

FRONT**EX**



EUROPEAN BORDER AND
COAST GUARD AGENCY

Cooperation between Frontex and third countries in 2023

FRONT**X**



EUROPEAN BORDER AND
COAST GUARD AGENCY

Cooperation between Frontex and third countries in 2023

Table of Contents

Foreword	5
1. Dialogue and cooperation frameworks	6
1.1 Developing dialogue and structured cooperation	6
1.2 Fundamental rights	10
2. Technical and operational cooperation	13
2.1 Situational awareness and monitoring	13
2.1.1 Strengthening cooperation in the framework of EUROSUR	13
2.1.2 Risk analysis networks and communities	13
2.2 Border control	14
2.2.1 Operations with executive powers on the territory of a third country	14
2.2.2 Operations without executive powers in third countries	16
2.2.3 Tackling cross-border crime	17
2.2.4 Coast guard functions cooperation	18
2.2.5 Combatting document fraud	19
2.3 Returns	19
2.3.1 Pre-return assistance	19
2.3.2 Return operations	20
2.3.3 Post-return assistance	22
3. Capacity building	23
3.1 Training	23
3.2 Research and innovation	23
3.3 European Travel Information and Authorization System	24
3.4 Technical assistance projects	24
4. Strategic assessment	28

Foreword

Setting ourselves a new strategic objective to become a reliable and trusted partner, Frontex is further reinforcing its work in the external dimension – in cooperation with third countries. Our engagements are an integral part of the Agency’s mandate and its strategic priorities, contributing to the broader task of ensuring safe and well-functioning external borders of the EU.

I am pleased to share with you the account of our activities in the external dimension in 2023, displaying the Agency’s growing network of partnerships with the key countries of origin and transit, and delivering concrete operational results along the key migratory routes to the EU.

As the Agency is further developing its operational capabilities, I am particularly proud of our active engagement in the operational theatre in the EU pre-accession countries. Building on the results of joint operations in Albania, Moldova, Montenegro, and Serbia, in 2023 we reached several new milestones, among them the launch of the fully-fledged Joint Operation in North Macedonia and the introduction of first-line checks within the Joint Operation Moldova – the latter for the first time in a third country.

Our operational footprint is further underpinned by extensive capacity building measures drawing on EU standards and best practices as well as a robust fundamental rights framework. The Memoranda of Understanding on complaints mechanisms that I had the pleasure to sign in Albania and in Moldova testify to these efforts, along with the launch of a new EUR 7 million technical assistance intervention in the Western Balkans.

Throughout 2023, we also invested significant efforts to aid our Ukrainian counterparts in maintaining their core IBM functions at the country’s Western border. The EUR 12 million grant assigned to the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine resulted in the purchase of essential equipment that will support Ukrainian capabilities on the ground. Effective border management is not possible without well-functioning return systems. The Agency can be proud of another leap in this area, increasing the number of returns supported by Frontex by almost 60%. A range of activities



on pre-return and a growing portfolio on post-return and reintegration contributed to make our work on return more effective and sustainable.

In response to increasingly volatile migratory flows across the Mediterranean and the Aegean, the Agency further strengthened cooperation with key interlocutors in Africa and Middle East. In the Southern Neighbourhood, we invested into closer relations with Morocco, Lebanon, and Jordan, and had a solid opportunity to reopen dialogue with authorities in Egypt and Tunisia, as part of broader EU’s dialogue with these countries. In the Silk Routes region, the Agency focused on strengthening ties with Pakistan, with a number of high-level visits and capacity building activities taking place throughout the year.

At the same time, Frontex remained vigilant in upholding and promoting fundamental rights across all its activities in the external dimension. Extensive work by the Fundamental Rights Office, including their monitoring activities, impact assessments and regular advice allowed us to mitigate major risks and better integrate proactive measures to promote fundamental rights.

Hans Leijtens
Executive Director

1. Dialogue and cooperation frameworks

In 2023, Frontex further reinforced its strategic efforts to strengthen partnerships across the key migratory routes to the EU. The Agency actively engaged in structured dialogue and collaborative initiatives with key countries of origin and transit along key migratory routes to the EU, fostering trust and investing into capacities needed for future operational cooperation.

Following the priorities endorsed by the Management Board as part of the Agency’s International Cooperation Strategy, Frontex focused its engagements in the external dimension on several regions, continuously readjusting prioritisation based on migratory flows and emerging

operational needs, EU’s external action policy, fundamental rights and security situation, as well as other factors.

In 2023, our cooperation activities focused on the closest neighbours in the Western Balkans, as well as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova – all connected with a common aspiration to join the EU and hence striving to integrate closer to the European Border and Coast Guard. Important priorities were also partners in the Southern Neighbourhood and West Africa, where the Agency focused its capacity building efforts. Some targeted engagements also took place in the Silk Routes countries and in Central Asia.

1.1 Developing dialogue and structured cooperation

Pre-accession partners

The pre-accession partners remained the utmost priority in the external dimension. 2023 was the fifth year in a row when the Agency launched a new fully-fledged joint operation in the EU’s neighbourhood. Complementing joint operations in Albania (2019), Montenegro (2020), Serbia (2021) and

Moldova (2022), in April 2023 North Macedonia welcomed Frontex’s Standing Corps for joint operational efforts at the border with Greece. The signature of the Status Agreement with Albania in September 2023 kicked off preparations for expanding the scope of the Joint Operation (JO) Albania



Signature of the MoU on complaints mechanism with Albania, Tirana, June 2023

to the borders with North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo,* once the agreement enters into force.

To support operational activities, Frontex also worked to strengthen institutional ties and frameworks for structured cooperation. Negotiations took place with all Western Balkan partners and Moldova to renew working arrangements with the Agency, making full use of Frontex’s enhanced mandate.

The Agency also worked to ensure that effective complaint mechanisms underpin the implementation of existing EU Status Agreements. To ensure full compliance with fundamental rights, the Agency concluded Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with Ministries of Interior of Albania and Moldova and engaged in negotiations with other pre-accession countries.

In November, Frontex invited EU pre-accession partners hosting joint operations for a biennial exchange with the Agency’s the Management Board. For the first-time hosting also Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as new candidate countries, the meeting provided an excellent platform to exchange with the entire European Border and Coast Guard, facilitating their preparation for EU accession.

With severe implications of the Russian aggression against Ukraine spilling over to the entire region, throughout 2023

the Agency invested efforts to aid Ukrainian counterparts in maintaining the core IBM functions at the country’s Western border with the EU and supported Moldovan border and customs authorities with tailored capacity building activities.

In the operational theatre, Moldova hosted a fully-fledged JO for a second operational cycle and became an operational frontrunner with first line checks fully and directly performed by Standing Corps Officers since October 2023. The Status Agreement framework was completed in the country with a Memorandum of Understanding on complaints mechanisms and negotiations to renew the working arrangement with Frontex reached the final phase. Once concluded, the new arrangement will enable the full use of Frontex’s enhanced mandate will all relevant IBM actors in the country.

During 2023, Georgia proved again to be a close partner for Frontex, hosting our officers in advisory capacity at Border Crossing Points (BCPs) in all three domains (air, land, sea).

Complementing operational efforts, the Agency further strengthened its capacity building and technical assistance work in support of pre-accession partners. In the beginning of the year, Frontex launched a new multi-annual project “EU Regional Support to strengthen border



Gift exchange during the meeting between the EU pre-accession partners hosting Frontex joint operations and the Management Board, November 2023

* 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.



security capacities in the Western Balkans”. A number of activities were also implemented in the framework of the ongoing project “EU Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management Systems in the Western Balkans”. A separate unprecedented grant agreement

was successfully implemented in support of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine that delivered a solid technical contribution to our Ukrainian partners [see more in Chapter 4.4].

