



# Cooperation between Frontex and third countries in 2022

Report to the European Parliament, the Council  
and the Commission



EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY



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# Foreword



Cooperation with third countries is increasingly decisive when it comes to how effectively we are in managing the EU's external borders. We need close partnerships to predict and prepare, so we can better target cross-border crime, protect those in need and make it easier for borders to connect our cultures, businesses and peoples.

Focusing on the major countries of origin and transit along the key migratory routes to the EU, Frontex engages in a wide variety of partnerships that build on mutual needs and are guided by shared values.

We carry out this work with great responsibility and a commitment to promoting European standards for integrated border

management - among them fundamental rights and the principles of international protection - and always act in close coordination with the EU's broader external action policy.

The Agency's Fundamental Rights Officer, along with a team of over 40 monitors has an important role to play at every step of the process. A Due Diligence Policy, adopted by FRO in 2022, has already proven instrumental in guiding human rights impact assessments performed prior to concrete engagements with third countries, and ensuring we identify potential risks and mitigating measures.

In 2022, Russia's war on Ukraine fundamentally shifted the EU's security landscape, including our response at the Union's Eastern borders. Mobilising support to frontline Member States, Frontex also strengthened operational assistance to neighbouring Moldova and initiated emergency technical support to Ukraine.

EU Status Agreements - in force in Albania, Montenegro, Moldova and Serbia - formed the backbone of our operational cooperation in the external dimension, allowing Frontex's standing corps officers to work side-by-side with local border authorities, reinforcing their technical capabilities and expertise. As ongoing negotiations with Mauritania and Senegal show, such cooperation does not have to be limited to our closest EU neighbours

- in the future Status Agreements to be concluded by the EU may allow Frontex to support many other countries of origin or transit, focusing on the most vulnerable routes for migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

In response to the growing migratory flows across the Mediterranean, Frontex also continued to strengthen dialogue with authorities in North Africa and the Middle East. A series of capacity building activities aimed at further bolstering the resilience of border management services, gradually building trust for operational cooperation to take place in the future.

Return, readmission and reintegration remained among the key priorities. With Frontex-supported returns reaching record numbers, much remains to be done in strengthening cooperation with third countries along the entire cycle of return; from cooperation on identification and documentation of third-country nationals, to increasing Frontex support in post-return and reintegration.

These and other examples outlined in the report paint a picture of the Agency's increasing operational footprint in the external dimension. Whilst we can point to numerous achievements, much still lies ahead of us.

Hans Leijtens  
Executive Director

# 1. Dialogue and cooperation frameworks

In 2022, Frontex continued to develop and further strengthen ties with third countries. The Agency engaged in structured dialogue and embraced capacity and trust-building measures tailored to develop long-term partnerships with key countries of origin and transit for irregular migration.

## 1.1 Developing dialogue and structured cooperation

### 1.1.1. Western Balkans

Amid growing migratory pressure in the Western Balkans, Frontex worked to enhance the Agency's operational presence in the region based on EU Status Agreements with Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. The Agency also engaged in preparations ahead of the implementation of the Status Agreement with North Macedonia, signed by the European Commissioner for Home Affairs and Minister of Interior of North Macedonia in October 2022.

To underpin operational activities, Frontex also worked to strengthen

institutional ties and frameworks for structured cooperation. Negotiations were launched with all Western Balkan partners 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 EU Status Agreement implementation with all three countries. To this end, Frontex initiated negotiations for Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with respective ministries and ombudsmen in Montenegro, and Serbia and Albania. The MoU between the Frontex Fundamental Rights Officer and the Albanian Ombudsman was signed in 2022, while the signature of the MoU with the Ministry of Interior followed in 2023.

Capacity building projects continued to complement and support joint activities in the operational theatre, while bringing the Western Balkan partners closer to EU standards for integrated border management [see chapter 3 on technical assistance projects].

### Highlights - International Border Police Conference

On 26-28 October 2022, Frontex hosted the 25th edition of the International Border Police Conference - the Agency's biannual flagship event for international cooperation. Designed as a platform for the international border police community to exchange on topics of common interest, the conference brought together over 260 border and coast guard executives from around the world, along with representatives of different EU bodies and international organisations. The overarching theme of the conference was 'Contingency planning for emergencies at the borders', reflecting the challenges the global border and coast guard community has faced during the past three years, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the war in Ukraine.



25th International Border Police Conference, October 2022



Launching a new forum on border security operations and capacity building in Prague, November 2022

### 1.1.2. Eastern Partnership region

Engagement with the Eastern Partnership region was shaped by the outbreak of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. In response to the war in Ukraine, Frontex joined the EU's efforts to provide technical and operational support to Moldova and Ukraine.

