

FRONTEX EVALUATION REPORT

Joint Operation Focal Points 2018 Land

Operational Response Division
Field Deployment Unit

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[signed]
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1. Background information

1.1. Introduction

The concept of the Joint Operation (JO) Focal Points¹ is specific when compared to other joint operations in respect of the following criteria: the duration of the deployment and the length of the implementation process. These elements provide a long-term strategic value to the operation. Moreover, Member States can propose the deployment of their officers or the opening of a Focal Point based on national needs.

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

The deployment of team members (TM) and seconded team members (sTM) is planned, based on the area's regional or local characteristics, such as: the volume and composition of traffic, the size of the BCP, the nationality of passengers, the purpose of travel, the seasonality, the means of transportation, the situation of the border security and common *modus operandi*. The request for the deployment of team members and seconded team members covers not only the operational and tactical aspects mentioned above but also seasonal variations identified in irregular migration trends.

1.2. Operational aim

The core idea of the JO Focal Point Land was to facilitate the implementation of the Integrated Border Management concept at the EU external borders by establishing a permanent Focal Points system at the selected Border Crossing Points and using them as a platform for joint operations and information gathering.

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

1.3. Period of implementation and operational areas

The joint operation was implemented from 31 January 2018 till 30 January 2019 split into 13 deployment periods with the duration of 4 weeks each. During the operation 47 Focal Points were established.

1.4. Participants

JO Focal Points 2018 Land was hosted by Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia (12 Host Member States). Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland (25 Home Member States) and participating Third Countries deployed in total 345 experts broken down into the following profiles: Advanced Level Document Officer, Stolen Vehicle Detection Officer, Cross-Border Crime Detection Officer, First-Line Officer, Second-Line Officer, Dog Handler and Observer. Technical means such as heartbeat detectors, CO2 probes and service dogs were deployed in total for 4.074 man-days.

Albania, Georgia, Kosovo*, Moldova, North Macedonia and Ukraine had deployed their observers during the implementation of the operation in order to enhance information and experience exchange.

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

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

Cooperation with Europol and Interpol took place within the framework of the Joint Action Days (JADs) “Danube III”, “Mobile” and “Western Balkans”, organized under European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).

2. Achievement of objectives

Enhance border security - The objective was fully achieved.

Enhance operational cooperation - The objective was partly achieved.

Enhance exchange of information - The objective was partly achieved.

Identify possible risks and threats - The objective was fully achieved.

Establish and exchange best practices - The objective was fully achieved.

3. Link to other Frontex activities and best practices

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

3.1. JO Flexible Operational Activities 2018 Land on border surveillance

TMs deployed to Focal Points in the operational areas of Local Coordination Centres established in the operational structure of the JO FOA 2018 BCU, were also following reporting and the command and control system of the JO FOA 2018 BCU. Focal Points TMs participated in the briefing and debriefing meetings as well as in the weekly ICC meetings where they provided information on their activities.

The JO Focal Points 2018 Land supported the implementation of the JO FOA 2018 BCU in information gathering and reporting process, interviews of passengers, irregular migrants or facilitators and providing any other necessary operational support.

Full integration of Focal Points TMs and sTMs in the established coordination as well as command and control structure of the JO FOA 2018 BCU was considered both by TMs and the hosting Member States to be effective and beneficial having in mind its positive effect on information exchange.

3.2. JO Flexible Operational Activities 2018 Land on border checks (FOA 2018 BCP)

During the period of implementation of the JO Flexible Operational Activities 2018 Land on Border Checks, sTMs were deployed at the selected Focal Points, which had been affected by cross-border crime related incidents and/or are having high traffic flow at their BCP during peak seasons or all over the year. Furthermore deployment of sTMs contributed to the mitigation of the existing deployment gaps within the JO.

STMs were working in close cooperation with TMs deployed in the framework of the JO Focal Points 2018 Land on a daily basis and exchanged information and experience with local staff of the activated Focal Points. While the reporting system remained exclusively under the JO Focal Points 2018 land, sTMs were providing daily activity reports in JORA as well as Monthly Reports. Both reports included information about sTMs daily/monthly performance, observations, recommendations and statistics.

STMs with different profiles, in particular Second-Line Officers, Advanced-Level Document Officers, Stolen Vehicle Detection Officers and First-Line Officers were deployed/redeployed from 3 up to 11 months. Longer deployments allowed flexibility and faster response to the border related challenges.

