation training;
- vessel tracking services training;
- training on marine environmental protection;
- seminar on Mediterranean memorandum of understanding on port state control (Med MoU);
- International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping for Seafarers (STCW) training;
- training on search and rescue;
- training on ballast water management;
- maritime law and International Maritime Organisation conventions;
- Training on International Ship and Port Facility (ISPS);
- Preparation and follow-up on International Maritime Organisation Member State Audit Scheme (IMSAS).

EU enlargement countries:

Frontex: workshop on the European integrated border management strategy in October in cooperation with the European Commission.

EFCA through the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean.

EMSA implements a DG NEAR-financed project entitled: 'Preparatory measures for the participation of enlargement countries in EMSA's work', and it conducts training activities to support the implementation of associating EU legislation.

Black Sea

Frontex: technical assistance for projects.

EFCA through the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

Pilot project 'Black Sea'

EMSA held several training sessions and seminars on flag state implementation, port state control, vessel tracking services, vessel tracking management information system, protection of environment and pollution response, human element, security of ships and port facilities, communication and visibility, and provision of tools and services.

Gulf of Guinea

EFCA through PESCO project (the European Union-funded initiative for Improved Regional Fisheries Governance in Western Africa, implemented with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission);

EMSA/Copernicus through SWAIMS (Strengthening Criminal Justice Systems in West and Central Africa) – an EU/UNODC partnership project whose objective is to improve maritime security and safety in the Gulf of Guinea in the ECOWAS Region.

To jointly support future EU capacity building cooperation programmes with third countries, where relevant.

Currently, the three agencies organise different training events for their own communities. During the annual coast guard event, the agencies requested an input from the national authorities on possible cross-sectoral training needs.

EMSA has a specific training module on fishing vessel safety for the EU and third countries. EFCA was invited to deliver a presentation on fisheries control during this training. This is the first example of cooperation in the context of third countries.

Frontex started to organise an IBM training for third countries. In 2019, it was delivered in the Western Balkans. There was a possibility to explore presentations from EMSA and EFCA during these trainings. EFCA has also experience and developed courses in Eastern countries.

Area 4 Risk analysis

To further enhance cooperation between the relevant EU agencies on cross-sectoral risk management cooperation. EFCA and Frontex developed their own risk analysis frameworks within their mandates. This information, combined with the data gathered by EMSA and available in their systems, supported national authorities performing coast guard functions (e.g. providing risk assessment tools, risk assessment analysis and products and/or abnormal behaviour monitoring). In order to develop a common understanding, the three agencies exchanged information about the types of data, methodologies (steps, levels and objectives of risk assessment) and analytical products that are currently used by each agency. The agencies discussed possible levels of integration and respective analytical products, considering advantages and disadvantages of each level to determine which type of analytical products can be jointly developed by the three agencies. The different mandates of the agencies resulted in the development of different analytical products. The adequate spatial and temporal dimensions would be important to consider. The levels of planning between strategic planning versus operational day-to-day monitoring were also considered. The identification of complementarities that could be relevant for each agency (data-poor situations, low risks with high impacts) was also considered. A glossary/terminology on risk assessment related to coast guard functions was elaborated.

To enhance tailor-made cross-sectoral risk analysis services provided to relevant authorities responsible for coast guard functions where relevant and according to each agency's mandate. The agencies initiated an exploratory analysis of joining a risk assessment outcome for fisheries (strategic risk assessment outcome from EFCA), incident reports off illegal border crossings and smuggling of goods (data from Frontex) and likelihood of oil spills (from the EMSA CleanSeaNet). Different maps were explored for the Mediterranean Sea by plotting the different data or information from the three agencies. This was a preliminary exercise of trying to combine data or information from the three agencies. Additional data sets that could be considered from EMSA, include:

- non-correlated vessel detection system – identification of targets from satellite remote sensing imagery;
- vessel traffic density maps – annual, seasonal and monthly density maps by vessel types;
- SafeSeaNet incidents – different categories.

Area 5 Capacity sharing

To elaborate a concept for a European multipurpose maritime activities while using existing, planned, outsourced capacity of each Agency.

The concept draft of the European multipurpose maritime activities, with the integration in operational modules of operations, is under the development. The interagency concept has been discussed with Member States during the second annual European coast guard event. Comments have been taken into consideration and the concept focused on MMO needs to be discussed in the frame of TSC3 chaired by Frontex.

Following the TSC3 meeting in Brussels in December 2019, the three Agencies agreed to develop a draft of MMO concept definitions based on 'Coastex 17', with Frontex in lead in close cooperation with EFCA and EMSA. It has been further agreed to develop MMO guidelines based on common understanding of MMO concept. EFCA in lead in close cooperation with EMSA and Frontex. The discussions on the development of draft concept is planned to take place during the TSC3 meeting in March 2020.

In that perspective, MMO 'Black Sea 2019' implemented under the Frontex Joint Operation Focal Points 2019 Sea in the Bulgarian (BGR) and Romanian (ROU) territorial waters, contiguous zones and Exclusive Economic Zones in cooperation with EFCA and EMSA may be view as a first step and practical approach to better elaborate such enhanced cooperation at EU level under coast guard functions.

To further enhance cooperation modalities between EU Agencies on capacity sharing issues including sharing assets beyond multipurpose operations.

A memorandum of understanding has been signed between Frontex and EFCA on new Frontex Aerial Surveillance Services (FASS).

Following the extension of the scope of the SLA between EMSA and EFCA, EMSA provided some pollution response equipment and relevant training to EFCA offshore patrol vessel 'Lundy Sentinel'. Consequently 'Lundy Sentinel' has been added in the database of available response resources in Common Emergency Communication Information System - Marine Pollution (CECIS MP).

Cooperation with EFCA in the use of Frontex's RPAS pilot was established.

Frontex and EFCA have established operational contacts and exchange information on periodical basis in connection with EFCA offshore patrol vessel operational activity.

To identify the legal and operational regimes that apply to multipurpose operations led/supported by the Agencies;

Legal issues reflecting the "flag state" enforcement powers in the international waters have been explored and discussed, also in relation to leasing/chartering of the agencies' equipment.

To further enhance cooperation between Agencies and National Operational Centres for exchange of information in real time and provision of responses to threats in the areas of operation (also relevant for Area 1).

A mapping exercise of the existing authorities performing coast guard functions has been conducted. The mapping is based on the authorities participating at the agencies' level but it also relies on European and international forums related to coast guard functions (BSRBCC, ECGFF, NACGFF, MCGFF, and CGGS). The document is under finalisation.

The mapping of Agencies Operational Centres for exchange of information in real time has been conducted. The document has been finalised.

In that perspective, concrete steps of the reinforcement of the interagency cooperation were in this domain in 2019:

The finalization of the Incidental Sighting Potential Marine Pollution Form (ISPMP) between EMSA and Frontex and to be used in Frontex Joint Operations

The briefings/ trainings of European Coast Guard Functions Officer (ECGFO) deployed in the International Coordination Centres of Frontex Joint Operations were organized in EFCA/EMSA HQ in February and July 2019. Frontex organized ECGFOs briefings in HQs in April, October and November 2019.

Highlights: Coast guard activities 2019

Coast guard activities keep strengthening on the basis of two main pillars: fostering the exchange of best practices among Members States and improvement of the cooperation among coast guard functions stakeholders at European and international level.

Exchange of best practices

For a second year in a row, two SAR Workshops were successfully implemented within the framework of JO Poseidon and additionally two SAR workshops were organised in Bulgaria and Romania in the frame of the MMO Black Sea 2019 (JO focal point – sea). A working group for updating the handbook on 'Boarding in Frontex – coordinated joint maritime operations' was launched bringing together Member States and dedicated experts.

Cooperation among coast guard functions

Following the successful implementation of ECGFO pilot project, in 2019, an ECGFO was deployed within JO Themis and Poseidon and an evaluation meeting with ECGFOs was organised and held on January 2019 in Frontex headquarters. Frontex implemented also a MMO in the Black Sea supporting Bulgarian and Romanian authorities with the participation of EFCA and EMSA. Collaboration within the framework of Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation continued and was enhanced with the participation of more Frontex units within the framework of the MMO 'Baltic tracking' 2019.

Frontex keeps developing cooperation with EFCA and EMSA under the TWA. In 2019, Frontex organised the annual European coast guard event in the framework of this arrangement. The drafting of the practical handbook on European cooperation on coast guard functions was initiated with the Member States and under the coordination of the three maritime Agencies. Frontex also supported the activities of the European coast guard functions forum by co-organising a workshop with the Italian Presidency of ECGFF and took an active part within the multipurpose maritime exercise 'Coastex 2019'. With the purpose of developing international cooperation at sea, Frontex participated in the Coast Guard Global Summit in Japan and the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum plenary conference in the United States. Coast guard cooperation with third countries is under development via coast guard fora or in a bilateral way (Morocco, Ukraine), as well as in the frame of capacity building projects such as the EU4BorderSecurity.

2.3. Operational response

Summary

In 2019, Frontex further enhanced the operational response at the external borders of the EU by allocating additional budget to operational activities and focused on the below activities.

Enhanced border security:

- Supporting the national authorities in disclosing cases of smuggling of migrants, trafficking in human beings and other cross-border crime.
- Active support in detecting irregular migrants at the border crossing points, false documents, stolen vehicles as well as preventing cross-border criminal activities at 47 focal points.
- Moldovan, Montenegrin and Georgian authorities proposed to expand their operational capacities in the field of the land and maritime border management, within the framework of the JO coordination points, proposing the establishment of four new coordination points respectively, two on land and two at sea borders.
- Establishment of a new international coordination centre in Frontex headquarters with the aim to have a more effective monitoring of JO FOA–land operational scenarios. The smooth exchange of information and best practices ensures Frontex capability to respond in a rapid and effective way to any emergency situation at external borders of EU.
- Successful launch of the first fully-fledged joint operation organised by Frontex outside the EU in Albania and the deployment of officers with technical equipment from seventeen EU Member States to support Albania in border control and to tackle cross-border crime. With the excellent support from Albanian authorities, the coordination structure was set up and good working conditions were ensured in both operational areas. All logistical arrangements continue to improve in the operational area. Respective Albanian authorities show very positive and cooperative approach.
- Initial steps taken for the planning of fully-fledged operational activities, including the intelligence gathering in Serbia and North Macedonia, following the entry into force of status agreements.
- Deployment of the first Frontex-owned patrol cars and handheld equipment in the framework of JO FOA – land and JO FOA – land in Western Balkans, in Albania. This relevant leap forward gives the Agency more self-sufficiency and flexibility in terms of securing adequate technical resources, especially in light of the upcoming standing corps.
- Debriefing activities have been successfully implemented from 24 April 2019 in Kilkis LCC (Greece – North Macedonia border). The joint debriefing teams have achieved very good results and were able to collect valuable and high-quality information concerning the migratory flows in and towards the region. Good results allow Frontex risk analysis unit (RAU) to provide the senior management with a constant and reliable update concerning the situation in the area.
- Increased technical support to selected focal points.
- Increased deployments during joint action days.

Enhanced operational cooperation:

- Enhanced cooperation with UNHCR in Albania.
- Focal points and coordination points were efficiently used as a platform for hosting other operational activities: EU policy cycle/EMPACT activities – joint action days (JAD Arktos, Danube 4 and JAD Mobile 2) and focal points – police customs cooperation centres information exchange.
- Cooperation with Europol, INTERPOL, CELBET, the European network of national contact points for the fight against cross-border vehicle crime (Carpol) and several national customs authorities during the JADs.
- Pilot implementation of the VEGA children – land activity at two locations with the involvement of experts from international and non-governmental organisations belonging to or endorsed by the Frontex consultative forum on fundamental rights.

Establishment and exchange of best practices:

- Information/awareness sessions (airport seminars), involving law enforcement authorities and other Frontex partners in hosting MS/SAC and TC airports, organised with local border guards in order to raise awareness about the children at risk while on the move and to introduce/promote VEGA handbook: 'Children at airports' and another VEGA handbook: 'Countermeasures at airports'.
- Dedicated document information sessions, 'roadshows' were organised and implemented at selected airports in operational area for local staff and deployed seconded team members and team members. The sessions were organised with the support of Frontex Training Unit and the Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud. The concept of 'roadshows' aims to raise awareness among the front line officers of the design and the potential abuse of secure identity documents, at the same time emphasising the frontline officers' vital role in detecting falsified documents. The specific information sessions are based on Frontex risk analysis, lessons learnt from Frontex coordinated joint operations and inputs from Member States.
- Staff exchange programme continues to be a regular part of operations, including the deployment of third country officers.
- Workshops and ad-hoc training sessions for local staff on JORA, detection of falsified documents and stolen vehicles delivered by team members and seconded team members.
- Local coordinators network meeting, including focal points and coordination points organised and held with the view to enhance the exchange of best practices.
- The fast and accurate information exchange between neighbouring MS and third countries' authorities and between corresponding ICCs (e.g. Rome and Piraeus) have proved to be a key factor to the successful development of several events during 2019.
- Establishment of standard procedures for the migration management support.
- Raising cultural awareness linked with the migratory patterns in the deployment areas.
- Thematically-oriented workshops, tailored to local needs.
- Implementation of operational activities with the multipurpose character (interagency cooperation on coast guard functions).

Budgetary breakdown of Operational Response Division's (ORD) appropriations for 2019:

- ORD Field Deployments Unit (FDU) – EUR 119,727,520 [technical and human resources deployment cost, cost of participants of Frontex organised meetings (including logistics)]; readmissions of Frontex staff and seconded team members);
- European Centre for Returns – EUR 67,410,191 (return and pre-return activities which are further described at 2.4 below);
- Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud – EUR 1,739,931;
- Coast Guard Sector – EUR 879,691;
- Law Enforcement Sector – EUR 730,000;
- Divisional Support Office – EUR 30,500;
- Total budgetary envelope – EUR 190,517,833.

The activity-based utilisation of ORD appropriations for 2019:

- ORD - 1 focal points concept (EUR 6,690,009);
- ORD - 2 multipurpose maritime activities concept (EUR 100,123,453);
- ORD - 3 flexible operational activities concept (EUR 12,914,058);
- ORD - 4 coast guard functions activities (EUR 879,691);
- ORD - 5 operational cooperation in the area of law enforcement (EUR 730,000);
- ORD – 6 operational cooperation in the area of fighting document fraud (EUR 1,739,931);
- ECRET – 1-9 return activities (EUR 67,410,191);
- divisional support (EUR 30,500);
- The total amount of EUR 190,517,833 was committed at the end of the year with 31.5 % that was carried over to 2020.

Frontex involvement in the EU policy cycle/EMPACT

According to the EBCG Regulation, contributing to addressing serious crime with a cross-border dimension is part of the Frontex mandate to ensure a coherent European integrated border management at the external borders. One of the main contributions of Frontex in this area is its engagement and active participation in the EU policy cycle/EMPACT. In 2019, Frontex supported 70 operational actions across various EMPACT priorities. The Agency is gradually increasing not only the number of engagements, but also its quality and relevance. In 2019, Frontex organised the following five joint action days (JADs).

- **JAD Arktos**

The activities were co-led by Estonia and Finland, targeting excise fraud (especially smuggling of tobacco products), document fraud, and migrant smuggling, with a focus on the EU Eastern external land border. The coordination centre was established in Frontex headquarters between 6 and 17 May 2019.

The JAD contributed to the seizure of 12 stolen vehicles, more than 11.6 million of cigarettes, 396 litres of alcohol, seven firearms, and 200,000 pieces of ammunition. Moreover, 395 cases of illegal stay were reported, 2,666 persons were refused entry, and 84 cases of document fraud were registered.

- **JAD Adria**

Joint action day 'Adria' took place from 28 May to 4 June 2019 and focused upon the smuggling of migrants and drugs trafficking within the Adriatic/Ionian Sea and by land routes in neighbouring countries. The JAD took place within the EMPACT platform for combating organised crime. A coordination centre was set up in Piraeus, Greece at the Hellenic Coastguard headquarters. The JAD was coordinated by Frontex and co-led by Greece, Croatia and Italy. France and Europol also supported the action and through this provided the opportunity for real-time information exchange between the countries.

In terms of operational results, during the activities nine maritime vessels were intercepted and eight facilitators were arrested. There were 169 irregular migrants apprehended and 166 persons refused entry and 20 forged/falsified documents seized. In addition, 27.4 kg of cannabis was also seized and a drug smuggler was arrested.

- **JAD Danube 4**

The activities were co-led by Austria, targeting facilitated illegal immigration, document fraud, trafficking in human beings, environmental crime with the focus on the Western Balkans area, the South Eastern European external border and selected BCPs at the EU Eastern external border. The coordination centre was established in the joint operation office in Vienna, while JAD Danube 4 used the platform of the Frontex coordinated land joint operations, namely joint operation focal points 2019 – land, joint operation flexible operational activities 2019 – land and joint operation coordination points 2019 – land and for implementing the objectives of the initiative. The JAD contributed to arresting 26 people smugglers and the seizure of EUR 403,850 in cash, 16 stolen vehicles, more than 200,000 cigarettes, three firearms and 88 pieces of ammunition. Moreover, 2,760 irregular migrants were apprehended, 92 cases of document fraud were noted, 508 illegal stayers reported and 1,714 persons were refused entry.

- **JAD Mobile 2**

The joint action day was held between 23 September and 4 October 2019, and it focused on stolen vehicles, illegal immigration and document fraud. The JAD was co-led by Europol, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands and Poland. The coordination centre was established at Frontex headquarters and it was attended by 12 MS, and the following third countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo⁽⁴⁾, North Macedonia, Montenegro. This JAD used the platform of the Frontex-coordinated land joint operations, namely joint operation (JO) focal points 2019 – land, joint operation flexible operational activities 2019

⁽⁴⁾ 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.

– land and joint operation coordination points 2019 – land for implementing the objectives of the initiative. The JAD contributed to the seizure of 439 stolen cars, 11.9 million illegal cigarettes, and 20 tonnes of raw tobacco. Moreover, 166 suspected people smugglers, drug smugglers and people in possession of smuggled excise goods and weapons were arrested.

- **JAD Morpheus**

The JAD coordinated by Frontex targeted drug trafficking, facilitated illegal immigration and related document fraud at the EU external air borders from 14 to 25 October 2019. The action was co-led by Greece, France and Bulgaria. Europol and INTERPOL also supported the action along with the other 12 MS and three third countries. There was a total of 100 incidents of document fraud reported, 213 falsified/forged documents detected, 160 genuine documents held by impostors, 105 refusals of entry, 19 facilitators identified and 84 persons arrested.

Other highlights of the Agency's support to EMPACT activities include:

- **JAD Western Balkans**

JAD Western Balkans targeted the trafficking of firearms, facilitated illegal immigration, and drugs trafficking in the Western Balkans region. The coordination centre was established at Europol headquarters between 4 and 8 September 2019. Frontex hosted the JAD Western Balkans preparatory meeting from 21-22 May 2019, in co-operation with EUROPOL under the EU policy cycle/EMPACT Western Balkans, led by Spain and co-led by Frontex.

The operation contributed to the seizure of 51 firearms and 895 pieces of ammunition, and to the detection of 14 cases of visa fraud or misuse, of 71 forged or falsified documents, and of 164 clandestine entries.

- **Trafficking in human beings operational action (THB OA) 5.1**

In the course of 2019, Frontex was co-leading the activities which consisted of three workshops. After the strategic approach undertaken in 2018 by the previous leader (Austria), in 2019 the operational action 5.1 was expected to become more operational. Frontex applied some techniques derived from operations management studies to facilitate the transition from the strategic to the operational context in the first workshop. The results were presented in the last session and were expected to be tested during the large scale JAD implemented between 16 and 20 September 2019. The action leader, Spain, contacted the Austrian action leader of the operational action THB 2.4 leading the part of the large-scale JAD connected with trafficking in human beings. However, the time to arrange the document fraud component and the changes in the operational plan was too short. Therefore, further involvement of document fraud experts in THB JAD is expected in 2020.

- **Trafficking in human beings and VEGA concept**

Frontex participated regularly to the EU policy cycle/EMPACT trafficking in human beings. It was a co-leader of OA 1.1 (identification and monitoring of trends for an updated intelligence picture) and a participant in seven other operational actions. Additionally, since 2018, the VEGA concept has been moved to the area of competence of the Law Enforcement Sector, which coordinates it with the other activities in the field of combatting trafficking of human beings.

As a co-leader in EMPACT THB OA 1.1, Frontex transmits all non-personal data gathered during JOs and JADs to EUROPOL for further analysis. As a participant in the OA 2.3 (JADs against all forms of trafficking), Frontex was responsible for disseminating VEGA children handbooks. Handbooks on trafficking in human beings and VEGA handbooks are disseminated to all deployed team members, and implemented as part of operational activities by Frontex Field Deployment Unit. All JOs have established a referral mechanism.

In OA. 4.1 (ETUTU sub-project – Nigerian THB), Frontex participated in the initiation of a report aiming to analyse the secondary movements of the Nigerian migrants, focusing on victims of human trafficking. Risk Analysis Unit developed questionnaires for non-personal data collection in consultation with the coordinator. The findings from the data collection were presented and discussed with participating Member States at the ETUTU meeting in Wiesbaden on 21-23 October 2019.

Investigation support activities for cross-border crime (ISA-CBC)

Following its successful launch in 2018, the ISA-CBC pilot project brought concrete operational outcomes throughout 2019. The project supports the Member States in cases of illegal trafficking via the EU external borders by combining the analytical and surveillance tools of the Agency with the equipment and financial support. ISA-CBC started running in the Operational Area 'Poniente', covering the Atlantic side of the EU external borders and focusing on operations against the cocaine route from Central and South America and the hashish route from North Africa. This pilot proved to be a major step for the Agency in the law enforcement arena, recognised by several stakeholders as an important partner in tackling cross-border crime also in the maritime domain. In 2019, Frontex further enhanced its support to EU MS on detection and investigative activities of serious cross-border crime, which resulted in 15 requests for collaboration, with four positive cases (one remains classified). On 13 November 2019, Frontex organised an ISA-CBC evaluation meeting in Lisbon, which was attended by operational partners in the project.

- **El Canonero**

Frontex supported an action by the French Central Office for the Suppression of Illicit Drug Trafficking - Mediterranean area anti-drug enforcement coordination centre (OCRTIS-CeCLAD) and the Italian Guardia di Finanza, detecting and intercepting the 'El Canonero' boat sailing south of Sicily and seizing 6,360 kg of cannabis resin and arresting two Spanish citizens and one Colombian. ISA-CBC supported the action coordinating Frontex aerial means deployed in JO Themis.

- **Operation Tuga**

Together with the Portuguese Maritime Analysis and Operation Centre – Narcotics (MAOC(N)), Frontex supported an operation led by Portuguese Policia Judiciaria. A vessel was intercepted when crossing the Portuguese exclusive economic zone, carrying 3,326 kg of cocaine on board (worth estimated EUR 125 million). Frontex provided analytical reports to increase the intelligence of the operation, and co-financed an aerial asset which supported surveillance and assault at high sea.

- **Operation Familia**

Frontex supported an operation which started with an investigation by the Croatian authorities in 2018, in cooperation with Czech, Serbian and Slovenian authorities. The target was a Balkan organised criminal network suspected of large-scale cocaine trafficking from South America to Europe using private planes. Under the coordination of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration and Europol, several law enforcement agencies implemented task forces to identify and target suspects in Europe, South America, and Asia. Frontex supported the seizure of 603 kg of cocaine on board a private jet coming from South America due to monitoring in cooperation with Eurocontrol.

Operational co-operation with customs

Frontex has identified customs authorities as an important partner in relation to the control of external borders and consequently built the strategic partnership due to the investment in institutional framework and enhanced trust-building efforts. The side event of the EBCG day gave another opportunity to further develop these investments.

In light of the Frontex mandate, regarding counteracting cross-border crime, as well as in accordance with the EU IBM, the Agency established and increased the operational interaction with EU customs in 2019. The customs operational cooperation development is key to a successful and modern protection

of the borders and at the same time prevention and detection as well as investigation of cross-border crime.

The EU Policy cycle 2018-2021 is very relevant for the operational cooperation with customs. It created new opportunities for the collaboration with customs, especially due to the new operational priorities, such as environmental crime and organised property crime (including stolen vehicles smuggling) and continuation with the current priorities like excise fraud and firearms. The Agency consequently invited customs to the operational actions led by Frontex, joint Frontex and customs participation in operational actions and joint action days, embedded in EU Policy cycle organised by MS or Europol. In particular the Agency invited customs as a co-leader to two out of five Frontex-led JADs and supported joint customs operations with targeted controls at border crossing points.

Additionally, in the framework of the EU Policy cycle/Firearms EMPACT priority, under OA 3.3 of 2019, Frontex initiated and coordinated, co-led by European Firearms Expert group, guided by the Commission (DG HOME and DG TAXUD) and supported by the CCWP, EUROPOL, OSCE, INTERPOL, UNODC, EU-BAM and Seesac, the drafting of the 'Handbook on detection of firearms for border guards and customs officers', which will additionally contribute to the enhancement of collaboration with customs. In 2019, three working group meetings were organised in Frontex headquarters and the first draft was circulated amongst relevant actors for its development, print and distribution in 2020. Moreover, the planning of a pilot exercise along the Polish/Ukrainian border to test the practicality of the handbook started at the end of 2019.

Moreover, 2019 saw further elaboration on the establishment of adequate frames and standards for the participation of customs at Frontex joint operations or other operational actions, including synergies between JADs, JCPO and JIAs⁽⁵⁾. Consequently, Frontex operational activities and risk analysis projects offer ample opportunities for operational cooperation aimed at the prevention and suppression of different cross-border crime (e.g. drugs trafficking, smuggling of excise goods, stolen vehicles smuggling, firearms trafficking and terrorism), providing support with surveillance services and tools in place – Eurosur Fusion Services (EFS).

Highlights: law enforcement 2019

During 2019, Frontex enhanced its substantial contribution to the EU policy cycle/EMPACT priorities defined under new policy cycle. The operational activities of the Agency supported eight priority areas/operational action plans, namely: facilitation of illegal immigration as the co-driver, trafficking in human beings, excise goods, firearms, organised property crime, environmental crime, drugs (cocaine, cannabis and heroin) and the horizontal priority area of document fraud. In addition to participating in 70 operational actions, Frontex coordinated five joint action days in 2019, which have taken place under the umbrella of existing joint operations held in the land, sea and air domains. Only the mentioned five short-term JADs coordinated by Frontex with Member States and third countries resulted in detection of more than 8400 illegal migrants/refusals/over stayers, 219 migrant smugglers, the seizure of more than 460 stolen motor vehicles, 20 tonnes of tobacco and 25.7 million pieces of cigarettes, 61 firearms and more than 200,000 pieces of ammunition, 381 document fraud cases and 27.4 kg cannabis.

In 2019, the Agency further developed the scope of activities of Frontex' Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud to enhance field activities on document checks. Frontex became the point of reference in activities related to document and identity checks/frauds, enhancing the coordination of implementation of the Council of European Union and the European Commission policies on this matter. Frontex also reinforced its operational partnership with Europol and INTERPOL, further extending it to a number of international and regional organisations such as International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Southeast European Law Enforcement Center (SELEC), Police Cooperation Convention for South-East Europe Secretariat (PCC SEE) who are actively contributing to the fight against document fraud. Cooperation with INTERPOL is particularly successful in the frame of the FIELDS (Frontex – INTERPOL Electronic Library Document System) project,

⁽⁵⁾ Joint intensified actions carried out in the context of CELBET 2.

dedicated to defining the business and technical requirements of a transactional system integrating the Frontex quick check cards in the frontline databases. Together with OSCE, Frontex organised a joint conference which focused on the fight against document fraud in the Western Balkans region, engaging also the members of the expert group.

The newly established Frontex structure has pulled documents and related identity expertise and knowledge into the Frontex expert group on document control (102 experts and forensic officers from 27 Member States). The group contributes horizontally to several Frontex activities.

Several workshops were implemented in a form of need-finding sessions (three in total with EU document experts, Western Balkan document experts and stolen vehicle detection officers), leading to a better positioning of Frontex in the business of document and identity checks/frauds and to establishing a solid basis for the new FADO system that will be developed in the next years. Additional two workshops were dedicated to the electronic security of documents and to the issues related to stamps.

Frontex staff participated in the most relevant global conferences on document and identity, providing presentations and, in case of the ICAO Symposium, also a stand for advertising the FIELDS project.

The presence of the Agency on document and identity frauds in field activities was enhanced by the frequent deployments of document experts working in Frontex. This provided regular support to the pre-deployment briefings organised in operations as well as roadshows implemented in cooperation with the Field Deployment Unit and under the organisation of the Training Unit. Furthermore, the Agency staff participated in all assessment sessions of the advanced level document officer training sessions organised by Frontex in the Netherlands.

Frontex document experts supported the proactive approach and the simulation exercises implemented in the frame of vulnerability assessment activities and assisted the European Centre for Returns in implementing the package to engage Armenia in return activities. Frontex contributed also to the activities of the European document fraud network and to some key projects related to document inspection systems implemented by the Frontex Research and Innovation Unit.

Cooperation between the Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud with the Coast Guard and Law Enforcement Unit was particularly effective in the frame of Frontex activities connected with the EU policy cycle, with specific focus on the document fraud cross-cutting priority and the related operational actions.

The Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud also participated in JAD Danube 4 (with four officers deployed), JAD Mobile with three officers deployed) as well as JAD Morpheus (with two officers deployed). The experts of the centre contributed to enhance the deployed officers' knowledge during operational briefings providing operational information on document security as well as on the latest trends and modus operandi in the fight against documents fraud, and also in processing concrete detected cases in course of operational deployments on the spot. The centre also made reference manual, the Agency's own document system, available to support daily operational actions in the implementation of the respective JADs.

Highlights: Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud 2019

The centre contributed to setting up a standard methodology for introducing the component of document fraud in the different priorities of EMPACT. This was done in the trafficking in human beings priority by co-leading the operational action THB 5.1., together with Spain. Identification of the most relevant indicators on the use of fraudulent documents in various types of crimes and the breakdown in stages of the aforementioned crimes allowed to prepare a checklist to be used by investigators for the involvement of document experts, when necessary.

2.4. Return activities

Summary

Return operations

In 2019, Frontex increased the operational assistance to Member States by providing support in the following areas.

Returns by scheduled flights – 25 Member States carried out returns by scheduled flights with Frontex support returning 4,776 third-country nationals to 81 destinations, including 34 new countries of return. Among the returnees, 893 were escorted, 3,728 unescorted and 155 departed voluntarily. The Agency also managed to increase the number of partner airlines by 11 during the year.

Return operations by charter flights coordinated or organised by Frontex – Member States organised 330 return operations by charter flights, facilitating the return flights of 10,903 returnees and reaching 40 third countries of return. In comparison with 2018, both the number of return operations and third country nationals returned slightly decreased – by 4 % and 11 % respectively. Out of all return operations by charter flights organised in 2019, 142 were joint return operations⁽⁶⁾, 64 collecting return operations and 124 national return operations.

Readmission operations from Greece to Turkey under the EU-Turkey statement – 36 readmission operations were carried out (31 by sea and five by air) readmitting 197 third-country nationals. The number of readmitted persons from Greece to Turkey decreased in 2019 due to more third-country nationals applying for international protection and handing in subsequent applications, as well as returnees absconding in greater numbers. At the very end of the year, the trend slightly improved due to changes in Greek asylum procedures. In 2019, 259 forced return escorts deployed on the Greek island of Lesbos were trained in 12 dedicated pre-deployment training sessions. The readmission operations will continue in 2020.

Deployment of monitors from Frontex pool – 22 Member States contributed to Frontex pool of forced-return monitors with 71 monitors. 260 out of all 330 return operations by charter flights in 2019 were carried out with at least one monitor on board. Hundred and eighty-three of these operations were monitored by a total of 199 monitors from Frontex pool which is a significant increase compared to 2018 when 158 monitors from the Frontex pool took part in 152 return operations by charter flights.

Deployment of forced-return escorts from the Frontex pool – the pool consists of 1,058 persons from 27 Member States. A total of 335 forced-return escorts were deployed in Greece in support of readmission operations throughout the year. Apart from that regular deployment, in response to two requests received by the Agency in 2019, a total of 29 trained forced-return escorts from Frontex pool were deployed to support Member States in joint return operations.

Framework contract for chartering aircrafts - the Agency chartered 13 aircrafts: nine for return operations, and four for readmission operations.

Frontex application for returns (FAR) – in 2019, a total of 81 new requirements were implemented in FAR module on charter flights in order to better organize and coordinate return operations by charter flights. Two new versions of the FAR module on charter flights were released, the latest v.1.7 one on 23 October 2019.

Moreover, 28 new requirements were implemented in FAR module on scheduled flights during the same year. Six new versions of the FAR module on scheduled flights were deployed, the latest one on 12 December 2019.

⁽⁶⁾ Joint return operations involve returnees returned by an organising Member State with a potential support of other Member States.

Pre-return activities

ECRet continued its developments in the area of pre-return throughout 2019, with a key focus on supporting MS in operational processes and digitalisation and facilitating the cooperation with third countries and other key partners in the field of pre-return. Additionally several hand-over related activities were prepared and implemented with regards to EU-funded programmes.

Deployment of return specialists – In 2019, ECRet supported the deployment of 13 return specialists to five different Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, and Italy), focusing on providing support in the field of consular engagement, in the preparatory phase of return operations by using the Frontex application for returns (FAR) scheduled and charter flights modules and on providing support to improve the national return case management system.