Africa and the Middle East

Throughout 2023, the Agency invested into dialogue and cooperation in Africa and the Middle East. In the Southern Neighbourhood, Frontex’s engagements were mainly carried out in the framework of the Commission-funded EU4BorderSecurity project. The project increased its implementation speed through the delivery of various capacity building activities, further described under Chapter 4.4.

To strengthen dialogue and cooperation with partners in North Africa and the Middle East, important initiatives at the regional level were organised with partners such as the Arab Interior Ministers’ Council (AIMC) of the League of Arab States and the NAIF Arab University for Security Sciences (NAUSS).

At bilateral level, progress was made in the relations with Morocco, Lebanon, and Jordan by intensifying capacity building activities in the various IBM domains. Furthermore, the Agency’s Management Board authorised the Executive Director to initiate working arrangement negotiations with Lebanon and Jordan,¹ which will be pursued in 2024.

On 11-12 December, the Executive Director visited Rabat with an aim to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with the Moroccan border management authorities. This meeting held within the framework of the Frontex-Morocco Comité Mixte was instrumental in leading both sides to start discussions on a working arrangement and preparing for the deployment of a Frontex Liaison Officer to Rabat. The meeting also agreed on a roadmap for cooperation in 2024 that includes joint activities in the areas of risk analysis and coast guard matters, among others. The meeting was co-chaired at Executive level between Frontex and the Ministry of Interior of Morocco with the involvement of high-level representatives of the DG National Security, Royal Armed Forces, Royal Gendarmerie, Royal Marine and Forces Auxiliaries.

Following several years of very limited engagement, the Agency also reopened dialogue with Egypt and Tunisia in an attempt to develop trust and mutual understanding that may lead to joint activities in the future. Familiarization visits from the national authorities of Tunisia and Egypt to the Agency’s headquarters took place in September and October respectively. In **West Africa**, Frontex strengthened

¹ Frontex Management Board Decision 25/2023 of 27 July 2023 authorising the Executive Director to negotiate working arrangements with selected EU entities and third countries.



cooperation with Senegal and Mauritania, for the latter in support of the Commission's efforts to conclude a Status Agreement. Trainings on Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC) were provided to representatives of Mauritania and Senegal in the Training Academy in Bruehl, Germany. The Agency also initiated negotiations with Nigeria to renew the working arrangement that was concluded in 2012.

In February, Frontex concluded the EU-funded project to strengthen AFIC, providing equipment and training to eight African countries. The establishment of risk analysis cells and numerous training sessions, workshops, and

Silk Routes countries and Central Asia

In the Silk Routes countries, Frontex developed dialogue with the authorities of Pakistan. Following up on the visit of the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, a senior level Frontex delegation visited Pakistan in February. Aiming to support Pakistani capacities for border management, Frontex held a study visit on e-gates, including sessions in Berlin and Vienna airports, and several activities on return.

As regards Central Asia, Frontex supported the 10th phase of the Border Management Programme in Central Asia and

Trans-Atlantic cooperation and other partners

Frontex further strengthened dialogue with partners in the United States and Canada, with an aim to enhance intelligence exchange and mutual support with good practices and expertise. The Agency hosted a record number of high-level visits and preparing the ground

joint visits marked the success of the project. Frontex extended its commitment to support the Risk Analysis Cells (RACs) through ongoing joint activities. In October, Frontex experts discussed reintegration in Banjul, The Gambia, aiming to develop an effective national mechanism for return and reintegration services. This event gathered participants from various authorities and civil society organisations, reflecting Frontex's dedication to collaborative efforts in the region, and paving the way for future work and common activities in the area of reintegration with eventual benefit to the Gambian citizens returning home.

Afghanistan (BOMCA) project, thereby aiding the further development of the capacities of Central Asian countries for effective border management. In this context, a delegation from Central Asian countries visited Frontex in March 2023. This visit, organised in cooperation with BOMCA and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Central Asia, brought together officials from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, facilitating exchange on migratory flows in the region.

for renewing working arrangements with both countries. In November 2023, the Agency also started negotiations with the United States on a new working arrangement which will bolster strategic and operational cooperation with this strategic partner, with the objective of pursuing



transatlantic cooperation with EU partners with a similar vision and challenges in integrated border management.

The Agency embarked on the negotiations for a working arrangement with the United Kingdom. The working

arrangement was concluded in February 2024, paving the ground to explore future cooperation with the country in a new set-up, following its exit from the European Union.

Latin America

The Agency explored dialogue and exchange with law enforcement counterparts in Latin America, particularly in view of strengthening cooperation on cross-border crime. To that end, Frontex engaged with relevant authorities through several Commission funded projects in the region, such as EUROFRONT and SEACOP, joining efforts in the framework of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) drug and human

trafficking-related operational activities involving Latin American partners.

In support of capacities to detect document fraud, Frontex organised a tailor-made awareness session on security of documents and look-alike fraud to the representatives of Embassy of Latin American countries to Poland.

1.2 Fundamental rights

When engaging in cooperation with third countries, Frontex must “act within the framework of the external action policy of the Union, including with regard to the protection of fundamental rights and personal data, the principle of non-refoulement, the prohibition of arbitrary detention and the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.² To that end, the Fundamental Rights Office (FRO) supports the Agency with the assessment of the fundamental rights implications of planned or potential cooperation with third countries. In 2023, this procedure applied to various contexts of Frontex’s cooperation in the external dimension, including working arrangements, pilot projects and technical assistance projects, return-related activities as well as activities based on status agreements.³ The overview of each third country referred to the human rights matters

relevant for its migration management practices and their potential implications to the Agency.

In line with its 2022 Fundamental Rights Due Diligence Procedure, in 2023 FRO assessed the fundamental rights situation in the following third countries: Albania, Angola, Argentina, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of Cote d’Ivoire, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, The Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Jordan, Kenya, Kosovo, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Mexico, Montenegro, Kingdom of Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Panama, Peru, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Togo, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Venezuela.

² Regulation (EU) 2019/1896, article 73 (2)

³ In respect to Status Agreements, prior to concluding such agreements, the European Commission also assesses the situation of fundamental rights in the relevant third country.

FRO was also involved in briefing the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) on the fundamental rights implications of the Frontex's engagement with the selected third countries.

In the area of risk analysis, FRO was requested to provide assessments on the human rights situation in third countries hosting Risk Analysis Cells in the framework of the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC) and on Türkiye in the framework of the Blueprint network. FRO also contributed to various products, such as the annual risk analysis report and the strategic risk analysis report and attended the Plenary meeting of the AFIC in Togo in November 2023, thus mainstreaming the fundamental rights perspective into the Agency's analytical work.

In the same vein, FRO and the Analysis Unit enhanced regular exchange when planning and following up on monitoring missions to third countries and held meetings to discuss challenges and observations related to the monitoring of debriefing activities, including through a dedicated webinar for debriefing officers. As a result, since June 2023, fundamental rights monitors have been



Meeting with US Customs and Border Protection Deputy Executive Assistant Commissioner Mark Koumans, January 2023

given access to the Fundamental Rights Office Dashboard, a tool created by the Analysis Team to support the monitoring activities. The Dashboard allows to break down disaggregated data for irregular border crossings by countries, border crossing points, green borders, routes, and border types, indicating vulnerable groups. As part of the regular monitoring to ensure fundamental rights compliance of Frontex's joint operations, in 2023 monitoring missions were conducted to joint operations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Moldova.