3.3. JO Coordination Points 2018 Land

Communication between TMs deployed to different Frontex coordinated operational activities was an important part of an effective information exchange. In the course of implementation of the JO Coordination Points 2018 Land, the deployed EU experts exchanged information and experience several times with the TMs deployed to Focal Points and vice versa. The FOSS content of the JO Coordination Point 2018 Land and JO Focal Points 2018 Land was made available for all Team Members/ EU experts deployed in one of these 2 operations. As an already recognized best practice, the Local Coordinators of new Coordination Points were deployed to Focal Points prior to the activation of the Coordination Points.

Practical cooperation and networking between the Focal and Coordination Point Local Coordinators took place in the framework of the Local Coordinators Network Meeting, which was held in Warsaw in June 2018. Local Coordinators of the JO Focal Points 2018 Land and the JO Coordination Points 2018 Land had the possibility to meet and discuss processes and practices related to daily work at their BCPs.

In addition, 12 teams of Commanders and Local Coordinators of the Coordination Points were participating in the Focal Points Staff Exchange programme in order to further strengthen the bonds between the two operations.

3.4. Joint Action Days (JADs)

There were three JADs undertaken during 2018 under the umbrella of deployments within the frame of the JO Focal Points Land 2018.

- **JAD Danube III** took place from 11-24 June 2018 and focused upon two main serious crimes: excise fraud and facilitated illegal immigration along the external eastern land borders and those with the Western Balkans. There were two co-leaders: Lithuania, who led on the Excise Fraud component and Bulgaria, who led on Facilitated Illegal Immigration.
- **JAD Mobile** was held between 24 September and 7 October 2018. The action focused upon stolen vehicles, illegal immigration and document fraud. The JAD was co-led by Europol, Germany, Greece and Poland.
- **JAD Western Balkans** took place from 5-9 September and was a joint activity between the 4 EMPACT priorities Firearms, Illegal Immigration with its component of Document Fraud and Drugs.

3.5. Staff Exchange

The JO Focal Points 2018 land served as a platform for implementation of the Staff Exchange in 2018. The main objective of the Staff Exchange was to further improve the existing Local Coordinators Network in the field of cooperation and exchange of information/best practices among the Focal and Coordination Points.

The host MSs were requested to nominate BCP/FP Commander(s) and FP Local Coordinator(s) and at the same time to notify Frontex about their interest to host deployments from other Focal/Coordination Points. Based on the Member States / Third Countries needs and requests as well on operational aspects Frontex prepared a proposal for the deployments.

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

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

3.6. Information exchange between Focal Points and Police and Customs Cooperation Centres

The core idea of information exchange between the Focal Points and Customs Cooperation Centres (PCCC) remained the same - to provide the host MSs local staff and TMs deployed in Frontex coordinating the JO Focal Points Land the possibility to check relevant information on persons and vehicles in the appointed PCCCs for the purpose of rendering more efficient the border check procedure and decreasing the response time.

According to the information received from the participating FPs and PCCCs in the form of evaluation reports, during the implementation phase, a total of 432 inquiries were sent to PCCCs from nominated Focal Points. As from December 2018, a pilot project had been launched in order to improve technical support for FP-PCCC exchange of information. During the pilot, the Joint Operations Reporting Application (JORA) was used for reporting purposes: monthly statistical reports of Focal Points were sent via JORA. The successful introduction of the new reporting tool provides a new direction for further development of the information exchange product.

All feedback received from the MSs' local staff working at the Focal Points as well as from TMs were very positive, emphasizing the importance of such platform and the valuable support received. The product ensures simplified procedures, especially in cases when the request is sent to a non-neighbouring MSs and the previously used so-called "chained requests" could be avoided.

4. Operational results

Operational results of the JO Focal Points 2018 Land included the following: detection of 2.225 false documents (incidents), 372 stolen vehicles (incidents), 2.460 clandestine entry (persons), 18.754 overstay (persons), 52.374 refusals of entry (persons) and 979 smuggling of goods (incidents).

5. Financial information

The budget for JO Focal Points 2018 Land was initially planned at the level of € 2,700,000. After adjustments, the estimated operational budget amounted to € 2,957,233.