Joint Frontex – European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) exchange programme – The activity has been initiated in 2019 to exchange return practitioners with the main aim to gain experience and obtain more knowledge on return-related issues in general and the organisation of the return processes in other Member States. In total, nine different subcategories were introduced including pre-return and eight return practitioners were exchanged out of 94. The activity will continue also in 2020, the call for interest has been sent via national focal point of contact (NFPoC), national training centres and direct contact points in return matters (DCP) as well as the pre-return activities network (PRAN) to all MS with a deadline for nominating exchanges to CEPOL of 2 March 2020.

Cooperation with countries of return – In the field of identification and documentation, ECRet supported 12 identification missions (both short and long term), and set up a pilot project to use video-conferencing equipment for identification purposes, resulting in the handling of 1,196 cases, of whom of 805 migrants were identified, and 580 travel documents issued. Additionally, there were nine visits of third countries, six familiarisation visits and three consular workshops, aiming at building new or enhancing the existing cooperation and to identify possible challenges and efficient ways forward. Four inward missions of third countries were supported aiming to visit some Member States and discuss return systems and practices. Member States sought the cooperation of third countries along with Frontex through outward mission. One 'best practices on return' document was discussed. Two action plans 'assistance in return-related matters' as well as tailor-made return related training sessions and workshops were developed for building the capacities, knowledge and skills of third countries in the domain of identification and return. Similar capacity building activities have been introduced within the frame of IPA II project.

Cooperation with the EU-funded projects – The European Union return liaison officers (EURLO) pilot project on the deployment of EURLO under the legal and financing scheme of Frontex by Norway to Ghana was extended on 9 April 2019 for a period until 31 July 2020. The transfer plan for the EURLO Programme has been finalised and adopted. The lead of the EURLO network was successfully handed over to Frontex in December 2019. Preparations were made for the handover of the EURLO deployments in Q1/2020. Discussions on and preparations for developing a transfer plan for the ERRIN Programme were initiated in 2019. Work continues on the development of a transfer plan and preparation for its implementation in 2020.

During 2019 European return initiative (Eurint) activities were gradually taken over. In July 2019, a workshop was organised jointly by Frontex and Eurint to explore the possibilities to develop tools that can be used by practitioners (such as case workers, escort officers) working in the field of return to inform, prepare and support children during the different stages of the return procedures. A follow-up of this workshop organised by Frontex is foreseen in 2020. By the end of 2019 the phase-in/phase-out activities for Eurint were concluded. By the end of 2019 all Eurint activities have been successfully transferred into Frontex.

Digitalisation – In the field of return digitalisation, Frontex developed, consolidated and published the reference model-Recamas (return case management system) intended to support the Member States in increasing the efficiency of the return process and improving data collection and reporting of the returns

at the national and EU level. The reference model is in reality a blueprint of an ideal Recamas, subject to continuous update and improvement. Reference model v1.0 has been released to all MS in February 2019. Four gap analyses have been performed to identify the main gaps between the existing national systems and the model-Recamas in collaboration with Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Finland. Due to a high interest from MS not all requested gap analysis were possible in 2019, and therefore they are postponed for implementation in 2020. Frontex also provides operational and financial support to the implementation of the gap analysis recommendations. To that end, the first return specialist for Recamas was deployed in December 2019 to support the national authorities with the improvement of their national return case management system by sharing his own knowledge and experience.

Furthermore, Frontex organised a Recamas workshop dedicated to data protection matters. The workshop led to the establishment of a **subgroup of the Recamas working group on data protection**, which will convene in 2020. Additionally, Frontex has initiated a project and concluded a grant agreement with Austria to **connect the national Recamas to FAR**. The first release took place in mid-December 2019. This exercise will serve as a blueprint in fulfilment of the Agency's tasks under the new mandate, i.e., for establishing a centralised infrastructure between national Recamas and the central system in Frontex.

As of 1 January 2019, Frontex completed the **handover of the integrated return management application (IRMA)**, from the European Commission. In 2019, IRMA grew in terms of content: a third country knowledge store was created and the overall structure of the platform was revised. The knowledge store content focuses on relevant information on support and cooperation, concerning the general context of a specific third country. Furthermore, new functionalities developed, e.g. encryption scheme for secure communication, aligning the user interface to Frontex' corporate visual identity. Throughout the year, seven training sessions on the new functionalities of IRMA were delivered by IRMA service desk to users from the MS.

The alignment of IRMA with the started during 2019 and is foreseen to be finalised in 2020. This will grant IRMA users an access to information and documentation system in light of the Frontex-EASO cooperation in the field of return and asylum.

Meanwhile, Frontex has also launched a project on IRMA 2.0 to create a centralised system for all return related matters, with a new design, modules, and incorporation of FAR and other automated business processes. The large part of business analysis for that purpose has already been completed in 2019 and the business case developed.

Training activities in the area of return – in 2019, different types of training activities were supported. These included, in cooperation with the training unit, training for forced-return escort officers, forced-return escort leaders, readmission officers. In cooperation with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), training unit and the fundamental rights office provided training to forced-return monitors.

In the area of digitalisation IRMA as well as FAR (charter and scheduled flight modules) training was conducted to allow MS to use the different modules and functionalities of IRMA.

Furthermore, various capacity building activities were conducted, including training, in cooperation with Eurint, for experts from Members States and third countries on the topics of consular engagement and effective negotiation techniques.

Highlights: ECRet in 2019

Finalisation of the Eurint phase-in/phase-out

In line with the foreseen phase-in/phase-out of the Netherlands-led EU-funded Eurint programme, a transfer plan was drafted and implemented in very effective cooperation with the Eurint team. Throughout the year various activities, including the coordination and organisation of the so-called country working groups, identification missions as well as inward and outward missions were taken over by the Agency. The finalisation of the transfer was highlighted during the Frontex return networks meeting (DCP/PRAN) in September 2019.

Returns by scheduled flights

Throughout 2019, Frontex scheduled flights mechanism was not only established as a permanent activity based on the project's positive evaluation, but also exceeded the established performance goals and contributed substantially to continuous efforts to assist Member States in the implementation of returns. In total, by the end of 2019, 25 Member States participated in the activity returning 6,259 third country nationals to 83 destinations.

Budget summary

ECRET initial budget in 2019 amounted to EUR 63,042,000. The following transfers were executed in 2019 after Frontex budget review:

- EUR 1,900,000 was transferred to Field Deployment Unit in order to cover the costs of the forced-return escorts deployed for the readmission activities under Poseidon 2019.
- EUR 1,700,000 was transferred to Pooled Resources Unit in order to undertake full responsibility for the framework contracts for chartering airplanes for return operations purposes (both LOT 1 and LOT 2).
- EUR 200,000 was transferred to ECRet in order to cover transfer of the EURLO programme under FOA-R 2019.
- EUR 1,507,204 was transferred to ECRet to increase the budget – for FOA-R 2019 in order to cover the grants for return operations by charters – it was the first tranche.
- EUR 2,156,702 was transferred to ECRet increase the budget for FOA-R 2019 in order to cover the grants for return operations by charters it was the second tranche.
- Two final budget transfers were executed in mid-December 2019 in the amounts of EUR 957,926 and EUR 3,146,359 in order to cover the return operations by scheduled flight till May 2020.

The final ECRet budget was in the amount of EUR 67,410,191.

2.5.A. Risk analysis

Summary

During 2019 specific efforts were devoted to the implementation of the roadmap for the EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, particularly during the second semester, in relation to the new provisions concerning risk analysis. The Agency is tasked to prepare a strategic risk analysis, which will be used as the basis for preparing a policy document developing a multiannual strategic policy for European integrated border management. In addition, such provisions implied the developing of new concepts for adapting the analytical support to the overall new operational cycle and concept of the Agency. Furthermore, the Risk Analysis Unit was involved in the creation of the profiles and tasks for the staff to be recruited, trained and deployed as part of the standing corps for tasks related to risk analysis. In addition, a new concept had to be designed for the implementation of the new provisions concerning the processing of operational personal data of suspects, victims and witnesses of cross-border crime and the extension of the data retention period. Such endeavours will continue during the whole of 2020.

In 2019, a holistic product review was launched. For this purpose, the recipients of risk analysis reports were listed and questionnaires were developed. In total, more than 140 stakeholders were interviewed and asked for constructive feedback. The insights and findings will be used for the establishment of a new product portfolio and re-tailored reports.

During the year, efforts were intensified for developing synergies with relevant EU agencies, such as Europol and EASO, in order to develop a common understanding of migration and cross-border threats in all dimensions of the integrated border management framework. The deployment of members of Risk Analysis Unit and IFC at the information clearing house at Europol continued, resulting in an increased sharing of information between the two agencies, a better mutual understanding of opportunities for further cooperation and the initiation of new common projects in the analytical field. This was reflected in joint assessments such as on the smuggling of migrants from Turkey to Italy by leisure boats. These reports had also an operational follow-up aimed at exploiting the common understanding of the phenomena targeting both communities of reference for Frontex and Europol.

Joint assessments were also drafted in cooperation by the three agencies – Frontex, Europol and EASO. The joint work of analysts on joint reports have contributed to the increased understanding and trust among the agencies. The so-called ‘caravan of hope’ in Turkey and shortly afterwards the announced ‘caravan of glitter’ in Greece provided extra impetus for direct cooperation among the three agencies. For the information gathering on site, a Frontex analyst was sent to Greece to support the Frontex liaison officer. In this way, it was possible to directly obtain information that was necessary for understanding which additional measures in support of the MS were required. The deployment of Frontex liaison officers is based on risk analysis. Therefore, Frontex undertook a comprehensive analysis of relevant cooperation countries.

The year 2019 provided the opportunity to increase the number of risk analysis networks. A new network with third countries for air borders was set up. As a result, a new channel for exchange of information was created among the network members.

The newly formed maritime intelligence community and the risk analysis network – set up for this purpose – have made further progress. In order to meet service requirements, the processing was assigned to the strategic risk analysis sector. A new maritime analysis tool has been successfully tested. As a result, the purchase of a tool with specified requirement criteria is planned for 2020.

Operational risk analysis was set up for the first joint deployment in a third country (Albania). In this way, valuable knowledge regarding the security situation at the Greek-Albanian border is gained. Based on the evaluation and Frontex’ support, the number of detections increased significantly at this border section.

Within the implementation phase of the project AFIC (Africa-Frontex intelligence community), Frontex opened four risk analysis cells: in Ghana, The Gambia, Senegal and Nigeria. Frontex developed three operational guidelines for the risk analysis cells together with the AFIC national authorities (Niger, Ghana and The Gambia). The scope of the guidelines is to increase the capacities of AFIC countries to produce strategic and operational risk analysis.

Frontex trained 80 analysts from 16 AFIC countries on risk analysis and border management to enhance their analytical capacity. To support the training activities, a risk analysis training guide in French language was delivered to analysts from AFIC countries. These activities were essential in setting up a communication channel with the AFIC countries and represented the basis for a better exchange of information on migration and cross-border crimes.

Highlights: Risk analysis in 2019

Pilot project on forecast

Frontex Risk Analysis Unit has been developing a pilot exercise for forecasting the number of detections of illegal border-crossings on entry, for land and sea borders, along the four main migratory routes towards the European Union where the great majority of illegal border-crossings has taken place in the last ten years, the Central Mediterranean route, the Eastern Mediterranean route, the Western Balkan route and the Western Mediterranean route.

The forecasting consists of a quantitative analysis based on historical data on illegal border-crossings tailored to every route, according to their main characteristics and peculiarities, combined with an expert assessment of the outcome, resulting in the final forecast and analysis. The forecast by route is further broken down by border sections, indicating the trends by border section taking into account the border type, the short-term and long-term trends, and the route pressure.

2.5.B. Vulnerability assessment

The year 2019 featured a significant expansion of vulnerability assessment activities, both in terms of new lines of work and for the organisation of Vulnerability Assessment Unit (VAU), also due to enhanced provisions in the new Regulation (EU) 1896/2019 (addition of Art. 33 etc.). Following the establishment of a dedicated unit (VAU) in 2018, vulnerability assessment activities in 2019 reached a higher level of maturity with the completion of several recruitments and the consolidation of the unit organisational structure with two sectors.

Several important milestones were achieved in 2019. Overall, vulnerability assessment activities gained 'cruising speed' with the successful completion of the third full cycle of assessments. VAU conducted Baseline Assessments establishing the overall capacity for border-control for all EU MS/SAC with external borders. While for the majority of Member States their contribution to this process improved, shortcomings remained in relation to the data provided by some Member States, with some significant gaps in relation to accuracy and completeness of the data provided by these countries. Following the completion of the annual baseline assessments, targeted simulation exercises were launched to assess capacity and readiness of selected Member States to face possible future challenges at their external borders.

As a result of the assessments, over the course of 2019 the Executive Director issued a series of recommendations on necessary measures to be implemented by the Member States concerned. In line with the spirit of the EBCG (EU) 2019/1896 Regulation, the monitoring of the implementation of these recommendations was also further intensified. As a significant novelty, the Agency further enhanced the offer of technical and operational support to Member States in order to assist them in the implementation of some of their measures. This support was delivered in close cooperation with other entities in the Agency (such as CED, FDU and TRU).

Importantly, for the first time, new assessment tools were tested to allow more specific and tailored assessments to be carried out through on-the-spot visits to a Member State. This represented a new opening for vulnerability assessment activities, simultaneously demonstrating the increased trust and cooperation between the MS/SAC and the Agency. In particular, the Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud contributed to the development and implementation of simulation exercises addressing the capacity of Member States to detect document fraud.

The Agency also released biannual reports to the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the Commission highlighting the results of vulnerability assessments. By further developing the content of these reports, high-level decision makers were offered a strategic overview of major vulnerabilities at EU-level and a unique source of information on the main challenges faced by border-control authorities.

Exchanges to deepen synergies between vulnerability assessment activities and the only other quality control tool for border control at European level, the Schengen Evaluation Mechanism (SEM), were formalised with an exchange of letters between the Agency and the Commission, DG HOME, in the spring of 2019 and are now taking place on a monthly basis. Further steps were taken later in the year to reinforce VAU's role as a single point of contact for SEM matters in the Agency, notably with regard to the provision of Frontex observers to Schengen evaluation on-site visits.

In order to align the vulnerability assessment activities to the new legal framework of the EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 which entered into force in December 2019, a revised common vulnerability assessment methodology (CVAM) was prepared in close cooperation with Member States and Commission experts, and adopted by the Management Board. This represented the second major revision of the vulnerability assessment methodological framework since the start of vulnerability assessment activities in 2016. The new methodology aligns the CVAM with the relevant legal provisions and will also further help to better assess Member States' preparedness to face challenges at their external borders.

To allow that the knowledge and data generated by vulnerability assessment effectively contributes to strategic and operational activities of the Agency, internal processes and policies were also developed and adopted over the course of 2019. Furthermore, to ensure an independent, external view on the state-of-play of vulnerability assessment activities, a benchmarking study into the unit's activities by external consultants was launched in September 2019. Information technology continued to support the implementation of vulnerability assessment.

Important milestones were completed in 2019: the vulnerability assessment platform (VAP) was further developed and consolidated to function not only as an efficient and secure technological solution to exchange classified information, but also as a tool to alleviate the administrative burden for Member States. The platform was rolled out to all 29 MS/SAC and significantly eased the complex information exchange efforts for vulnerability assessment activities, especially the annual data collection.

2.6.A. Capability development and operational resource management

Summary

With the coming of the adoption of the new Frontex regulation, the 2019 activities within the realm of capability development and operational resource management were dedicated to making the necessary preparations to facilitate the swift implementation of the regulation novelties once it enters into force.

Towards the European integrated border management

The first technical and operational European integrated border management strategy was adopted in March 2019 in accordance with Article 8(5) of the Regulation. Based on strategic steer of the Council of the EU and the European Commission, it sets the vision of smooth and lawful transit of persons and goods across safe, secure and well-functioning external borders of the EU.

- It further paves the way for the European border and coast guard (EBCG) to work in a more proactive way in order to predict and prevent challenging situations from emerging at the external borders.
- In case they do surface at the external borders, the EBCG shall be able to react and stabilise the situation.
- This shall be enabled by ensuring that the EBCG is capable of responding to the challenges of today and prepared for to counter those of tomorrow.

With the new regulation, the strategic steer will be formalised through the establishment of the multi-annual strategic policy cycle for IBM and once it is running, the technical and operational strategy will be revised accordingly.

Developing capabilities for the future

The new regulation introduces the concept of integrated planning, which consists of three elements – operational plans for border management and resources for the reality of today, contingency plans for the worst-case situations and capability development plans to address the medium and long-term needs. Both the contingency and capability development plans shall contain the scenario against which they have been developed. Furthermore, the procedure and method to establish these plans shall be adopted by the Management Board. The Agency shall establish an overview of the national capability

development plans and its own multiannual plans, based on which a capability roadmap shall be established. Once approved by the Management Board it shall be annexed to the technical and operational European IBM strategy.

During the autumn of 2019 the Agency has in close cooperation with the Commission organised a series of meetings with Member States and their experts in order to take stock of their knowledge and experience in long-term planning. This will form the basis for the proposal for a methodology to be tabled in early 2020 for the subsequent revision to enable the Agency and Member States to commence working on the respective plans in such a way that they can be put in place during the course of the multiannual financial framework (MFF).

Establishing a recruitment strategy and the requirements for the standing corps statutory staff

The most tangible of the novelties stemming from the new regulation is the establishment of the European border and coast guard standing corps. In developing this capability, a strategy for the recruitment of the Agency's statutory staff to form part of the standing corps (category 1) was drafted. While aiming to meet the requirements set out in the regulation by 2021, the strategy was designed to avoid depletion of Member States' border and coast guard resources. Therefore the target group for the first round of recruitment looked beyond the border and coast guard community, addressing both former and active law enforcement officers along with those with experience from emergency services, peace-keeping missions and defence. Personnel with this sort of background is likely to need shorter time for training and to better understand hardships, hence possible drop-out rates are expected to be lower. For future recruitments the scope could be widened to also include e.g. university graduates.

The requirements were compiled into vacancy notices that were subsequently published in line with the EU Staff Regulations. In addition to requirements associated with eligibility, the vacancy notices also covered attributes associated with physical and psychological aptitude as well as advantageous experience with regard to the target group described above.

Developing a uniform capability

In line with what is required in the new regulation, a concept for the uniform for category 1 addressing the high-level targets and requirements, addressing its dual purpose:

- strategic: to convey EU values, integrating the authority and the service to the EU Member States;
- operational and tactical: to allow personnel to carry out duties through ensuring wearability and protection in operational areas – across the EU, in the pre-frontier area and in third countries – in varying climatic conditions in safe and secure conditions in line with the responsibilities of duty of care.

The concept draws on the existing ones in the Member States and covers the specifications for the actual uniform garments, the protective equipment and the associated rules and protocol for their use.

Revising the profiles

With the establishment of the standing corps, and the new requirement of adopting the definition of profiles and their respective allocation for each Member State, the Agency – together with Member States – took the opportunity to redefine the existing set of profiles in order to make them compatible with the new way of working. Adopting a competence-based approach, the profiles have been defined bearing in mind that some operational tasks to be performed are of more general border and coast guarding nature, whereas others are more specialised:

- **border guard officer:** carries out tasks related to border checks (first-line checks, gate, and second-line checks), border surveillance, interviewing/screening (basic), registration and fingerprinting, cross-border crime detection (basic), forgery detections (basic), motor vehicle crime detection (basic) and return support (basic);

- **information officer:** supports the information and data management processes between Frontex and national authorities (including third countries);
- **debriefing officer:** carries out at least one of the following tasks: debriefing, interviewing and screening (advanced level);
- **advanced-level document officer:** carries out thorough examinations of a broad range of travel-related documents;
- **cross-border crime detection officer:** supports the prevention and detection of serious crime belonging to the cross-border dimension (e.g. migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings, terrorism, etc.);
- **motor vehicle crime detection officer:** carries out thorough verifications of vehicles and their documents in order to establish possible vehicle theft and trafficking;
- **dog handler:** carries out border control tasks at the external borders of EU Member States and Schengen associated countries through the support of a service dog;
- **Frontex tactical support officer:** assists Frontex in tasks related to operational response support, support for logistics, occupational safety and health and field press support, towards effective implementation of its operational activities;
- **forced return escort and support officer:** supports duties for the return of third country nationals within the framework of escorting on ground and on board, and carries out tasks related to escorting in forced return operations, ground and on board support to voluntary and forced return operations;
- **return specialist:** carries out tasks connected to return of third country nationals illegally staying on a territory of a host Member State;
- **coast guard function officer:** has the knowledge and experience with regard to maritime border control, and/or other coast guard functions;
- **crew member:** carries out operational or/and technical tasks related to maritime and aerial assets, including boarding team members.

Delivering Opera evolution

Launched in early 2019, Opera evolution is the natural evolution of prior Opera and ABNet. It will provide a comprehensive software tool for pooling resources, it will provide capabilities for operational activities and enable their management during deployment, including its financial aspect. This unique and comprehensive tool, acting as an interface between Member States and the Agency, was contracted for design and production following one and half year of thorough preparations during which the associated internal business processes were mapped and the requirements defined. Adaptation has been done during the course of the project to ensure compliance of Opera with the new Regulation. The project has progressed according to plans to go live in early 2020 in order to be used as the platform for the preparations of the operational activities in 2021. Towards the end of 2020, Opera evolution will also cover the functionalities to support the implementation of the operational activities.

Adapting the process for pooling and providing capabilities under the new regulation

With a view of the Agency's statutory staff and Member States' long term secondments, acting as the backbone of the standing corps by 2027, equipped with the Agency's own fleet of owned and leased equipment, this provides a baseline of operationally available capabilities against which the operational activities can be planned. This is a significant change in the dynamics and it allows the Agency to become a competent and capable partner to Member States. Preparations on adapting the current process for pooling and providing capabilities commenced during the autumn of 2019 and will be gradually implemented during the course of 2020. Seeing that the operational activities for 2021 will still heavily rely on the capabilities of Member States, the process will gradually evolve towards 2027 as the Agency's own capabilities will be strengthened.

In exploring new deployment concepts, preparing for the European Standing Corps, the Agency launched a pilot project on the seconded team members. The project looks at the feasibility of deploying in teams, each focusing on a different set of tasks. Following preparations together with MS/SAC the pilot project will see the deployment of STMs during the operational cycle 2020.

Providing capabilities for operational activities

All operational activities for both 2019 and 2020 fall under the framework of the 2016 regulation with the European border and coast guard teams (EBCGT) and the technical equipment pool as the sources of operational capabilities for its coordinated activities.

MS/SAC contribute to the EBCGT by selecting from their national border and coast guard pools officers whose expertise meets the 16 different profiles developed by Frontex in cooperation with national authorities. In 2019, 8,930 border and coast guards were selected by MS/SAC and listed in the Agency's operational resources management system (Opera).

As part of the EBCGT, to give to the Agency the flexibility to react more decisively to massive shifts in the migratory flows and other emergencies at the external borders of the EU, Frontex established a rapid reaction pool. On 31 December 2019, a total of 3,059 experts were assigned by MS/SAC to cover the 14 EBCGT profiles required. The EBCGT are also complemented by seconded team members who are border guards seconded by MS/SAC to Frontex and subsequently selected by the Agency to be deployed to different joint operations. In 2019, 344 seconded team members were deployed covering 29,000 operational days.

In support to return-related activities across the EU, Frontex has developed three separate pools of experts: forced-return monitors, forced-return escorts, and return specialists drawn from MS/SAC. In 2019, MS/SAC have contributed to the three return profiles with more than 1,000 experts comprehensively, exceeding Frontex needs as expressed in the MB Decision 41/2016 on return pools.

For the operational activities of 2020, the Agency launched the annual bilateral negotiations (ABN) process during the spring of 2019 – assessing hosting capacity, identifying generic operational needs and establishing the annual MB Decision on minimum number of items of technical equipment (MNITE). A meeting with third countries in order to assess hosting capacity and interest in participating as observers in the Agency's coordinated operational activities took place in 2019. The process then culminated during the ABN week in October 2019, during which Member States spend a week in bilateral meetings with the Agency in order to reach an agreement on their commitments.

To support the Agency in implementing activities, the external experts' database was in a continued use to solicit the services of external advisers and expertise.

Safety and health

The Agency's occupational safety and health policy, which came into force in January 2018, as well as the technical and operational European IBM strategy form the basis for ensuring safe, secure and healthy working conditions for personnel deployed in operational activities. Overall the number of accidents (six in total both on and off duty) and five hospitalisations remain at a very low level in the context of the 7,436 registered deployments in 2019. Inspections of office spaces and hot spots were carried out in Albania, Greece and North Macedonia.

During 2019, the Agency initiated a survey on the psychological impact of participating in return operations (PIRO). Two hundred and fifteen forced-return escorts, forced-return-monitors and the Agency staff took part. In addition to increasing awareness and fostering prevention and alleviation of return-related stress and psychological impact of joint return operations, the purpose of this research was to identify and implement further actions related to stress management.

The Agency published recommended vaccination scheme for the personnel assigned to coordinated operational activities of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Together with the European Asylum Office (EASO) and the European Law Enforcement Agency (EUROPOL), the Agency published the occupational safety and health – deployment information, building on a previous edition developed by the Agency.

The Agency explored further synergies in the context of entry-exit screening for infectious diseases in humans with the Consumers, Health and Food Executive Agency (CHAFEA), a leader in developing actions and activities in public health area under the current EU health programme. Also medical evacuation capabilities for operational activities in third countries were assessed together with the European Defence Agency (EDA).

Complementing the existing framework contract for personal protective equipment, Frontex launched a tender for a comprehensive framework contract for the EU-wide supply of tactical emergency casualty care equipment and complementary emergency aid materiel in December 2019. The framework contract is expected to be in place in May 2020, in time for the establishment and training of the European Border and Coast Guard standing corps. The framework contract will cover thirty different types of tactical first-aid equipment including tourniquets, emergency bandages, haemostatic dressings, distress hand flares and rescue equipment such as foldable emergency stretchers.

With the adoption of the new regulation of the Agency in November 2019 and its entry into force in December 2019, the Agency's role in this regard will change. From January 2021 the Agency will contribute its own trained and equipped statutory staff to the European border coast guard standing corps and they will operate alongside staff members on long- term secondments and short-term deployments from MS/SAC. The role of the Agency will therefore evolve into having the legal responsibility for ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for its own staff deployed in operational activities. The 2019 has been a year to prepare the transition to a new way of operating, exploring how the Agency's own occupational safety and health capability needs are to be enhanced in order to be able to react in a timely and effective manner to incidents and accidents involving Frontex own statutory staff deployed as part of the European Standing Corps.

Managing stakeholder interest

In the context of IBM, capability development and operational resource management, the Agency continued to manage stakeholder interest through the pooled resources network, the high-level IBM working group and other ad-hoc forums. It further provided the report for 2018 annual information on commitments and deployments to the European border coast guard teams and the technical equipment pool in accordance with the 2016 regulation. It also provided monthly reports specifically on technical equipment.

Highlights: management of pooled resources in 2018

Highlights in the context of capability development and operational resource management include:

- The adoption of the technical and operational IBM Strategy;
- Launching the development of the methodology for capability development planning;
- Establishing the strategy and requirements of the recruitment of Agency's statutory staff (category 1) of the European Standing Corps;
- Developing the concept of the uniform capability for category 1.
- Revising the profiles and adapting it to the new regulation;
- The launch of the development and production of Opera evolution;
- Managing the resource pools in Opera and implementing the ABN 2019;
- Publishing revised guidelines for occupational safety and health for deployed personnel, together with EASO and Europol, as well as \$
- providing recommended vaccination schemes;
- Working closely with Member States in the PRN.

2.6.B. Equipment, support and logistics

Summary

Frontex' own equipment, support and logistics

The strategy for acquisition of own technical equipment adopted by the Management Board in September 2017 allowed an incremental approach in the acquisition and leasing of Frontex' own technical equipment. In view of the expanded mandate under the Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, the Agency embarked on drafting a strategy for acquisition of own technical capabilities with an overall goal to cover the gaps in operational needs by its own equipment and services.

This strategy will provide break-even points for each kind of heavy equipment showing when it is economically justified for the Agency to shift from leasing/chartering to ownership.

Status of procurement procedures at the end of 2019:

- 52 % signed, (11 out of 21)
- 5 % awarded, (1 out of 21)
- 10 % under evaluation, (2 out of 21)
- 10 % published, (2 out of 21)
- 9 % unsuccessful, (2 out of 21)
- 14 % under preparation, (3 out of 21)

The following table shows all active acquisition procedures (first part), and also the deprioritised/replaced/transferred acquisition procedures for 2019:

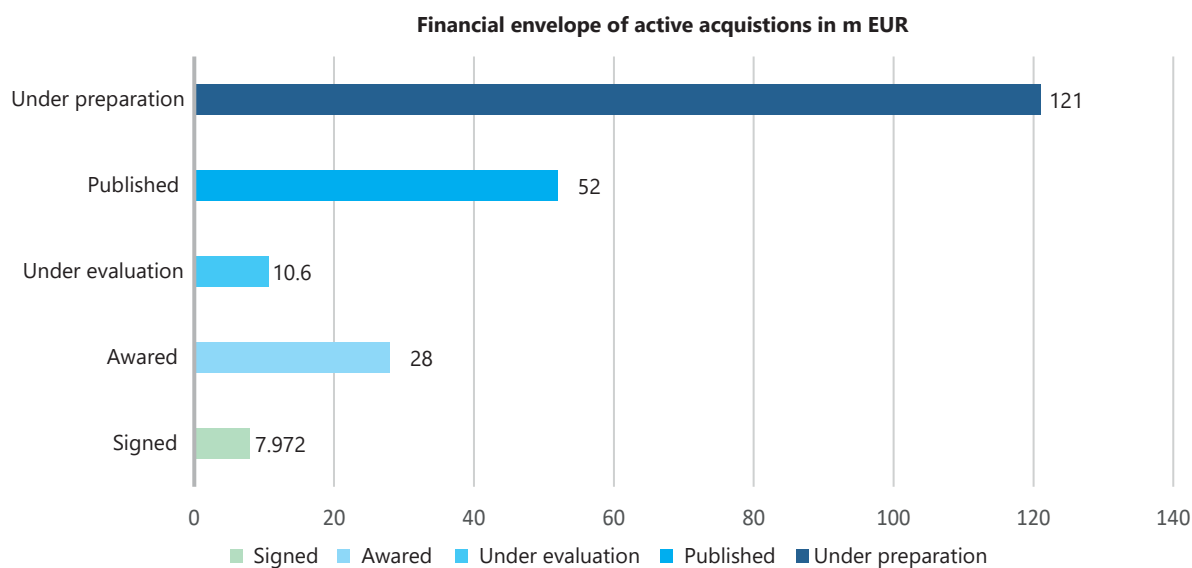
Table 1 – List of active acquisition procedures in the area of acquisition of equipment and services for Frontex operational activities

No	Contract	Status
1	Purchase of Mobile Surveillance Systems (MSS)	D
2	Passenger transport services by sea between Greece (Lesvos) and Turkey	E
3	Chartering of Coastal Patrol Vessel for border surveillance and border control	A
4	Provision of Requirements Management consultancy services	C
5	Purchase of Monitoring and tracking system and data capture for vehicles	E
6	Provision of Frontex Corporate Visual Identity materials	F
7	Renting of mobile office capacity (in various countries)	E
8	Provision of Aerial surveillance capacity by Medium Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (MALE RPAS)	B
9	Short notice chartering of aircraft for Frontex operational activities	C
10	Acquisition of heartbeat detectors	E
11	Acquisition of cooled thermal cameras	E
12	Provision of general insurance brokerage service	E
13	Framework contract for the provision of door-to-door transportation services for Frontex vehicles	E
14	Aerial Surveillance Services for Border & Coast Guard Functions (FASS III)	A
15	Purchase of Training outfits	B
16	Provision of door-to-door transportation services	A
17	Purchase of technical equipment: Purchase of video scopes	E
18	Two trainings: - Acquisition and Through-Life Management (ATLM) for project managers, - Integrated Logistics Support (ILS) for logistics officers	E
19	Purchase of technical equipment: Purchase of drug detectors	E

20	Purchase of technical equipment: Purchase of drones with payloads	F
21	Provision of fuel cards and associated services	E
1	Contract for the acquisition of live scans for fingerprinting activities	G
2	Consultancy services for technical requirement definition for Coastal Patrol Vessel	H
3	Provision of secure parking in the operational locations (for Frontex vehicles)	H
4	Purchase of X-ray gates (for Hungary)	G
5	Consultancy service on Occupational Safety and Health (e.g. vaccinations)	I
6	Language Services (translation and language analysis, extended number of MS languages)	G
7	Acquisition (lease) of vehicles for dog handlers	H
8	Purchase of technical equipment: 1. Supporting surveillance (drones, binoculars, etc.). 2. light IT and communication equipment. 3. Supporting prevention, detection and pre-investigation activities (drugs detectors/analysers, endoscopes, etc.)	H
9	Software upgrades for technical equipment	G
10	Dog cages for patrol cars	G
11	Provision of fuel services for Frontex vehicles in Bulgaria	H
12	Provision of fuel cards services for Frontex vehicles in Greece	H

Legend	Status	Number	Percentage (for active procedures):
Under Preparation	A	3	14%
Published	B	2	10%
Evaluation	C	2	10%
Award	D	1	5%
Signed	E	11	52%
Unsuccessful	F	2	9%
Procedures active throughout 2019		21	
Deprioritised	G	5	
Replaced	H	6	
Transferred	I	1	
Deprioritised / replaced / Transferred procedures		12	

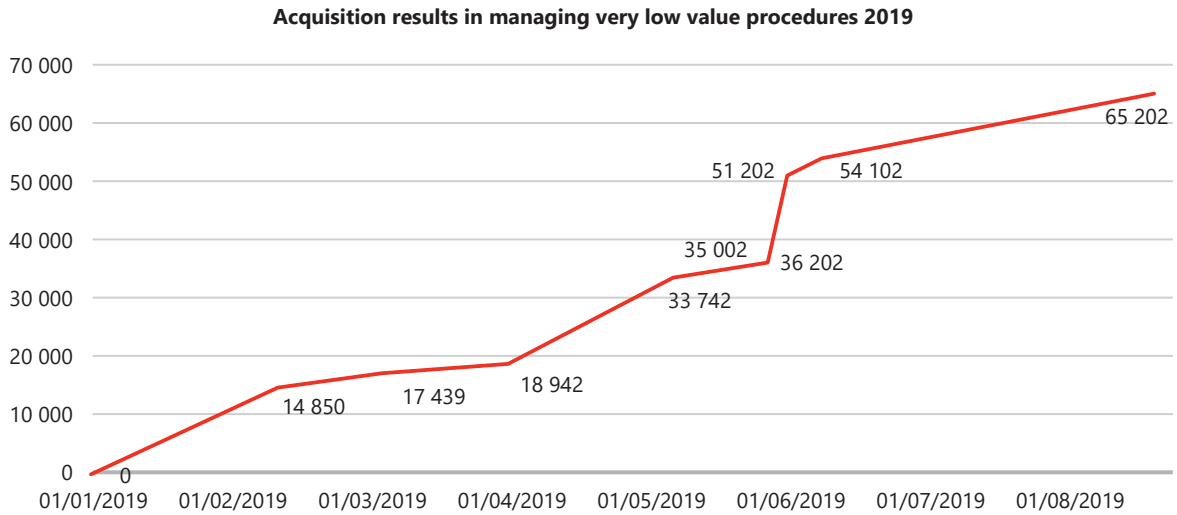
Graph 1 - Financial envelope of active procurements in m EUR



The following figures shows the financial envelope for all active acquisition in million EUR.