On 17 March, the EU signed the Status Agreement with the Republic of Moldova on border management cooperation with Frontex. The agreement, negotiated in record time, allowed for increased deployment of Frontex staff to work together with Moldovan authorities at the borders with the EU and with Ukraine. Joint Operation Moldova was later complemented by capacity building measures, including on tackling cross-border crime and supporting Moldova to work together with Frontex within the framework of EUROSUR.

#### Highlights - A new forum on border security operations and capacity building

Under the auspices of the Czech Presidency of the EU Council, in November Frontex launched a new forum for exchange on the implementation of EU Status Agreements in third countries. Bringing together EU Member States and third countries where Frontex has joint operations with executive powers, the meeting served as a platform to exchange practices, discuss challenges in the operational theatre, and follow-up on the commitments taken at the last EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forum.

The first meeting was attended by approximately 70 representatives from 14 Member States as well as Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Moldova. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine joined as special guests in view of the ongoing talks aimed at concluding their respective Status Agreements.

As soon as the situation permitted, the Agency also reactivated contacts with key counterparts in Ukraine. In response

to the dire need for technical support at the country's borders, Frontex offered technical assistance geared to supporting the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine with the most needed technical equipment. Implemented via a direct grant of EUR 12 million, the project will be implemented throughout 2023, enabling Ukrainian partners to purchase various types of essential equipment, such as warm winter uniforms for border guards, electric generators, portable power stations, field kitchens, patrol vehicles and pumps.

Cooperation with Georgia continued via regular operational deployments within the framework of JO Coordination Points, as well as engagement on return and capacity building.

### 1.1.3. Africa and the Middle East

Throughout 2022, the Agency continued its efforts to build dialogue and cooperation in Africa and the Middle East. Within the framework of the Commission funded EU4BorderSecurity project, Frontex continued its engagement with authorities in the Southern Neighbourhood through a set of familiarisation and capacity building activities (see chapter 3).





Bilateral cooperation was strengthened, in particular with Morocco. Following a preparatory visit to Frontex in June, Frontex's interim Executive Director and the Director of Migration and Border Surveillance of Morocco's Ministry of Interior convened in October the third meeting of the Frontex-Morocco Comité Mixte. Both sides committed to initiate preparations for the deployment of a Frontex Liaison Officer to Morocco, to start dialogue on a working arrangement and to further strengthen exchange in several areas of mutual interest, outlined in the Joint Roadmap for 2023.

The Agency also pursued cooperation with other priority countries in Africa, focusing in particular on West Africa.

Joint Commission-Frontex missions to Mauritania, Niger and Senegal embarked on strengthening cooperation at an operational level and helped to advance negotiations, resulting in substantive process in negotiations with Mauritania and Senegal and an agreed working arrangement text with Niger.<sup>1</sup>

To strengthen support to Niger, Frontex also signed a working arrangement with EUCAP Sahel Niger, the EU's civilian CSDP mission based there. The cooperation will focus on the prevention of illegal migration as well as related cross-border crime by means of enhanced cooperation on risk analysis and capacity-building activities to promote EU standards for integrated border management.

The Agency also advanced working arrangement negotiations with Senegal and Mauritania and supported the European Commission in the preparation of respective Status Agreements with both countries. Bilateral engagements also continued with Senegal and Niger through Frontex Liaison Officers deployed to both countries.

#### 1.1.4. Silk Route countries

In the Silk Routes countries, Frontex continued providing support to countries neighbouring Afghanistan by contributing to the 10th phase of the Border

Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) programme. Frontex also supported the project 'IBM in the Silk Route Countries' project, funded by the European Commission, and implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), and maintained multilateral dialogue with key countries in the region through the Budapest and Prague Processes.

At a bilateral level, the Agency supported the upcoming deployment of a EURLO to Iraq and sought further dialogue with the Pakistani authorities, including on the potential deployment of an FLO to Pakistan, preparing for a senior level visit to Pakistan in February 2023.

#### 1.1.5. Strategic partners

Frontex continued to strengthen collaboration with strategic partners – among them Australia, Canada, and the United States of America.

Following the start of the war in Ukraine and as was previously the case with the COVID-19 response, Frontex built increasingly regular exchanges with strategic partners, allowing the Agency and its partners to benefit from sharing relevant situational updates. Strategic partners voiced a great degree of interest with respect to Frontex's response to the war in Ukraine and the ensuing migratory pressures at EU borders.

In April, Frontex hosted a delegation of representatives of the United States' Department for Homeland Security / Customs and Border Protection and the Director of the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) programme to exchange experience within the context of Frontex work on ETIAS.

<sup>1</sup> The adoption process will continue once the Agency receives prior authorisation by the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS)

### 1.1.6. Latin America

The Agency also continued exploring dialogue and exchange with law enforcement counterparts in Latin America, particularly in view of strengthening co-operation on cross-border crime, namely drug smuggling. To that end, Frontex engaged with relevant authorities through several Commission funded projects in the region, such as EUROFRONT and SEACOP.