As part of due diligence and its advisory role, FRO also provides assessments to the Agency on the implications of return operations to countries with an increasingly challenging fundamental rights or security related situation. In this regard, due diligence is established by providing advice to the Executive Management on the potential security and fundamental rights risks that could directly impact the completion/success of a given return operation, according to specific return-related indicators. Such assessments were provided with regards to returns to Iran and on voluntary returns to Ukraine. Case-by-case assessments were also conducted both for voluntary and forced returns of individuals and families to Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Eritrea, Haiti, Israel, Pakistan, Sudan, and Tunisia.

In the Serious Incident framework, FRO looked into and exchanged with host third countries on twelve incidents of possible violations, namely in Serbia (6), Albania (3), North Macedonia (2) and Moldova (1).⁴ As per standard practice, FRO requested feedback on a set of detailed questions from respective national authorities. Based on these inquiries, and with the exception of the cases in North Macedonia where allegations were raised against Frontex officers, concerns persist in relation to expulsions/irregular return of migrants by officers of the host states, and in some cases – even about the use of violence. Serious Incident investigations also looked into four instances of fundamental rights violations by Libyan search and rescue actors at sea that occurred following Frontex's sightings but did not entail outreach to the Libyan authorities.

Following intensified efforts of Frontex and FRO to strengthen the complaints mechanisms available within the framework of joint operations with executive powers in third countries, FRO further strengthened relations with independent human rights monitoring bodies in the relevant third countries. Building on the 2022 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) concluded by FRO with Ombuds institutions of Albania, Moldova and Serbia, a similar arrangement with the Ombudsman of Montenegro was concluded in 2023. The purpose of these MoUs is to ensure the compatibility and effective cooperation between

⁴ The data included herein refer to the calendar year (1 January 2023 until 31 December 2023), and not the operational year.



Frontex visiting the Human Rights Department of the League of Arab States, Cairo, May 2023

the national complaint mechanisms and the complaints mechanism of the FRO within the scope of their respective mandates, and to establish an exchange of information on the complaints on fundamental rights violations related to the activities of the Agency in these third countries.

To develop sustainable dialogue on fundamental rights with authorities of third countries, Frontex also engaged with national human rights bodies via a series of events. In April 2023, the FRO held the first working visit of National Human Rights and Ombuds institutions to Frontex. The meeting targeted countries with which FRO established MoUs on the complaint mechanism, based

on the respective Status Agreements, namely Albania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

In cooperation with the Arab Interior Ministers' Council (AIMC), in June Frontex organised a workshop on human rights at borders at the Police Academy in Cairo. Representatives of the Arab League Member States, FRO and the President of the Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen exchanged good practices and discussed oversight mechanisms to monitor human rights at borders. As a follow-up, in December, a delegation from the Human Rights Department of the League of Arab States visited Frontex HQ to further familiarise themselves with the Agency's work and forge closer ties with FRO.

2. Technical and operational cooperation

2.1 Situational awareness and monitoring

2.1.1 Strengthening cooperation in the framework of EUROSUR

Making use of the EUROSUR framework for exchange of information and for operational cooperation, in 2023 Frontex further expanded cooperation in the context of Specific Situational Pictures (SSP) that can be established either based on Status Agreements between the EU and third countries or based on working arrangements that third country authorities conclude with Frontex. Following EU Status Agreements with Moldova, North Macedonia, and Montenegro, the SSPs were established under the respective Joint Operations.

Aiming to ensure safe information exchange, the Agency invested into the capacities of third countries to

establish and manage Coordination Centres in line with the EUROSUR framework standards and best practices. EUROSUR experts supported one of the components of the EU-funded project “Regional Support to Strengthen Border Security Capacities in the Western Balkans” under IPA III, where Frontex promotes basic requirements for the Coordination Centres in the region.

Awareness sessions on the framework of EUROSUR were also held for the benefit of the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Tunisia, Nigeria, Silk Route countries under the Budapest process, EU CAP Sahel Niger and other partners, including as part of ongoing talks to conclude working arrangements.

2.1.2 Risk analysis networks and communities

At the backbone of Frontex risk analysis and intelligence cooperation, work was carried out in three well established regional groups – the Western Balkans Risk Analysis Network (WB-RAN), the Eastern Partnership Risk Analysis Network (EaP-RAN) and the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC). These fora bring together representatives of third countries for analyst-to-analyst exchanges, raise regular situational awareness and promote joint analytical work. The risk analysis networks in the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans enabled regular exchanges of information, interactions and meetings resulting in joint regional analytical products that enhance situational awareness and serve strategic and operational decision-making on all sides. Steps have been taken to extend data collection in the EaP-RAN with respect to firearms and ammunition data. Data on firearms detected at the EU Eastern borders will allow to reflect on this phenomenon in the analytical reports, which is particularly important in the context of the war in Ukraine.

The Agency also further pursued cooperation within the framework of the AFIC and organised workshops with the AFIC Risk Analysis Cells to jointly perform analytical overview of relevant developments impacting border management. In September 2023, Frontex organised and facilitated an operational meeting between The Gambia and Senegal and also organised a Regional Workshop focusing on cross-border crime developments in West Africa. In November 2023, Frontex hosted an annual plenary meeting aiming at bringing AFIC partners together to discuss border security matters of wider regional interest.

Air Borders Risk Analysis Network

In 2023, eight third countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine) provided statistical data relating to specific indicators to the Air Borders Risk Analysis Network (AB-RAN) - Pulsar data collection, performed together with 30 EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries. The data supported the creation of the EU’s situational picture of the wider European air borders in close to real time, using key indicators of irregular migration, obtained on a weekly basis from all participating countries.

The AB-RAN also supported the creation of several risk analysis products including for Frontex operations by allowing the assessments of risk at specific airports and their prioritisation, as well as enabling to assess specific operational targets for the host authorities the member States and third countries to concentrate on at specific airports.

In support of the data collection and the analysis process, the Agency organised its work in the framework of two separate Air Borders Risk Analysis Networks – one dedicated to the Member States and another one – involving third countries. The network with third countries met twice a year in a plenary meeting, back-to-back with regular meetings for the Member States, and engaged into regular exchanges via a moderated online forum. The network members worked together to identify emerging trends, discuss the factors affecting irregular migration at air borders and identified good practices.

2.2 Border control

Operational cooperation with the third countries at the borders continued with scope and intensity according to the operational needs, encompassing fully-fledged operational activities under EU Status Agreements in five third countries, multilateral activities against cross-border crime as well as coast-guard exercises and exchange of observers. In addition to the fully fledged operational activities under EU Status Agreement frameworks, operational cooperation also took place on the basis of working arrangements between Frontex and the partner

countries; in these cases, resources were deployed by the Agency with the status of EU expert with monitoring and advising tasks.

As with many areas, the Russian invasion of Ukraine continued having a profound effect over Frontex joint operations at the EU's external borders, requiring mobilising the Agency's resources in support of the frontline EU Member States, and where possible also third countries.

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

In 2023, Frontex further expanded its operational footprint outside the EU.

A new large-scale Joint Operation was launched in North Macedonia in April 2023, thus phasing out the bilateral support provided by Member States at the border between North Macedonia and Greece in the framework of EU-funded Special Measures Programme. The operational aim of JO North Macedonia 2023 was to implement coordinated operational activities at the land borders of North Macedonia in order to control illegal immigration flows, to tackle cross-border crime and to enhance European cooperation.