In addition to the procedures planned in the annual procurement plan also nine very low value procedures for an overall amount of EUR 65 thousand were signed.

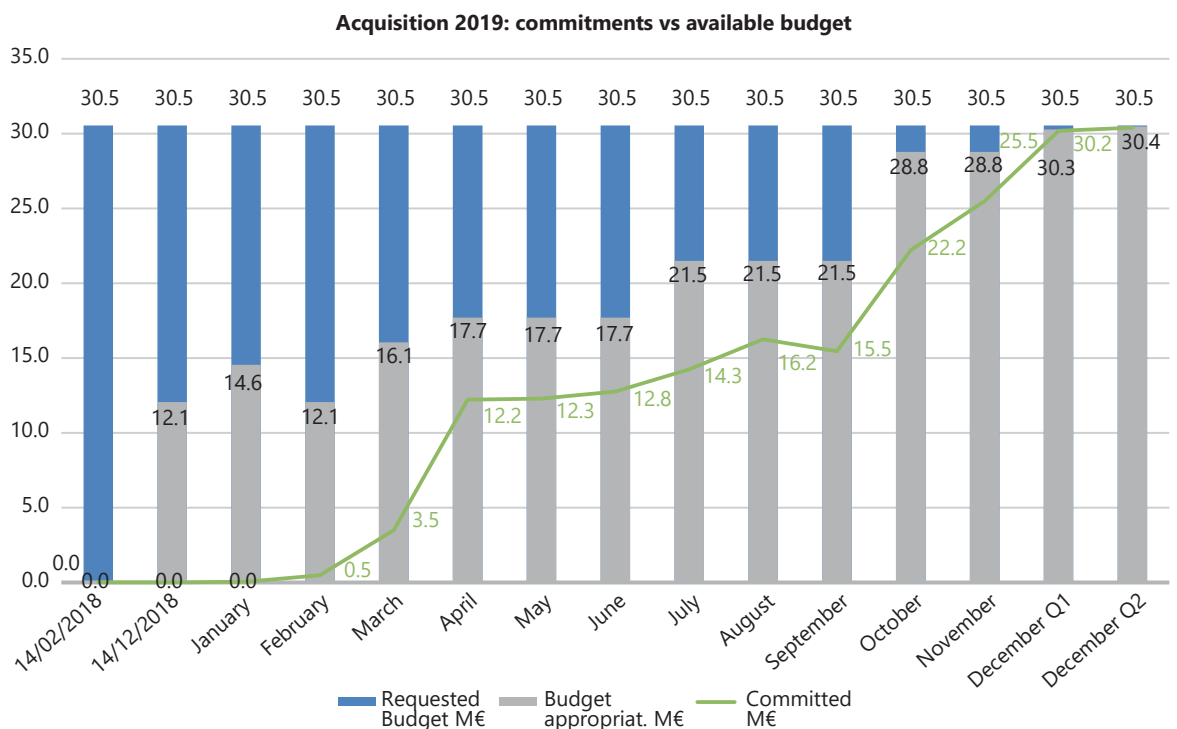
Graph 2 - Acquisition results in managing very low value procedures 2019 for Frontex operational activities



Acquisition results in managing commitments

The total of 99.8 % of the requested budget was fully implemented. The figure below demonstrates the ability of Frontex to plan the budget needs in the area of acquisition of equipment and services for operational activities. In blue, the budget requested since December 2018, in green, the budget progressively transferred to acquisition (in accordance with the table above), and in grey the cumulative ability to commit the related available budget.

Graph 3 - PRU 2019 - commitments vs available budget



The initial estimation was done in December 2018, and monitored and controlled as per the following table:

Table 2 – Monitoring of the level of commitment of PRU budget authorisation in 2019

Month	Internal request budget (EUR m)	Internal authorisation budget (EUR m)	Committed (EUR m)	%	Comments
14-12-18	30.5	0	0	0 %	Budget requested by acquisition for 2019
21-12-18	30.5	12.1	0	0 %	Budget confirmed as available for acquisition 2019
January	30.5	14.6	0	0 %	Initial authorization ABAC 14.5m (incl. 2.5m CAP)
February	30.5	12.1	0.5	4 %	Budget was decreased by 2,500,000
March	30.5	16.1	3.5	22 %	Budget was increased by 4,000,000
April	30.5	17.7	12.2	68 %	Budget was increased by 1,650,000
May	30.5	17.7	12.3	69 %	
June	30.5	17.7	12.8	72 %	
July	30.5	21.5	14.3	66 %	Budget was increased by 3,796,000
August	30.5	21.5	16.2	80 %	
September	30.5	21.5	15.5	72 %	
October	30.5	28.8	22.2	77 %	Budget was increased by 7,279,185
November	30.5	28.8	25.5	89 %	
December Q1	30.5	30.3	30.2	100 %	Budget was increased by 1,500,000
December Q2	30.5	30.5	30.4	100 %	Budget was increased by 203,000

Highlights: Management of pooled resources in 2018

Frontex aerial surveillance services (FASS) contract has been developed into a new enhanced, inter-institutional framework contract for the next four years, contributing to the achievement of the requirements as set by Article 68 of the EBCG Regulation. This contract supports the implementation of Frontex operational activities including the activities under the multipurpose aerial surveillance (MAS). The contract covers the operational needs of Frontex and its partner Agency – EFCA.

The very first flight under Frontex contract for chartering of aircraft for return operations took place in July 2018. In 2019, the Agency chartered 13 aircrafts: nine for return operations, and four for readmission operations. This contract enables Frontex with its own capacity to charter flights for return operations until the end of 2021.

According to the adopted strategy for acquisition and leasing of technical equipment, Frontex supported the implementation of operational activities by acquiring light equipment for border surveillance and border checks. Seventy-three units of various devices, such as thermal cameras, CO2 detectors, heartbeat detectors, goggles, binoculars were distributed to the operational locations. In parallel, Frontex undertook the activities for concluding the contracts for acquisition of terrestrial technical equipment, such as patrol vehicles and vehicles for migration management support.

2.7. Training

Summary

2019 was a year of change for Frontex aiming to ensure that, its products and service and their delivery match the requirements of the 2019 EBCG Regulation in the field of training, while at the same time accommodating fast changes and multiple demands. Ultimately, Frontex training aims at equipping the European Border and Coast Guard with the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for effective protection of the Union's external borders. To this end, cost-effective training solutions, a hybrid model of training and learning services offering delivery of training on a large scale as well as tailored to the specific operational and individual needs of border and coast guards before and during deployment were developed and put in place.

As result of the revision of the structure of the training the following three strands have been designed:

1. Operational training

A dedicated area that supports the diverse training requirements of the European border and coast guard teams (EBCGT) as well as building capacities in the Member States in areas covered by the Frontex regulation, fostering harmonisation of practices and enhancing the contributions provided to the Agency for implementing its mandate.

Working in close collaboration with operational personnel, this area is responsible for developing operational training products and implementing delivery mechanisms driven by the training need assessments, feedback and post-deployment reviews.

2. Training capacities

Training capacities sector develops and delivers a variety of educational and training programmes to ensure a harmonised approach to EU border and coast guard training. These include the development and implementation of the common core curricula (CCC-basic, CCC-mid-level), the European joint master's in strategic border management (EJMSBM) and the mid-level management course (MLC). This area fosters and further develops cooperation among border and coast guards' training institutions in the Member States and third countries through maintaining formal networks as well as supporting common training projects and exchange programmes. It coordinates the training cooperation of the unit with third countries, EU agencies and international organisations.

3. Training support

Providing horizontal support to all other training areas, this area leads the development and implementation of educational standards, quality assurance and integration of educational technology to learning, in line with the European standards for education and training and Frontex goals of achieving harmonisation and interoperability in border and coast guard activities. It leads on technological and digital learning developments by researching and applying education innovations for agile and effective training needs assessment, design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation. In addition, Training support ensures strategic planning and reporting, supporting change management and business process improvement within Frontex training activities. It also offers opportunities for sharing good practices and fostering cooperation and synergies between border and coast guard practitioners, trainers, researchers and educational experts through communication actions and stakeholders' events.

Training delivered in 2019

Frontex continued to support the development of the human resources capacities required for the implementation of the operational activities coordinated by the Agency as well as in support of capacity development in the Member States in the areas covered by the Agency's founding regulation.

In this regard, during 2019, the following courses were delivered:

Table 3 – Overview of operational training activities provided in 2019

Title of the course	Number Course iterations	Number of staff trained	Satisfaction rate (scale 1-5)
Basic pre-deployment online course	online	466	4.5/5
Schengen borders code online training	online	316	4.3/5
Debriefing expert (profile 2)	3	45	4.2/5
Screening expert (profile 3)	3	45	4.3/5
Course for registration officer	2	30	4.5
Elementary rules for border checks at the external borders course	1	74	3.7/5
Advanced level document officer (profile 8) (*)	8	128	4.8/5
Border surveillance officer – land operations (profile 9)	6	86	n/a
Border surveillance officer – maritime operations (profile 9)	3	63	4.7/5
Border surveillance officer – Air crew preparation for joint operations (profile 9)	4	52	4.8/5
Frontex support officer (profile 11)	4	48	n/a
Cross-border crime detection officer (profile 12)	1	31	4.3/5
Pre-deployment dog handlers workshop	5	60	4.3/5
European coast guard functions officer (profile 16)	5	70	4.6/5
Training for forced-return officers	17	102 (forced return escort Leaders/ escort officers) 263 (readmission officers)	4.5/5
Training for pool of return specialists	4	55	4.9/5
Ad-hoc training for forced-return officers/escort leaders	6	166	4.8/5
Frontex course on CIRAM for border agencies – full course	1	25	4.8/5
Frontex course on CIRAM for border agencies – intensive course	8	175	4.6/5
European course for integrated border management (IBM) strategy advisers	4	118	4.7/5
European integrated border management (IBM) strategy (for Frontex staff)	1	45	4.3/5
Frontex course on Schengen evaluations	3	128	4.7/5
Frontex course on advance information	1	14	4.3/5
Frontex course on vulnerabilities of automated border control (ABC) systems	2	56	4.9/5
European course for border guards and customs cooperation advisers	2	42	4.2/5
European course for canine team instructors (general use)	1	25	4.6/5
Roadshow – basic course on false documents detection (*)	4	190	4.7/5
Consular staff training (*)	3	131	4.8/5
European course for specialists on identity and security documents	1	14	n/a
English for border and coast guarding – level 1	online	462	4.5

(*) The Centre of Excellence for Combating Document Fraud contributed with technical knowledge to training sessions organised for staff of EU Consular Services deployed in third countries. Officers of the centre also contributed to the assessment of advanced-level document officers courses in seven occasions in course of the year. The operational and specialist document experts of the centre supported 20 roadshows, three organised by Frontex and 17 organised by field deployment unit in the context of Frontex joint operations.

Highlights of 2019 for specialised training in key areas of Frontex mandate

Returns

- Frontex organised training before the deployment of readmission officers at the island of Lesvos. The aim of this training was to prepare the officers for the escorting of returnees during their deployment. Also we organised escort leaders courses in which experienced escorts officers are trained for the role of a leader in a joint return operation. This training is also open for escort officers of third countries. Selection or recommendation of those officers is based on upcoming return operations with those third countries.
- Based on ad-hoc request the Agency made a selection of countries in which there was a need to train basic forced return escort officers. Last year Frontex delivered training in Greece, Cyprus, Serbia and Ukraine. Also the upcoming year ad-hoc activities are planned.
- In cooperation with ICMPD Frontex makes sure that the forced-return monitors are trained before they enter the pool of monitors. At the same time, trainers who are delivering those courses are trained by ICMPD and Frontex. In the upcoming years the Agency will take over the forced return monitor project from ICMPD and will be responsible for all training activities.
- Frontex was in close contact with Eurint for specialist training activities for Return Specialists. Eurint organised four training sessions in cooperation with Clingendael Institute in the Netherlands in which officers were trained in negotiation techniques. In the upcoming year Frontex is looking for possibilities to create a training for this specific profile.

Document fraud

Course for advanced level document officer

- The number of course iterations was increased significantly in order to better address the operational needs. The aim of this course is to qualify the participants for acting as advanced-level document officer in Frontex operational activities. The course provides the knowledge and the skills to identify genuine documents on the basis of primary and advanced security features and personalisation techniques and to refer suspicious documents to a higher level of expertise. Learners are expected to establish conclusively the status of the document under inspection/examination. The advanced-level document officer course will also add an extra focus on latest technologies and perspectives in authentication of identities, documents and identity fraud.

'Roadshow' on falsified documents

- The format of the 'roadshow' caters for providing a hands-on learning experience, thus allowing officers to respond to the regular operational front-line needs during the duration of the exercise;
- Course for visa-section staff of EU MS/SAC deployed in third countries. This course was delivered in third countries in cooperation with EU delegation. The course encompasses learner-centred activities, including theoretical and a practical sessions that are also adapted to the geographical need;
- Course for specialists on identity and security documents. This course was initiated as of 2019 with the aim of qualifying the participants for acting as false document experts at specialist level. The content of the course is based on the Framework for the harmonised programme for the training of document examiners in three levels (Council Doc. No. 9551/07 and 16261/14) and takes into consideration the latest developments in the authentication process related to the identity chain.

Fundamental rights

- Training aspects were addressed with an overall approach introduced by Frontex in 2019: specialised and tailored fundamental rights components were embedded as an integral and horizontal part of all profile-related advance specialisation training. For all advanced profile-related courses, the compliance with fundamental rights was emphasised throughout all training activities and discussed in relation to expected training outcomes. The same concept of fundamental rights mainstreaming was applied to the pre-deployment induction training – the course targeting all staff members involved in Frontex joint operations.

- The goal of fundamental right-related components is to provide participants with knowledge on fundamental rights aspects as relevant to their tasks and powers. Specialised sections on fundamental rights raise awareness and provide harmonised guidelines on respecting and promoting fundamental rights while performing tasks of different border control stages and within the scope of various profiles. Thus, the new approach of fundamental rights mainstreaming contributes to dissemination of the core common message stating that fundamental rights are unconditionally relevant to all stages of border control and must be equally respected and promoted by all members of the European border and coast guard community.
- With this consolidated and comprehensive methodology, the needs and expectations of trainees are addressed in a more holistic manner. They are provided with the so-called 'tailored training packages' comprising all relevant materials and tools allowing for improving skills and competences pertinent for specific profiles. Offering training packages with fundamental rights adequately discussed in relation to all operational activities, comes in response to recommendations of increasing operational relevance of training.
- To better facilitate and secure the highest standards of training process, in 2019, the 'Course manual for Frontex fundamental rights trainers' was published, providing comprehensive and operational guideline. Following the objective of special attention to be paid to children's rights and ensuring that the best interests of the child are respected, the 'Frontex course manual on the protection of children at borders', has been finalised for publication, aiming to support trainers in their more in-depth analysis of risks faced by children at borders and the applicable counter-measures.

European coast guard functions

- Course for European coast guard officer. In 2019, five iterations of the European coast guard functions officers course were carried out for 70 participants from MS/SAC. The aim of the course is to enhance the level of competence of the participants to operate effectively in host MS main operational structures (e.g. ICC/LCC) or on board of assets supporting the implementation of coast guard functions (e.g. EU agencies). This advanced specialisation training focuses on tasks, mandate, role and responsibilities of officials of a competent national authority to prepare them to meet all demands they may face during their deployment during a Frontex joint maritime operations. Learning strategy is based on a student-centred learning approach; each iteration is divided into an independent learning phase and a contact learning phase.
- Course for border surveillance officer – air crew preparation for joint operations. The course aimed to enhance the capacity for interoperability of air crew members in Frontex joint maritime/land operations and promote common training standards, thereby strengthening the opportunities for operational cooperation. The course was developed in cooperation with EFCA and EMSA for the session related to fisheries and environmental pollution control operational procedures. Four iterations of the course for border surveillance officer-air crew preparation for training were delivered to benefit 52 air crew members.
- Screening/debriefing/registration. During 2019 the capacities for providing specialised training relevant for the operational profiles of screening officer, debriefing expert and registration officer were up-scaled. The content of the training was revised and updated and additional 25 screening and debriefing trainers were trained and certified based on a standardised curriculum. Also, for the first time, a specific training for registration officers was created and delivered. Overall, 50 screening and debriefing officers were trained and 25 registration officers.
- Entry-exit-system. In view of the entry into operation of the entry-exit-system by Q1 2022 Frontex started in 2019 the development of training materials on the subject for border guards and other officers involved in border checks based on a training needs analysis exercise in the Member States/SAC. Both the training needs analysis exercise as well as the training development and future training delivery are coordinated with eu-LISA and CEPOL. Training materials will consist of an online self-study course for border guards as well as blended training courses for national multipliers. Start of delivery is foreseen for Q2 2020.

IBM strategy

Course for IBM Strategy advisors

Following the adoption of the technical and operational European integrated border management strategy (TO-EIBM) by the MB in March 2019, the Agency's training arm worked together with the Member States and the European Commission to translate the European IBM requirements into national strategies. To this end, Frontex delivered in 2019 three updated courses for IBM Strategy Advisors to Member States and Schengen Associated Countries that were benefitted by 92 experts. The ultimate goal of this course is to ensure that enough appropriately trained experts are available and capable to support their national authorities in drafting the national IBM strategies and action plans in line with EU standards. Other iteration of the course was also delivered to 25 experts from Western Balkan countries in order to make them aware of the state-of-play of European IBM. Furthermore a special course for Frontex staff members on the European IBM strategy was conducted in November 2019 with 45 participants from the Agency and the European Commission.

Course on Schengen evaluation

To prepare 98 national experts as well as Frontex staff members and European Commission officials in conducting proper Schengen evaluation missions in the field of external borders as well as return, two courses for Schengen evaluators were delivered in 2019, while a special thematic Schengen evaluation training for the assessment of national IBM strategy was conducted in mid-2019 with altogether 32 participants.

Course on vulnerabilities of ABC systems. As the role of ABC systems in developing and delivering effective and efficient border management capabilities is increasing significantly, Frontex supports MS and SAC with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to assess ABC and biometric systems, their vulnerabilities and learn appropriate mitigations to reduce risk likelihood and impact on border security. In 2019 two courses were carried out at the Biometric Evaluation Center (BEC) of the German Federal Institute for Information Security (BSI) with strong support from this institution. Altogether 58 experts from MS/SAC, the European Commission and Frontex benefitted from the courses in 2019.

Course on advance information

In 2019 Frontex developed and initiated the delivery of a training course on advance information. In the context of increased traveller flows, understanding what risk a traveller represents, using advance information and the different available intelligence sources, and the practical requirements for a successful roll out of the traveller analysis capacity (or 'targeting'), all hold great potential for rendering border management more efficient as well as more secure. The EU Member States and Schengen associated countries are in the process of setting up advance information capacities with a view to make the best use of all the increasing amount of traveller information that is collected, identify as soon as possible persons of interest and take adequate actions to further secure the Schengen area.

- Based on the Frontex Advance Information Guidelines and other related documents this course aims to provide basic training for border guard/border police officers who will work (or already work) in the national targeting centres or otherwise engaged in the targeting work. The course objectives are focused on three main operations, Identifying sources of advance information that can be used legally by border guards/border police for border management, creating risk profiles and issuing targets.
- Frontex conducted in close cooperation with the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee its pilot training iteration for 14 learners from the EU Member States and SAC in December 2019.

Cooperation with customs

- Frontex continued fruitful cooperation with the Customs Eastern and South-Eastern Land Border Expert Team (CELBET) in the area of training. In cooperation with CELBET members and also the customs experts from several EU Member States, Frontex completed the development of the European course for customs and border guard cooperation advisers in 2019. Two iterations of this course

gathered over 40 learners from the customs and border guard authorities of EU Member States, in Warsaw and Hamburg. At the same time custom experts from several EU Member States supported the development of the training for cross-border crime detection officers.

- Course for canine team instructors in the field of general use. The European course for canine team instructors was delivered in 2019. At this stage, following the first stage of assessment and the staff previously certified, Frontex has over 80 certified canine team instructors ready to be used for training of dog handlers in any specialisation needed.

Training capacities

- Frontex continued to support the MS to ensure a harmonised and common approach to EU border and coast guard training and education by developing and delivering a variety of educational and training programmes such as the common core curricula (CCC-basic, CCC-mid-level), the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management (EJMSBM) and the mid-level management course (MLC). The cooperation among border and coast guards training institutions in the Member States and third countries is further developed through the maintenance of formal networks as well as to support common training projects and exchange programmes.

Table 4 – Overview of EU border and coast guard training provided in 2019

Title of the course	Course iterations in 2019	Number of border and coast guards trained	Satisfaction rate
Mid-level management course	2	32	4.8/5
European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management	Closing of 2017-2019 iteration Starting of 2019-2021 iteration	24 33	4.7/5 (the rate reflects both iterations by taking the feedback on the second iteration and the beginning of the stage 1 of the third iteration)

European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management (EJMSBM)

- Out of the originally enrolled 26 students, 24 successfully completed the second iteration (2017–2019) of European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management (EJMSBM). The third iteration (EJMSBM 2019–2021) was launched in September, with 34 new students enrolled (one student suspended), five of them from Frontex.

Cooperation with third countries

- Training cooperation with third countries was promoted through the national training coordinators and partnership academies networks to promote excellence in border and coast guard education and to implement the common core curricula. Partnership academies have already been established in Albania, Ukraine and Georgia and the network is expected to grow further.
- In October 2019, the European course for IBM strategic advisers as well as other thematic training in the fields of operational cooperation, joint operations, situation awareness and monitoring or return were provided to Western Balkan countries.

Grants

- The Agency's grant scheme was launched in 2019 to benefit border and coast guard training institutions throughout the EU. The call for proposals supported two actions: 1) training courses; and 2) mobility and exchange. Following the selection, eight applications were granted funding, six for training courses and two for mobility and exchange.

Common core curriculum – basic (CCC Basic)

- To evaluate the integration of the common core competences for border and coast guard into the basic training provided on the national level, Frontex launched the common core curriculum – interoperability assessment programme 2019 – 2020 at the beginning of the year. The assessment

is composed of two parts: an evaluation of national training institutions and an assessment on the knowledge of the students.

- After a testing pilot phase in three different countries, 23 countries provided their input to the assessment report. Border and coast guard students from 13 countries took part in the evaluation test. The expected outcome is the final report presenting the level of the CCC basic integration into the national basic training in and outside EU as well as the future needs and required professional competences that will be published in 2020.

Common core curriculum for mid-level management

- To ensure the harmonisation of border and coast guard training across the EU (and beyond) and guarantee the interoperability required from officers with supervisory or managerial responsibilities deployed at any section of the external borders of the EU, in 2019, Frontex launched the core curriculum for border and coast guard mid-level management training in the EU (CCC ML), the instrument setting European educational standards for those responsible for supervising and managing the operational work of border and coast guards.

Mid-level management course

- Thirty-two participants completed the two iterations of mid-level management course. The first iteration was launched in May, the second one in October. The mid-level management course was conducted with the active participation of Frontex staff, ensuring the knowledge and experience transfer from the operational units to the mid-level participants from the Member States and Schengen associated countries.

Basic training programme for the European border and coast guard standing corps – category 1

- The basic training programme for the European border and coast guard standing corps – category 1 was designed in the fall of 2019 on the basis of the CCC basic. It consists of six modules aimed at the harmonised preparation of the staff of category 1 for the standing corps, as required by the new Frontex regulation. Training good practices in the areas of use of force, self-defence, and shooting have been collected in the form of a comprehensive manual for trainers.

Training support

- Frontex is committed to increasing the capacity to develop operational competence, streamline and increase the effectiveness of training processes and to upscale the capacity to deliver practical applied training to border and coast guards and enable trainers to design and deliver training and assessments to ensure that the operational competence is met. In this context, Training support is responsible for Frontex learning management system and the development of e-learning solutions, particularly in view of the large amount of training needs implied in the creation of the standing corps required by the 2019 Frontex regulation.

Table 5 – Overview of EU border and coast guard training provided in 2019

Title of the course	Course iterations in 2019	Number of border and coast guards trained	Satisfaction rate
Course design using the sectoral qualifications framework for border guarding	1	18	5
Border and coast guard training delivery methodology	2	43	5

Manuals and educational material produced in 2019 are as follows:

- Frontex course manual on the protection of children at borders;
- common core curriculum – mid level;

- Reference material and terminology for train-the-trainers course on facial features for imposter detection;
- Schengen evaluation training course handbook;
- English for border and coast guarding (student's and teacher's books);
- Course manual for Frontex fundamental rights trainers.

Course development, in the course of 2019, Frontex developed new courses (to be delivered in 2020):

- English for border and coast guarding – advanced;
- Entry-exit-system training (online course);
- First-line border checks at the EU external borders (profile 7) – available in stages from 2020;
- Frontex course on advance information (pilot iteration delivered on 3-5 December 2019).

Highlights: Training activities in 2019

Training delivered, courses developed and training material produced

In 2019, Frontex delivered 34 courses in different iterations, totalling **128 training sessions** and three online courses made available for the benefit of more than **3,600 participants** among border and coast guards, members of the EBCGT pools, Frontex staff, third countries law enforcement representatives, consular staff, averaging a satisfaction rate of 4.4/5.

There were four new courses developed in the course of 2019, with **five new manuals** and the CCC-ML handbook produced.

Basic training programme for the European border and coast guard standing corps – category 1

Following the entry into force of the new Frontex regulation, Frontex, in cooperation with Member States and Schengen associated countries developed the basic training programme for the European border and coast guard standing corps – category 1, in line with the common core curriculum basic.

Common core curriculum – mid level

The common core curriculum for border and coast guard mid-level management training in the EU (CCC ML) was launched in 2019. The CCC-ML is a continuation of the common core curriculum for border and coast guard basic level training. It comprises a set of units of learning references to the sectoral qualifications framework for border guards levels 5 and 6, aiming at harmonising the core learning requirements for border and coast guard mid-level managers. As such, it serves as a curriculum guideline for national integration to correspond to the professional competences for the mid-level management identified on the European level.

The structure enables flexibility of the curriculum in terms of its usage for national needs and facilitates the recognition of prior learning. The structure of the CCC ML consists of four themes: 1) supervision and management, 2) operational studies, 3) investigation, intelligence and risk analyses and 4) cooperation. All CCC ML units of learning include, when relevant, the overarching topics, namely 1) fundamental rights; 2) legislation; 3) communication and 4) European integrated border management.

E-learning

One of the key achievements of Frontex in 2019 is the full operationalisation of Aula 2.0, the online platform developed to provide direct and real-time contact between Frontex and the border and coast guard community, on training matters. Aula 2.0 offers direct access to all information about Frontex training activities for border and coast guards while increasing the training management and delivery capacities.

In 2019, the platform contributed to improved planning, management and evaluation of over 380 activities organised by Frontex involving 4200 members of the border and coast guard community across Europe.

The main features of Aula 2.0 are:

- enhanced data collection and reporting capacities through further customisation, using business intelligence;
- collaborative document management;
- extensive personal dashboards for training design development and participation;
- multimedia training resources;
- online news, articles, tutorials and learning content;
- enhanced user support through instant chat and forums.

2.8. Research and Innovation

Summary

Technology and innovation

The technology assessment and innovation area integrates activities aimed at performing operational assessments of the effectiveness of border control systems and technologies. This includes tests and demonstrations of systems and technologies that have already achieved a high level of technology readiness in areas relevant for border control. The results collected can be further translated in tender specifications to support the acquisition of technical equipment by Frontex and/or the Member States.

The most relevant achievements were:

- assessment of the border management technologies aiming to improve the EIBM;
- enhanced awareness of the stakeholders of Frontex on the different technologies and systems for border control
- resulting from the above increased operational border control capacities at EU level;
- the completion of a number of activities aiming to identify emerging technologies and/or innovative technical solutions for border control in the areas of border surveillance and border checks.

In line with the abovementioned, the main implemented activities were as follows:

- testing and evaluation of the small MALE RPAS pilot project in the Central Mediterranean Sea;
- setting up and execution of the maritime surveillance aerostat pilot project in Eastern Mediterranean Sea;
- setting up and execution of a pilot on 'biometrics on the move' at Lisbon airport;
- facilitating the dialogue with the industry regarding the state-of-the art and innovative technical solutions relevant for border control.

Cooperation activities:

- Launch and testing of a new Copernicus service on combined time-area imagery;
- Finalisation of the testing on the new Copernicus Service on wake detection;
- Support on the development of the procurement for RPAS and Frontex aerial surveillance system – three services;
- Support on the development of the procurement for maritime analysis tools services;
- Participation in external meetings and conferences addressing technology issues relevant for border control and coast guard functions; technical support to other Frontex, European Commission, EU agencies, Member States and third countries' activities.

Capacity assessment and development

Frontex drives the capacity assessments and promotes targeted measures for the development of capacities in Member States and third countries (where applicable) pertinent to the implementation and operationalisation of new technologies for border management and EU policy developments in this area. In 2019, work in this area focused on:

- Provision of expert support for the development and delivery of the advance information training course focusing on the creation of risk profiles and the targeting of travellers. Training content delivery in the first training session in December 2019;
- The organisation of the international conference on biometrics for borders 2019 on 9–10 October 2019. The main purpose of the conference was to facilitate knowledge transfer and dialogue between various stakeholders as well as to summarise the key opportunities and challenges that biometric solutions at the border face both now and in the near future.

Development of technical and operational standards, and assessment methodologies

The role of the Agency is fundamental in defining and supporting the development of end-user driven best practices and standards (technical and operational). In 2019, we worked with Member States and other stakeholders to develop and implement shared standards and best practices, through:

- Setting up of a technical expert group for the development of minimum technical requirements for aerial equipment, including fixed wing aircrafts, helicopters and remotely piloted aircraft systems, as well as the provision of an advanced draft of the technical report on the minimum technical and operational requirements for aerial equipment (to be finalised in 2020).
- Setting up of a technical expert group for the development of minimum technical requirements for terrestrial equipment, including border checks and border surveillance equipment. Kick-off meeting in Q4 2020.
- Publication of the Frontex performance assessment methodology for document inspection systems developed to support the testing and evaluation document inspection systems' operational performance, thereby supporting Member States with the independent assessment of document inspection systems to verify if quality requirements of important check routines are met. Work will continue on validating the methodology in order to confirm its operational use to Member States.

Technical assistance to Member States and third countries

Frontex contributes to the development of the capacities of the Member States in applying state of the art technical solutions and EU policies, and supports the development and consolidation of technical capacities and capabilities of third countries, in line with the EU external relations framework and Frontex' operational priorities (in particular, Western Balkans).

In 2019, technical support and expertise was provided as follows:

- Technical expertise was provided to entry exist system advisory group and during the meetings of the Informal working group on the implementation of the passenger name record (PNR) Directive, as well as to activities of other business units in relation to advance passenger information (API).
- Expertise on advance information was provided to the European Commission in the framework of the evaluation of the API Directive.
- An external expert was contracted to develop an operational research tool to support the implementation of Entry Exist System regulation in Member States. The tool was presented to the Member States who confirmed their interest to use it selected BCPs. The field visits to the BCPs where MS requested assistance will take place in 2020.
- An external company was contracted to develop the study on advance information on land and sea borders, to be completed by the end of 2020, and disseminated in 2021.
- As part of Frontex technical assistance to third countries, Frontex provided support to pre-accession Western Balkan countries in the area of advance passenger information. In 2019 Frontex organised study visits on advance Information for Western Balkan countries to selected EU Member States. These visits aimed to offer Western Balkans' experts the opportunity to get hands-on experience on API systems in the European Union with a view to support the implementation of advance information systems at national level. Two study visits took place in 2019 – in October 2019 at the Netherlands's targeting centre borders and in December 2019 at the API unit at Munich airport, Germany. The first visit was attended by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo⁽⁷⁾ and North Macedonia, while the second visit was attended by the same countries plus Serbia. Montenegro did not take part in any of the visits.