#### Highlights - Working arrangements

Following the adoption of a model for working arrangements by the Commission in December 2021, Frontex initiated negotiations with three third countries – Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal – and pursued updating existing working arrangements with another seven – Moldova and the six Western Balkan partners.

Negotiations were in principle concluded with Niger, Moldova, and Kosovo<sup>2</sup>, pending further clarifications from the European Commission and the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) on the necessary provisions on personal data exchange.

#### Highlights – consolidating border management support to Moldova and Ukraine

As an expression of solidarity with Ukraine and an example of deepening cooperation between the EU and Moldova, in June 2022 Frontex and Moldova held a conference entitled 'Support measures in response to the crisis: experiences and first lessons learnt' in Chisinau. Bringing together executives and senior officials from EU Member States and Moldova, as well as EU institutions and the international community, the conference took stock of the first experiences of the JO Moldova and outlined the way forward for further operational cooperation.

## 1.2 Frontex Liaison Officers

The network of Frontex Liaison Officers (FLOs) in third countries continued to grow and consolidate, reaching six FLOs deployed to cover 14 third countries. The FLOs continued to support the implementation of the Agency's operational activities and contributed to the development of the pre-frontier situational picture, in close coordination with the networks of liaison officers deployed by the Member States and the Commission.

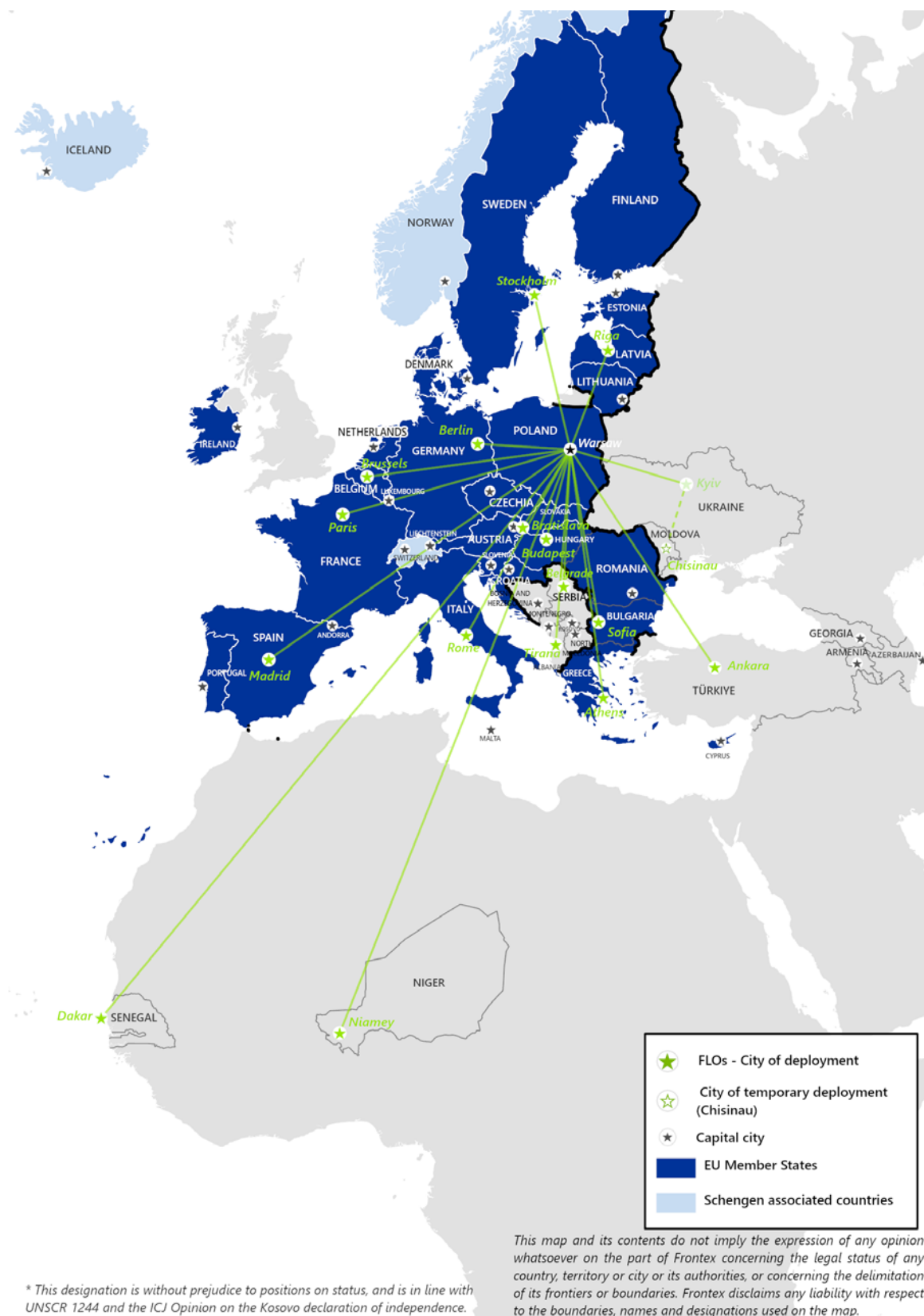
In July 2022, the FLO to the Eastern Partnership countries took up her duties in Chisinau, Moldova, with a mandate to cover Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine<sup>3</sup>. Although initially envisaged to be based in Kyiv, the war in Ukraine led to a temporary deployment to Chisinau, with an intention to return to Kyiv once security conditions permit.