Based on the updated Status Agreement between the EU and Montenegro signed in May 2023, Frontex further developed the Joint Operation implemented in Montenegro by including land border surveillance activities between Montenegro and Albania, developing the EUROSUR

component, as well as introducing debriefing and screening interviews in the operational concept. The maritime joint operation with executive powers in Montenegro continued as an annual activity in 2023 at the Adriatic Sea as well as at the Port of Bar.

Based on the Status Agreements concluded in 2019, Frontex supported land and sea operational activities in **Albania**, preparing reinforced engagement in the anticipation of the new Status Agreement to be signed in 2024. The activities fostered synergies between the maritime joint operations implemented in Albania, Greece, Italy, and Montenegro resulting in strengthened regional cooperation in the Adriatic and Ionian seas.

The Agency also supported **Serbia** by implementing the operational activities at the land border between Serbia and Bulgaria, running since 2021, and between Serbia and Hungary – operational since 2022.



Launch of JO North Macedonia, March 2023, Skopje

Joint Operation Moldova 2023 was the continuation of the first Frontex JO with executive powers in Eastern Europe launched swiftly in 2022 as an important building block in strengthening security in the EU and beyond its borders.

As of July 2023, the Standing Corps officers deployed to Chisinau Airport were granted access to the databases, allowing them to independently perform duties at the first-line checks, for the first time ever in a third country.

Joint Operation	Human Resources and Technical Equipment	Officer -days and asset-days
JO Albania - Land 2023	287 HR 128 units of TE	32 217 officer-days 44 897 asset-days
JO Albania - Sea 2023	105 HR 8 units of TE	5 895 officer-days 439 asset-days
JO Montenegro Land 2023	110 HR 34 TE units	6 204 officer-days 3 761 asset-days
JO Montenegro Sea 2023	110 HR 3 TE units	3 100 officer-days 486 asset-days
JO North Macedonia 2023	429 HR 254 TE units	31 850 officer -days 23 917 asset days
JO Serbia Land 2023	561 HR 198 TE units	43 106 officer -days 50 424 asset-days
JO Moldova 2023	288 HR 127 TE	32 453 officer -days 43 417 asset-days



Visit of the Executive Director to the border between Moldova and Ukraine, October 2023

2.2.2 Operations without executive powers in third countries

As part of its operational activities with third countries, the Agency implements the JO without executive powers by deploying Standing Corps officers as EU experts. These operational activities are implemented on the basis of Working Arrangements between the host country and Frontex.

Three JO Coordination Points were implemented in 2023:

- JO Coordination Points Air, Land and Sea 2023, hosted by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova,⁵ Montenegro⁶ and North Macedonia
- JO Coordination Points Serbia 2023, hosted at air and land BCPs
- JO Coordination Points Kosovo* 2023, hosted at air and land BCPs

Forming the concept of “Coordinated Operational Activities in Third Countries”, the operational activities under the JO Coordination Points were limited to providing support and advice to the hosting third country authorities responsible for border control. The concept was created with the aim

of providing the Agency with awareness of matters related to irregular migration and cross-border crime activities at the nominated BCPs in the host third country, which has a direct link to or influence on the Schengen area’s BCPs.

As a part of the concept on strengthening cooperation and capacities of the host countries, within the operational framework the Agency also organised roadshows on falsified documents, awareness sessions for motor vehicle crime detection at land BCPs, document forgery detection awareness sessions and an awareness session on security features used in travel documents.

Within JO Coordination Points Air, Land and Sea 2023, one observer from Moldova was deployed at Tbilisi airport. Albania and Moldova also deployed their officers as observers at land BCPs at the Montenegro-Albania border on Montenegro’s territory and at the Georgia-Türkiye border on Georgia’s territory. As a result of those deployments, direct contacts were established between two third countries, enabling the exchange of good practices.



Prepared for operational activities at air BCP

⁵ As of 2 of 24 July 2023 Chisinau Airport was transferred to the fully – fledged JO Moldova 2023, granting executive powers to the SC officers in air domain. As a result of it, the SC officers deployed to Chisinau Airport were granted with access to the databases, allowing to directly perform first-line checks in full.

⁶ As of 1 November 2023, Podgorica and Tivat airports were transferred to the fully fledged JO Montenegro 2023

Joint Operation	Human Resources and Technical Equipment	Officer -days and asset-days
JO Coordination Points Air, Land and Sea 2023	120 HR 9 units of TE	17 067 officer-days 2 927 asset-days
JO Coordination Points Serbia 2023	21 HR 1 unit of TE	3 845 officer-days 365 asset-days
JO Coordination Points Kosovo 2023	12 HR 1 unit of TE	2 807 officer-days 365 asset-days

2.2.3 Tackling cross-border crime

In addition to the operational cooperation with third countries, Frontex was also working with third countries in other relevant fora, providing its expertise migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, firearms, and drugs trafficking with the aim to contribute to global multi-institutional objectives of the EU.

Cooperation in the context of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) provides an important platform for Frontex to promote European integrated border management and particularly the inter-agency cooperation between border guard, customs and law enforcement communities. Within the EMPACT framework, in 2023 Frontex coordinated six Joint Action Days (JADs) in 2023, co-led one and was participating in five other major operational activities. Five of the Frontex coordinated JADs were implemented with the involvement of third countries.

In May 2023, Frontex supported JAD Global Chain - the biggest operation against all forms of trafficking in human beings involving 44 countries and international organisations, from EU Member States, Western Balkan partners, Moldova, Ukraine, Asia, Latin America, North America, and Africa. The operation led to the identification of 1 476 potential victims and 138 suspected traffickers worldwide leading to 212 arrests and 244 new investigations.

In response to the consequences of the Russian war in Ukraine, Frontex launched a range of activities to enhance the prevention and detection of firearms and ammunition at the EU's External borders. These activities, involving the Member States, the Western Balkans countries, Moldova and Ukraine, intended to enhance the situational picture on the firearms trafficking trends, to introduce the national language versions of the Handbook on Firearms developed by Frontex under EMPACT, to analyse the relevant firearms trafficking cases linked to the conflict in Ukraine, and to address the impact of Russian aggression and associated terrorist threats.

In September 2023, together with partners Frontex successfully finalised JAD Southeast Europe focused on

firearms and drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, associated document fraud, and high-risk criminal networks. The JAD resulted in 566 arrests, 310 weapons seized, almost 1 tone of drugs (626 kg cocaine, approx. 300 kg cannabis, heroin, and marijuana plants). In addition, Frontex held workshops on firearms trafficking counteraction in Serbia and Moldova and 6 Firearms Detection Courses (for all 6 Western Balkans jurisdictions and Croatia); 1 Train the Trainer Course (held in Ungheni, Moldova, for Moldovan authorities) and 3 Common Risk Indicators Workshops, out of which 2 were implemented in Moldova also engaging Ukrainian authorities.

Other JADs included:

- JAD Danube on migrant smuggling, THB and document fraud, among others result in the arrest of 108 migrant smugglers, and apprehension of 4 939 irregular migrants.
- Finestra 3 covering the Eastern EU land borders and third countries to jointly tackle the smuggling of tobacco and other excise products, migrant smuggling, firearms trafficking, and document fraud in the Black Sea and Danube River regions, with the participation of Moldova and Ukraine, our traditional partners for this operation, and for the first time - also Georgia, Serbia, and Montenegro. Among other the JAD resulted in the seizure of 15.7 million cigarettes, 1 million pieces of chewing tobacco, and other illicit goods.