⁽⁷⁾ 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.

Setting up of a border security research capability

The border security research work area is a knowledge and foresight hub in the field of research for European integrated border management, aiming to identify critical research themes, further structure the dialogue with academia and industry on research projects, as well as representing Frontex as senior user of the EBCG within the EU framework programme in relation to border security research.

In 2019 the work in this area focused on preparation of the framework for collaboration with the Commission on research and innovation, and delivery of first inputs; as well as establishing new and enhanced research capabilities.

In this context, the following main activities were implemented:

- Provision of Frontex input to the 2019 Horizon 2020 border security research projects;
- Provision of input to border security research topics 2021–2022;
- Research services for Frontex business units concerning handgun and ammunition restrictions in MS, recruitment capabilities and capacities in MS, training capabilities and capacities in MS and SAC;
- Conceptual work for the border management innovation center;
- Stocktaking/scanning of the existing body of knowledge related to border security research and scoping meeting of the research for innovation network with Member States.

Highlights: Research and innovation in 2019

International conference on biometrics for borders 2019

The international conference on biometrics for borders 2019 held on 9–10 October 2019 in Warsaw brought together almost 200 experts and stakeholders from a variety of institutions from different disciplines covering legislators, border management authorities, academia, NGOs and industry associations and from areas including the EU (both Commission and Member States⁽⁸⁾), United States and Australia. The main purpose of the conference was to facilitate knowledge transfer and dialogue between the various stakeholders as well as to summarise the key opportunities and challenges that biometric solutions at the border face both now and in the near future. The conference focused on one of the challenges to biometric solutions: the threat to security potentially posed by morphing. The conference key themes can be summarised as follows:

- Biometric solutions will continue to develop and will be an essential part of the border control process now and in the future, despite the variety of operational and implementation challenges they face, as they are essential to deal with the ever-increasing volumes of traveller facilitation whilst at the same time ensuring enhanced security.
- There is a continued need for improved coordination between the worlds of legislation, technology and the actual operational implementation of this technology at the border.
- Training end users on technology is of vital importance so that the solutions truly optimise the whole border crossing process and are a proper support to the border guard.
- In terms of threat of morphing attacks it was noted that currently none of the available morphing attack detection (MAD) algorithms came close to offering an acceptable operational solution to this problem, and that there appeared to be a need for greater engagement from various stakeholders including the commercial sector to generate a volume of better algorithms that could provide potential operational solutions at the borders. Also noted was the need to develop and test other process or human based solutions to this problem, for example the rolling out of live enrolment of an applicant's image at passport document issuance or via the deployment of better human detection of morphed images at the borders. More work also needs to be done in Europe to standardise the measurement of quality criteria and the testing methodologies in the area of morph detection.
- Further, it was also noted how important it was to follow the GDPR⁽⁹⁾ and the national data protection regulations in the EU when conducting testing on new solutions and that access to properly managed data sets was of critical importance.
- In conclusion it was agreed that this kind of conference brings evident positive benefits for all the stakeholders in biometrics and that Frontex will look into organising further such events in the future.

⁽⁸⁾ In the context of these conference proceedings, Member States will refer to EU Member States and Schengen associated countries.

⁽⁹⁾ General data protection regulation (EU) 2016/679.

Pilot project on maritime surveillance aerostat

Frontex conducted a technology pilot addressing the use of an aerostat for coastal maritime surveillance along 2019. The pilot project was conducted by Frontex, hosted by the Hellenic Coast Guard of Greece and participated by the Hellenic Coast Guard and the National Republican Guard of Portugal. Operational deployment of the system took place from 30 July to 31 August 2019 on the island of Samos in Greece.

The pilot proved that a system consisting of an aerostat platform carrying as payload a set of sensors and having powerful processing software, can support the task of maritime/coastal border surveillance for law enforcement purposes. Still a more extensive trial would be desirable as the deployment site and its length were not ideal.

In relation to the Portuguese maritime mobile surveillance system (MSS) deployed simultaneously with the aerostat, no definitive conclusions could be reached as the deployment sites for the MSS were sub-optimal and the number of events that could be observed simultaneously by MSS and aerostat, were very few.

The main recommendations following from the implementation of this pilot are: to conduct a new pilot, in a relevant coastal area, with a more powerful payload, for a longer period of time. Important lessons learned to be incorporated in the new pilot are: selecting the deployment site prior to the integration of the system, as the area to survey has a direct impact on the aerostat payload requirements and, also, ensure the availability of a reliable wideband network connection in the deployment site.

Frontex support to MS and eu-LISA in the implementation of entry-exit system

The entry-exit system (EES) is expected to be fully operational in all Member States by February 2022, therefore national authorities need to make the necessary preparatory arrangements to ensure the smooth operationalisation of the system. Moreover, the implementation must be harmonised across all Member States in order to be successful.

Frontex has played an active role in relation to the implementation of the entry-exit system by providing support to the technical development and implementation of the EES; acting as an observer in the EES advisory group and contributing extensively to the eu-LISA working group on information and communications technology solutions for external land and sea borders. The Agency has also closely engaged with the European Commission in the development of the practical handbook for the implementation and management of the EES.

In 2019 Frontex was actively engaging and meeting with Member States to identify their needs and operational challenges in order to plan and implement a whole variety of support actions. In 2019, Frontex held a series of meetings, technology demonstrations, training activities and a conference:

- Frontex developed and has made available operational research model and simulation tool which will help Member States in decision making at BCP level. The tool will facilitate decisions on which technology to use, on quantities of equipment to be acquired, its location in the physical space of a border crossing point, and on what and how changes to the processes and infrastructures should be addressed. The tool was presented to Member States during a meeting in October 2019, and accompanied by a demonstration of the biometrics on the move technology pilot project conducted at Lisbon airport in cooperation with the Portuguese immigration services (SEF).
- Also the participants of the international conference on biometrics for borders (ICBB) 2019 showed a high interest in topics related to the practical and operational implementation of the EES, indicating the focus of 2020 conference.
- Frontex has been closely working with eu-LISA and CEPOL in the area of training in relation to EES, specifically on the training courses on vulnerability assessment and testing for automated border control (ABC) and biometric systems for the EES.

With this intense involvement and intensification of pace, Frontex will continue supporting Member States border management authorities in developing capacities and preparedness related to the practical implementation of the EES. The focus of research and innovation is on identification and demonstration of technologies, refinement of infrastructures and business processes at BCPs, development of training and other capacity building measures. Frontex will continue working very closely with eu-LISA (and other agencies) as well as with the EC.

2.9. Situational Monitoring

Summary

In 2019, situational monitoring activities of Frontex were divided between Frontex Situation Centre, responsible for providing (close-to) real-time situation monitoring, and newly created Information Fusion Centre, tasked with provision of Eurosur/Copernicus Fusion Services.

In 2019, multipurpose aerial surveillance activities were further developed, with the introduction of a 24/7 regime, an extension of activities to new surveillance areas, and a sharp rise in flight hours, leading to greater pre-frontier situational awareness and saving lives at sea.

Throughout the year there had also taken place numerous activities aimed at enhancing information exchange and trust-building, e.g. with other EU agencies. Meanwhile, a crisis management week was held for the first time at Frontex, providing the staff with knowledge and awareness on the Agency's crisis management processes.

Eurosur/Copernicus Fusion Services (EFS)

In 2019, existing EFS were further consolidated and enhancements were incorporated. An increasing demand was witnessed by higher service requests received and a growing interest in training, such as IMINT training. As previously, the services were implemented in close cooperation with EMSA and the EU Satellite Centre (SatCen). Throughout the year, Frontex continued to engage with the Copernicus programme. Negotiations about the extension of the current delegation agreement and future plans were initiated. Cooperation with other Copernicus services were intensified.

The EFS continued to support Member States and other partners with situation monitoring and information exchange capabilities. In 2019, the EFS contribution included 1,726 SAR images, 1,803 optical images, 590 GEOINT and IMINT products, 141,469 anomaly detection alerts, 73 vessel monitoring reports.

Multipurpose aerial surveillance (MAS)

Multipurpose aerial surveillance supported Frontex, Member States and EU Agencies with enhanced situational awareness and reaction capability in the EU and its pre-frontier areas in the context of an EU-wide surveillance project. The area of operations included the Central Mediterranean Sea, the Western Balkans, the Aegean Sea, the Black Sea, the Adriatic Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Polish, Slovak and Hungarian pre-frontier areas. Moreover, MAS operations became a 24/7 activity in 2019. Cooperation between internal and external stakeholder has greatly improved with the coordination and de-conflicting of flights with the EUNAVFOR MED, the communication with EFCA on fisheries-related cases, as well as the internal cooperation in the framework of joint operations and multipurpose maritime operations and a support to the 'Coastex' and EBCGD exercises contributing to an enhanced information exchange and results on the ground.

MAS in numbers

- A total of 2,754 flight hours is a 42 % rise compared to the same period in 2018, ensuring a much wider aerial surveillance and providing an enhanced situational awareness for the Agency and the Member States;
- On 92 occasions MAS detected migrant boats in distress in the Central Mediterranean and in the Aegean, initiating search and rescue operations leading to the rescue of approximately 4,672 people;
- On 72 occasions MAS detected illegal border crossings at the Croatian and Slovak borders involving approximately 985 people;
- The total of approximately 5,650 migrants detected constitute a rise of 4 % compared to the same period of 2018.

Crisis management support

For the first time ever, a crisis management week was organised for the entire Agency. Nearly 200 staff members participated in a series of training sessions, workshops, exercises and awareness sessions between 21 and 25 October. The strategic response team and the crisis response team have been trained and exercised with the aim of building up the Agency's resilience culture.

The situation in Greece, at the date of preparing this report, and the consequent activation of the weekly crisis response team meetings demonstrates that the Agency needs effective processes and policies in place that allow for the Agency to quickly take measures on a cross-divisional level and to facilitate information exchange.

Cooperation with partners on situational monitoring

FSC continued to explore new modes of cooperation with its partners, enhancing information exchange and trust-building with EU Agencies and international organisations through joint products and staff exchange programmes as well as events focusing on sharing good practices in real-time situation monitoring and furthering interagency cooperation.

- In March 2019, Frontex teamed up with Europol and EASO to create the first tripartite joint Frontex-Europol-EASO report on the 'caravan of hope'. In November, a meeting was organised to develop a trilateral working arrangement between Frontex, Europol and EASO to work jointly on predictions, early warnings and recommendations about the ongoing situation in Greece/Turkey/Bulgaria. Moreover, to enhance situational awareness, Frontex facilitated bi-weekly video conference meetings with Europol and EASO, providing a platform for the production of tripartite situation awareness products;
- Potential synergies and opportunities for cooperation were discussed during Europol and INTERPOL staff exchange visits hosted by Frontex in November;
- The December workshop 'Real-time situation monitoring: an opportunity for interagency cooperation' gathered Experts from the European Commission, seven EU Agencies, and two international organisations to enhance operational cooperation and to share good practices in real-time monitoring and interagency cooperation.

2.10. International and European cooperation

International cooperation

Western Balkans and Turkey

The Western Balkan region and Turkey continued to be important priorities across various areas of the Agency's work with overall cooperation significantly increasing throughout 2019.

The cooperation between Frontex and the Western Balkan partners already spans across all areas of mandate, from exchange of observers in Frontex joint operations and coordination points, to engagement under the EU policy cycle/EMPACT, cooperation on returns and capacity building. With the launch of the first fully-fledged joint operation in the Albania under the EBCG status agreement, in May the Agency opened a new chapter in cooperation with the Western Balkans.

To use the momentum and bring the Western Balkan authorities 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 and explore areas for even closer cooperation, particularly in view of the future implementations of the EBCG Status Agreements. The meeting and subsequent consultations helped to map further areas for enhanced cooperation that the Agency followed throughout the year.

In June Frontex finalised phase I of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) II funded project 'Protection sensitive migration management in the Western Balkans and Turkey' and kicked-off its phase II to last until July 2021. This second phase will continue 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. The project also supports the development of national registration systems, with the view to facilitate their eventual interoperability with EURODAC in the future, upon EU accession.

The engagement with Turkish authorities continued through the Frontex liaison officer in Ankara and participation of Turkish counterparts in several Frontex events and activities. For example, in November a high-level delegation from the Turkish National Police, led by the Deputy Director General, visited Frontex to explore common areas of interest. The Agency and the Turkish Ministry of the Interior also advanced negotiations on the cooperation plan for 2020-22, which was signed during the visit of Frontex Executive Director in Ankara in January 2020.

Africa and the Levant

The Agency continued capacity-building activities addressed to the Southern Neighbours in North Africa and the Levant in the framework of the ENI funded EU4Border Security project. As part of the project's inception phase, Frontex carried out scoping visits to Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine⁽¹⁰⁾, Israel and Tunis (the latter in relation to Libya). In follow-up to that, delegations from Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan visited Frontex in Warsaw to learn more about the Agency and its work.

At a strategic level, a number of high-level visits took place, with an aim to enhance dialogue with interlocutors in North Africa and the Sahel, including official visits of the Executive Director to Morocco and Senegal, the launch of the bilateral Frontex-Morocco *Comité mixte* in Warsaw, and the participation in the EU-Egypt Migration Dialogue in Cairo.

The Agency also actively engaged with multilateral organisations in the region, particularly the Arab Interior Ministers' Council (AIMC) and the African Union Mechanism for Police Cooperation (AFRIPOL). Enhanced dialogue with these organisations was instrumental in facilitating with their member states and broadening the outreach of Frontex activities through various regional events. For example, in cooperation with the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee, the AIMC and the EU-funded counter-terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa (CT-MENA) project Frontex held a workshop on countering terrorism at airport border checks and traveller risk assessment. Another joint workshop on risk analysis and combating cross-border crime was organised together with AFRIPOL in Algiers, whereas AIMC and CT-MENA project were partners for a joint workshop on irregular migration and cross-border crime.

The Agency also continued to provide support and expertise to several Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, namely EUBAM Libya and EUCAP Sahel Niger. In particular, Frontex supported the training of approximately 265 officers, part of the border module carried out in Niamey. 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 training to border police officers from 22 African countries.

Eastern Partnership, Silk Routes and strategic partners

With the Eastern Partnership (EaP) integrated border management capacity building project completed at the end of 2018, cooperation with the EaP countries continued through bilateral initiatives. In response to the request by the state border guard service of Ukraine, Frontex supported the national authorities in the development of the new IBM strategy and action plan for Ukraine. New cooperation plans were concluded between Frontex and the state border guard service of Ukraine for the years 2019–2021 and with the state border committee of Belarus – for the years 2020-2022.

⁽¹⁰⁾ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a state of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

On the margins of the European border and coast guard day, Frontex held a side event on 'Integrated Border Management and the European Neighbourhood: Cooperation across borders'. The event provided an opportunity to bring together the authorities from the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan regions and exchange practices on the development and implementation of IBM strategies.

In 2019, Frontex also worked to advance cooperation with countries in the Silk Routes region. A visit was held to Pakistan to exchange views with relevant authorities with regard to bilateral collaboration. Frontex also hosted a visit by a diverse group of authorities of Iraq. Finally, the Agency took up a role in the advisory board of a project on IBM in the silk routes region, funded by the European Commission and administered by ICMPD.

Frontex continued to strengthen collaboration with strategic partners. Building on the existing long-term cooperation with the US authorities, a high-level meeting was held with the US Department of Homeland Security to discuss common challenges and areas of interest. Collaboration also continued with relevant authorities of Canada, in particular, in relation to ETIAS. Gradually expanding its engagement with strategic partners, the Agency signed a declaration of intent with the Australian border force to take first steps to explore cooperation in a range of areas. Initial exchanges were also held with New Zealand.

Highlights: Cooperation with third countries in 2019

International border police conference 2019

On 28-30 October, executives of the global border and coast guard community from nearly 100 countries and five continents gathered in Warsaw for the 24th international border police conference. In this edition of the event, participants looked at cross-border security through the lens of preparedness, prevention and response. With over 30 high-level speakers and ample opportunities for network and bilateral exchange, this biannual conference offers an excellent platform for strategic level discussions on border security.

Frontex-Morocco *Comité Mixte*

On 31 October, Frontex and Morocco held their first *Comité mixte* in Warsaw, chaired by Fabrice Leggeri, Frontex Executive Director and Khalid Zerouali, Wali/Governor, Director-General of the Ministry of the Interior of Morocco. The bilateral meeting with Moroccan counterparts was dedicated to explore areas of mutual interest and to discuss possibilities for cooperation, including on risk analysis, technology and innovation as well as coast guard cooperation. A joint *feuille de route* for follow-up activities was agreed upon and the reunion of the next *Comité mixte* is foreseen in fall 2020 in Rabat, Morocco.

Institutional partnerships

In 2019, Frontex enhanced the already established good cooperation with its current EU and International partners and continued identifying new ones. A number of cooperation plans and working arrangements were revised and negotiations with new partners were initiated.

Frontex continued its close cooperation with the EU's Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) agencies, including through the JHA Agencies Network. For example, Frontex and FRA signed a Service Level Agreement whereby FRA committed to support the establishment and development of the Frontex Fundamental Rights Monitors – an important task under the EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896.

The Agency also strengthened its cooperation with EASO by renewing the cooperation plan between both agencies to cover 2019–2021. The document frames the agencies' joint work in the areas of operational cooperation, information and analysis, capacity building and horizontal cooperation. The two agencies will continue to work together on the set-up and implementation of the migration management support teams (MMST), as well as delivering a common situational picture on irregular migration and persons in need of international protection. The Agencies also supported each other in the area of international cooperation, such as through the joint IPA II project or ad-hoc visits (e.g. visit of the Serbian Asylum Commission to Frontex, organised by EASO).

Frontex concluded a cooperation plan with CEPOL, facilitating cooperation in the area of training, EU policy cycle/EMPACT activities, communication, as well as administrative issues.

Contacts with EU entities outside of the JHA remit, such as the Joint Research Centre (JRC), European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and the European Defence Agency (EDA), were also taking place, reflecting Frontex' broad, multidisciplinary approach to security.

Furthermore, Frontex and EDA launched the joint pilot training on the coordination of law enforcement and navy actions in maritime border security. The training programme, held at the NATO-Maritime Interdiction Operational Training Centre in Crete (Greece) during 25 March – 5 April 2019, aimed to maximise joint response to the threats and challenges at sea. The main focus of the pilot training was to explore procedural differences in order to identify partners' good practices in dealing with migrants intercepted at sea and to search and rescue operations, in full compliance with relevant international and human rights law.

In the framework of coast guard functions and for the implementation of the EU Maritime Security Strategy to the extent possible, the first quadrilateral meeting of the Directors of Frontex, EMSA, EFCA and EDA took place.

In 2019, Frontex started negotiations with EASA on a working agreement and started dialogue with MAOC-N to explore the possibility to develop structured cooperation. Frontex also enhanced cooperation with JRC, jointly defining areas of common interest and discussing the potential of concluding a working arrangement in the future.

The European External Action Service, alongside the European Commission and its relevant DGs, continued to be the key interlocutor for the Agency's external engagement. Cooperation at institutional level, through staff-to-staff meetings, as well as in the operational theatre, through close engagement with EU CSDP missions and operations. In 2019, Frontex also hosted the first Eunavfor Med Associated Expert to the headquarters, in order to enhance the cooperation between the two entities, and contributed to the Crime Information Cell established in EUNAVFOR MED operation SOPHIA.

Frontex intensified active participation in the Customs Cooperation Working Party. Moreover, strategic talks with DG TAXUD were initiated in the framework of the extended cooperation with the Customs Eastern and South-Eastern Land Border Expert Team (CELBET) as well as during the participation in workshops on the future of Customs 2040. Such activities reflect the increasing efforts to enhance synergies between border and customs authorities and provide support on customs to the European Commission and the Member States.

In 2019, Frontex further developed cooperation with international organisations, among them UNHCR, IOM, INTERPOL, UNODC, ICAO and others. Such cooperation covers in particular the fields of migration, border management and the fight against cross-border crime. Frontex sought to build upon the existing working arrangements, explore new possibilities and ensure the voice of the European border and coast guard community in relevant international fora. For example, Frontex became a full member of the 'Dialogue on an effective multilateral policing architecture against global threats' – an INTERPOL initiative engaging regional police organisations from around the world.

Highlights: EU partners and international organisations in 2019

Frontex signed a working arrangement with the OSCE

In October, the Agency signed a working arrangement with the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The working arrangement allows Frontex and the OSCE to enhance cooperation in the area of integrated border management, with an aim to address migratory challenges and serious crimes with a cross-border dimension, including trafficking in human beings. In that framework, Frontex also started discussions to foster cooperation with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

First staff-exchange programme with Europol

On the basis of the joint action plan between Frontex and Europol, the Agencies launched a staff-exchange programme that started with a week-long visit of nine Europol experts to Frontex. The staff-exchange programme was a first of its kind and its main objective was to bring professionals together and build personal links that would facilitate cooperation in the future. The cooperation between the two agencies covers many areas including operational activities, information sharing, training, as well as research and development.

Frontex liaison officers networks

In 2019, Frontex continued to develop and consolidate the networks of Frontex liaison officers (FLOs) in Member States and third countries.

FLOs in EU Member States

The Agency continued the training and progressive deployment of the FLOs to the Member States and Schengen Associated Countries, most of them with a regional mandate covering up to four states. The FLOs have a role to foster cooperation and dialogue between the Agency and the national authorities responsible for border management, including in relation to coast guard and return. They act on behalf of Frontex in all areas of the Agency's mandate and aim to provide mutual benefit to the Agency and the Member States in the implementation of the European IBM. Among a wide range of tasks, the FLOs play an important role in the Agency's vulnerability assessment.

By the end of 2019, all 11 FLOs were effectively deployed in Member States hosting the main seat and took up duties in 28 Member States and Schengen Associated Countries.

Supporting the monitoring of the migration flows as well as taking part in the vulnerability assessment processes is an important task for the FLOs. This implies that the FLOs act as an important source of information for the assessment of the Member States border management capacities. While further deployments continued, some FLOs already had a chance to contribute to the VA in 2019, their reports constituting part of the assessment. The FLOs supported the collection of information, provided clarifications, jointly verified certain information, and proposed follow-up by Frontex.

The progressive deployment of the FLOs has already proven to be of benefit in a number of areas. Their role has already proven instrumental preparing the ground for the EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 and will continue to be important in its implementation. For example, the FLOs were essential for the organisation of the regional meetings with the Member States on the operationalisation of the EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896. The meetings served as a unique platform for the Agency's Executive and Senior Management to exchange views with the Commanders of relevant national authorities, including border management, police, coast guard, customs and migration management services.

The FLOs have also facilitated a number of high-level visits from the Member States to Frontex HQ, and supporting Frontex visits to the Member States on topics across the board of the Agency's mandate.

FLOs in third countries

The FLOs posted in Turkey, Niger and the Western Balkans (main seat in Serbia) consolidated their presence in those countries, in support of the overall cooperation with the Agency.

The Agency also prepared the deployment of two other FLOs – to Senegal and a second FLO to the Western Balkans (based in Albania). 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 as of January 2020. The FLO to Albania has also been recruited, with the pre-deployment phase envisaged for the first half of 2020.

The administrative arrangements with the EEAS necessary for the colocation of the FLOs in the EU delegations were negotiated and finalised for the deployment in Senegal and progressed substantially for the colocation in Albania. The Agency also launched the negotiation with the EEAS on a service level

agreement that will replace the administrative arrangements and set the basis for the deployment of the future FLOs in third countries.

The Liaison Officers Networks Unit consolidated its role as the back-office for the FLO networks, supporting and guiding the FLO work and ensuring they effectively contribute to the Agency's operational goals. The back-office held two biannual meetings for the FLOs at the headquarters in order to provide a space for further training and exchange on the latest developments that could affect their respective areas of responsibility.

Highlights: Frontex liaison officers networks in 2019

Frontex liaison officers in EU Member States

In the course of 2019, Frontex achieved the objective set by the EBCG Regulation and deployed 11 FLOs to their main seats in the EU Member States. The FLOs are an essential tool for closer cooperation within the European Border and Coast Guard, facilitating cooperation between the Agency and the Member States in across all aspects of the IBM. The respective FLO clusters are as follows:

1. Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland – the main seat in Germany;
2. Belgium, Iceland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands – the main seat in Belgium;
3. Bulgaria;
4. Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania – the main seat in Hungary;
5. Cyprus, Greece – the main seat in Greece;
6. Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia – the main seat in Slovakia;
7. Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden – the main seat in Sweden;
8. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania – the main seat in Latvia;
9. France;
10. Italy, Malta – the main seat in Italy;
11. Portugal, Spain – the main seat in Spain.

2.11. Media and public relations

Summary

To promote the achievements of the Agency and in line with its commitment to openness and transparency, Media and Public Relations (MPR) continued to facilitate access of journalists to Frontex's operations. In 2019, dozens of journalists visited operational areas at the external borders of the EU. Many of them were embedded on vessels, helicopters or aircrafts during patrolling activities and search and rescue operations.

The journalists represented national and international media outlets including BBC, El Pais, Reuters, El Mundo, AFP, ARD, France 3, Le Figaro, ZDF, the Independent, France 5, and Discovery Channel. Furthermore, Frontex also organised several press conferences and briefings held by the Executive Director across Europe.

In 2019, Media and Public Relations Office continued to carry out a wide range of outreach activities. In its headquarters in Warsaw, Frontex hosted more than 500 guests who included students, researchers, police academy cadets and military officers. Our spokespersons briefed them on Frontex's activities, answered their questions and provided relevant printed materials.

Each month, Frontex receives numerous requests for information and access to its operations from the general public. We contributed to a wider academic discussion about migration by providing information about Frontex and the role of European Institutions in general to Master and PhD students and researchers from European academic institutions and beyond. Additionally, our spokespersons were invited

to present at a number of different venues including universities, embassies, and various government departments, speaking to an audience of over 1,000 participants.

In 2019, we published more than 60 press releases on migratory flows, new operations and events organised in the headquarters and in operational areas. The press releases were often accompanied by short videos published on Frontex's social media channels.

MPR also supported different teams and divisions by organising in-house and external training sessions including media training and presentation workshops.

Last year, Frontex continued to expand its presence in various social media channels, including Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. On Facebook, the number of followers grew to more than 16,000, four-times the number from the start of 2019. The number of followers on LinkedIn doubled to 24,000, while followers on Twitter grew to more than 30,000.

In 2019, MPR organised the information campaign for the recruitment of the first candidates to the European border and coast guard. MPR prepared the promotional materials that were distributed to various uniformed services and professional organisations throughout the European Union. The office also conducted the campaign throughout all Frontex social media channels, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, attracting massive interest from potential candidates. MPR also assisted in the handling of the hundreds of queries from potential candidates.

Aiming to reach and integrate the Agency's growing staff, MPR prepared monthly birthday breakfast meetings with the Executive Director, family day and Frontex happy hour. It also organised an internal day which focused on sports activities and a Christmas party for all staff and their spouses or partners.

In 2019, MPR produced 38 longer and shorted videos about key Frontex's activities as well as 160 publications (reports, training manuals, brochures, booklets), including '2018 in Brief', a short report summarising achievements of the Agency in the previous year. MPR also played an important role in organising and disseminating information on the Agency's key annual events (annual coast guard event, IBPC, ICBB, EBCG day), including preparation of ted talk style presentations, creating videos and other visuals that were later used for communication purposes. MPR also regularly assisted other units and the Agency's management, providing video and photographic support as well as guidance on visual identity issues.

To make the information about the Agency accessible to all EU citizens, MPR continued developing a multilingual version of its website in all 24 official languages of the EU. It also drafted, along the European Ombudsman's guidelines, the external language policy which was adopted by the end of 2019 and has already been translated into all EU languages.

2.12.A. Fundamental Rights

Summary

Under the overall tasks to monitor compliance with fundamental rights in activities and to follow high standards for border management and ensuring respect for, and protection and promotion of fundamental rights, the Fundamental Rights Office (FRO) continuously provided observations and recommendations to all operational plans and evaluation reports for the consideration of operational units.

In view of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, FRO prepared general instructions on how to ensure the safeguarding of fundamental rights during the operational activity for the upcoming year.

In 2019, FRO has been appointed as the coordinator to nine serious incidents reports on fundamental rights submitted by participants to operations as well as derived from open sources reporting about general situations not involving Frontex staff nor staff deployed by Member States under the umbrella of Frontex joint operations.

FRO team supported and delivered presentations on fundamental rights in operational briefings and activities, such as briefings for team members to be deployed, to Frontex liaison officers to MS and TCs, to third country observers, air border authorities in the framework of VEGA children project as well as in several training sessions, workshops and conferences i.e. team leaders of de-briefers in the course of the EBCG maritime border surveillance officer training.

FRO team undertook several field visits to the EU external borders in view of monitoring the operational activities and providing guidance on fundamental rights compliance. In addition, a field visit was undertaken to the JO FOA Albania 2019 in order to familiarise with the Agency's activities outside the EU and to increase awareness on the work of FRO and Frontex complaints mechanism in particular, to the Albanian authorities at central and local levels, deployed officers and other migration actors.

With regard to the deployment of forced-return monitors from the pool of monitors, FRO was regularly involved in the selection of monitors, together with Pooled Resources Unit and the European Centre for Returns, followed by an open call sent to relevant bodies in the Member States. By taking part in this process, FRO ensured that the skills and competences of the monitors allow them to carry out their tasks in accordance with fundamental rights.

Moreover, FRO contributed to the development of the guide for readmission operations by sea to be finalised and participated in familiarisation visits of third countries in the area of return as well as in the direct contact points in return matters and pre-return activities network meetings. Moreover, FRO engaged in several training events and conferences dedicated to monitors as well as escorts. In Frontex headquarters, ECRet invited to a first workshop with MS for developing a tool preparing children for returns and a follow up activity is planned.

In 2019, FRO received 227 monitoring reports which mainly served to provide concrete recommendations and follow up measures as well as to adjust training needs of those organising the implementation of return operations. In accordance with the Regulation, the biannual FRO observations on return operations are to be presented to the Management Board.

In July 2019, FRO submitted to the Executive Director an expression of concern related to numerous reports received from different sources including international organisations as well as the Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights, of potential fundamental rights violations at the border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. FRO recommended to discuss with the relevant Authorities to potentially help addressing these issues of major concern.

In the field of capacity building, FRO was engaged in the development of several training sessions and materials for mainstreaming fundamental rights, including the review of the common core curriculum for border and coast guard mid-level management training (CCC ML) as well as of the basic training programme for the standing corps category 1 in view of the Regulation (EU) 2019/1896. The overall approach is to embed fundamental rights components as an integral and horizontal part in the training activities.

FRO team also provided a number of training sessions outside the EU to border guard officials on fundamental rights related to border management, in cooperation with international organisations (IOM, UNHCR), in countries such as Turkey and Georgia. Two workshops were part of the IOM project: 'Regional cooperation on border management with Greece and Bulgaria' (phase 2). The project is designed to support Turkey's border management efforts in line with the EU Acquis. Through peer exchanges and presentation of good practices, the project aims enhance the cross-border cooperation between Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria at central and local levels.

FRO team attended several workshops on trafficking in human beings. Identification and referral of persons as potential victims/vulnerable persons remains a major concern and need is seen to increase targeted training on trafficking in human beings in specific operational areas. The continued cooperation and coordination work with the EU Agencies towards delivering on the actions foreseen in the 2017 Communication and the Joint Statement of commitment is regularly discussed during the trafficking in

human beings coordination meetings of justice and home affairs (JHA) Agencies. Within the Agency, the outcomes of the coordination meeting are shared with the stakeholders and further input is provided regarding the identification and referral of victims at the EU external border.

A child consultancy was commissioned by FRO to draw up recommendations in view of the drafting of a revised Fundamental Rights Strategy. FRO team is regularly engaged in inter-service group consultations on the rights of the child related to migration and supportive measures.

Within the implementation of the ETIAS regulation, the Fundamental Rights Office is expected to play a role in the establishment and the functioning of the ETIAS Fundamental Rights Guidance Board. In this context, FRO provided contributions to relevant documents in close cooperation with the ETIAS and Interoperability task force and attended meetings on its progress in implementation.

FRO continued to provide guidance on fundamental rights compliance and participated in meetings and workshops related to the forced-return monitoring project III (FREM) implemented by ICMPD in conjunction with Frontex and FRA. An internal assessment was undertaken with respective entities and FRO for the handover of the FREM project to Frontex for the management and functioning of the pool of forced-return monitors. It resulted in that FRO will be assigned to have a prominent role in the upcoming Agency's activity which entails the overall support for forced return monitoring, including training of monitors in cooperation with training unit, ensuring an efficient pool management and taking over the direct coordination of the pool of forced-return monitors.

Throughout the year 2019, FRO with its team was engaged in the induction training sessions for newcomers on a monthly basis. The engagement in this activity is deemed crucial since the Regulation has clearly stepped up the fundamental rights obligations of the European border and coast guard staff. FRO also was engaged in the revision of the concept on fundamental rights training for Frontex staff and actively participated in the sessions held with a module on Frontex tools for monitoring fundamental rights.

FRO closely cooperated with the consultative forum on fundamental rights throughout the year. The Agency in performing its tasks, in its relations with Member States and its cooperation with third countries shall take into account the reports of the consultative forum, as explicitly expressed in Article 34(4), Regulation 2016/1624. The consultative forum prepares a specific annual report of its activities that is publicly available both in hard copies and online in the Agency's website.