To ensure a coherent approach and to enhance better coordination among all European immigration liaison officers, the Agency actively contributed to the ILO Steering Board chaired by the Commission and supported the coordination of actions performed by Member States and the Agency. In their places of deployment, the FLOs regularly contributed to regional ILO meetings and other activities.

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

<sup>3</sup> Belarus was originally part of the mandate, but currently on hold in line with the EU's policy towards Belarus





\* 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.

Frontex Liaison Officer deployments in 2022

### 1.3 Fundamental rights and data protection

To promote the protection of fundamental rights, robust fundamental rights safeguards are included in every working arrangement that Frontex concludes with third countries, and further integrated in concrete cooperation the Agency implements, whether in terms of operational response or capacity building.

The Fundamental Rights Office (FRO) regularly monitors all Frontex's operations to ensure fundamental rights compliance, including in third countries. In 2022, the FRO conducted monitoring missions to joint operations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Moldova.

#### Fundamental rights due diligence procedure

In line with the Agency's Fundamental Rights Action Plan, in 2022 the FRO established the fundamental rights due diligence procedure to comprehensively assess the fundamental rights situation in third countries, identify potential risks and propose mitigating measures.

Based on this policy, in 2022, the FRO carried out assessments of the fundamental rights situation in Canada, Nigeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Cabo Verde, Moldova, Senegal, The Gambia, Niger, the United Kingdom, United States, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, ahead of the Agency initiating negotiations on respective working arrangements as mandated by the Frontex Management Board. Once negotiations commence, the FRO is also consulted at each step of the process, such as after every round of negotiation, and provides an opinion on the final arrangement in line with the EBCC Regulation.

Fundamental rights assessments are also carried out for specific activities in third countries, with the FRO providing individual analysis of potential human rights risks and detailed recommendations on how to mitigate them. For example, in 2022 the FRO provided assessments regarding returns to third countries, a technical assistance project to the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine and performed a human rights impact assessment in view of a collaboration with eight risk analysis cells established within the framework of the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC) in Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo.

#### Strengthening the implementation of Frontex complaints mechanism

In 2022, Frontex and the FRO intensified efforts to strengthen the complaints mechanisms available within the framework of joint operations with executive powers carried out in third countries. In 2022, the FRO concluded Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Ombuds institutions of Albania, Moldova and Serbia, followed by a similar arrangement with the Ombudsman of Montenegro in 2023. MoUs are also prepared by the Agency with respective Ministries of Interior, which should ensure cooperation with the two co-existent complaints mechanisms within their respective mandates and guarantee effective exchange of information regarding allegations of fundamental rights violations related with the activities of the Agency in these countries.

#### Mainstreaming fundamental rights

To develop sustainable dialogue on fundamental rights at the borders with third country authorities, Frontex also engaged with their human rights bodies via a series of events. In cooperation with the Arab Interior Ministers' Council (AIMC), Frontex organised at the Police Academy in Cairo a workshop on human rights at borders. Representatives of the Arab League Member States, Frontex Fundamental Rights Office and the President of the Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen exchanged good practices and discussed oversight mechanisms to monitor human rights at borders. In a follow-up to the workshop, a delegation from the Human Rights Department of the League of Arab States visited Frontex headquarters in December to further familiarise themselves with the Agency's work and forge closer ties with the Fundamental Rights Office.

#### Protection of personal data

In 2022, Frontex worked closely with the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) to ensure that EU data protection standards and requirements are duly reflected in the Agency's working arrangements with third countries.

## 2. Technical and operational cooperation

Frontex continued providing technical and operational assistance to third countries through various operational activities – from collaboration on risk analysis to joint operations in third countries.