Frontex also supported the Operation Tayrona VI targeting the trafficking of drugs via the EU's external borders. The operation was led by Colombia with Spain, Netherlands, and Croatia as co-leaders, and aimed to promote, to coordinate and to develop transnational investigations against organised crime groups involved in the wholesale cocaine trafficking from Colombia to EU.

Under the framework of VEGA Children - a Frontex initiative to help frontline border guards to recognise the signs of human trafficking - the Agency conducted 18 field visits, five of them for the benefit of authorities in Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Moldova.



Meeting the chiefs of Border Police of Moldova and Ukraine, October 2023

2.2.4 Coast guard functions cooperation

Frontex is part of several international networks with third countries, such as the the Mediterranean Coast Guard Functions Forum (MCGFF), the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum (NACGF) and the Coast Guard Global Summit (CGGS) and other fora promoting maritime cooperation, such as the Baltic Sea Region Border Control Cooperation (BSRBCC).

Along with partners from outside of the EU, the Agency makes use of synergies across a variety of coast guards, strengthening border control, search and rescue as well as maritime safety and security.

Within the framework of the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum (NACGF), where Frontex participates as an observer, the Agency contributed to four out of seven working groups, covering maritime security, search and rescue, illegal migration, and drug trafficking. The forum serves as a platform to develop and foster cooperation between several EU Member States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Under the Japanese chair of the Coast Guard Global Summit (CGGS), Frontex, together with the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) and European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), contributed to the Core Group Members in charge of developing the activities of the summit in support of the Japanese Coast Guard.

The Agency also actively supported capacity building of third country authorities in the remit of coast guard functions. In 2023, several observers from third countries took part in search and rescue (SAR) workshop/drills organised by Frontex within the framework of joint and multipurpose maritime operations. Experts from Morocco, Türkiye and the United States of America participated in a SAR workshop organised within the JO Poseidon in Greece, whereas representatives from Georgia participated in the SAR drill organised within Multipurpose Maritime Operations (MMO) Central and Eastern Baltic Sea in Estonia.

2.2.5 Combatting document fraud

In 2023, Frontex implemented various activities related to the fight against document and identity fraud with third countries. Familiarisation sessions, operational awareness sessions, exchange of information sessions, briefings and other meetings were held by the Centre of Excellence for Combatting Document Fraud in cooperation with other Frontex entities. Officials and officers from Albania, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Egypt, Georgia, Japan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tunisia, the United States including local consular staff in Egypt and Lebanon benefited from various trainings and awareness raising sessions.

Among the key achievements was the inclusion of document experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Moldova in the network of Frontex-INTERPOL Electronic Library Documents System (FIELDS). Thanks to the partnership with INTERPOL technical capabilities and systems and Frontex expertise in travel and identity documents, this joint initiative merged pre-existing services and products of Frontex and INTERPOL to support frontline police officers and border guards with an easy and user-friendly tool to share document-related information (the Frontex Quick Check Card).

2.3 Returns

2.3.1 Pre-return assistance

During 2023, the Agency has carried on various activities to enhance the operational and technical cooperation with countries of return. These include:

- supporting the deployment of European Return Liaison Officers (EURLOs),
- supporting the organisation of identification missions,
- deployment of the Standing Corps with Return Specialist profile, in particular to liaise with consular and readmission authorities of countries of return,
- use of the Readmission Case Management Systems (RCMS),
- events related to third country cooperation and
- technical assistance activities.

At the end of 2023, Frontex coordinated the deployment of 9 European Return Liaison Officers (EURLOs) covering 13 third countries supporting Member States and Frontex in enhancing cooperation on return-related activities at all phases of the return process including pre-return, return operations and voluntary returns, post-arrival, and reintegration.

Through 2023 Frontex supported the implementation of 13 Identification Missions of 7 third countries relevant to 10 Member States, some organised directly by the Agency who engaged relevant third country authorities.

During 2023, 7 deployments of Standing Corps to 6 Member States aiming to enhance general cooperation with countries of return and 1 deployment supporting more

tailored cooperation via the RCMS were implemented. In total, Standing Corps submitted 825 identification requests to consular authorities of countries of return and 334 via the RCMS, obtaining 111 travel documents for return.

In addition, Frontex engaged with **Armenia** and **Georgia** on the use of the RCMS. This resulted in the organisation with Georgia of a workshop for Member States' experts and the Standing Corps to familiarise with the Georgian RCMS and to improve their preparedness liaising with Georgian authorities for identification and acquisition of travel documents for return. At the end of the year, Frontex also got familiarised with the Armenian RCMS. Finally, anonymised and aggregated operational data from both systems were agreed to be shared with Frontex.

Under the **Technical Assistance Projects for Third Countries on Return, Readmission and Reintegration (TAP4RRR)** framework, Frontex supported three projects focused on building reintegration capacity in 3 third countries.⁷

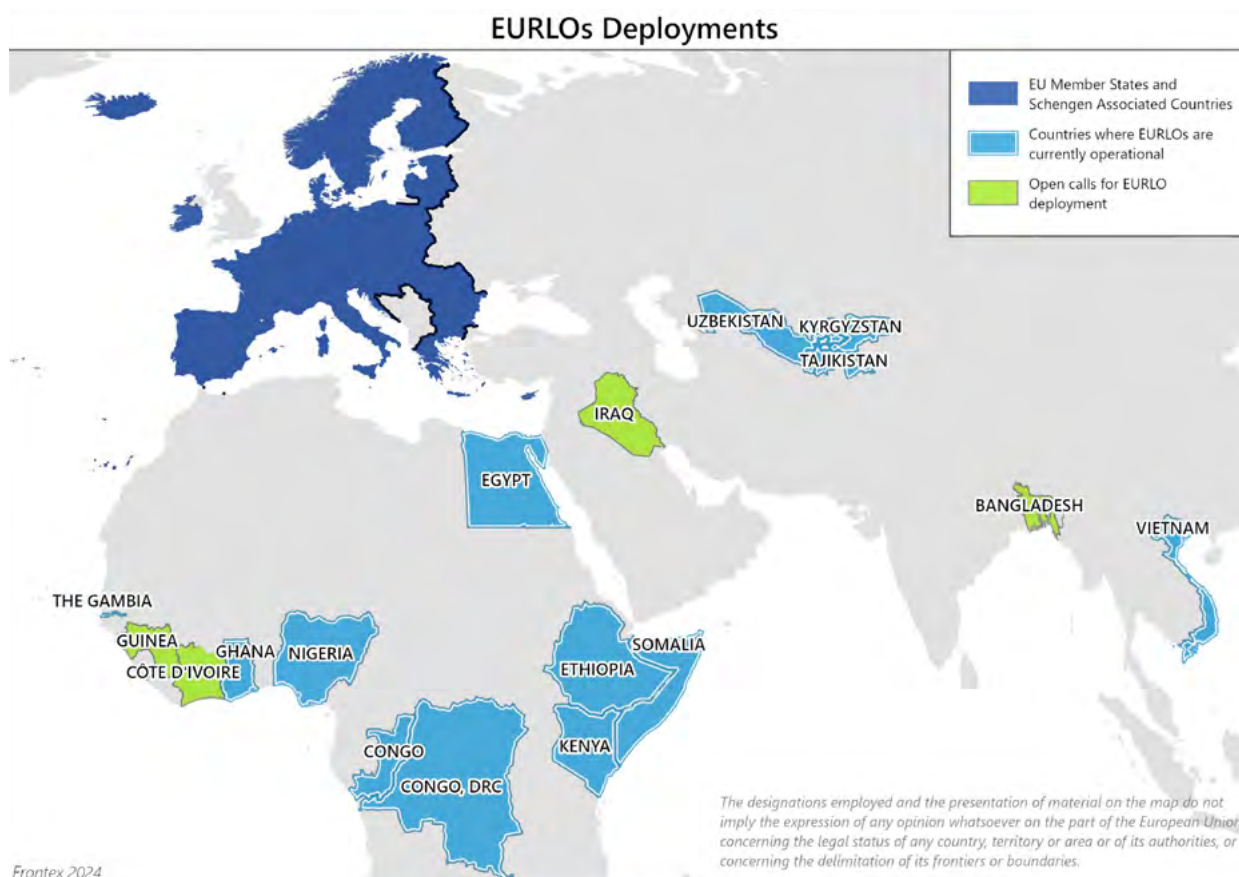
Within the same framework, and also as part of supporting the EU-funded IPA III project "EU Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management Systems in the Western Balkans, Phase III", Frontex further strengthened the cooperation with partner institutions in the Western Balkans in charge of return matters and provided an opportunity for all the beneficiaries to take part as observers in selected Frontex-managed Country Working Groups.