In 2019, a consultancy for the evaluation of the Consultative Forum was undertaken. The overall aim of this assignment was to conduct an independent external evaluation by assessing the performance, achievements and impact of the consultative forum.

Highlights: Fundamental rights in 2019

Pilot project on fundamental rights monitors

In view of the adoption of the EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, a service level agreement was signed between the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and Frontex with regards to the fundamental rights monitors (FRMs). In order to prepare for the establishment and management of the FRMs at the end of 2020, a pilot project is being implemented during operational activities to test the means of field visits and processes of the pilot FRMs and to pilot the most effective monitoring of fundamental rights in Frontex operational areas.

The objectives of the pilot project (service level agreement – phase 1) were the following:

- to develop guidelines on the monitoring of compliance with fundamental rights of Frontex operational activities;
- to prepare and train pilot fundamental rights monitors to use monitoring tools and guidelines;
- to conduct visits to Frontex operational activities to test the guidelines and advise on the most effective means of fundamental rights monitoring;
- via the monitoring visits, to consolidate monitoring tools and guidelines in order to develop a comprehensive methodology of fundamental rights monitoring;

- to analyse the findings and produce recommendations concerning the recruitment, deployment and management of the fundamental rights monitors.

In the course of the pilot project, the pilot monitors visited operational areas and observed the operational activities, including daily briefings and daily tasks of all the participants to the operations. Workshops are held to discuss findings, draw recommendations and guidelines to be applied to the fundamental rights monitors upon recruitment.

Complaints mechanism

According to Article 111⁽¹¹⁾ of the Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, the complaints mechanism framework is set up as an administrative mechanism aiming at safeguarding the respect for fundamental rights in all the activities of the Agency. The FRO is responsible for handling complaints received in writing by the Agency from individuals directly affected by the activities of the Agency, or their representatives, in accordance with the right to good administration. The FRO is in charge of performing an admissibility check and referring admissible complaints for follow-up and findings to the relevant Member State (MS) authorities and the Agency's Executive Director (ED), as applicable.

As established in the Regulation (EU) 2019/1896⁽¹²⁾ 'in order to increase transparency and accountability, the Agency should report on the complaints mechanism in its annual report. The report should cover, in particular, the number of complaints it has received, the types of fundamental rights violations involved, the operations concerned and, where possible, the follow-up measures taken by the Agency and Member States'.

In relation to three admissible complaints, a FRO final report is under preparation. Regarding other four admissible complaints, the procedures before competent authorities are pending and the FRO is consolidating information on the findings and follow-up upon receipt, requesting updates as necessary, prior to preparing a final report and closing each complaint.

Regarding the complaints declared inadmissible, the FRO responded individually with a decision providing the complainants the reasons for inadmissibility, and whenever possible information on other available remedies, in case complainants wish to address their complaints or concerns to other institutions or authorities, in accordance with the principle of good administration and the information provided by Member States themselves. This information generally includes complaints mechanism at the Member States Ministry of Interior and the Ombudspersons or fundamental rights institutions, as well as some specific organisations, if known or available.

Further details of the admissible complaints as per Recital 104 of the EBCG Regulation

CMP-2019-00004

- **Complainant:** three Afghan families (sixteen persons, including children and women in vulnerable situation).
- **Frontex activity:** joint return operation, flight from Budapest, Hungary to Kabul, Afghanistan, scheduled for 7 May 2019.
- **Allegation types:** right to asylum (Article 18 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union); protection in the event of removal, expulsion, or extradition (Article 19 of the Charter); rights of the child (Article 24 of the Charter); Health care (Article 35 of the Charter); right to effective remedy and to a fair trial (Article 47 of the Charter).
- **Alleged perpetrator:** Member State staff, Frontex operational implementation.
- **Type of case:** imminent risk case.
- **Follow-up and findings:** MS authorities informed the FRO that there had been no fundamental rights violation and that the national procedures by the Immigration and Asylum Office (Office) and courts had been conducted in a proper way. In their opinion the complainants had all had their legal guarantees respected by the Office and later on in judicial procedure by courts (the

⁽¹¹⁾ Article 72 in the Regulation (EU) 2016/1624.

⁽¹²⁾ Recital 104 of the Regulation (EU) 2019/1896.

hearing of the complainants; native-language interpreter; assistance of a legal representative). Inadmissibility decisions of their asylum applications and decisions on expulsion from Hungary had been issued in accordance with the law and the non-refoulement principle had been respected by national authorities in all their cases, based on different information (country information, health status of the complainants). Further, MS authorities claimed that the conditions in which the families had been held in a transit zone, had been adequate (living conditions, provided healthcare). Finally, the complainants had voluntarily left Hungary to Serbia before the execution of the return decision.

CMP-2019-00011

- **Complainant:** two Serbian/Canadian citizens.
- **Frontex activity:** JO focal points 2019 – land, border crossing point Röszke, Hungary
- **Allegation types:** human dignity (Article 1 of the Charter); prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 4 of the Charter); Right to Property (Article 17 of the Charter).
- **Alleged perpetrator:** Member State staff, Frontex operational implementation.
- **Type of case:** standard
- **Follow-up and findings:** pending before national competent authorities. The complaint was forwarded to the national competent authorities in September 2019.

CMP-2019-00013

- **Complainant:** two Georgian families (five persons).
- **Frontex activity:** JO coordination points 2019 Air; operation in Kutaisi airport, Georgia.
- **Allegation types:** human dignity (Article 1 of the Charter); right to good administration (Article 41 of the Charter)
- **Alleged perpetrator:** Member State staff, Frontex operational implementation.
- **Type of case:** Standard.
- **Follow-up and findings:** pending before national competent authorities. The complaint was forwarded to French and Italian competent authorities respectively in February 2020.

CMP-2019-00014

- **Complainant:** Ukrainian citizen.
- **Frontex activity:** JO Focal Points 2019 Land, border crossing point Terespol, Poland.
- **Allegation types:** human dignity (Article 1 of the Charter).
- **Alleged perpetrator:** Member State staff, Frontex operational implementation.
- **Type of case:** Standard.
- **Follow-up and findings:** FRO is consolidating information on the received findings and follow-up.

CMP-2019-00015

- **Complainant:** Afghan citizen.
- **Frontex activity:** joint return operation financed by Frontex, from Sweden to Afghanistan, scheduled for 12 November 2019.
- **Allegation types:** right to health care (Article 35 of the Charter) in relation to protection in the event of removal, expulsion or extradition (Article 19 of the Charter).
- **Alleged perpetrator:** Member State staff, Frontex operational implementation.
- **Type of case:** imminent risk.
- **Follow-up and findings:** FRO is consolidating information on the received findings and follow-up.

CMP-2019-00016

- **Complainant:** Republic of Congo citizen.
- **Frontex activity:** readmission operation financed by Frontex from Lesbos, Greece, to Turkey, scheduled for 15 November 2019.

- **Allegation types:** protection in the event of removal, expulsion or extradition (Article 19 of the Charter); right to effective remedy and to a fair trial (Article 47 of the Charter); right to asylum (Article 18 of the Charter).
- **Alleged perpetrator:** Member State staff, Frontex operational implementation.
- **Type of case:** imminent risk.
- **Follow-up and findings:** pending before national competent authorities. The complaint was forwarded to Greek NFPoC on 14 November 2019.

CMP-2019-00018

- **Complainant:** The complainant is of an unknown citizenship.
- **Frontex activity:** joint return operation financed by Frontex, from Sweden to Afghanistan, scheduled for 9 December 2019.
- **Allegation types:** protection in the event of removal, expulsion or extradition (Article 19 of the Charter).
- **Alleged perpetrator:** Member State staff, Frontex operational implementation.
- **Type of case:** imminent risk.
- **Follow-up and findings:** Pending the preparation of an admissibility decision.

2.12.B. Data protection

Summary

Throughout 2019, the Data Protection Office expanded with the addition of an Assistant DPO to the team, which is now composed of three persons, the Data Protection Officer (DPO), the Associate DPO and the Assistant DPO.

The Office has been involved in 256 meetings in its capacity to provide guidance and advice on an array of activities with an impact over the processing of personal data, being 21 of them with externals, mostly related to the DPO network or the EDPS.

The Data Protection Office has received over 242 requests for advice, which is an increase of 86 % compared to the previous year.

During 2019, the DPO has received 52 new records of processing operations (previously called notifications) for consultation and advice, which are in different stages of completion. In 2019, the DPO has handled a total of 82 records in 2019. Out of these 82 records of processing operations, 31 have been completed, and 58 remain pending⁽¹³⁾. There has been an increase of 244 % in finalised records. However, there has been also an increase of 41 % in records pending for closure due to the increase in records submission and overall tasks of the office.

Highlights: Data protection in 2019

The DPO Office has been actively involved in the process of implementation of ETIAS regulation. The DPO has been on a regular basis advising the ETIAS task force on the application of the data protection requirements in ETIAS and has been requested to provide input and comments to variety of documents concerning ETIAS (including draft implementing and delegated acts prepared by the Commission). The EDPS has shown particular interest in the ETIAS topic and has decided to hold regular meetings with Frontex and eu-LISA on the implementation of data protection in ETIAS.

In addition, in order to expand the data processing activities of PeDRA and to speed up the cooperation with Eurojust, a change of the 2015 Management Board Decision on the processing of personal data from joint oper-

⁽¹³⁾ Records labelled as 'pending' remain in the hands of different stakeholders, i.e. some are pending on the DPO's side for the review and comments. Others were commented and are pending on the controllers' side for adapting the record in accordance to the comments received.

ations, pilot projects, rapid border interventions and migration management support teams was required. The DPO proposed a first draft that was thoroughly commented by the EU Commission and Member States. A specific workshop with national experts was held, paying particular attention to the issue of joint controllership between the Agency and the Member States of the data collected in joint operations. Regrettably, a second draft was not adopted by the Management Board due to the imminent entry into force of the EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 in December 2019.

As an outcome of the entry into force of the EBCG regulation, for first time in the history of the Agency the operational plans were consulted to include data protection requirements, mainly directed at allocation of the data protection responsibility between the Member States and the Agency and to enable international data transfers of administrative data with third countries on which territory the Agency has deployed team members.

There has been an increase in data subject access requests handled by the Office. In particular, one resulted in a positive hit and all data related to the requester had to be provided, including internal communication related to the data subject. Likewise, with the entry into force of the new Data Protection Regulation, there is the obligation to communicate personal data breaches to the EDPS.

DPO has raised awareness, in particular through newcomers' training. In addition, to reinforce the knowledge level of the staff and to respond to particular needs of the units, ad-hoc trainings tailor-made for specific needs have been delivered (two sessions for Human Resources, two sessions for Training unit and one session to External and International Relations unit).

The DPO hosted the EDPS twice at Frontex headquarters, and met twice with them in Brussels with the aim of discussing the Management Board Decision on operational personal data and ETIAS.

Due to the new obligations set by the new data protection regulation, DPO has issued new templates for records of processing operations with guidelines on how to fill them in, a template for compliance checks, a template for threshold assessments and another template for DPIAs. Consequently, the DPO handled 31 compliance checks, two thresholds assessments and three DPIAs. Equally, the DPO created draft clauses for those cases where international data transfers are required.

The DPO received five data subject requests that were answered within the legal time frame, two of which required followed up and was involved in the handling of three data breaches. The DPO was asked to open an internal investigation concerning an alleged violation of privacy of staff. The investigation concluded with a clearing answer.

DPO carried out an inventory of data processing activities conducted in Frontex which resulted in the identification of 106 processing operations over personal data. There are 70 records of processing operations in the public register.

The entry into force on 11 December 2018 of the new data protection regulation marked a shift in the way data protection is handled within the Agency. Equally, the entry into force of the EBCG regulation had a great impact in the activities conducted by the DPO. In relation to the entry into force of the new EBCG regulation, its impact can be seen in a new annex on data protection requirements included in the operational plans of all joint operations. The annex has two versions: one facilitating the transmission of personal data on those operations that take place outside of the territory of the EU; the other version is included in regular joint operations, defining the data protection responsibilities between the Agency and the host Member States.

2.13. Governance

Finance and corporate services

Highlights: Finance and corporate services in 2019

From a financial management perspective, BFCS (budget, finance and corporate services) contributed to achieving efficiency gains in 2019 by continuing the implementation of the simplified grant scheme. For comparison, the number of grants awarded in 2018 was 499 whereas in 2019 only 361. Budget management and financial

governance contributed to keeping up Agency's full-scale operations through the verification of 2,872 unique commitments amounting to a close to EUR 430 million (budget 2019 and anticipated budget 2020).

Another significant BFCS's achievement in 2019 was the opening for use of three additional elevator shafts and four fully furnished office floors (5,881 sqm, 26 % of total Agency's office space), with 280 new workstations. Building reconstruction, aimed at increasing the number of workplaces and improving accessibility, was in progress and the right of first refusal was lifted with regard to three floors. Temporary facilities were procured for the recruitment of the standing corps. Continued support was provided to existing staff, newcomers and contractors throughout the year, amounting to more than 900 workstations being managed at the end of 2019. Each newcomer was provided with a stationery set. Additionally, in order to better manage the stock of office supplies and the use of storage rooms, a pilot project of e-shop for stationery was launched. As part of caring for the staff wellbeing and facilities uninterrupted operation of the canteen, kitchenettes and cleaning services were guaranteed.

More than 550 reimbursement claims related to public transport and health and safety were processed. Also, the necessary repair and maintenance programs of both buildings' facilities were ensured. Three service cars were purchased for Frontex liaison officers. At year's end the corporate services were providing administrative support to 15 FLOs and EURTF Catania.

To facilitate the growing cooperation and exchange with external stakeholders nearly 6,100 meetings were supported with more than 18,000 visitors registered. Over 5,600 parcels and letters were handled. Effective support was provided to the expatriate staff, including direct assistance in almost 1,700 cases and handling of more than 130 claims for VAT and excise tax reimbursement. Over 70 expatriate services information mailings were sent for the use of all staff.

BFCS enabled all Agency's entities to perform duties related to travel with over 4,500 mission orders processed, followed by a similar amount of claims. Under a new contract the travel Agency supports Frontex from its own premises and the space formerly used for the implant office could be assigned to Frontex staff making a further efficiency gain in office space use.

On 28 May, Frontex organised the next European border and coast guard day. The event was held in a big conference centre in Arłamów (South-Eastern Poland, near the Polish-Ukrainian border). BFCS provided transportation facilities, accommodation and other logistics for the guests, assisted with on-site coordination of activities and delivered a range of back-office support.

Human resources and security

Highlights: Human resources and security in 2019

- Successful management of all related HR activities, in particular considering the high number of new staff that joined the Agency, namely in areas of rights and entitlement of staff, learning and staff development (including extensive newcomers induction programme);
- Increased achievements in the area of recruitment, namely:
 - Launch of 65 new recruitment procedures, +16 % compared to the previous year;
 - Filling of 218 vacant posts (TAs, CAs and SNEs), including 16 posts of Directors, Heads of Units, Heads of Task Forces and Heads of Sectors, +17 % compared to the previous year;
- Organisation and administration of Frontex traineeship programme with 28 positions filled each intake (spring and autumn);
- Administration of Frontex Interims staff support with 40 positions filled during the year;
- Introduction of flexitime time management system;
- Reinforcement of HR sector with the recruitment of four new staff to keep the ratio HR staff vs. Frontex staff at the level of 5 %;
- Working arrangements on exchange of classified information with SAC countries negotiated and under process of finalisation;
- On the basis of a physical security risk assessment further securing of Spire B building, finalisation of reconstruction Spire B ground floor;
- On the basis of a physical security risk assessment, setting of security requirements for ETIAS offices, new headquarters and new Brussels liaison office;
- Establishment of briefing for handling of European Union classified information for all Frontex Staff and security briefing for newcomers;
 - Establishment of HEAT (hostile environment awareness training) training for Frontex staff.

Information and communication technology

Highlights: Information and communication technology in 2019

In 2019, based on the IAS audit on ICT governance and project management, ICT has developed the ICT Strategy 2020-2025 covering the implementation of the EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896. An ICT and information governance board was established on 9 November 2019 and the ICT register was established and integrated in the corporate risk register.

Evolution of the Frontex infrastructure is under study and needs will be covered by the Frontex cloud strategy. ICT security strategy is under development and in 2019 Disaster Recovery Site was activated.

Support of the further development of Frontex application for return (FAR) and Frontex application for return – return by scheduled flights (FAR RSF)

During 2019, the FAR charters application has been maintained and developed further with two new releases covering 81 new requirements. Major improvements covered strengthening personal data protection based on the European Data Protection Supervisor's recommendations, a tool for managing recommendations, a readmissions module in which readmission operations from Greece to Turkey are managed and coordinated and numerous functional and aesthetical changes are made to improve user experience.

In FAR scheduled flights, 28 new requirements were implemented in 2019. The number of new requirements was limited in 2019 due to the fact that the development of the new FAR scheduled flights software started in that year and therefore, most of the new requirements/features were assigned to the new software release (expected in 2020). Six new versions of the FAR module on scheduled flights were deployed, the latest one on 12 December 2019.

Eurosur: There were no new developments on Eurosur in 2019 nevertheless following the new Regulation this network must be maintained till new Eurosur communication network (ECN) deployment (2025). Action plan 2020 was prepared in order to modernise part of the network, to implement new security layers as well new equipment's for MS.

Delivery of data collection tool for vulnerability assessment: In 2019, Member States were granted access to the vulnerability assessment platform.

Delivery of analysis tools: In 2019, JORA evolution application development was finalised and roll out process was launched.

Opera evolution: At the end of 2019, the first batch of OPERA evolution was delivered. Development of synergies with ABNet is in progress to merge both tools as of 2021.

Delivery of Frontex Intranet MyFX: Implementation on Frontex intranet and document management system was finalised. The implementation covered internal communication features, social features as well as business workflows and case management solutions for PAD, contract management etc.

ICT support performance statistics for 2019: Total number of service requests and incidents created in 2019: 28,193 which shows an increase of +2.75 % in comparison to 2018: 27,441.

Legal affairs

Highlights: Legal affairs in 2019

2019 has been a busy year for the legal services sector (LEG) of the Legal and Procurement Unit (LPU). LEG continued to be involved in an increasing amount of legal issues connected to procurement procedures and contract management issues.

LEG also became increasingly busy in its support to core business practitioners (e.g. regarding border management/justice and home affairs/Schengen acquis). For instance, in the light of increasing numbers of requests for legal support) LEG has further developed its dedicated internal team providing legal support to the Agency's various operational divisions/units, and entities. LEG continued to be highly active in reviewing and contributing to the drafting and signature of various operational plans, memoranda of understanding on the deployment of Frontex liaison officers to Member States and to third countries, status agreements with multiple third countries (e.g. Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia), supporting the establishment of the ETIAS Central Unit.

Furthermore, again in light of continuously increasing number of requests for legal support, LEG further developed its dedicated internal team providing legal support to the Agency's non-operational divisions/units, and entities. As such, LEG continued to be highly active in carrying out quality control reviews of internal decision-making processes (e.g. legally reviewing draft Executive Director's and Management Board Decisions),

other MB-related work, reviewing detailed amendments to the existing lease for office space in the Warsaw Spire building, assisting with the extension of the free loan agreement for the EURTF premises in Catania, supporting the implementation of the headquarters agreement between the Republic of Poland and Frontex, taking over the IRMA platform from the European Commission, concluding lightweight arrangements for the exchange of classified information with Schengen-associated countries, and more.

Moreover, in 2019 LEG organised a LEGNET meeting for national border management officers/lawyers and for six months successfully chaired the Interagency Legal Network (IALN) for EU agency and joint undertaking lawyers.

In addition, LEG continued to be supporting ICO in the handling of complaints lodged against Frontex with the European Ombudsman (with no findings of maladministration).

Furthermore, LEG continued to successfully represent Frontex in court cases both before the EU general court and national courts. In this sense, LEG has achieved a 100 % success rate with all court cases won between 2017 and 2019, and also recovered costs incurred in litigation proceedings.

The transparency office within the LPU remained charged with processing a continuously increasing amount of applications for PAD (thereby also managing sensitive operational data). Procurement sector's achievements in 2019 are included at point 4.4 of this annual report.

2.14. Inspection and control

Summary

Inspection and Control Office

Highlights: Inspection and Control Office in 2019

As regards the **audit liaison function**, the office organised nine audits and two follow-up audits which included: preparation of audit visits, collection of documents prior to and after the visit, scheduling interviews and coordinating inputs into audit questionnaires and surveys. As a follow-up of each audit visit, the office coordinated adversarial procedures and collection of Agency's comments and replies to both draft and final audit reports, and whenever necessary the office organised the translation of Agency's official replies.

The office coordinated the Agency's input into the revision of the strategic internal audit plan (SIAP) 2019–2020. All activities were performed in a timely manner, safeguarding the good, professional relationship of the Agency with the auditing institutions.

The office enabled the auditors to give the overall assurance on the functioning of the Agency's operations and on the legality and regularity of its transactions. As a result, the office with its audit liaison function contributed to the improvement of the Agency's internal control framework.

In 2019, a remarkable effort was made to increase the **awareness** of the staff **on fraud-related matters** and to strengthen the ethical culture in the Agency aiming at decreasing risks related to irregularities or fraud. Together with learning and development team, the e-learning course on ethics was developed and introduced to staff in September 2019 and 74 % of staff finalised the training in 2019. The **guidelines on whistleblowing** were adopted by the Management Board in July 2019. The results of the annual anti-fraud quiz showed an increase in staff awareness on the fraud-related matters as well as an increase in communication from managers on ethical issues. As a result of those activities, an improvement was noticed in the efficiency and level of controls in the field of ethics and integrity, as showed in the internal control framework assessment report 2019

Another significant achievement in 2019 was done in the area of **contract management**. Together with the procurement sector, the proposal was made to establish a centralised contract management team and it was presented to the managers and the Executive Director. The proposal was accepted and an ED decision on establishing the centralised contract management team was adopted in January 2020.

With regard to **programming and reporting activities**, during 2019 progress was made in this area, as the single programming document was streamlined, following the strategic framework developed by the Agency and focusing on striking the right balance between the level of information provided and disclosing all required information as defined in the legal framework of the Agency.

In relation to the **reporting activities**, apart from the timely adoption of the consolidated annual activity report 2018, ICO initiated regular reporting to stakeholders on the key performance indicators at corporate level as defined in the programming document 2019–2021. This activity will be consolidated during 2020.

The area of **ex-post controls** continued its development from its introduction as part of inspection and control office responsibilities. All three ex-posts controls initiated in 2018 were closed and during 2019 four more were initiated together with an evaluation of the pilot project implemented by Estonia and Portugal – the control of the calculation method and the accuracy of the unit costs established by the two Member States for aircraft and coastal patrol vessel costs.

2.15. Frontex projects

ETIAS/Interoperability Task Force

During 2019, ETIAS and the interoperability programme board was established and endorsed the composition of the steering committee of the project for setting up of the ETIAS Central Unit. A high-level planning was developed for the timeline of the project, recruitment strategy as well as preparation of the premises for the ETIAS Central Unit. Internal brainstorming day took place to raise awareness about the project and start collaborations with internal stakeholders.

In its two meetings, the programme board reviewed the progress of the setup of the ETIAS Central Unit and of the access to the SIS II project.

The ETIAS and Interoperability Task Force supported the European Commission in the development of delegated and implementing acts through a provision of comments and attendance at the smart borders committee and ETIAS expert groups. In order to promote standardisation of processes, procedures and practices between ETIAS Central Unit, Europol and ETIAS national units, a number of meetings were organised for the Member States in close cooperation with the European Commission, eu-LISA and Europol to discuss issues related to the operating models, the user profiles, the appeal procedure and the status of the setup of the National Units in the MS.

Data protection issues were addressed together with EDPS and the eu-LISA and the work on the subject is to continue in 2020. Additionally, ETIAS and Interoperability Task Force has been assigned with the development of carriers assistance centre for ETIAS and EES and will continue to work towards successful implementation of this new task.

At the end of 2019, the ETIAS and Interoperability Task Force team consisted of six staff members.

Highlights: ETIAS and interoperability task force in 2019

Overall planning: A high-level project plan including the most important work streams of the project has been produced.

Governance: the project for the setting up of the Central Unit is part of the ETIAS and Interoperability programme, together with the Central Repository for Reporting and Statistics (CRRS), Multiple Identity Detection (MID) and Access to Schengen Information System (SIS) II projects. ETIAS and Interoperability programme board has met twice in 2019 and has endorsed the composition of the steering committees, discussed the progress of the projects and gave direction for their continuation.

International cooperation: ETIAS task force has established cooperation with relevant authorities in the USA and Canada responsible for developing and running electronic system for travel authorisation (United States) ESTA/ETA systems, to share knowledge and benefit from their experience

Support of external stakeholders: ETIAS and Interoperability Task Force and other entities in the Agency continued supporting the European Commission in the development of the delegated and implementing acts by producing valuable contributions and comments to the proposed texts and by attending meetings of various expert groups, such as: the smart borders committee, ETIAS expert group and the EES/ETIAS advisory group.

The Task Force also contributed to the smooth cooperation between the agencies involved in ETIAS, by participating in regular coordination meetings aiming at discussing salient issues, the status of ongoing activities, achieved progress and timeline of ETIAS implementation.

The Task Force organised in 2019 three meetings for Member States in collaboration with the European Commission, eu-LISA and Europol. The meetings served as a platform for sharing knowledge and exchanging best

practices with the focus on organisational and operational issues. Additionally, the aim of the meetings was to harmonise as much as possible processes, procedures and practices used by ETIAS National Units and ETIAS Central Unit.

Carriers assistance centre: The Task Force has been assigned with development of the carriers assistance centre at Frontex for EES and ETIAS systems and started the consultation with eu-LISA, carriers and carriers organisations.

Data Protection: The Agency was cooperating closely with EDPS and eu-LISA in order to define an approach for the elicitation of the data protection requirements and further clarify roles and responsibilities of the different partners in that area.

Increase of knowledge and awareness of the ETIAS regulation and the ETIAS Central Unit among internal and external stakeholders: The Task Force organised a brainstorming day for internal stakeholders to discuss matters, such as: operations of the Central Unit, compliance with ETIAS regulation and other regulations (e.g. EU institutions data protection regulation) and needed resources. The aim of the event was to raise awareness and to kick off bilateral and multilateral collaborations with respective internal stakeholders, to define the needs and to assess the duration and resources required for successful accomplishment of tasks related to the set up of the ETIAS Central Unit.

The task force also took part in the international border police conference in Warsaw where presentations about ETIAS were carried out as a side event. Informative leaflets were also prepared for that occasion and distributed widely among the conference participants.

Staffing of the Task Force and the Central Unit: ETIAS Task Force team consisted of six staff members at the end of 2019. The recruitment strategy and the high-level planning for the recruitment of staff for 2020 and 2021 were defined in collaboration with the human resources and security unit, and this planning is integrated in the broader recruitment goals of Frontex.

Premises of the ETIAS Central Unit: The high-level planning of the activities necessary for the timely rental and the preparation of the premises of the ETIAS Central Unit (until the new headquarters building becomes available) has been drawn in collaboration with the Task Force in charge of the new building project. Market survey activities have been launched in order to find suitable candidate buildings for the ETIAS Central Unit.

New premises Task Force

Highlights: new premises Task Force

Frontex permanent premises

Following the transfer to the Agency of the plot of land on Raclawicka Street 132b, a governance framework and the Frontex corporate real estate strategy were established and validated by the Project Board.

Under the governance framework, a three-member Management Board Advisory Group (MBAG) was established. Task Force BUILD initiated a number of preparatory consultancies, investigating: the legal aspects of plot zoning and the building permit application; future workplace modalities; contractual and financial aspects of the investment and the performance requirements of the future headquarters.

A list was drafted of the urban regulations applicable for a construction permit application. Preliminary building parameters (footprint, height, surface) were ascertained and validated by the project board.

ETIAS Central Unit premises/alternative office facilities (AOF)

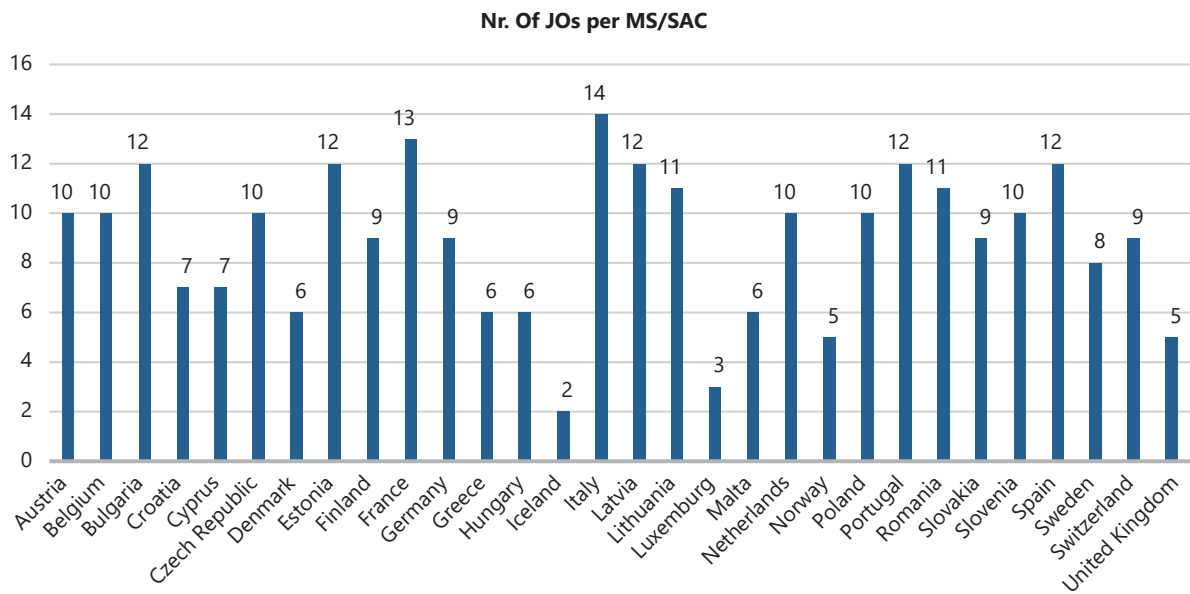
The Frontex corporate real estate strategy 2019–2024 with addendum was finalised and accepted by the European Commission. Following the central unit's move into the permanent premises in 2024, the vacated building is to become the Agency's AOF as well as a training centre and debriefing space for standing corps category 1 staff. An early information notification on the planned ETIAS CU/AOF premises was submitted to budgetary authority on 19 December 2019.

3. Results and progress towards the achievement of operational objectives of Frontex

3.1. Operational indicators

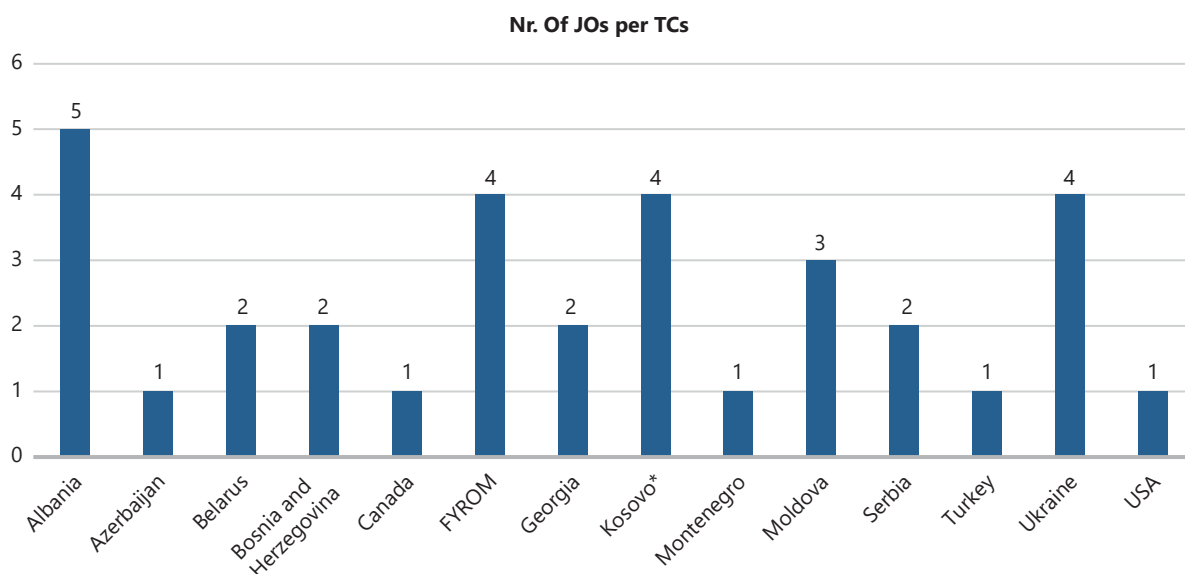
Description of operational indicator	In 2019, the number of Member States participating in operational activities should remain at the same level as in 2018.
Target	A total of 30 Member States and Schengen associated countries participated in operational activities in 2019.

Graph 4 – Number of JOs per MS/SAC



The overview above shows that during 2019, all Member States and Schengen associated countries participated in at least one joint operation. In that respect the target was achieved.