### 2.1 Situational awareness and monitoring

#### Risk analysis networks and communities

At the backbone of Frontex risk analysis cooperation, work continued in three well established regional groups – the Western Balkans Risk Analysis Network (WB-RAN), Eastern Partnership Risk Analysis Network (EaP-RAN) and the Africa-Frontex Intelligence community (AFIC). Bringing together third-country representatives for analyst-to-analyst exchanges, these fora foster regular exchanges on the situational picture and joint analytical work.

The risk analysis networks in the Eastern Partnership and West Balkans continued to enable regular exchange of information, leading to joint analytical products that feed better situational awareness and serve strategic and operational decision-making on all sides.

Set within a more informal framework, the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community further strengthened analytical cooperation among approximately 30 participating countries via a series of workshops and trainings. Complementing regular activities, a Commission-funded technical assistance project continued to support risk analysis capacities of AFIC participants, enabling more effective cooperation within the network (see chapter 3.3. on technical assistance).

#### Strengthening cooperation within the framework of EUROSUR

Making use of the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR), in 2022 Frontex piloted the first Specific Situational Picture under the EU Status Agreement with Moldova.

Preparing the ground for further cooperation within the framework of EUROSUR, the Agency continued to invest into the capacities of third countries to establish and manage Coordination Centres in line with EUROSUR standards and best practices. EUROSUR experts visited Kosovo\* and North Macedonia, where they introduced basic requirements for the future Coordination Centres in the region, including the exchange of information under Specific Situational Pictures. Similar workshops were also held for the benefit of Mauritania and Senegal, as part of ongoing talks to conclude Status Agreements and working arrangements.

### 2.2 Border control

Operational cooperation at the borders continued at different scope and intensity, encompassing fully-fledged operational activities under EU Status Agreements, multilateral activities against cross-border crime as well as coast-guard exercises and exchange of observers.

As with many areas, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has had 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, notably Moldova.

#### Operations with executive powers

In 2022, Frontex further expanded its operational footprint outside the EU. Following the request for operational support from the Republic of Moldova, in record time, Frontex launched the



EU launches the Support Hub for Internal Security and Border Management in Moldova, Brussels, July 2022

fully-fledged Joint Operation in Moldova on 19 March 2022, only two days after signing of the respective Status Agreement, also negotiated in record time.

The Joint Operation provided immediate technical and operational assistance to control migratory flows, in support of those fleeing the atrocities of war and preventing cross-border crime making use of the new opportunities in an unprecedented situation. Deployments at both Moldova's border with Ukraine and the EU helped to better manage humanitarian and security challenges, reinforcing the capacities of the Moldovan authorities.

Amid growing migratory pressure in the Western Balkans, in December 2022, Frontex extended its operational activities in Serbia to also cover the border section with Hungary, where joint activities were deployed to reinforce border surveillance and border checks.

Based on the Status Agreements concluded in the previous years, Frontex continued to support land and sea operational activities in Albania and

Montenegro, at the borders with neighbouring EU Member States. The operational aim was to tackle cross-border crime passing the Western Balkans region towards the EU, control illegal immigration flows and enhance European coast guard and law enforcement cooperation.

The operational 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.

#### Operations without executive powers

In addition to fully-fledged operational activities with executive powers, Frontex continued to use JO Coordination Points as a platform to exchange information for early detection of illegal immigration and cross-border crime, and to facilitate cooperation on coast guard functions, promoting European standards for integrated border management and fostering mutual learning.

Under the JO Coordination Points framework, in 2022 Frontex activated 14 airports, 18 land border crossing points and one seaport in nine host third countries, namely: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine. Most activities continued in already established locations in previous years, with new locations at air and land domains in Georgia and Serbia.

Operational activities in Ukraine had to be suspended shortly before the outbreak of the war. The Standing Corps officers deployed at Ukrainian airports and at land border crossing points were instructed to leave the country for security concerns.

Following the conclusion of the Status Agreement with Moldova in March 2022, the land border crossing points, previously activated under the JO Coordination Points, were transferred to the new JO Moldova 2022, apart from Chisinau airport.



EBCG Team Members in joint operations in Albania, Montenegro, Moldova and Serbia



JO Coordination Points domain	Number of host third countries	Number of border management team members deployed as EU experts
Air	9	121
Land	9	156
Sea	1	2

EBCG Team Members in JO Coordination Points in third countries in 2022

To facilitate operational exchange, Frontex also continued welcoming third-country observers in its joint operations in the EU. In 2022, 18 observers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo\*, Moldova, Montenegro and North Macedonia participated under the JO Focal Points Air 2022. Due to the outbreak of war in Ukraine, only deployments within air domains were possible, whereas all planned deployments at external land borders were cancelled. At the request of Estonia, an exception was provided to Ukrainian observers who were deployed within JO Terra 2022 to Estonia in December.