⁷ More details under point 3.3.

In 2023 Frontex initiated national return case management systems (RECAMAS) gap-analysis exercise with two Western Balkans beneficiaries to assess compliance with the reference model, identify possible areas for improvement, and provide recommendations.

Additionally, a more collaborative and complementary approach in steering and implementing return-related activities has been agreed among all donors operating in the Western Balkan region as well as addressing gaps in integrated return management systems, in particular between the Frontex IPA III project, Joint Cooperation Platform led by Austria and the Dutch-led project “Western Balkan Return Mechanism”.⁸

Apart from existing activities agreed under the Technical Assistance Projects for Third Countries on Return, Readmission and Reintegration (TAP4RRR) and the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) programmes, no specific action plans were concluded with individual third countries on return. In some cases, the political and security situation in specific third countries affected possibilities or willingness for cooperation, while in other cases cooperation was discussed and agreed upon on a higher political level, decreasing the needs for the development of dedicated action plans or other agreements between the Agency and the country of return.



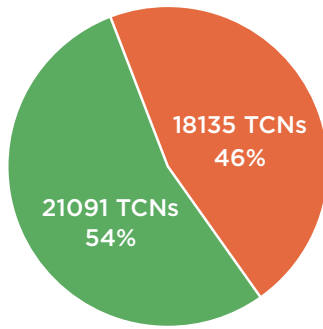
2.3.2 Return operations

In 2023, Frontex provided technical and operational support to the Member States in carrying out the return of **39 231 individuals to 112 third countries of destination** (54% voluntary-based returns).

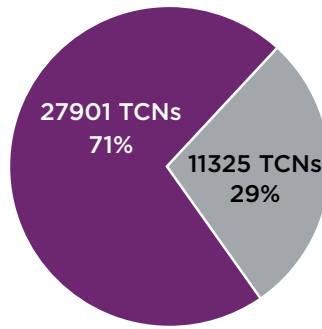
Three return operations were organised directly by the Agency: to **Bangladesh, Albania/Georgia and Nigeria**, allowing 9 Member States to return 173 third country nationals. In such Frontex organised return operations, it is the Agency to engage the authorities of the country of return, via the EU Delegations, Frontex Liaison Officers

⁸ More details under point 4.4.

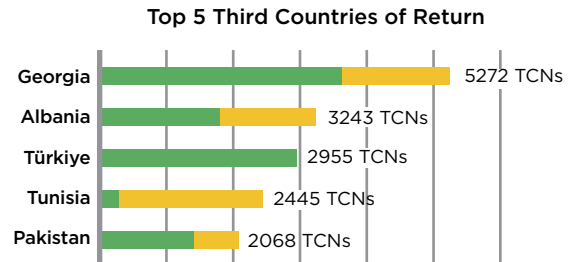
Return Operations & Voluntary Returns by Air in 2023



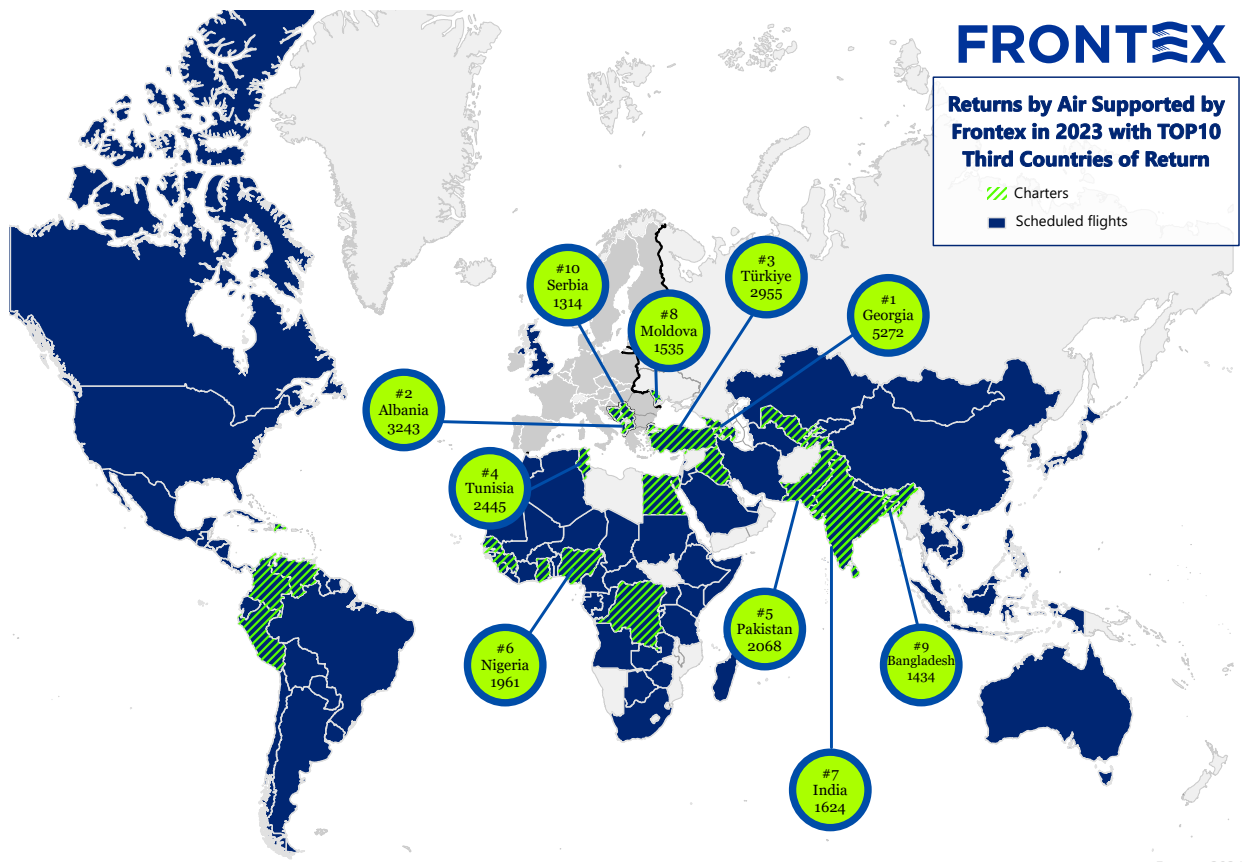
■ Voluntary Returns
■ Forced Returns



■ Scheduled flights
■ Charter flights



■ Scheduled flights
■ Charter flights



and/or European Return Liaison Officers, to agree on the implementation of the operations.