Graph 5 – Number of JO per third countries



In 2019, a total of 14 third countries at least once participated in Frontex operations. Albania was the most active third Country and participated in five joint operations, followed by Ukraine (four), Kosovo⁽¹⁴⁾(four) and North Macedonia (four). USA participated as a third country in JO Minerva 2019 (based on the bi-lateral agreement with Spain)

Graph 6 – Participation* of Member States in return operations by charter flights – 2019

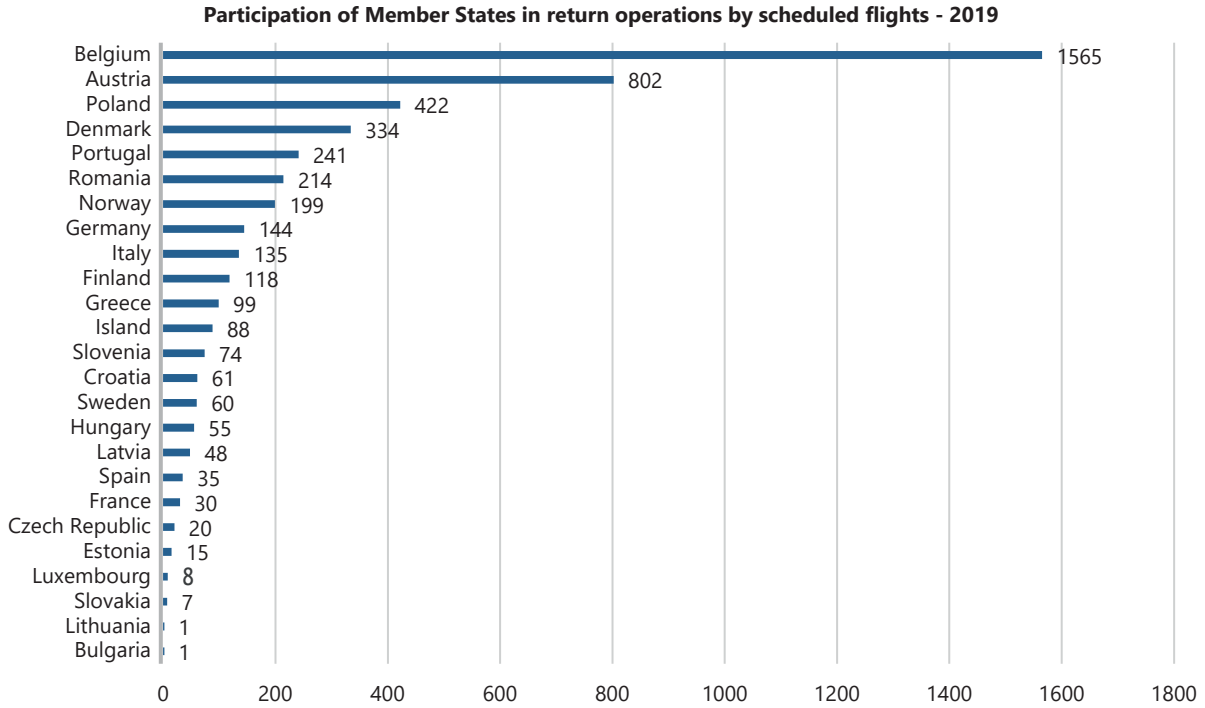


*both as organising as well as participating Member States

In 2019, 23 Member States took part as either an organiser or a participant in return operations coordinated and co-financed by Frontex. Overall, in 2019, Member States handed over 10,903 returnees and reached 40 third countries of return. In comparison with 2018, both the number of return operations and third country nationals returned decreased by 4 % and 11 % respectively.

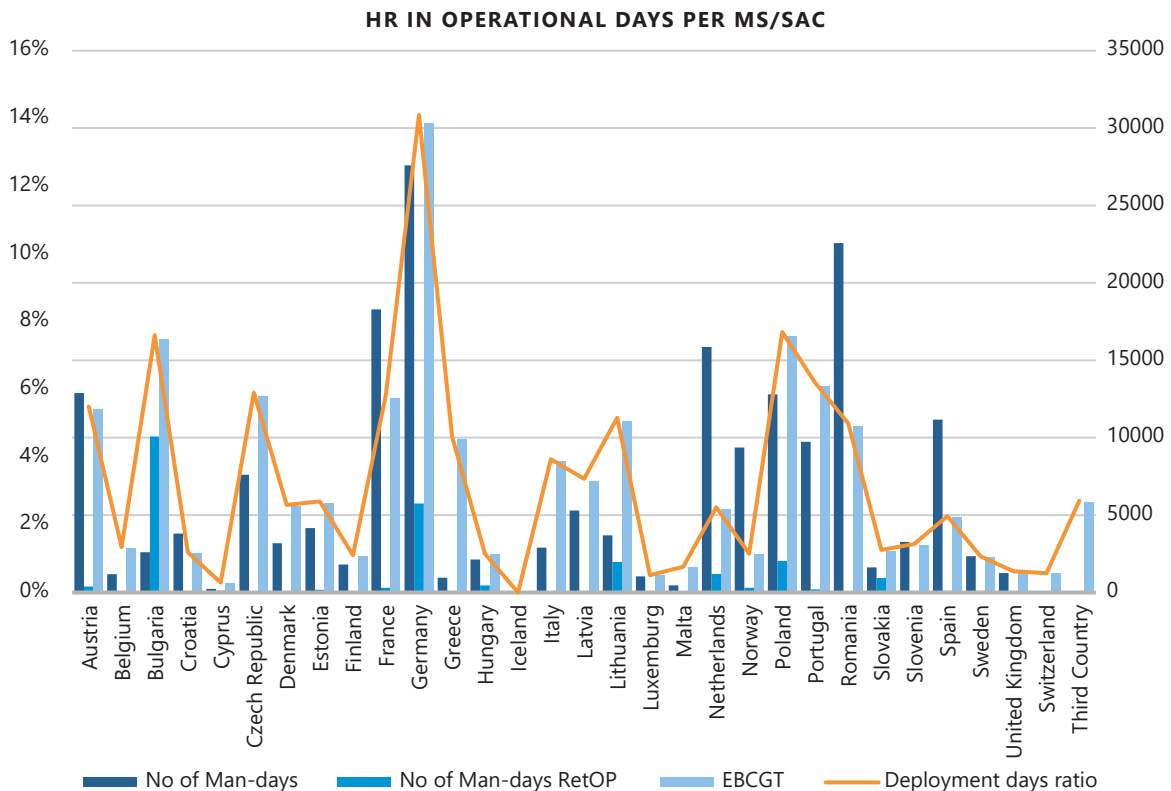
⁽¹⁴⁾ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Graph 7 – Participation of Member States in return operations by scheduled flights – 2019



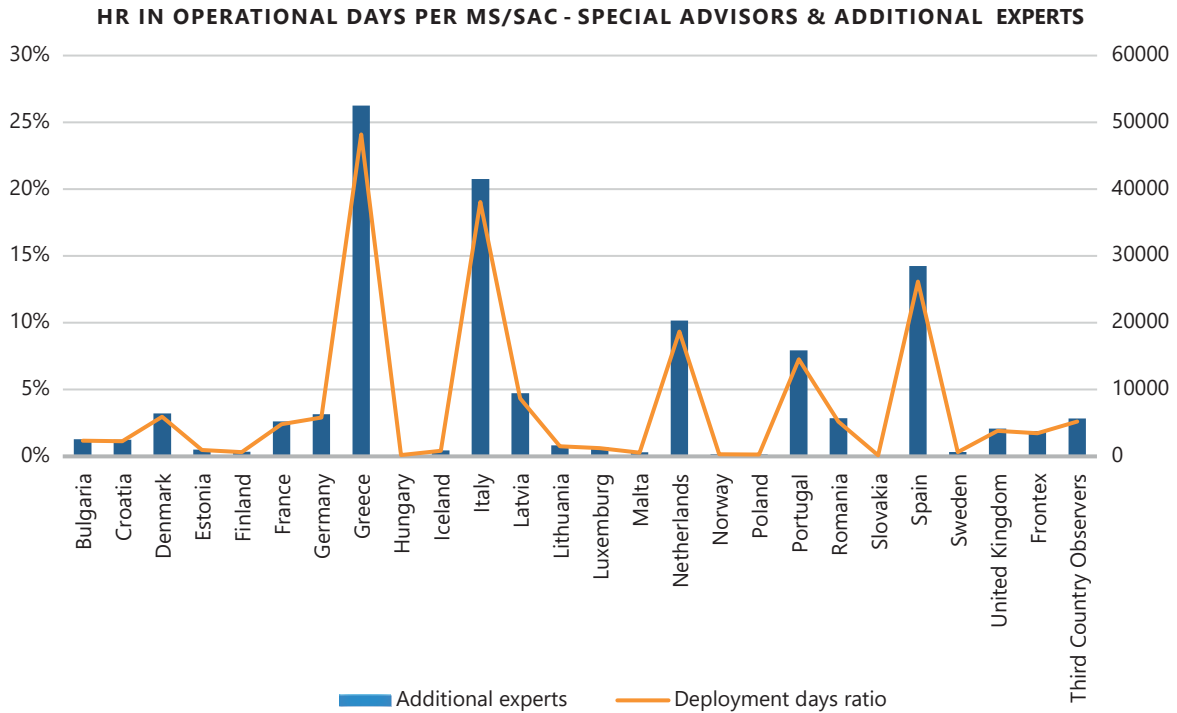
In 2019, 25 Member States carried out returns by scheduled flights with Frontex support returning 4,776 third-country nationals to 81 destinations, including 34 new countries of return. Among the returnees, 893 were escorted, 3,728 unescorted and 155 departed voluntarily. The Agency also managed to increase the number of partner airlines by 11 during the year.

Graph 8 – HR in operational days per MS/SAC



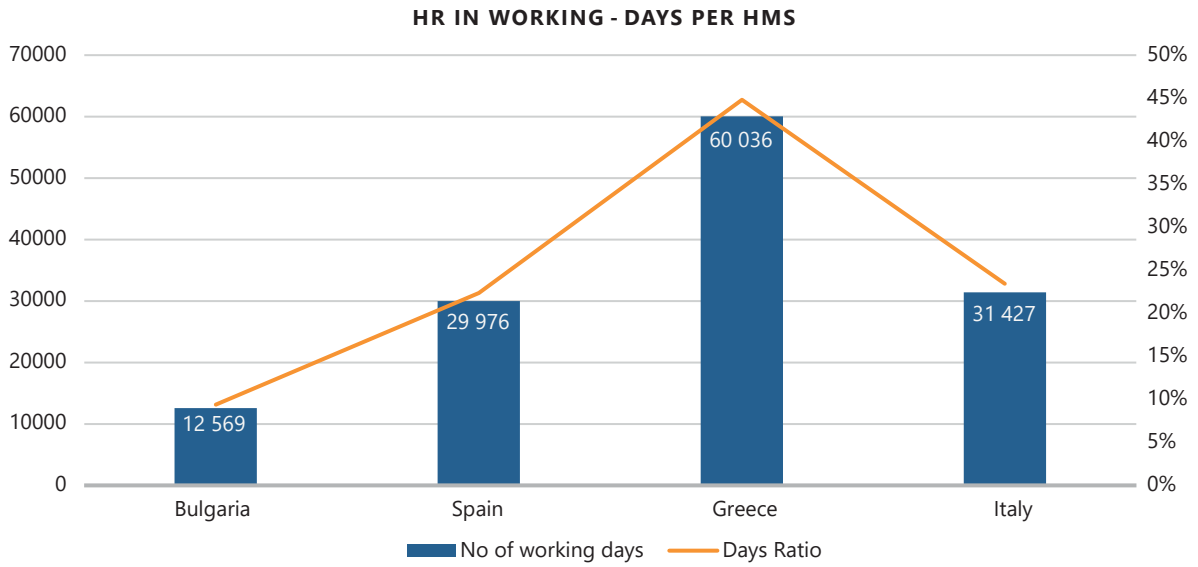
In terms of deployment of the European Border and Coast Guard team members and return pools experts, the top three MS contributing with the highest number of working days was Germany, Poland and Bulgaria. The host Member States (Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Spain) contributed to more than 18% to the overall number of EBCGT & return pools working days of experts' deployed in Frontex's operations. Out of 30 MS/SAC countries, 9 contributed to more than 10,000 working days in this category of deployments profiles. The total contribution in this category amounted to 215,157 working days.

Graph 9 – HR in operational days per MS/SAC – special advisors, and additional experts



The above chart on special advisors and additional experts deployed in operational activities (joint operations) needs to be read together with the one below as this shows that two hosting Member States (Greece and Italy) are still the main providers of human resources in joint operations. In terms of special advisors and additional experts, Greece and Italy were followed by Spain, the Netherlands and Portugal. In comparison to 2018, there was a significant increase in the contributions provided in working days in 4 out of 5 of the top Member States (Portugal providing lower contribution compared to 2018). Similarly to 2018, there is an apparent imbalance in contributions provided from other Members States. Out of 24 MS/SAC countries, the top five countries' contribution amounts to almost 73 % of the overall number of working days in this category.

Graph 10 – HR in working days per host Member State

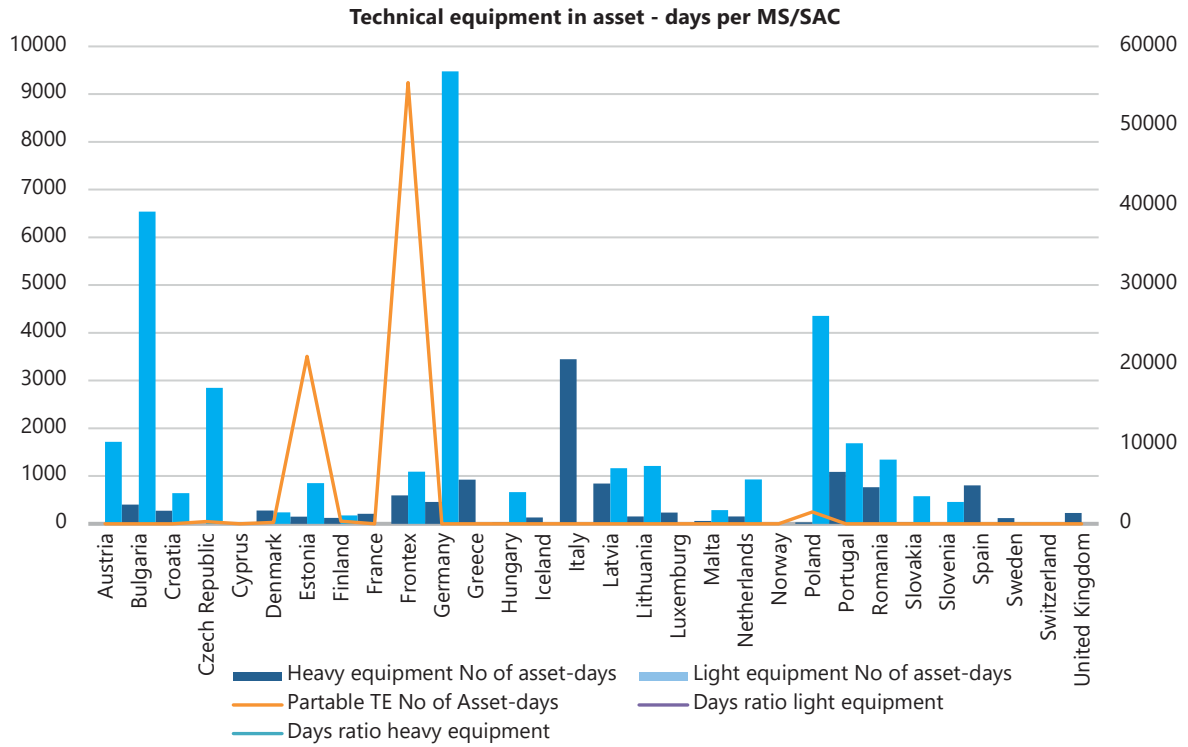


The high level of contribution from host Member States can also be seen in the internal deployments of human resources (in working days) deployed in Frontex operations. Overall, the internal deployments of host Member States amount to almost 31 % of overall number of working days of human resources deployed in 2019.

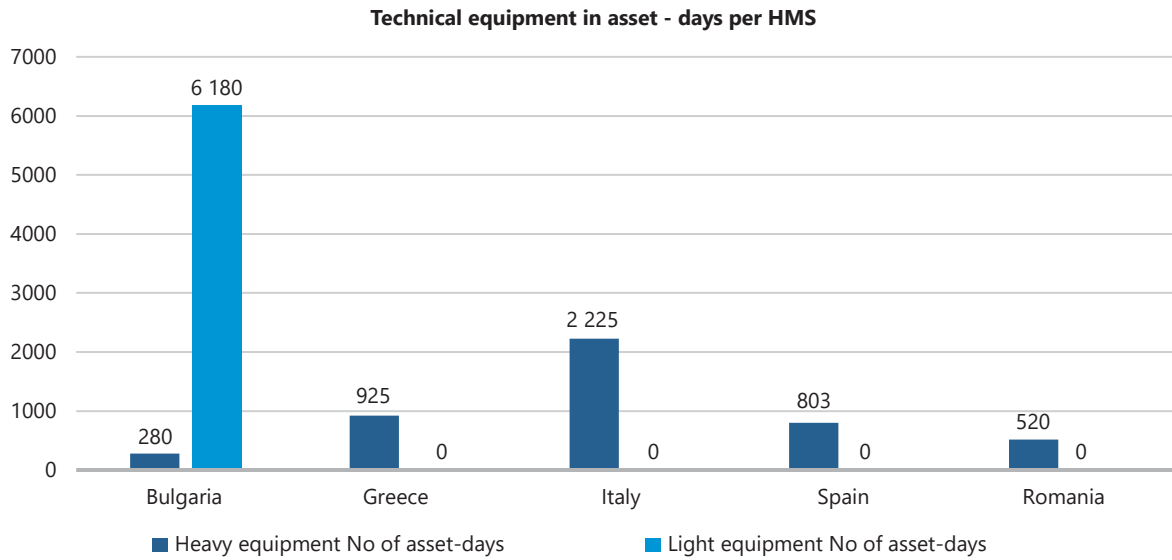
As regards the deployment of technical equipment, the same trend from 2018 can be identified. In 2019, the contributions from participating Member States have outpaced the level of contributions from hosting Member States. At the current stage and based on the tools at the full disposal of the Agency (own equipment), but also considering the level of resource utilisation in the participating Member States, a full replacement of resources provided by the hosting Member State is not achievable. In terms of light equipment, Germany contributed with the biggest number of asset days amounting to over 26 % of the overall contributions in this category.

In 2019, Frontex provided over 70 % of asset day contribution in terms of portable light technical equipment (CO2 detectors, heartbeat detectors and other small equipment) followed by Estonia, which contributed almost 27 % towards the deployment of portable technical equipment. On the other hand, Italy provided the highest contribution in terms of heavy technical equipment.

Graph 11 – TE in asset days per MS/SAC



Graph 12 – TE in asset days per host Member State



Financial indicators

Description of indicator	Provision of budget-related and financial services; Provision of miscellaneous corporate services including travel services;
Target	Prepared and submitted timely; monitoring provided; compliance with the regulatory framework; high level of satisfaction

Budget, planning, monitoring, coordinating and reporting on provisional and voted budget was efficiently performed. With regard to the discharge procedure, the support to external auditors was provided and all replies to the external auditors were timely submitted. The discharge procedure was properly prepared, all mandatory and additionally requested documents were submitted to the discharge authorities on time.

Regarding provision of financial services, the compliance with the regulatory framework was ensured. All transactions were timely introduced into ABAC and the revenue was timely collected. The decentralised financial initiation was supported by the unit in complex areas. For the part of financial initiation centralised in BFCS 6800 payments and compensation payments were executed, and over 110 recovery orders initiated. All commitment transactions as well as all payment transactions exceeding EUR 5,000 threshold were verified.'

The end-of-year procedure was steered and implemented under the guidance of the financial verifiers without any delays.

The unit also provided tailor-made training on ABAC and the expenditure lifecycle, the satisfaction level is very satisfactory:

- Three iterations of expenditure life cycle trainings (3hrs each)
- Three iterations of ABAC for financial initiators (Length - 2 days each)
- 23 individual coaching (newly nominated Authorising Officers (up to 3 hours each)

The unit has also provided ad hoc advice on financial matters and ABAC transactions (daily ad hoc solving of ABAC issues with 99 % of all cases solved in house without necessity to contact EC ABAC helpdesk)

Facility management enabled three elevator shafts and equipped four fully furnished new or reconstructed office floors (5,881 sqm, 26 % of total Agency's office space) with 280 new workstations. More than 900 workstations were managed at year's end. At the end of the year temporary facilities (16 rooms) were procured for the recruitment of the standing corps. Other relevant outputs delivered:

- Administrative support for meetings and conferences allowed for the organisation of 6,080 meetings.
- Reception registered 18,110 visitors and handled 5,875 parcels. Three service cars were purchased for FLOs. At the year's end corporate services provided administrative support to 15 FLOs and EURTF Catania.
- Office supplies were timely provided to all staff, including 190 sets of office supplies provided to newcomers, 553 claims for reimbursement related to public transport and to health and safety were processed along with 143 claims related to participation in meetings. 87 translations were ordered from CdT. Administrative ad-hoc support on several occasions was safeguarded.
- Expatriate services provided assistance in 1,699 cases, processed 110 claims for VAT and 21 for excise tax reimbursement and sent 72 info mailings for the use of all staff.
- Efficient management of corporate travel including the financial aspects of planning, managing and reimbursement of mission costs to staff members and STMs was ensured with 4,552 mission orders processed, followed by a similar amount of claims.
- Efficient management of corporate travel including the financial aspects of planning, managing and reimbursement of mission costs to staff members and STMs was ensured with 4,552 mission orders processed, followed by a similar amount of claims.
- Booking of missions and reimbursements was done in a timely manner. Thanks to the efficient management of bonus programmes, the negotiated discounts for flight tickets in 2019 were between 5–25 % depending on the bonus programmes with airlines.

3.2. Key conclusions on management and internal control

Frontex conducts its operations in compliance with the applicable laws and regulations, working in an open and transparent manner and meeting the expected high level of professional and ethical standards.

Frontex adopted a set of components (5) with corresponding principles (17) that form the internal control framework. This is based on international good practice and aims at ensuring the achievement of its objectives. The financial regulation requires that the organisational structure and the internal control systems used for the implementation of the budget are set up in accordance with such standards.

In 2019, an ongoing review of the components and principles of the internal control framework and organisational performance provided reasonable assurance to Frontex's management as to the level of compliance with all internal controls, on the correct functioning of the systems in place and on organisational performance. The reviews focused on the main strengths and the potential weaknesses of the systems in place and enabled improvement actions.

In 2019, Frontex took further measures to improve the efficiency of its internal control framework. Such measures need to be put in perspective with the ongoing implementation of the new and extended mandate, the significant increase in staff and the resulting overhaul of the organisational structure. Those undertakings are certainly challenging the steadfast implementation of control measures due to the resulting extension of the organisational 'learning curve'.

People management (recruitment, staff allocation and mobility) and operational structure were seen for 2019 as requiring major improvements. Following the reorganisation of the Frontex structure adopted and revised by the Management Board from June 2017 to February 2019, both areas were covered by tailored initiatives aimed at increasing effectiveness of the controls. Results have been obtained along 2019 in these areas.

In addition, Frontex has systematically examined the available control results and indicators, including those aimed at supervising entities to which it has entrusted budget implementation tasks, as well as the observations and recommendations issued by the Internal Audit Service and the European Court of Auditors. These elements have been assessed to determine their impact on the management's assurance as regards the achievement of control objectives.

In conclusion, Frontex management has reasonable assurance that Frontex has continued to implement a comprehensive system of internal controls, performance and results-oriented management embedding risk management and ensuring a proportional and balanced approach to compliance and effectiveness of internal procedures and systems. The necessary improvements and reinforcements have been implemented and the Executive Director, in his capacity as the Authorising Officer, has signed the Declaration of Assurance.

Nevertheless, Frontex recognises that given the substantial increase in the resources (human and financial) and the implementation of the extended tasks and responsibilities that are assigned to Frontex, efforts to further strengthen the internal control system must be further enhanced in 2020.

4. Budgetary and financial management

All expenditure is implemented in the form of centralised management. As a general rule, the Agency uses the financial circuit model 3 'decentralised circuit with central counterweight', where the operational initiation and verification functions, as well as the financial initiation function, are executed within each division. The ex-ante financial verification is centrally performed by the Financial Services within the Budget, Financial and Corporate Services Unit under Corporate Governance.

Four different circuits have been identified in Frontex: a standard circuit, a simplified circuit for commitments, a simplified circuit for payments and a mission circuit as explained below:

- For commitments below EUR 5,000, a simplified circuit is followed, where the operational verification function is performed by the authorising officer (by delegation or by sub-delegation).
- For payments below EUR 5,000, a simplified circuit is followed, where both operational and financial verification functions are performed by the authorising officer (by delegation or by sub-delegation).
- For missions, the operational and financial initiation function is performed centrally by the staff in the Corporate Travel Services within Budget, Financial and Corporate Services Unit; the operational and financial verification functions are performed by the relevant authorising officer (by delegation or sub-delegation).
- For all remaining transactions a standard circuit is followed where the functions of operational verification, financial verification and the functions of the authorising officer (or authorising officer by delegation or sub-delegation) are separated.

The system of delegations and deputising in Frontex respects the following principles:

- Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director are entitled to sign all transactions for all amounts and all budget lines.
- Delegations are granted by the Executive Director to: division directors and heads of entities outside divisions. The delegated authorising officers may propose to further sub-delegate to the heads of units, heads of sectors and other selected staff. The sub-delegation is in force when countersigned by the Executive Director. For commitment and payment transactions different financial thresholds apply to these delegations and sub-delegations depending on the level of responsibility of the delegated or sub-delegated AO (as a general rule: Director – EUR 5m, for the heads of unit – EUR 500k, for heads of sector – EUR 200k, for team leaders EUR 50k). At the end of 2019 the total number of delegations of authorising officers' powers was 9 and sub-delegations 62.
- Deputising: as a general rule, deputising is performed downwards; which means that the heads of units replace directors and that heads of sectors replace heads of units; when heads of sectors are absent, they are replaced by team leaders. In all cases when deputising for an AO by delegation or sub-delegated, the rights of the absent actor are given to the 'acting' AO by delegation or sub-delegation.

4.1. Implementation of appropriations

Table 6 - Summary overview of 2019 implementation per fund source

Fund source	Budget (EUR)	Total commitments (EUR)		Total Payments (EUR)	
C1 Regular budget	330 107 000	329 570 867	100 %	228 209 270	69 %
C4 Internal assigned revenue	1 509 308	387 170	26 %	339 085	22 %
C5 Internal assigned revenue carry over	1 639 115	1 638 399	100 %	973 052	59 %
C8 Automatic carry over	83 365 415	77 208 766	93 %	77 208 766	93 %
Sub-total:	416 620 838	408 805 202	98 %	306 730 173	74 %
R0 Earmarked expenditure	29 624 217	20 183 995	68 %	10 784 777	36 %
Total:	446 245 055	428 989 197		317 514 950	

The initial adopted budget of EUR 333.3 million was amended one time, resulting in the final budget of EUR 330.1 million.

In 2019, 100 % of the C1 appropriations were committed and 69 % were paid. Committed but not yet paid appropriations of EUR 102 million from 2019 budget were carried forward to 2020 (31 %). These commitments will be paid during 2020 with the final delivery of the goods or services or the completion of operational activities. Significant amount of the funds carried forward (EUR 89.4 million (88 %) were related to title 3 of the budget – ‘Operational expenditure’ with EUR 43.4 for joint operations, EUR 15.2 million for return operations. EUR 11 million (11 %) of the funds that were carried forward concern Title 2 – ‘Administrative expenditure’, out of which EUR 8 million related to ICT contracts. The funds automatically carried over from 2018 amounted to EUR 83.4 million (29 %). At the end of December 2019, the payment level reached 93 %, with EUR 6.2 million what was not paid and had to be cancelled. 76 % of the cancellations came from Title 3 - EUR 2.9 million from joint operations, EUR 0.5 million from Frontex Situation Centre, EUR 0.5 million from European Centre for Returns.

Internal assigned revenue concerns the amounts reimbursed from the funds used from Frontex regular budget (C1) – voted by the budgetary Authority. Internal assigned revenue amounted to EUR 1.5 million (C4), 26 % was committed and the rest was carried over as C5 funds. Recovery orders which were carried over from 2018 (C5) amounted to EUR 1.6 million, 100 % was committed and no funds were to be cancelled.

Table 7 - Regular budget (C1) implementation per budgetary title

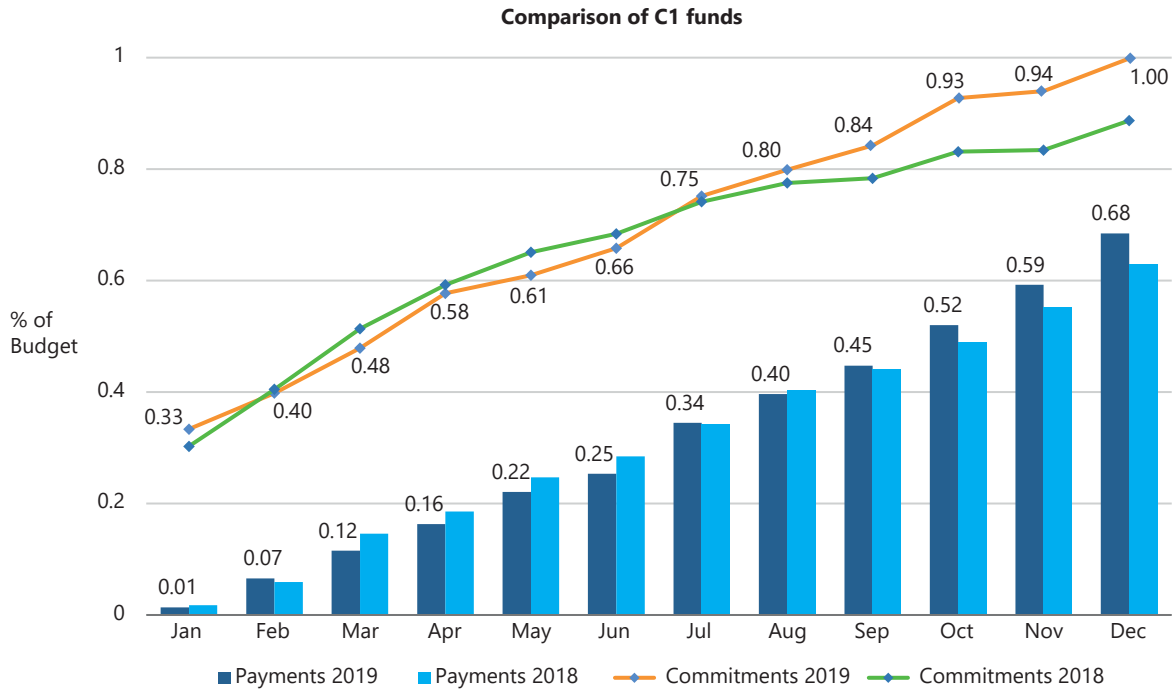
Fund source	Budget (EUR)	Total commitments (EUR)		Total Payments (EUR)	
	A	B	C = B/A	D	E=D/A
A - 1 Staff	49 780 514	49 732 100	100 %	48 763 644	98 %
A - 2 Other administrative expenditure	30 457 943	30 268 301	99 %	19 233 544	63 %
A - 3 Operational activities	249 868 543	249 570 467	100 %	160 212 082	64 %
	330 107 000	329 570 868	100 %	228 209 270	69 %

Table 8 - Performance comparison of the budgetary year 2019 versus 2018

	2019	2018
Commitments C1	100 %	98 %
Payments C1	69 %	70 %
Funds carried forward to the following year	31 %	29 %
Funds cancelled	0.2 %	1.6 %

The budget implementation was stable throughout 2019, as it was the case in 2018. The overall percentage level of commitments increased to 100 % when compared to 2018 and for the payments it decreased by one percent to 69 %. The percentage of funds carried forward from 2019 to 2020 is 31 %, and 0.16 % of the budget appropriations had to be cancelled.

Graph 13 - Comparison of C1 funds (commitments and payments) in 2019 and 2018.



4.2. Information on transfers and budget amendments

In the course of 2019 one amending budget was approved by the Management Board decreasing Frontex initial budget. The amending budget, adopted by the Management Board Decision 20/2019 of 20 August 2019, reduced the budget of the Agency by EUR 3.2 million. EUR 3 million were returned to the European Commission’s budget to cover the cost of the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN programme) and due to the need of accelerating the European Union return liaison officers network (EURLO programme) take over. EUR 0.2 million were returned to the Schengen associated countries, as their contribution is linked to the EU contribution, and therefore, by reducing one, the other should also be reduced.

Following the budget implementation reviews performed on a quarterly basis, nine budget transfers were approved by the Executive Director in 2019. Out of the nine transfers, during the end of the year process, two transfers were approved in December in order to ensure the best allocation and use of the resources as possible. In total, transfers amounted to EUR 52 million. In 2019, only nine budget transfers were approved following the implementation of quarterly budget reviews, compared to eight budget transfers in 2018 (EUR 34 million) and 17 transfers (EUR 37.3 m) in 2017.

The transfers in Title 1 were mainly redistribution of funds to increase allowances, where the initially foreseen amounts were not sufficient, to increase the funds for clerical services and for training. The transfers in Title 2 concerned mainly internal redistribution and additional funds related to ICT needs, furniture and other administrative costs. The transfers in Title 3 covered mainly the following needs:

- Internal transfer for return escort officers to be financed from field deployment;
- Increased needs for purchase and lease of own technical equipment;
- Additional contracts for aerial surveillance;
- Increase in return grants (for Germany at the end of the year).