Frontex standing corps officers at border crossing points between Romania and Moldova, 2022

### Tackling cross-border crime

Frontex is also engaging with third countries in a joint effort to tackle cross-border crime, such as migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, firearms, and drugs. Cooperation predominantly takes place within the framework of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), which is an important component of Frontex's operational response.

Within the EMPACT framework, in 2022 Frontex coordinated six Joint Action Days (JADs), co-led one and was engaged in five other major operational activities. Five of the Frontex coordinated JADs were implemented with the involvement of third countries.

In addition, Ukraine contributed to the EMPACT Operational Action Plan on 'Trafficking in Human Beings', focused on THB related document fraud and co-led by Frontex.

JADs	Participating third countries
JAD Finestra 2	Moldova and Romania
JAD Danube 7	Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia
JAD Southeast Europe	Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ukraine
JAD Mobile 5	Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia
JAD Child Trafficking	UK, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova

Participation of third countries in Frontex coordinated Joint Action Days in 2022





#### Results of JADs coordinated by Frontex in 2022

Frontex also supported the Operation Tayrona IV targeting illicit trafficking of waste via the EU's external land and sea borders. The operation was led by Colombia with Spain and Croatia as co-leaders.

Under the framework of VEGA Children - a Frontex initiative to help frontline border guards to recognise the signs of human trafficking - the Agency conducted 21 awareness sessions, five of them for the benefit of authorities in

Albania, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia and Moldova.

The Frontex Handbook on Firearms for Border Guards and Customs Officers became one of the flagship products supporting third country authorities, including as a starting point for trainings and awareness sessions. In cooperation with its Western Balkans partners, the Agency developed a regional version of the handbook that was launched in

December in Albania. As part of the EM-PACT Firearms initiative, Frontex also held a firearms detection course for Moldovan Border Police, Customs Service and Prosecutor's Office in November.

#### Cooperation on coast guard functions

In the area of cooperation on coast guard functions, Frontex is part of several international networks with third countries, such as the Baltic Sea Region



Search and rescue exercise, 2022



Search and rescue exercises, 2022

Border Control Cooperation (BSRBCC), the Mediterranean Coast Guard Functions Forum (MCGFF), the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum (NACGF) and the Coast Guard Global Summit (CGGS). 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 illegal 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 of America.

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 support capacity building of third country authorities in the remit of coast guard functions. In 2022, several observers from third countries took part in three search and rescue

(SAR) workshops organised by Frontex within the framework of joint and multipurpose maritime operations. Experts from Albania, Georgia, Montenegro, Tunisia, Senegal and the United States of America participated in SAR workshops organised within the JO Themis, JO Poseidon and MMO Black Sea.

#### Combating document fraud

In 2022, Frontex implemented various activities related to the fight against document fraud in third countries. Officers from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Albania, Kosovo, Moldova and Georgia, including local consular staff in Tunisia benefited from various trainings and awareness raising sessions.



Document experts from Western Balkans and Moldova join the first Frontex FIELDS workshop in Warsaw, October 2022



Among key achievements was the launch of the Frontex-INTERPOL Electronic Library Documents System - FIELDS project. Bringing together INTERPOL's technical capabilities and systems with Frontex's expertise in travel and identity documents, this joint initiative merges 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.

Part of the global roll-out of the FIELDS project, document experts from Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Moldova met in Warsaw in September to establish a new regional working group on document fraud and to work together on the integration of FIELDS within their national systems. Under the leadership of INTERPOL and its Member States, first steps were also taken to create similar

networks in the Americas, Asia and Oceania.