The Agency also supports the implementation of Collecting Return Operations (CROs) based on Article 50(3) of the EBCG Regulation.⁹ In these operations, the means of transport and return escorts are provided by the countries of return. In 2023, 42 of such CROs were implemented (1 865 third country nationals returned). The partner/destination countries were **Albania** and **Georgia**.

To ensure the respect for fundamental rights, the proportionate use of means of constraints and that the dignity of the returnee are guaranteed during the entire

return operation, Frontex always trains in advance the escorts of the partner countries of return based on EU standards. In 2023, such a training was organised for **Moldova**.

In order to further enhance the cooperation between Frontex, Member States and countries of return participating in CROs, a Forum Meeting was held in June 2023 with **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia and Serbia**. The main aim of the meeting was to have a common understanding and standardised procedures on CROs, and the sharing of best practices in organising this type of return operations.

2.3.3 Post-return assistance

In 2023, in the area of post-return and reintegration, Frontex actively provided support to reintegration assistance in **35 third countries** in partnership with reintegration partners, as part of the non-profit sector through the EU Reintegration Programme. There was no direct involvement of the third country authorities in the reintegration cooperation. However, concrete interest of involvement was noted by several third countries, in particular Armenia, Egypt, Cameroon, The Gambia, Nigeria, Iraq and Morocco.

As regards capacity building activities, as part of the Technical Assistance Projects for third countries on Return, Readmission and Reintegration (TAP4RRR), three projects were proposed in consultation with the Member States and Schengen Associated countries, EU services, and relevant stakeholders under Pillar 2 (Reintegration), aiming to contribute to the development of well-coordinated referral and reintegration mechanisms and to strengthen the reintegration counselling capacities in **Egypt, Nigeria** and **The Gambia**.

In 2023, Frontex co-organised the “Roundtable on Reintegration in The Gambia” in cooperation with Gambian national authorities and the EU Delegation. The event also included an awareness session on coaching opportunities related to the post-arrival and reintegration assistance. The roundtable attracted around 70 key national and

international stakeholders involved in post-arrival and reintegration assistance to the returning Gambians. The Roundtable on Reintegration provided a great opportunity for strengthening the cooperation between the EU and the Gambian authorities in the field of reintegration and paved the way for future work and common activities in reintegration.

Frontex also cooperated with **Egyptian** national authorities (in particular the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Coordinating Committee for the Prevention of Illegal Migration and Trafficking of Persons) to organise a “Workshop on Best Practices on Return and Reintegration” held in 2023 in Cairo. The event attracted interest from approximately 30 various stakeholders from Egyptian entities and ministries to discuss the development of a national return, reintegration, and referral mechanism. To support in this effort, relevant authorities from Armenia, The Gambia and Cameroon were invited to share their experiences and national return and reintegration frameworks. The workshop provided a practical platform for the various invited authorities to share and discuss their reintegration assistance programmes. It also provided an opportunity to present their learned experiences while also presenting a practical insight into identified local implementation issues for the benefit of the Egyptian authorities.

⁹ Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard.

3. Capacity building

3.1 Training

In 2023, Frontex conducted training courses that supported the implementation of its mandate and addressed various aspects of integrated border management for partner third countries. The courses were offered based on a thorough needs assessment, in consideration of the operational

context, identified vulnerabilities, and risk analysis reports, in addition to priorities recognised by the Agency.

In total, 390 officers from third countries participated in Frontex training in 2023.

Course	Trained participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Firearms Detection Course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 92 officers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, and Ukraine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course for Advanced Level Document Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 32 officers from Serbia, Montenegro, and Moldova
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course for Frontex Return Escort and Support Officer-FRESO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 38 officers from Moldova
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course on CIRAM (Risk Analysis) Intensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 officers from Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course on False Document Detection - Consular Staff Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9 officers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, United States, Canada, and Australia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English Language for Border and Coast Guarding - Level 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 386 participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-return and Return Terminology in English for Border and Coast Guarding - Level B2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 participants

In addition to the above courses, three roadshows were organised for officers from third countries: the Roadshow on Border Guard and Customs Cooperation (42 officers from Moldova and Ukraine), the Roadshow on Cross Border Crime Detection (14 officers from Montenegro), and the Roadshow on Falsified Documents (125 officers from Serbia, Montenegro, and Georgia). The main objective of the roadshows is to establish a common standard for cooperation between the Standing Corps, local border guards, and customs officers, as well as to update and harmonise training. These roadshows comprised learner-centred activities, including mostly practical sessions adapted to the operational situations of the selected BCPs.

In December 2023, a virtual session was held for 24 experts from the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. The purpose was to raise awareness about the European IBM and to introduce them to the recent concept as part of an ongoing dialogue on gradual alignment of national IBM practices with those in place in the EU.

The Agency also benefitted from the exchange of expertise with third countries, such as for the review and the implementation of the Common Core Curriculum for Border and Coast Guard Basic Training in the EU.

3.2 Research and innovation

Within the framework of the “EU Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management Systems in the Western Balkans”, Frontex supported the Western Balkan

partners developing the European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database (EURODAC)-compatible registration systems, by creating implementation masterplans.

In 2023, Frontex also started the preparatory work to support the development of European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG) Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) capabilities in operational scenarios with a Pilot Project involving the use of RPAS. Experts from North Macedonia took part in the Frontex-led discussions on the development of RPAS deployment models to be tested in an operational environment. The pilot project's results will be used to assess and eventually validate a proof-of-concept for a deployment model of this category of equipment in joint operations and to integrate such assets in the Frontex Technical Equipment Pool. An agreement was reached to carry out this pilot project under the umbrella of Joint Operation North Macedonia 2024, according to the JO's Specific Activity Plan. The initiative was officially kicked-off on 19 December 2023 between all

project stakeholders (Frontex, Austria, North Macedonia), with operational trials planned for Q1 2024.

Exchange of expertise with the global border and coast guard community was an essential part of research and innovation. As part of its mandate, Frontex regularly met with industry representatives, researchers, and experts from the Member States and third countries to provide a platform for discussion and to help develop new technologies and innovations related to border control. Industry Days allowed companies to share the latest technological developments, state-of-the-art and innovative solutions for border security, and to showcase their products and services to the end-user community – EU Member States and invited third countries.

3.3 European Travel Information and Authorization System

In preparation to launch the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS), the Agency engaged partner third countries that already developed similar authorisation systems, such as United States of America, Canada, and Australia, learning from their experience and expertise.

The cooperation included exchange of information, guidelines, and best practices via workshops and bilateral meeting, as well as the exchange of lessons learnt from the

implementation of such large-scale authorisation systems. The Agency further cooperated with those third countries, which already implemented interactive Advance Passenger Information (iAPI) systems including facilitation aspects and collaboration with carriers.

This cooperation is considered crucial for Frontex in view of the upcoming entry into operation of the Entry Exit System, followed by the start of the ETIAS six months later.

3.4 Technical assistance projects

EU Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management Systems in the Western Balkans – Phase III

In 2023, Frontex together with other implementing partners - European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) implemented Phase III of the EU-funded programme “EU Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management Systems in the Western Balkans, Phase III”. Within this framework, Frontex led the implementation in three priority areas dedicated to the improvement of a) capacity to identify and register mixed migration flows; b) integrated return management systems, as well as c) contingency planning and crisis response.

In the area of identification and registration of mixed migration flows, preparatory steps were taken towards the development of masterplans for the remaining Western Balkan partners: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia aiming at upgrading their information technology and communication infrastructure in view of the future connection to EURODAC. The Agency supported

Montenegro in the operationalisation of the masterplan already developed in 2021.