Table 9 - Budget transfers in 2019

#	Description	Transaction number	Date	Title 1 - staff expenditure (EUR)	Title 2 - other administrative expenditure (EUR)	Title 3 - operational expenditure (EUR)
1	Transfer Decision N1	FRO.23710	14.02.2019	0	6 570 000	2 500 000
2	Transfer Decision N2	FRO.23761	17.03.2019	0	0	4 000 000
3	Transfer Decision N3	FRO.23822 FRO.23825	25.04.2019	216190	1 032 275	3 772 738
4	Transfer Decision N4	FRO.23850	25.05.2019	0	50 000	0
5	Transfer Decision N5	FRO.23887	22.07.2019	450 000	818 550	10 097 450
6	Transfer Decision N6	FRO.23972	08.10.2019	289 970	1 683 065	10 065 310
7	Transfer Decision N7	FRO.24034	29.11.2019	105 000	527 127	4 261 702
8	Transfer Decision N8	FRO.24124	16.12.2019	0	399 985	1 160 926
9	Transfer Decision N7	FRO.24203	18.12.2019	10 000	792 940	3 146 359

4.3 Implementation of appropriations from 2018 carried forward to 2019

The amount carried forward from 2018 to 2019 (C8 funds) amounted to EUR 83.4 million of which 93 % was paid. The remaining 7 % (EUR 6.2 million) had to be cancelled.

Table 10 - Implementation of appropriations carried from 2018 to 2019.

Title	Carried forward (EUR)	Total payments (EUR)		To be returned (EUR)
	A	D	E = D/A	
A – 1 Staff	757 195	394 470	52 %	362 725
A – 2 Other administrative expenditure	13 463 053	12 424 605	92 %	1 038 448
A – 3 Operational activities	69 145 167	64 389 693	93 %	4 755 474
	83 365 415	77 208 768	93 %	6 156 647

4.4. Procurement procedures

Milestones achieved

- launch and signature of the first contracts related to EBCG 2019/1896 (e.g. uniforms, media campaign, languages skills testing);
- for the implementation of the EBCG 2019/1896 a concept of joint procurement with Member States was prepared; the content of the future joint procurement agreement is now clearly defined and PROC is ready to enter into negotiations with any interested purchasing unit of MS border or coast guard authorities.
- development of the concept of the central contract management team (CCMT), was approved in January 2020;
- automation and decentralisation of the very low value procedure (NP1) with procurement keeping the verification role – in use since October 2019;
- successful development of new procurement log in Frontex intranet (MyFx) – in use since January 2020;
- further data population of contract management module in MYFx;

- launch of e-submission of procurement-related documents;
- strengthening of planning and monitoring of procurement procedures in the Agency (regular amendment exercises);
- timely signature of all contracts with 2019 budgeting;
- standard operating procedure for the participation of Frontex in interinstitutional tenders;
- standard operating procedure for complaints during procurement procedures;

Most important tenders

In 2019 several more elaborated operational tenders were processed, such as:

- Remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) for medium altitude long endurance maritime aerial surveillance (EUR 50 million; currently in evaluation phase);
- Purchase of technical equipment – mobile surveillance systems (EUR 28 million; awarded);
- Inter-institutional framework contract for aerial surveillance for border and coast guard function services for Frontex/EFCA (EUR 27 million, signed in 2019);
- framework contract for the supply of heartbeat detectors for border checks (EUR 0.4 million, signed in 2019);
- framework contract for purchase of cooled handheld thermal camera for border surveillance (EUR 4 million, signed in 2019).

Other relevant, in terms of complexity, tenders processed were:

- framework contract for returns by scheduled flights supported by Frontex (EUR 30 million; signed in 2019);
- framework contract for provision of interpretation/cultural expertise services (EUR 25 million; signed in 2020);
- travel desk services framework contract (EUR 20 million, signed in 2019);
- framework contract for organisation of Events in Poland (EUR 6 million, signed in 2019);
- interim staff services (EUR 3 million, signed in 2019);
- framework contract procedure for the provision of door-to-door transportation services for Frontex vehicles;
- framework contract for the provision of fuel cards and associated services for Frontex vehicles (EUR 0.6 million, signed in 2019).

Knowledge-sharing activities

- six procurement training meetings consisting totally of 12 modules were delivered (total number of participants amounts to 226);
- specific procurement training sessions for newcomers delivered additionally on regular basis;
- 2nd Frontex procurement days event was organised in October with external participants (total number of participants: 68);
- different new tutorials were published on Frontex intranet (MyFx), one leaflet on open procedures was printed and distributed.

Procedural statistics

- total value of procurement procedures processed by PROC in 2019 amounted to over EUR 361 million, while in 2018 to EUR 252 million (43 % increase vs 2018);
- open tenders launched in 2019 amounted to over EUR 197 million, while in 2018 to EUR 155 million (26 % increase vs 2018);
- out of 28 open tenders launched in 2019, 11 resulted in signed contracts (value of EUR 49 million) additionally, 15 of them (total value of EUR 140 m) are ongoing and will be finalised in 2020;
- 45 low and medium value procedures (negotiated with 3 and with 5) of total value of EUR 3.3 m were handled in 2019 (29 % increase vs 2018, value higher by 42 %);
- 201 very low value procedures (negotiated with one) of total value of EUR 1.1 m were handled by Procurement in January-September 2019 (10 % increase vs 2018);

- In October-December 2019 (after automation and decentralisation of the very low value procedure (NP1)), 75 procedures were launched and conducted by Units of total value of EUR 0.4 m (by analogy, the same period of 2018 there were 70 procedures of total value of EUR 0.3 m);
- 884 procedures under existing framework contracts of total value of EUR 95.5 million were handled in 2019 (12 % increase vs 2018 with value higher two times than in 2018).

Table 11 – Overview of procurement processes in 2019 in comparison with 2018

Procurement procedures 2018-2019 overview	2018		2019		Change in % vs 2018
	Number (excluding amendments)	Value in EUR*	Number (excluding amendments)	Value in EUR*	
Open tenders	30	156,525,000	28	197,340,000	26
Orders and contracts issued under existing framework contracts	790	45,500,000	884	95,500,000	110
Negotiated procedures with min 3 and 5 candidates	35	2,390,000	45	3,382,000	42
Restricted tenders	0	0	1	2,600,000	n/a
Exceptional negotiated procedure	6	629,000	6	1,700,000	170
Negotiated procedures with min 1 candidate (below 15 000)	199	1,168,000	276	1,500,000	28

*estimated value of procedures as registered in procurement logs.

4.5. Late payments — interest paid to suppliers

The overall interest charged by suppliers through late payments (>30 days) amounted to EUR 946. The amount included just the late payment charged by suppliers as according to the financial rules, interest for late payment is not due to Member States.

4.6 Negotiated procedures – point 11 – Annex I to Financial Regulation

Table 12 – Overview of procurement processes in 2019 in comparison with 2018

List of contracts awarded by Frontex in 2019 on the basis of point 11 of Annex I to the Financial Regulation - exceptional negotiated procedures						
Contract number	Subject	Supplies / services	Budget line	Contractor	Signature date	Value in Euro
1486/2018	Acquisition of SAS software licences and associated services	services	2101	SAS Institute Sp. z o.o. ul. Gdańska 27/31, 01-633 Warszawa, Poland	19-02-2019	1,350,000
73/2019	Buffer Furniture Storage in Warsaw Spire for the Reconstruction Period	services	2350	WS Tower sp z oo Pl. Europejski 1 spółka komandytowo- akcyjna Pl. Europejski 1 00-844 Warszawa, Poland	22-02-2019	20,900
836/2019	Acquisition of SAS Viya software licences	services	2330	SAS Institute Sp. z o.o. ul. Gdańska 27/31, 01-633 Warszawa, Poland	20-11-2019	143,500

940/2019	Access to sources global security environment (open source intelligence) including access to open source intelligence on counterterrorism related issues	services	2330	IHS MARKIT GLOBAL SARL CHEMIN DE LA MAIRIE 24 PO BOX 152 1258 PERLY CERTOUX SWITZERLAND	23-08-2019	120,055
1206/2019	Database of passenger flow at air borders	services	1203	OAG Aviation Worldwide Limited 1 Capability Green Luton, Bedfordshire, LU1 3LU United Kingdom	18-12-2019	54,920
932/2018	Aerial surveillance, Lots 1,3,4 and 5 – increase of FWC ceiling	services	3400	Lot 1: CAE Aviation Sarl, Luxembourg International Airport, Luxembourg; Airborne Technologies GmbH, Wiener Neustadt, Austria; DEA Aviation Ltd, Retford, UK; FLY4LESS Kft., Budapest, Hungary. Lot 3: CAE Aviation Sarl, Luxembourg International Airport, Luxembourg; DEA Aviation Ltd, Retford, UK; consortium led by EASP Air BV, Schiphol, the Netherlands. Lot 4: CAE Aviation Sarl, Luxembourg International Airport, Luxembourg; DEA Aviation Ltd, Retford, UK; consortium led by EASP Air BV, Schiphol, the Netherlands. Lot 5: CAE Aviation Sarl, Luxembourg International Airport, Luxembourg; DEA Aviation Ltd, Retford, UK; consortium led by EASP Air BV, Schiphol, the Netherlands	27-06-19	9,000,000
131/2016	Lot 1 Services for SAS software and related technologies – increase of FWC ceiling	services	n/a	SAS Institute Sp. z o.o. ul. Gdańska 27/31, 01–633 Warszawa, Poland	12-07-2019	950,000
726/2016	Lot 2 Services for Microsoft BI software and related technologies – increase of the FWC ceiling	services	n/a	Fabrity K2 Sp. z o.o. Ul. Domaniewska 44A, 02-672 Warsaw, Poland Pentacomp Systemy Informatyczne S.A. Al.Jerozolimskie 179, 02-222 Warsaw, Poland	12-07-2019	300,000

726/2016	Lot 3: Services for ESRI GIS software and related technologies – increase of the FWC ceiling	services	n/a	Asseco Poland S.A. Ul. Olchowa 14, 35-322 Rzeszów Poland and EESRI Polska Sp. z o.o. Ul. Bonifraterska 17 00-203 Warszawa Poland; Dotsoft Software Development and Integrated ICT Solutions S.A. 3, N. Kountourioti Str. Gr-546 25 Thessaloniki, Greece and Epsilon Malta Ltd Tower Business Center, Tower Street Swatar BKR4013, Malta, GENEGIS GI S.r.l. - Viale L. Scarampo n. 47 - 20148 Milan, Italy	06-09-2019	550,000
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4.7. Ad-hoc grants and delegation agreements

External assigned revenue concerns funds that do not originate in voted EU appropriations for the Agency, but that are received for the execution of specific contracts or agreements from external financing parties or from the European Commission DGs. According to the Financial Regulation, these appropriations cannot be mixed with others, therefore they are shown separately under Title 4 of Frontex's budget.

The appropriations corresponding to assigned revenue are made available automatically, both as commitment appropriations and as payment appropriations, once the revenue has been received by the Agency. External assigned revenue is carried over automatically and must be fully used by the time all the operations relating to the programme or action to which it is assigned have been carried out.

Frontex is currently running three grant agreements and one Delegation Agreement, all funded by the European Commission, as listed below:

- IPA II grant agreement 'Regional support to protection-sensitive migration management in the Western Balkans and Turkey'. Grant signed on the 22 December 2015. Total budget EUR 5.5 million, implementation period of 42 months from 1/1/2016 following extension.
- IPA II Phase II grant agreement 'Regional support to protection-sensitive migration management in the Western Balkans and Turkey' was signed on 10 December 2018 with a budget of 3.4 million to be implemented in 24 months from 1/7/2019.
- Grant agreement 'Strengthening of Africa – Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC) in the fight against organised crime and the smuggling of migrants' signed with the European Commission (DG International Cooperation and Development) on the 10 August 2017; budget of up to EUR 4.0 million for three years starting in September 2017.
- Delegation agreement on 'Copernicus 2015–2020' with the European Commission, represented by DG Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, signed on 10 November 2015, entrusting Frontex with the service component implementation tasks, in line with Regulation (EU) No 377/2014 establishing the Copernicus programme. The indicative budget amounts to EUR 47.6 million, implemented until 31 December 2020.
- Grant agreement 'Eastern partnership IBM' (regional capacity-building project), signed with the European Commission (DG International Cooperation and Development) on 20 June 2014 and terminated on 31/12/2018, with a budget of up to EUR 4.5 million.
- Grant agreement EU4Border security project, signed on 7 November 2018 with the European Commission (DG Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations). It's a project for enhanced border security in the Southern Neighbourhood with a budget of up to 4 million for 36 months from 1 December 2018.

4.8. Human resources management

4.8.1. Human resources developments

The year 2019 was the fourth year of Frontex's significant growth, following the adoption of the previous EBCG Regulation 2016/1624 that significantly increased resources in the area of budget and staff. To that end, eight managerial posts and eleven Head of Sector posts were published in 2019 and the total number of recruits reached 218 (an all-time record).

However, due to high internal turnover (82 staff members were appointed to a new position after having successfully participated in an external recruitment process compared to 41 the year before), the net increase in staff compared to the previous year was only 106, which led to the overall number of 749 posts filled (temporary agents, contract agents and seconded national experts).

It is to be noted that about 38 % of all Frontex staff are newcomers who joined the Agency during the last two years. This growth led to additional workload for all services provided by HR. In order to handle this change and growth all HR services have been strengthened (net increase of 3 FTEs) to a total of 35 FTEs (and 6 vacant posts in a recruitment process at the end of 2019).

HR is also managing the traineeship programme that allowed 60 new trainees to get their first professional experience in the Agency and an interim workforce programme supporting the entities with around 40 additional employment agency workers.

With a view to address the objectives set in the EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 to recruit several additional thousands of staff until 2026 HR services continued their efforts to further increase efficiency of staff selection and recruitment processes. Therefore, in collaboration with several other agencies Frontex started shifting to an advanced fully paperless cloud-based e-recruitment system which should become operational in summer 2020. The Agency continued to extensively use new diversified communication channels, such as LinkedIn and Twitter and restarted its cooperation with the European Personnel Selection Office.

The project of introduction of SYSPER 2 (the EC Human Resources and Management Information System for managing the employees' data, staff rights and obligations, time management and others features for career management and organisation charts) was proceeding slower than expected due to limited available human resources.

In the course of 2019, six new implementing rules to the Staff Regulations have been adopted:

- On the engagement and use of temporary staff under Article 2(f);
- On working time (followed by the introduction of working time registration system);
- On preventing psychological and sexual harassment;
- On whistleblowing;
- On setting up a Staff Committee.

Also, Frontex continued to implement new or revised other HR policies, namely on:

- Team events;
- New traineeship policy (BlueBook traineeship programme);
- Pre-recruitment medical services (open tender procedure published in early January 2020);
- New framework contract for interim services.

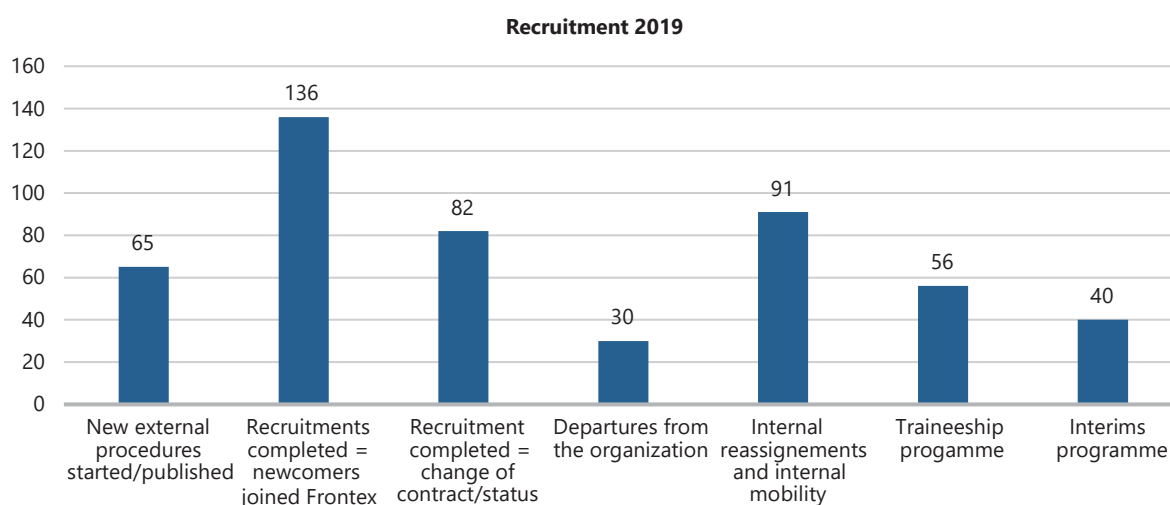
HR services were subject to an in-depth audit by Commissions' Internal Audit Service in autumn 2019 (results not yet available).

4.8.2. Recruitment

Table 13 – Overview of recruitment processes in 2019

Process	Quantity	Additional comments
New external procedures started/published in 2019	65	Several procedures covered more than one post to be filled (16 % more than in 2018)
Recruitments completed – newcomers joined Frontex in 2019 (A)	136	Figure refers to new staff members without former employment contract with Frontex (7 % less than in 2018)
Recruitment completed – change of contract and/or status in 2019 (B)	82	Figure refers to staff members appointed to a new position after having successfully participated in a completed external recruitment process (100 % more than in 2018)
TOTAL Recruitment completed (A + B)	218	(16 % more than in 2018)
Departures	30	Figure refers to staff members that left the Agency (3 % more than in 2018)
Internal reassignments and internal mobility	91	81 staff re-assigned in the interest of the service or due to restructuring of entities 10 staff transferred as the result of individual requests for internal mobility
Traineeship programme	2 x 30	Position filled during spring and autumn intake
Interims programme	40	Position filled during the year (on a rotation basis)

Graph 14 – Recruitment 2019



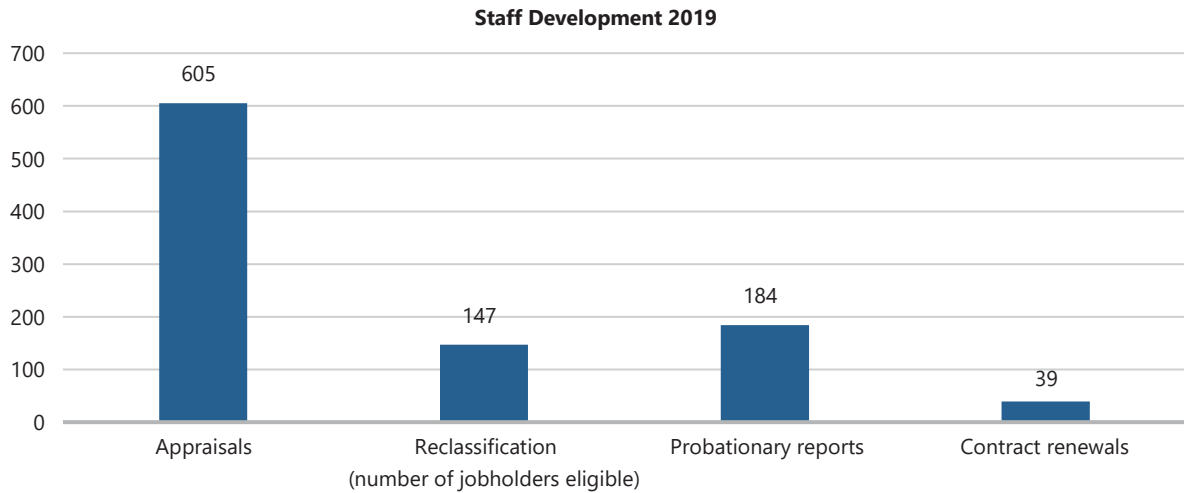
4.8.3. Staff development and training

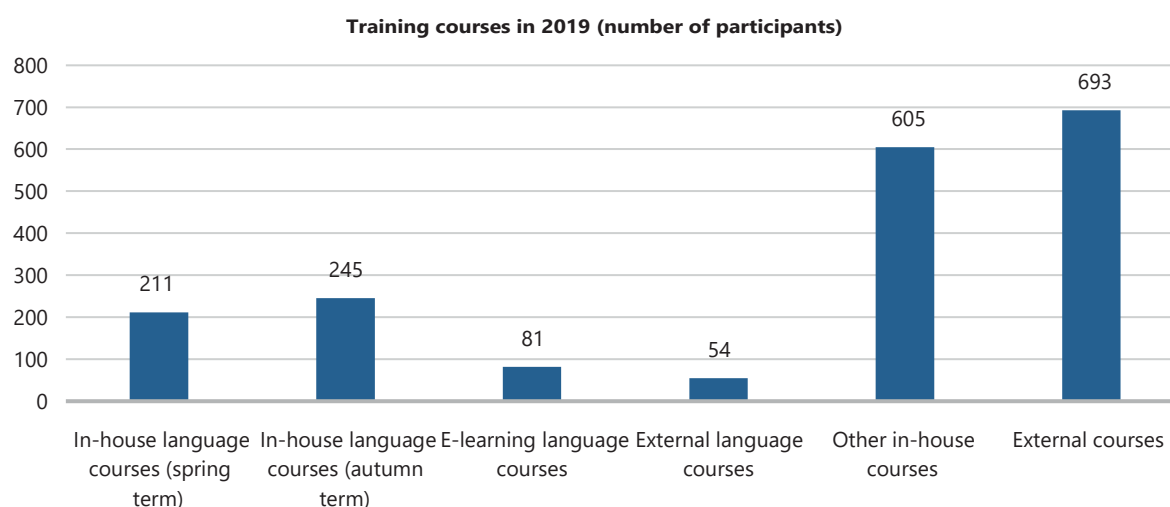
Table 14 – Overview of main activities performed related to staff development in 2019

Process	Quantity	Additional comments
Appraisal	605 appraisals processed (24.5 % increase vs. the last year)	93 % of appraisals were finalised by 23/01/2020 (formal closure of the 2019 Appraisal exercise); No complaints under Article 90 (2). There were 4 appeals filed by the closing date to the Appeal Assessor within the appraisal procedure as per Article 7 of the appraisal rules.
Reclassification	147 jobholders eligible (60 TAs and 87 CAs)	The reclassification process for 2019 is going to be carried out in 2020.

Probation	184 probationary periods started in 2019 (53 % increase vs. the last year)	So far one contract has not been confirmed at the end of the probationary period (some probationary periods started in 2019 are to be still finalised in 2020).
Contract renewal	39 contract renewal procedures started in 2019 (for contracts ending in 2020, 23 of which leading to indefinite contract)	20 contracts were renewed in 2019 while the remaining processes are pending the Appointing Authority's decision. No delays in communicating the decisions related to contracts of employment. No complaints under Article 90 (2).
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in-house language courses: 30 groups in the spring semester (6 languages – DE, EN, ES, FR, PL and IT) – 211 participants • 30 groups in the autumn semester (6 languages – DE, EN, ES, FR, IT and PL) – 245 participants • e-learning language courses: 81 participants • external language courses: 54 requests • other in-house courses – 578 participants • external courses – 713 participants 	It should be noted that apart from language courses , other in-house courses as well as external courses, newcomers' induction programme (involving 289 newcomers) and leadership and management development programme (involving 19 managers) were successfully continued during 2019.

Graph 15 – Staff Development 2019



Graph 16 - Number of participants in training courses in 2019


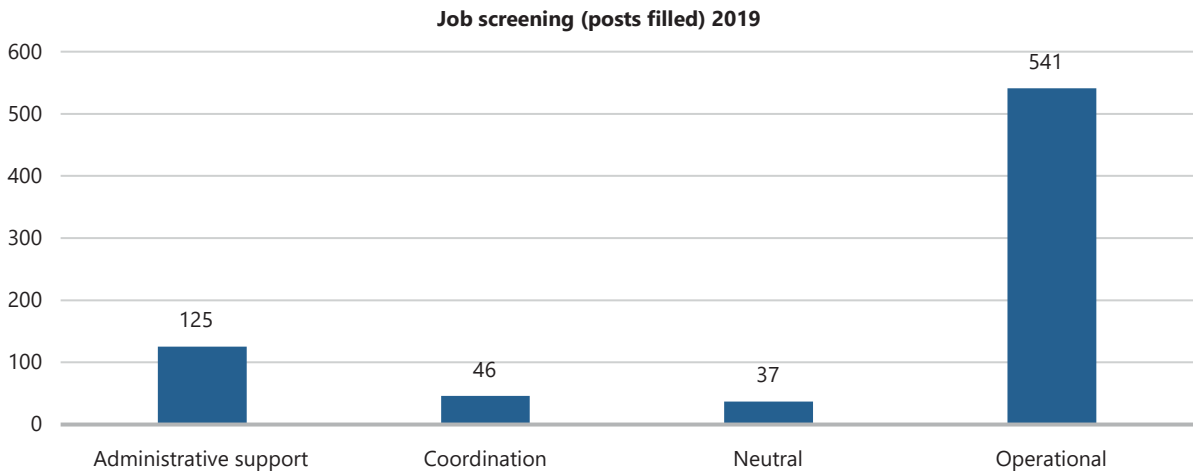
4.8.4. Job screening

The standardised job screening exercise (classifications of posts into the roles of Administrative support, Coordination, Neutral and Operational)⁽¹⁵⁾ was done according to the guidelines defined by the EU Agencies Network and based on staff figures including temporary and contract staff as well as seconded national experts and existing posts with open replacement on 31 December 2019.

Table 15 –Job screening 2019

TYPE/ROLE AND CATEGORY	Filled posts		Vacant posts		Total posts	
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	125	13.70 %	20	2.20 %	145	15.90 %
DOC	6	0.70 %		0.00 %	6	0.70 %
HR	34	3.70 %	4	0.40 %	38	4.20 %
IA	8	0.90 %	3	0.30 %	11	1.20 %
ICT	20	2.20 %	7	0.80 %	27	3.00 %
LOG	52	5.70 %	6	0.70 %	58	6.40 %
RES DIR/HOA	5	0.50 %		0.00 %	5	0.50 %
COORDINATION	46	5.00 %	11	1.20 %	57	6.30 %
COMM	11	1.20 %	4	0.40 %	15	1.60 %
GEN COORD	4	0.40 %		0.00 %	4	0.40 %
LEGAL	31	3.40 %	7	0.80 %	38	4.20 %
NEUTRAL	37	4.10 %	6	0.70 %	43	4.70 %
FIN/CONT	37	4.10 %	6	0.70 %	43	4.70 %
LING		0.00 %		0.00 %		0.00 %
OPERATIONAL	541	59.30 %	126	13.80 %	667	73.10 %
EVAL	87	9.50 %	20	2.20 %	107	11.70 %
GEN OPER	335	36.70 %	69	7.60 %	404	44.30 %
PGM M/IMPL	97	10.60 %	32	3.50 %	129	14.10 %
TOP COORD	22	2.40 %	5	0.50 %	27	3.00 %
	749	82.10 %	163	17.90 %	912	100 %

⁽¹⁵⁾ In line with the EC methodology for Agencies job screening

Graph 17 - Job screening (posts filled) 2019

4.9. Assessment by management

4.9.1. Ex-ante controls

Frontex conducts ex-ante controls in accordance with its policy of ex-ante control which complements the provisions of the financial regulation. In accordance with this policy, each transaction is subject to ex-ante control. In addition, as grants to Member States constitute the major part of Frontex budget, additional ex-ante requirements exist concerning the submission of supporting documents proving the costs incurred.

Consequently, during 2019 Frontex continued the efforts to strengthen the ex-ante control framework, in particular in the case of joint operations, pilot projects and return operations due to their high value. The total amount paid in 2019 in the form of grants to Member States for their participation in operational activities equalled EUR 168,741,265. Out of this amount, Frontex verified supporting documents substantiating the request for final payment for the amount of EUR 87,745,216, covering 51.99 % of the total amount paid (EUR 168,741,265).

4.9.2. Ex-post controls

The evaluation and controls activities (ex-post controls included) implemented by the Inspection and Control Office kicked off with a recruitment of one staff member who joined the Office mid-July 2018. In the first semester 2019, the checks on Spain, Italy and Greece were completed and they focused on:

- Spain – Guardia Civil and Policia Nacional: management and control system and implementation of a new financing scheme/methodology used for the calculation of unit costs and desk review of the unit costs.
- Italy – all beneficiaries such as Polizia di Stato, Guardia di Finanza, Guardia Costiera: management and control system and implementation of a new financing scheme/methodology used for the calculation of unit costs and desk review of the unit costs.
- Greece – Hellenic Police and Hellenic Coast Guard: management and control system and implementation of a new financing scheme/methodology used for the calculation of unit costs and desk review of the unit costs.

The above controls were further followed by:

- Evaluation of the pilot project implemented by Estonia and Portugal – control of the calculation method and accuracy of the unit cost established by the two Member States for the aircraft and coastal patrol vessels costs.
- As a result of the above evaluation, the ex-post controls on Estonia and the final payments from 2015, 2016 and 2017 as well as the ex-post controls on Portugal and its final payments from 2017 were implemented.

In the second semester 2019, the following controls were initiated or completed:

- Ex-post control on Romania – General Inspectorate of the Romanian Border Police and its grant agreements on technical equipment (final report stage).
- Ex-post control on Belgium – Federal Police Belgium and Immigration Office Belgium and their grant agreements on deployment of human resources and return operations (final report closed).
- Ex-post control on Poland – Polish border guards and its grant agreements on deployment of human resources and return/pre-return activities (final report stage).
- Ex-post control on Croatia – Ministry of Interior and its grant agreements on technical equipment (final report closed).

In December 2019, the ex-post controls on Latvia, Malta and Austria were announced to the Member States and started in 2020, those controls are still in progress and will be included in the next consolidated annual activity report.

5. Management and internal control

The internal control is a process that helps an organisation to achieve its objectives and sustain operational and financial performance, respecting rules and regulations. It supports sound decision making, taking into account risks to the achievement of objectives and reducing them to acceptable levels through cost-effective controls. Internal control applies to all activities, irrespective of whether they are financial or non-financial.

Following the expanded mandate and responsibilities of Frontex under the new European border and coast guard regulation as well as the introduction of changes to the European Commission's internal control framework on 19 April 2017, Frontex internal control framework (ICF) was updated accordingly ⁽¹⁶⁾ and is revised on an ongoing basis.

With entering into force of the European border and coast guard Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 (6 December 2019) a validation of the internal control system will be carried out in connection with the reorganisation of the Agency and the redesign of its business and enabling processes starting in 2020.

To appropriately and effectively address its objectives, Frontex follows a **risk-based approach**. This approach enables the Agency to act according to its strategic directions ensured by internal control processes and mechanisms that provide the Executive Director with reasonable assurance that Frontex delivers effectively even in cases where business continuity measures are activated.

Frontex current ICF defines five major components **that underpin the framework's structure** and support the Agency in its efforts to achieve its objectives, namely: (1) control environment, (2) risk assessment, (3) control activities, (4) information and communication, and (5) monitoring activities. These five components are **incorporated and must be present and effective at all levels of the Agency**, in order for the internal control over Frontex's operations to be considered effective.

Each of the five components consists of several principles (17 in total). This structure facilitated the implementation of the ICF during 2019 and served as a guidance for the management when assessing whether each above-mentioned component is present and functioning effectively and in harmony. A holistic approach of assessing the framework from 17 perspectives contributes to providing a reasonable assurance that the Agency's objectives are met, as they specify the actions required for effective internal control.

The Executive Director was mandated to implement the framework, and to conduct an overall assessment of the presence and functioning of all internal control components at least annually (in the context of the preparation of consolidated annual activity report), in order to:

- establish and/or streamline the processes, structures and functions to accommodate changes resulting from the revision of the Frontex internal control framework, and in particular the processes of risk management, control, planning and evaluating, reporting, and communicating.
- ensure the adequate resources for an efficient and consistent implementation, and effective assessment of the internal control system;
- with the support of the Inspection and Control Office to take appropriate actions to establish and manage the revised internal control framework; by performing the internal control coordinator function the Office shall facilitate the process and support the managers in defining the baselines and targets as regards internal control, taking into account their specificities and risks, and to improve awareness and understanding of the internal control framework by all staff, in particular through training, information and support activities.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Frontex internal control framework was adopted by the Management Board on 22 November 2017.

The dynamic reality experienced in 2019 impacted the first stage of the assessment process, which is carried out by the managers who monitor the functioning of the internal control system on a continuous basis. Replacing an annual assessment as previously done, the status of the internal control system is summarised via internal control periodical reports, and regularly discussed at senior level, mainly during briefings and meetings of directors. In such fora the validation of the assessments of the corporate risk status was addressed as well as the validation of quarterly reports on exceptions and non-compliance events.

The following conclusions were elaborated on the basis of the following dedicated reports:

- The regular internal control reports based on the evaluation of the Frontex corporate risk log, and the exceptions register, contributing to the quarterly assessments of the effectiveness of the internal control system.
- The opinion of the internal auditor (IAS) as expressed in the audit reports and in its assessment of the implementation of post audit recommendations.
- The opinion and observations of the external auditor of Frontex (European Court of Auditors) as well as based on Frontex actions proposed in response to the observations and recommendations received.

These reports result from a systematic analysis of the available evidence. This approach should allow to provide 'reasonable assurance'⁽¹⁷⁾ so as to the completeness and reliability of the information reported. The control results and other elements that support management's assurance are detailed in the sub-chapters as follows: control results, audit observations and recommendations, assessment of the effectiveness of the internal control system. These inputs are used to provide the conclusions as regards assurance.

All directors of divisions, and where appropriate, their subordinated staff were requested to issue individual declarations of assurance which were presented to the Executive Director as an input and supporting evidence for him to prepare his own declaration of assurance as the Agency's authorising officer⁽¹⁸⁾.