## 2.3 Returns

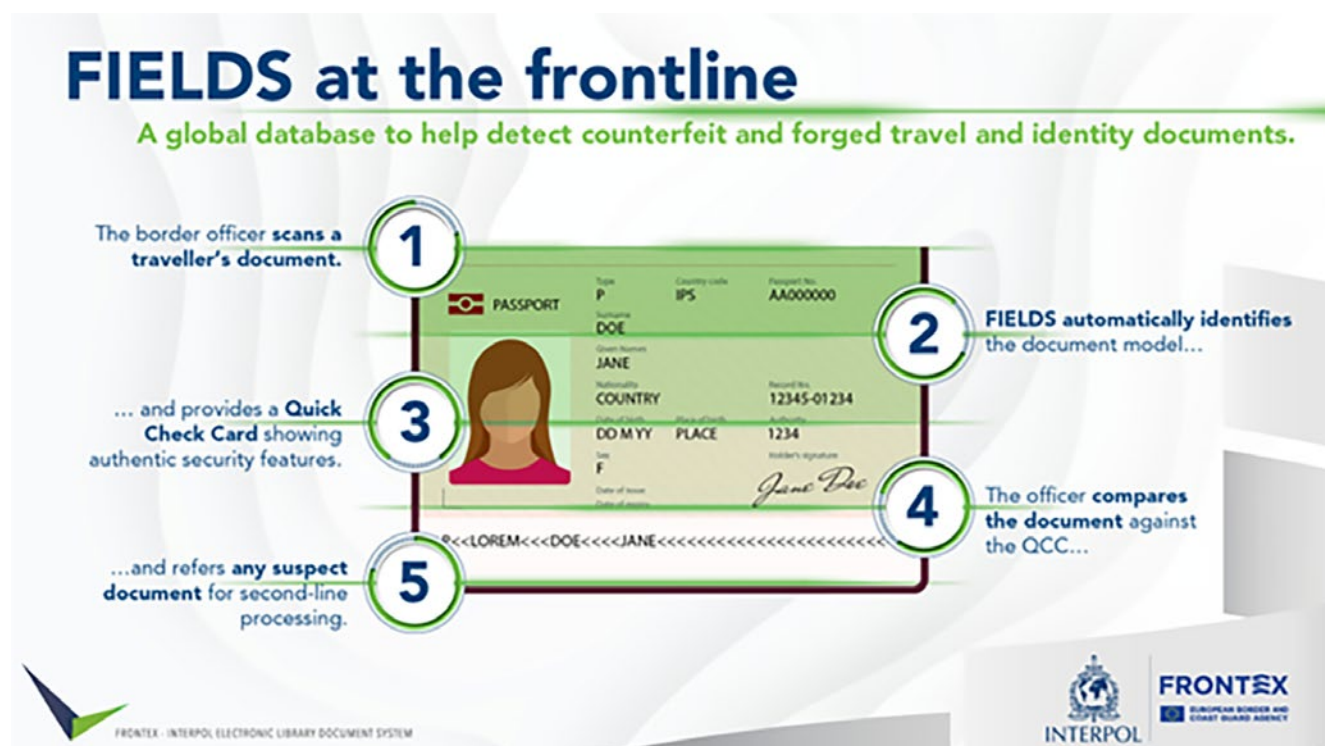
Cooperation with third countries on returns continued to be high on the Agency's agenda, aiming to deliver effective support to EU Member States at different steps of the return process.

In 2022, Frontex supported Member States with the return of 24 866 third-country nationals (TCNs) to a total of 116 destinations, setting a record in returns supported by Frontex. 14 countries were reached for the first time, namely Australia, Barbados, Canada, Eswatini, Israel, Maldives, Singapore, Taiwan, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom, United States and Zambia. Compared to 2021, the total number of third country nationals returned increased by 36% and in comparison, with 2020, by 108%.

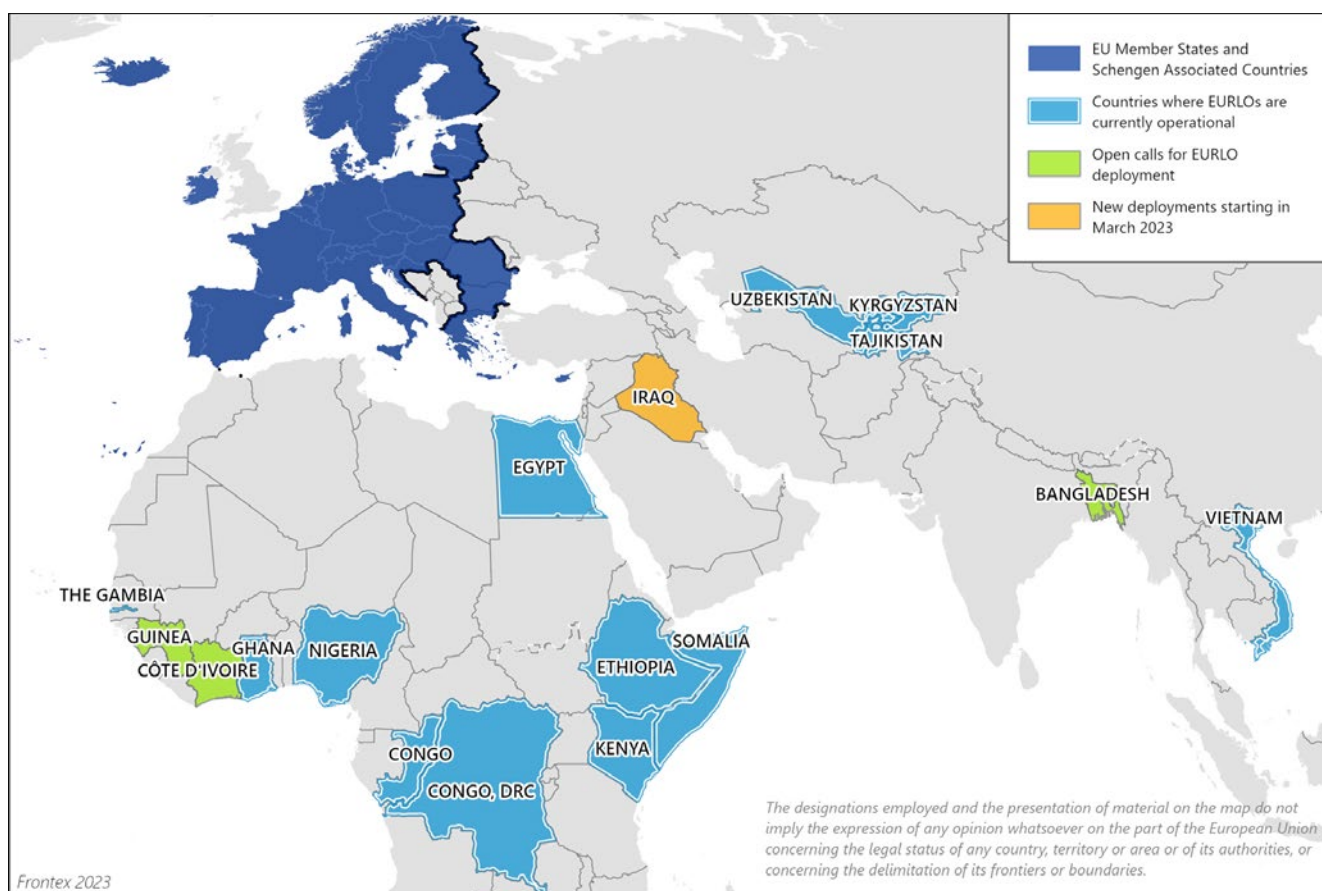
Almost all return operations were by air, either by scheduled (60%) or charter (40%) flights, and a significant proportion of TCNs (39%) were returned on a voluntary basis, including humanitarian voluntary returns.