In the area of return, Frontex introduced the reference model for national return case management systems (RECAMAS) for third countries to the Western Balkan partner and started work with Serbia and North Macedonia on a gap assessment. Continued assistance was provided to train return escorts and forced return monitors and to establish more sustainable national training systems. The Agency also facilitated knowledge exchange between EU Member States and Western Balkan partners on cooperation with countries of origin.

In the area of contingency planning and crisis response, Frontex and EUAA finished the development of a common methodological approach for contingency planning and presented it to the Western Balkans national authorities in a regional workshop. After the establishment of a dedicated Working Group and in close coordination and cooperation with the responsible authorities of Kosovo, Frontex and



Launch of the IPA Migration project, March 2023, Brussels

EUAA began work on the revision of a Kosovo's contingency plan based on the developed methodology.

EU Regional Support to strengthen border security capacities in the Western Balkans

This regional programme builds capacities of border police for Frontex Joint Operations and other operational activities in the Western Balkans. It started in January 2023 as a stand-alone intervention with an official inauguration during the kick-off conference in Warsaw in November. The aim was to introduce the Frontex programme team and activities to the Western Balkans beneficiaries.

In its first inception year, the programme delivered four activities: two inception visits and two workshops on Frontex-INTERPOL Electronic Library Document System (FIELDS). The FIELDS workshops on Quick Check Cards creation and validation were conducted on 25-29 September in Estonia and on 23-27 October in Portugal with experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia for both events. The first two inception visits to the beneficiaries were implemented in November to North Macedonia and in December to Kosovo. Several other activities connected with creation of the Western Balkans Integrated Border Management Working Group, Network of Women from Border Police Authorities in the Western Balkans and building capacities to work together

in the EUROSUR framework, via a network of Coordination Centres compatible with EUROSUR standards, finalised their detailed planning and entered initial organisational phases.

EU4BorderSecurity project

Through the EU4BorderSecurity project, funded via a EUR 6.5 million grant by DG NEAR European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the Agency seeks to enhance border security in North Africa and the Levant, by fostering bilateral and regional cooperation, while facilitating bona fide travel.

Over the course of 2023, the project implemented in total more than 20 activities at national and regional levels, among which: workshops on fundamental rights at borders, consular workshops on countering document fraud, familiarisation visits for Egypt and Tunisia, regular meetings of the Euro-Arab Working Group gathering seven EU Member States and seven League of Arab States members under the lead of Frontex, regular National Steering Committee Meetings, as well as trainings on women in border management, Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) and Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC) among others.

The project maintained a good pace of implementation despite the geopolitical developments in the region, particularly the Israel- Hamas war, which led to the



Moments at the launch of the IPA Security project, November 2023, Warsaw



3rd Euro-Arab Working Group Roundtable, October 2023, Tunis

postponement of the flagship Euro-Arab Border Security Conference scheduled to take place in November 2023.

Mauritania and Senegal

Light technical assistance support was also offered to Mauritania and Senegal in terms of trainings on Tactical Emergency Casualty Care; and to Pakistan – in terms of a study visit on e-gates.

Strengthening Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community

In February, Frontex concluded the project on “Strengthening of AFIC as an instrument to fight serious cross-border crimes affecting Africa and the EU”. This project, initiated in 2017 and funded by the European Commission, aimed to enhance the capacity and capability of AFIC countries to collaboratively identify key threats impacting border management in Africa. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Frontex successfully completed the project and handed over equipment to trained border police analysts in eight AFIC countries: Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo.

These local analysts, trained by Frontex, operate risk analysis cells responsible for collecting and analysing data on cross-border crime, supporting authorities involved in border management. Frontex remains committed to supporting the Risk Analysis Cells (RACs) by organizing joint activities, including workshops, training sessions, and plenary meetings, to further develop AFIC risk analysis capacities. Key project statistics include the establishment of eight risk analysis cells, 14 training sessions for analysts from African countries, 10 regional workshops, and 17 joint analytical field visits in the EU and Africa.

Grant for Ukraine

The Agency’s grant to Ukraine - project “Technical assistance to the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine to enhance border security, particularly at the country’s Western borders” - was successfully implemented throughout 2023. The EUR 12 million assistance delivered a solid technical

contribution to maintaining core IBM functions of Ukrainian institutional partners until the situation stabilises. Winter uniforms, power generators, and new patrol cars, among others, have been acquired and swiftly dislocated for the use by the State Border Guard Service units at the most impacted border segments of the EU-Ukraine border. The grant therefore enabled greater capabilities of the national counterparts, preparing the ground for possible joint operational activities under the future EU-Ukraine Status Agreement.



Ukrainian partners marking patrol vehicles purchased under the grant agreement

4. Strategic assessment

Building on the priorities set in the International Cooperation Strategy, throughout 2023 Frontex focused on the key countries of origin and transit along the major migratory routes to the EU, continuously aligning our action to EU's external policy, changing geopolitical circumstances as well as operational needs and opportunities on the ground.

Our attention was particularly set on the EU's closest neighbours and allies on the path to EU accession – since 2022 next to Western Balkans also including Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. Over the past years, cooperation with these partners has reached a solid portfolio with joint operational activities underpinned by various support measures at its core. In 2023, significant milestones were reached consolidating the Agency's operational footprint via new or strengthened Status Agreements and a boost in technical assistance, particularly for the benefit of the Western Balkan partners and Ukraine. These investments are further facilitating the Agency's engagements in the region in 2024.

In the Southern neighbourhood, with countries along the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes, engagements focused on gradual capacity building, in an effort to develop mutual trust and dialogue that could in mid-term result in enhanced operational cooperation. Partnership with Moroccan authorities picked up a new speed of joint exchanges, resulting in an executive level visit and new commitments that will be pursued in 2024, such as the deployment of a Frontex Liaison Officer to Rabat and

negotiations of a working arrangement. The Agency also delivered numerous capacity building activities to Lebanon and Jordan in the framework of the EU4BorderSecurity project, and further facilitated Euro-Arab Border Security dialogue bringing together the Member States of the EU and the League of Arab States.

A portion of efforts were also dedicated to engagements in West Africa and the Silk Routes, among others to promote better information exchange and cooperation on return. Intensive dialogue and capacity building support offered to Pakistan in 2023, resulted in a commitment by the country to welcome a Frontex Liaison Officer in Islamabad, as confirmed already in 2024.

To achieve tangible results in the external dimension, Frontex also sought to act in a coordinated manner with EU institutions and Member States, using common leverage and promoting broader interests and values of the Union. A significant increase in returns, covering 112 countries of destination illustrate well the effectiveness of the Agency's support to Member States delivering on their return objectives.

However, fragile security situation and difficult fundamental rights record in a number of third countries continued to limit the possibilities for Frontex to develop partnerships covering all routes. Instability in the Sahel, civil war in Sudan as well as the war in Gaza illustrate some of the challenges, with spillover effects in the wider regions.

FRONTEX



EUROPEAN BORDER AND
COAST GUARD AGENCY

European Border and Coast Guard Agency – Frontex, 2024

Plac Europejski 6 • 00-844 Warsaw • Poland

frontex@frontex.europa.eu • www.frontex.europa.eu

©European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), 2024, FPI-24.0225

Warsaw, June 2024

International Cooperation Unit



Publications Office
of the European Union

PRINT	ISBN 978-92-9406-588-9	DOI: 10.2819/151067	TT-09-24-522-EN-C
PDF	ISBN 978-92-9406-589-6	DOI: 10.2819/726936	TT-09-24-522-EN-N