5.1. Control results

Frontex has an internal control system (ICS) in place which specifies the necessary requirements, actions and expectations in order to build an effective system of internal control that can provide reasonable assurance regarding the achievement of Frontex objectives.

The system also includes a number of internal procedures, for example, guidance on conflicts of interests, a code of good administrative behaviour, ex-ante and ex-post control policies and procedures and the procurement procedures. New internal procedures are introduced when necessary and existing procedures are revised at regular intervals.

In accordance with the internal control framework and the internal control principle No 12 adopted therein, Frontex advocated for the application of the modified procedure, ensuring that overrides of controls or deviations from the established processes and procedures are documented, duly approved, and logged centrally (ED Decision R-2018-102) applying to the management of exceptions and non-compliance events.

The control assessment results are presented hereunder. They cover the following areas: internal control assessment reports (section 5.1.1. Internal control assessments), report on exceptions and non-compli-

⁽¹⁷⁾ An internal control system, no matter how well designed and operated, cannot provide an absolute guarantee regarding achievement of an entity's objectives. This is because of inherent limitations of any control system and the possibility of deliberate human intervention to circumnavigate controls.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Following the Management Board Decision of 22 November 2017 adopting the revised Frontex internal control framework, after the revised framework is fully operational, the declaration of assurance (1) by the Executive Director will be complemented by the statement (2) of the internal control coordinator (HoO.ICO), both attached to the consolidated annual activity report (for annual activity report of 2019 and onwards).

ant events (Section 5.1.2. Register of exceptions and non-compliance events — overview of 2019; risk assessment report (section 5.1.3. Risk assessments); and audit reports (5.2).

5.1.1. Internal control assessments

In the course of the implementation of the ICF, a consolidation of the risks and issues logged in the Frontex improvement log was prepared enabling validation and prioritisation of actions during the year. Out of this exercise a consolidated Frontex improvement log was established, serving as a source for the internal control monitoring and reporting concluded in regular internal control reports. The log is based on multiple sources including: exceptions and non-compliance register report, Frontex corporate risks log, management meetings' conclusions, IAS audit recommendations, external auditor findings and recommendations.

Other issues might be identified ad-hoc during meetings at strategic and tactical levels as part of the ongoing assessment of the internal control system.

The internal control assessment results presented below, summarise the regular assessments of the controls performed during the year, focusing on:

- exceptions and non-compliance cases registered in 2019;
- risk assessment reports;
- audit reports and observations.

5.1.2. Register of exceptions and non-compliance events — overview of 2019

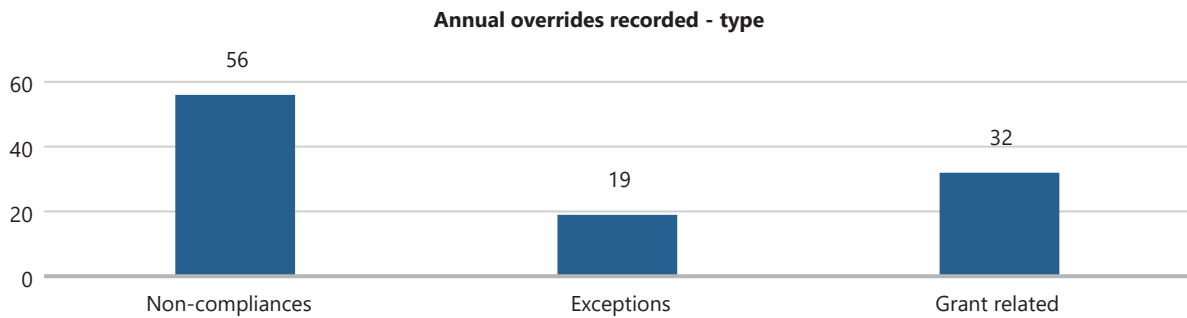
Exceptions recorded in 2019 followed the process described in the procedure for recording and monitoring of exceptions (ED Decision 2018/102). In 2019, ICO continued performing actions aimed at strengthening control measures regarding financial implementation of the annual work programme including related procurement actions. In addition, to eliminate issues observed in the previous periods, the following corrective measures were applied to the exceptions and non-compliance recording process in the course of 2019:

- 1 The revision of quality checks in the exceptions and non-compliance recording process⁽¹⁹⁾;
- 2 A more comprehensive, regular review of the high-value procurement procedures executed since November 2015 (adoption of the procedure 2015/88) in the areas that impacted the statistics on exceptions and non-compliance events to the highest extent;
- 3 Update of the relevant processes including ex-ante controls in respectively the Legal and Procurement Unit and in the Budget, Finance and Corporate Services Unit. Such updates are to assure that all budget is committed with clear links to the approved programming document (annual work programme, including annexed procurement plan and budget), or a duly approved exception;
- 4 Assuring timely publication of all updates of the financial decision (e.g. procurement plans, budget) approved during the year.

In 2019, a total of 107 overrides were recorded. Its distribution by type of deviation in percentage is presented hereunder. The majority of deviations were registered as non-compliance – 56 out of 107 (52% of the total).

⁽¹⁹⁾ Recording and reporting on 'Exceptions and non-compliance events' is one of the management tools used to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of internal control and/or changes to the internal control system needed. A system must be in place to ensure that all instances of overriding controls or deviations from the established processes and procedures are documented. All instances must be justified and approved before action is taken, and logged centrally.

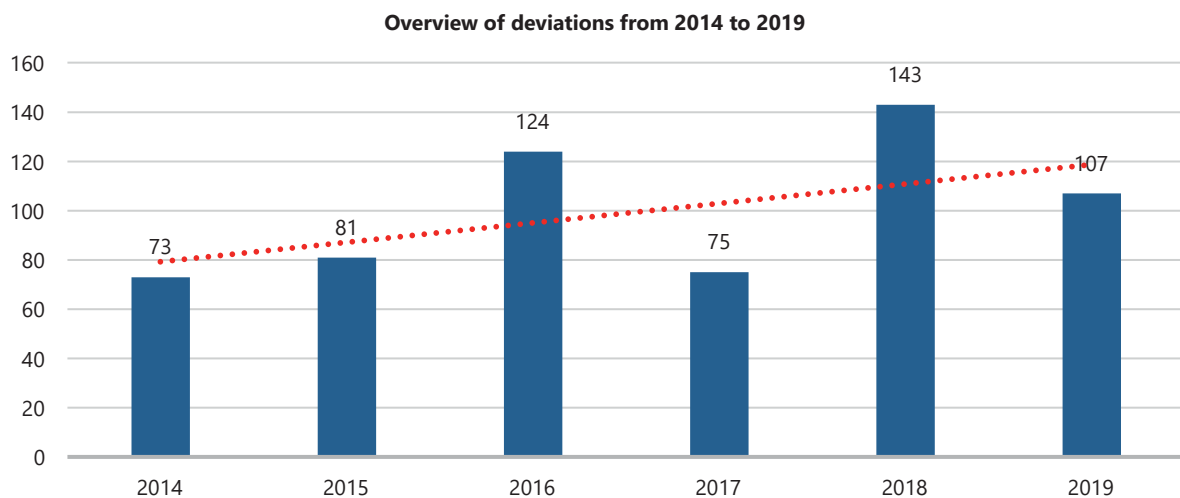
Graph 18 – Number of recorded deviations in 2019 per type



The annual widespread of deviations is balanced towards the non-compliance area. Bearing in mind the nature of non-compliance events, i.e. ex-post authorisations, necessary attention is to be given to them in order to address this situation during 2020 and move towards early detection and authorisation up-front (ex-ante) of cases where the strict adherence to regulatory requirements is not possible.

When comparing the number of deviations registered in 2019 with those in the period 2014–2018, the total number of deviations registered in 2019 totals 107 cases, which represents a 25% decrease compared to 2018 (143 cases), as indicated below.

Graph 19 – Overview of deviations from 2014 to 2019

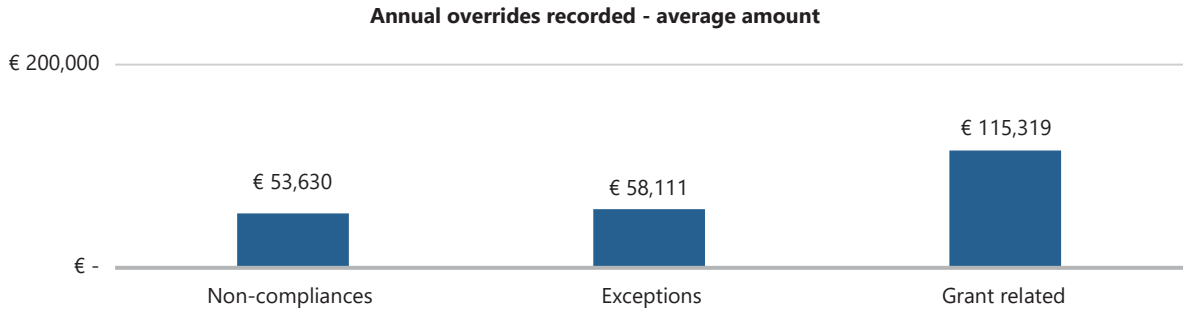


The decrease of events registered in 2019 (compared to 2018) can be explained by a better understanding of the regulatory requirements by the staff as a result of efforts performed by the management at all levels in setting the tune as well as for recurring internal training in the areas of financial management as well as procurement activities.

Another factor possibly influencing this outcome is the introduction of a simplified financing scheme for operational grants which also incorporated regular monitoring of the expenditures, enhancing awareness of staff regarding the need to constantly and adequately monitor the balanced level of budgetary and corresponding legal commitments to honour the underlying activities.

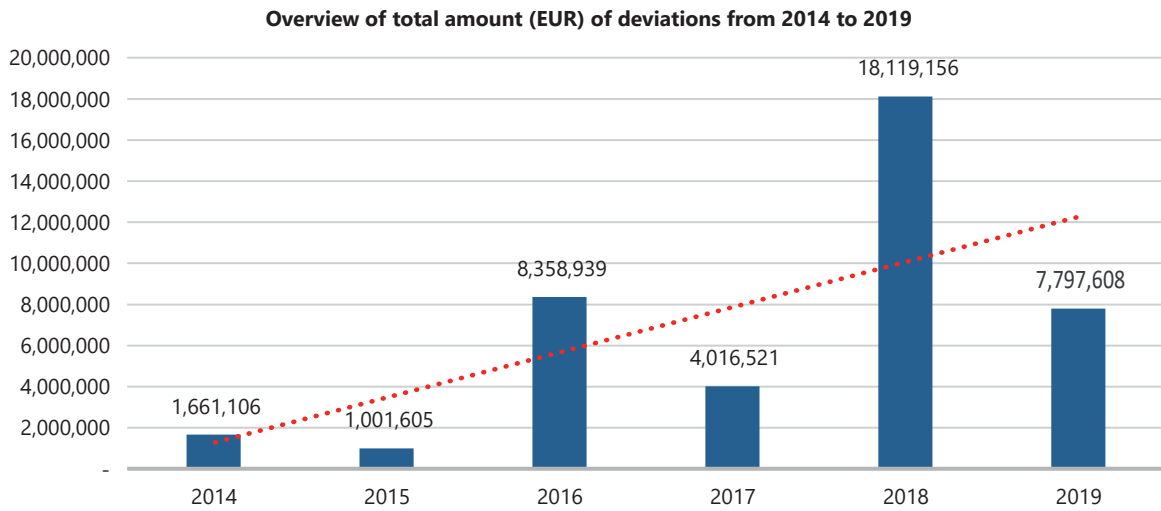
In 2019, the average amount by typology of deviation is presented below. It is relevant to note that although the average amount of deviation record for grant-related cases is well above the financial scope of those for non-compliances and exceptions, this is due to the high financial amounts involved in grants in view of its operational nature.

Graph 20 – Average amount of recorded deviations in 2019



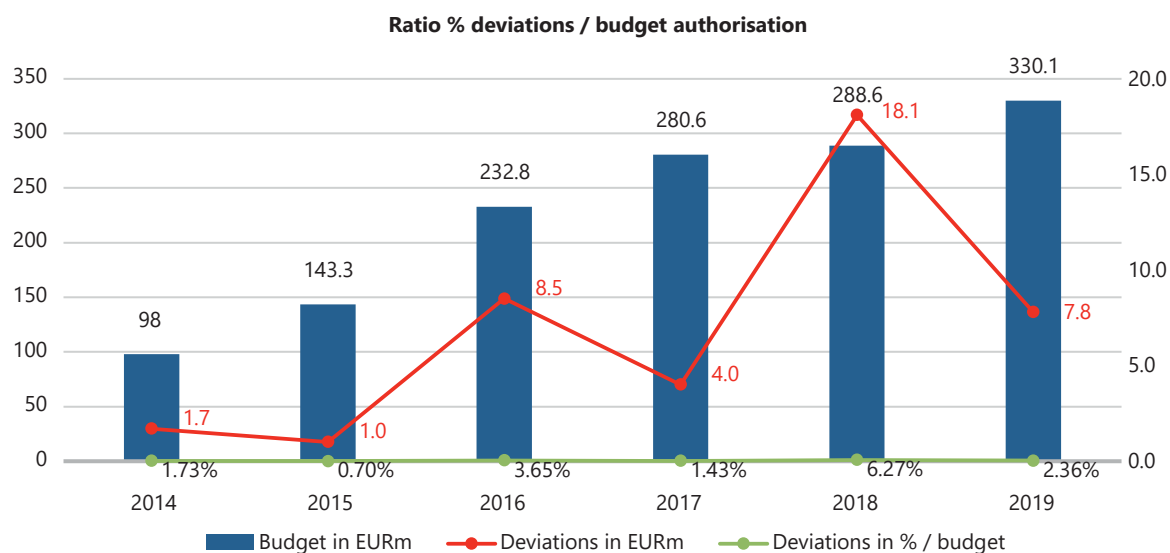
Providing a greater level of detail, chart hereunder displays the total annual amount in euros recorded by deviations in 2019 and its evolution from 2014 onwards. The financial scope of overrides registered amount to EUR 7,797,608 (2.36% of the total budget) and implies not only a 57 % decrease when compared to 2018 but also a decrease in absolute terms when compared to the budget of 2016 which was 30% lower.

Graph 21 – Overview of the total annual amount of deviations recorded from 2014 to 2019



The performance indicator established for the procedure of register of non-compliance and exceptions is the ratio of total amount of deviations register for the period and the total amount of payments made for the same period.

Taking into account the increase in scope of the Agency activities as well as the resources received in 2019 Frontex managed to decrease both number of deviations as well as its budgetary scope. The performance indicator shows 2.36% of deviations when compared with the total budget authorised. Such result is almost in line with the objective set for this ratio i.e. less than 2 % and represents a remarkable improvement in comparison to the previous year where the result of this ratio reached 6.27%.

Performance indicator, ratio of deviations in 2019 in comparison with period 2016-2019
Graph 22 – Overview of the deviations recorded from 2014 to 2019 including total budget, total deviations and percentage vs budget


Generally, the procedure to register exceptions and non-compliance are designed as element of internal control functions to provide reasonable assurance of the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions. The target set for the performance indicator was nearly achieved, and presents a noticeable progress when comparing 2019 with the previous year.

Deviations with the highest financial materiality registered in 2019
Table 16 – Deviations with highest financial materiality 2019.

Subject	Area	Amount
Increase of the contract ceiling to cover already created financial commitments	Contract management	EUR 2,150,000
The consumption exceeded the average expenditure, hence the amount identified in Grand Agreement	Grant agreement	EUR 594,885
Maintenance and administration of the core ICT infrastructure and systems (prolongation and increase of the value of 20 existing specific contracts)	Contract management	EUR 494,513
Omission in the monitoring table resulted with underestimation of the mission budget and related commitment	Grant agreement	EUR 457,497
Increase of reimbursement under commitment. Reimbursement not in line with REM guidelines	Grant agreement	EUR 446,817

5.1.3. Risk assessments

Frontex corporate risk management process builds on the continuous validation and assessment of risks, developing and incorporating response plans and the ongoing revision of the measures. All of that is carried out at different levels reaching from unit, to divisional and corporate level. During 2019 three reports provided information on the actual status of risks exposures at corporate level, assessing their likelihood and impact (i.e. their criticality). During the year the initially identified 11 corporate risks with the highest risk exposure which were subjected to frequent monitoring and reporting to the executive management, had increased to 16 during 2019.

In the process of the implementation of the annual work programme 2019 and also during the revision of the internal control framework, the corporate risks were evaluated, assessed and updated during the course of the year.

At corporate level the following two main groups of risks, above a certain level of criticality (likelihood x impact) were identified as potentially negatively impacting delivery of the Frontex mandate:

1. HR management in view of the proposed increase of staff from 750 to 2,000 by the end of 2020:

Risks related to and impacting recruitment of new staff have been continuously addressed. The low correction coefficient was already highlighted as a factor outside of the Agency's internal controls impacting the number of candidates applying for Frontex vacancies. Frontex took measures to maximise publicity of the job vacancies offered particularly through specialised social media channels such as LinkedIn, EU Agencies network job board and EPSO (from May 2019). These measures already provided partial yield during 2018 and 2019 when the number of applicants per announced selection rose. However, the high success rate of internal candidates resulting in high internal turn-over of staff is a clear sign that Frontex fails to attract sufficient number of quality candidates from outside of Frontex.

This might become even more significantly an issue as short recruitment deadlines and a strict EU legal framework that has never been designed for the operational tasks of the Agency and the European Standing Corps will further challenge effective HR management.

2. Programme management as regards the new Regulation 2019/1896 (by mid-2019)

- The political deadlines and expectations stemming from Regulation 2019/1896 require Frontex to proactively prepare for the new policies and processes well before the entering into force of the Regulation.
- A robust structure needs to be in place to ensure strategic guidance and steering, to keep the overview, to ensure corporate alignment, planning, efficient information sharing/cooperation and ensure timely deliverables as well as central approval of the different ongoing projects.

Frontex corporate risk log was reviewed to introduce the controls on the response plans' implementation (April 2019). The corporate risks were organised according to the response plans to effectively decrease the likelihood of risks. Out of this exercise, seven response areas were identified with three of them being followed with detailed response plans implemented in 2019.

5.2. Audit observations and recommendations

5.2.1. The European Court of Auditors

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) is required to provide its final opinion on Frontex accounts 'no later than 1 June of the following year'. Therefore, the ECA's opinion on Frontex' accounts for 2019 was not available at the time the Annual Activity Report 2019 was prepared. The opinion of the ECA on Frontex' accounts for the year ending 2018 is provided below as this provides some light on the adequacy of the internal control system.

Opinion on the reliability of the accounts

In the Court's opinion, the Agency's annual accounts present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Agency at 31 December 2018, the results of its operations, its cash flows, and the changes in net assets for the year then ended, in accordance with its Financial Regulation and with accounting rules adopted by the Commission's accounting officer. These are based on internationally accepted accounting standards for the public sector.

Opinion on the legality and regularity of the transactions (revenue and payments) underlying the accounts

In the Court's opinion, the transactions underlying the annual accounts for the year ended 31 December 2018 are legal and regular in all material respects.

Emphasis of matter regarding the legality and regularity of payments underlying the accounts

The Court has consistently reported since 2014 that proof of actual costs claimed by cooperating countries for equipment-related cost is often insufficient, which was again confirmed by this year's audit results. Frontex' ex-ante verifications of these costs are ineffective as long as reimbursements of costs which are not substantiated by supporting documents are continued.

Comments on the legality and regularity of transactions

The Court found that expenditure claimed by cooperating countries is not always supported by invoices or other evidence, but reimbursed nevertheless. As an example, in 2018 the Agency financed the support for the Armed Forces of Malta for the deployment of assets in Italy. Before reimbursing the expenditure claimed by Malta, the Agency asked for evidence for one category of declared expenditure. Although this was never provided, the Agency reimbursed some EUR 100 000.

As another example, the Agency financed the deployment of one airplane and one vessel used by the state border guard of the Republic of Latvia. The Agency asked for evidence for one category of declared expenditure for the vessel. Although the evidence was never provided, the Agency reimbursed some EUR 208 000.

In the above examples, the ex-ante verifications were, therefore, ineffective. The Agency should, together with the cooperating countries, work further on the development of a simplified and transparent financing scheme that also covers equipment-related costs. Until such a scheme is in place, Frontex should strengthen ex-ante verifications and reintroduce ex-post verifications to make sure that only substantiated costs are reimbursed.

At the same time, the Court stresses that Frontex also depends on the cooperating countries' cooperation for the financial management of the operations, and on the submission of reliable and complete evidence for any cost claimed for reimbursement.

Comments on sound financial management and performance

In one procurement procedure for a framework contract on the provision of the development and maintenance of a specific ICT software (EUR 8 million), the Agency received six offers, two of which came from the companies that had participated in the preparation of the procurement documents. For this reason, and in accordance with the Financial Regulation, the Agency required the operators concerned to undertake compensatory measures to avoid distortion of competition. One of the companies which had been involved in the preparation of this procurement procedure presented a winning offer for EUR 5.8 million, covering fixed costs for all services for development and maintenance to be purchased for the full duration of the contract in accordance with the tender specifications. Ancillary consultancy services represented a minor part of the offer (3 %). Despite this, the Agency awarded a framework contract for the maximum amount of EUR 8 million, equal to the initial total estimate. While framework contracts do not constitute an obligation to purchase up to the maximum contract value, the considerable difference between the maximum value of the contract (EUR 8 million) and the winning offer (EUR 5.8 million), could create a significant risk to sound financial management. The possibility to purchase additional services for an amount of EUR 2.2 million, or close to 30 % of the contract value, is not considered a reasonable contingency. The Agency should make more realistic estimates of its needs of services in the tender documents and apply rigorous financial management to IT contracts.

Comments on internal controls

The Agency does not have a sensitive post policy, which would identify sensitive functions, keep them up to date and define appropriate measures to mitigate the risk of vested interests. This is not in line with the Agency's internal control standards. The Agency should adopt and implement such a sensitive post policy without delay.

Comments on budgetary management

In 2018, the Agency managed a budget of EUR 289 million. Budget carryovers to 2019 amounted to EUR 83 million (29 %) and were slightly lower than in the previous year (EUR 88 million i.e. 32 %). The rate of cancelled carry-overs to 2018 was EUR 11 million (12 %), in relative terms somewhat less compared to the EUR 11 million (15 %) for the previous period. The main reasons for carry-overs and cancellations were the challenges in meeting the staff establishment plan by number and profiles of staff, the delay to the launch of the building project for the Agency's new premises, the multiannual nature of ICT projects and the fact that cooperating countries continue to overestimate the scale and cost of activities. The Agency should, together with cooperating countries, continue to strive for more precise cost estimates and budget forecasts.

Although the Agency continued further recruitment efforts and increased the number of staff from 526 to 630 in 2018, it still did not achieve the number of 760 staff authorised in its 2018 staff establishment plan (83 %). Frontex took note of the ECA comments and will make improvements where necessary.

Performance audits

In 2019, several performance audits were conducted in Frontex:

- a) Audit on 'Asylum, relocation and return of migrants' and follow-up on the functioning of hotspots (Special Report 6/2017); Special Report 24/2019 was issued in November 2019 and contained three recommendations with the deadline for implementation end of 2020;
- b) Audit 'Are EU Agencies performance driven?' is ongoing with the expected date of the publication of the report for Q4 2020;
- c) Performance audit on the European Border and Coast Guard Agency is ongoing with the expected date of the publication of the report in 2021;

5.2.2. The discharge authority's (European Parliament) observations and measures taken by Frontex

In March 2019, the European Parliament has adopted its decision on the discharge in respect of the implementation of Frontex' budget for the financial year 2017⁽²⁰⁾.

The main areas in which the European Parliament made comments are listed below:

1. follow-up on the 2014, 2015 and 2016 discharge recommendations;
2. transfers from the operational reserve to other operational chapters of the budget;
3. high level of carry-overs for Title II (administrative) and Title III (operational);
4. high level of cancelled carry-overs for Title III;
5. invitation to further develop the key performance indicators used;
6. developing a comprehensive business continuity plan;
7. the need for the additional office space due to the planned increase of staff;
8. requirement of adequate human resources assigned to the fundamental rights domain;
9. EP acknowledgment of the Agency's efforts to secure transparency, prevention and management of conflicts of interest, and whistle-blower protection;
10. EP recalling that the provisions on information and communication as part of the accountability of the Agency towards the public;
11. EP noting that the Agency did not carry out any ex-post verifications on grant expenditure reimbursements;
12. EP requesting the Management Board of the Agency to adopt clear service level agreements for the continuity of its activities in case of a site disaster;
13. EP, in relation to the headquarters, asks the Agency to report to the discharge authority on the resulting projects, in particular the construction of the new headquarters and the establishment of a European school in Warsaw.

⁽²⁰⁾ The discharge in respect of the implementation of the Agency's budget for 2018 has been granted (European Parliament Plenary sitting report with reference A9-0072/2020, dated 4.3.2020).

In September 2019, Frontex provided an update to the European Parliament on the measures taken in the light of the discharge authority's recommendations issued in respect of the implementation of the budget 2017. From the total of 19 observations identified in the discharge report for 2017, Frontex reported eight as implemented.

Frontex has taken the measures in the light of the discharge authority's recommendations. Summary points are provided below:

1. Most (18) of the outstanding issues are closed, only 11 out of 29 are ongoing or partially implemented.
2. With the entry into force of the new EBCG Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, the operational reserve can be released on monthly instalments and used for operational purposes, not only for rapid or return interventions.
3. In order to address the high level of carry overs, the Agency adopted a simplified financing scheme in relation to Member States' grants for joint operations using standardised unit costs, for the first time in 2018, together with a close monitoring of implementation and expenditure to reduce cancellations.
4. The majority of cancelled carry-overs were generated by joint border control and return operations that by their nature have regrettably low predictability.
5. The review of indicators used to monitor and steer the assessment of performance and added value provided is ongoing and will be further developed in 2020.
6. The Agency is working towards setting proper quantitative objectives and specific target values which have been already improved in SPD 2021–2023. However, a gradual consolidation for those will be necessary in the future.
7. Business continuity officer was nominated in November 2018. An ad-interim business continuity policy and business continuity plan is being developed and it is foreseen for the adoption in 2020.
8. The Agency established together with DG HOME and DG BUDG its real estate strategy 2019–2024. Future office space needs are calculated on the basis of the EBCG Regulation 2019/1896 with several building scenarios. An information note was sent to the budgetary authority on December 2019 concerning the intention of the Agency to launch a prospection of the market for renting (with an option to purchase) premises for the ETIAS CU from mid-2021.
9. Further preparatory activities are ongoing to establish appropriate permanent premises for the Agency as well as to ensure its functional and technical requirements. A feasibility study investigating the contractual and financial approach for the realisation of the permanent premises is underway.
10. The number of posts fully earmarked to fundamental rights issues in the fundamental rights office increased from two to ten as of 31/12/2019, including an Associate Fundamental Rights Officer.
11. The whistleblowing policy was adopted on 18 July 2019. Moreover, efforts were made to increase the awareness on fraud-related matters, and to this end e-learning materials were developed and 74 % of the staff completed such training by the end of 2019.
12. Since November 2018 Frontex has maintained a multilingual version of its website in all 24 official languages of the EU.
13. The area of ex-post controls continued its development from its introduction as part of Inspection and Control office tasks. All ex-posts controls initiated in 2018 were closed and during 2019 four new were performed, confirming the consolidation of this activity within the Agency.
14. An infrastructure and a solution for disaster recovery for the Frontex production systems is installed in a data centre of eu-LISA.
15. In 2019, Frontex was attributed an adequate plot of land by the Polish authorities and the planning is ongoing for building a purpose-designed premises by the end of 2024. The headquarters project will be submitted to the budgetary authority in the next period. A European school accreditation is on-going in 2020 and the school announced its readiness to commence to operate partly from the academic year 2020/2021.

Aside from the actions mentioned above, and taking into consideration the European Parliament recommendations, during 2019 the Agency underwent deep and radical internal changes as regards the following:

- its extended mandate introduced in December 2019 and for which the Agency was already working towards during the second half of 2019,
- the enforcement of the Frontex Internal Structure and Rules of Procedures (FISRoPs)
- the development of a new business model and operational concept adequate to manage the standing corps,
- the recruitment planning and implementation not only for the headquarters but also the ETIAS CU and the European Standing Corps to take place in 2020.

5.2.3 Audits — Internal Audit Service

In 2019, the Internal Audit Service (IAS) has performed audits on:

IT governance and project management

- Objective and scope: the objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy of the design and the effectiveness and efficiency of the management and control systems put in place by Frontex to govern IT and manage IT projects' lifecycle. In this respect, the scope of the audit included a review of the IT governance framework and IT project management practices in Frontex.
- Outcomes: four recommendations were issued, two of them with the priority status 'very important' and two, with the status 'important'. An action plan for the implementation of the accepted recommendations was adopted and presented to the IAS.

Human resources planning, allocation and recruitment

- Objective and scope: the objective of the audit is to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the internal control system supporting staff planning and allocation and the management of selection and recruitment processes. The scope of the audit covered the following areas: human resources strategy, qualitative and quantitative needs analysis and multiannual staff planning, staff allocation, competency framework, selection and recruitment, monitoring and reporting on staff planning, allocation, selection and recruitment. The audit covered the temporary and contract staff, as well as seconded national experts.
- Outcomes: final report not yet received.

Follow-up of recommendations

In 2019, IAS has performed two follow-up on the implementation of recommendations from the previous audits:

- The follow-up conducted in August 2019 resulted in closing of three recommendations from the audit on data validation and quality assurance in the risk analysis (2015) and one recommendation from the audit on IT project management.
- The follow-up conducted in September 2019 resulted in closing of two recommendations from the audit on stakeholder management in pooled resources (2014).

The status of recommendations in IAS team central (as of 05-02-2020) is as follows:

- Five recommendations have the status 'ready for review' and awaiting for a final decision from IAS :
 - Three from the audit on procurement (2014) and
 - Two from the audit on contract management (2018).
- Eleven recommendations have the status 'pending':
 - Four from the audit on IT governance and project management (2019).
 - Five from the audit on contract management (2018).

- One recommendation from the audit on data validation and quality assurance in risk analysis (2015)
- One recommendations from the audit on HR management (2014).

During 2019 two reports on the implementation status as regards recommendations from previous audits were provided to the Management Board (March and September 2019).

5.3. Assessment of the effectiveness of the internal control system

For each internal control requirement, the level of control and the effectiveness of the control is assessed.

The level of control is mainly determined by the findings summarised in the regular reports of the Internal Control Coordinator; these are discussed and validated by the heads of units, directors of divisions, DED and ED on the spot but also on quarterly basis.

The assessment of the effectiveness of control is further based on the level of implementation of audit recommendations and improvement actions and the results of the ongoing risk assessment collected from all directors of divisions, heads of units and heads of offices.

5.4. Conclusions as regards assurance

Overall conclusion

Based on the internal control assessment process, the Directors of Divisions who were in charge of risk management and internal control of the activities performed by the Division under their managerial remit, confirmed that the state of internal control in their Division during 2019 was duly reported, and the information provided and represented in Section II.3 of the Report is to the best of their knowledge, accurate and complete.

Following these statements, and the outcome of the overall internal control assessment process for year 2019, it can be concluded that the internal control standards are functioning effectively. However, as described above there are areas where improvements are needed. This is especially important given that there will be a continued increase in both financial and human resources from 2020 and beyond. The significant changes in the mandate of the Agency will further impact on Frontex's activities, the internal organisation and the way it interacts with the Member States and other external stakeholders. It is anticipated that these changes will put a major strain on the internal control system, thus placing the revised Internal Control Framework in focus.

The information reported above stems from the results of internal control assessment processes, audits and monitoring and is contained in the reports listed above. This approach provides sufficient guarantees on the completeness and reliability of the information reported and provides a comprehensive coverage of Frontex's budget.

Reviewing the elements supporting the assurance as described and the evidence as presented in this Consolidated Annual Activity Report some areas for improvement were identified. However, they do not rise to the level of 'reservations'.

5.5 Statement of the Head of Inspection and Control Office in charge of risk management and internal control

I, the undersigned,

Head of Inspection and Control Office in charge of risk management and internal control, declare that with reference to Frontex Internal Control Framework (ICF), adopted by the Management Board Decision 32/2017, adopting the revised Frontex internal control framework and authorising the Executive Director to adopt necessary measures for its implementation, dated 22 November 2017,

I state that on the basis of internal management reporting available to me and on the basis of my professional judgement – that the elements of Frontex Internal Control System (ICS), seen as whole, are well and functioning in an effective way to enable Frontex to achieve its objectives.

I hereby certify that the information provided in the present Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2019 (CAAR) of Frontex, and in its annexes, for the financial year 2019 is, to the best of my knowledge, accurate and complete.

Warsaw, 20 April 2020

Michael Juritsch

6. Declaration of assurance

I, the undersigned,

Executive Director of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, in my capacity as an authorising officer, declare that the information contained in this report gives a true and fair view⁽²¹⁾.

I state that I have reasonable assurance that the resources assigned to the activities described in this report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management, and that the control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgement, on the information at my disposal (including that provided by managers that reported to me) and on such work as the annual assessment of the internal control system, ex ante and ex post controls and the findings and observations of the Internal Audit Service and the European Court of Auditors for years prior to the year of this declaration.

I confirm that I am not aware of anything not reported here which could harm the interests of Frontex.

Warsaw, 3 June 2020

Fabrice Leggeri

⁽²¹⁾ True and fair in this context means a reliable, complete and correct view on the state of affairs in Frontex

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