## Pre-return assistance

As part of the return portfolio, the Agency continued to increase its pre-return assistance to EU Member States, particularly in identification and documentation for return purposes, where third-country authorities play a crucial role. The Agency facilitated the implementation of 16 identification missions of 11 third countries relevant for 8 Member States. Return Specialists of the Standing Corps deployed in Member States and European Return Liaison Officers (EURLO) deployed in third countries proved to be essential in engaging the relevant third countries authorities to accomplish the task.



FIELDS at the frontline



EURLOs deployed in 2022

At the end of 2022, Frontex coordinated the work of Eight European Return Liaison Officers (EURLO) covering 10 third countries with the task of supporting the Member States and Frontex on all aspects of return, readmission, and reintegration. The EURLOs included deployments in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, The Gambia, Kirgizstan, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Vietnam. Two deployments, notably to Bangladesh and Cote d'Ivoire /Guinea remained vacant. In 2022, the Agency also started negotiations for a new deployment to Iraq planned for the first half of 2023.

Dialogue and exchange continued with various countries of origin. In September, on the occasion of the EU- Cote d'Ivoire Joint Working Group for the implementation of the EU- Cote d'Ivoire readmission arrangement, the Agency hosted a delegation from Cote d'Ivoire. Later in the year, Frontex also delivered a tailored workshop on handover procedures during return operations, targeting The Gambian authorities and facilitated workshops on detection of falsified documents, directed to authorities of Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

As part of our contribution to sustainable, humane, and dignified returns, the Agency continued providing support on return, reintegration and readmission to key countries of origin. To that end, Frontex developed a comprehensive programme for capacity building – 'Technical Assistance Projects for Third Countries in the field of Return, Readmission, and Reintegration' (hereinafter 'TAP4RRR').

## Return operations

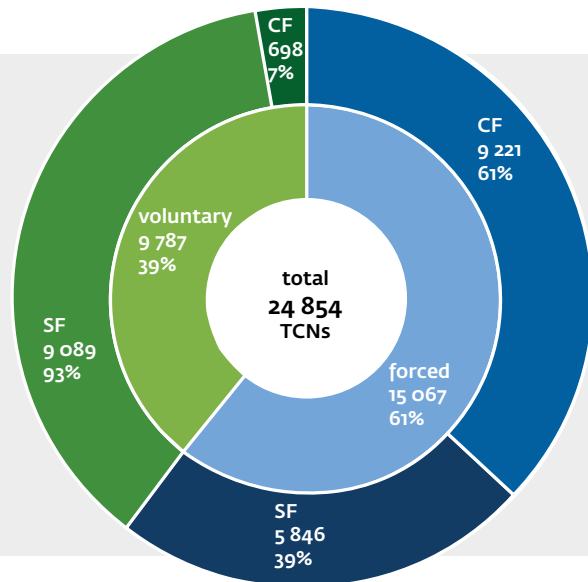
### Legend

CF - Charter flights

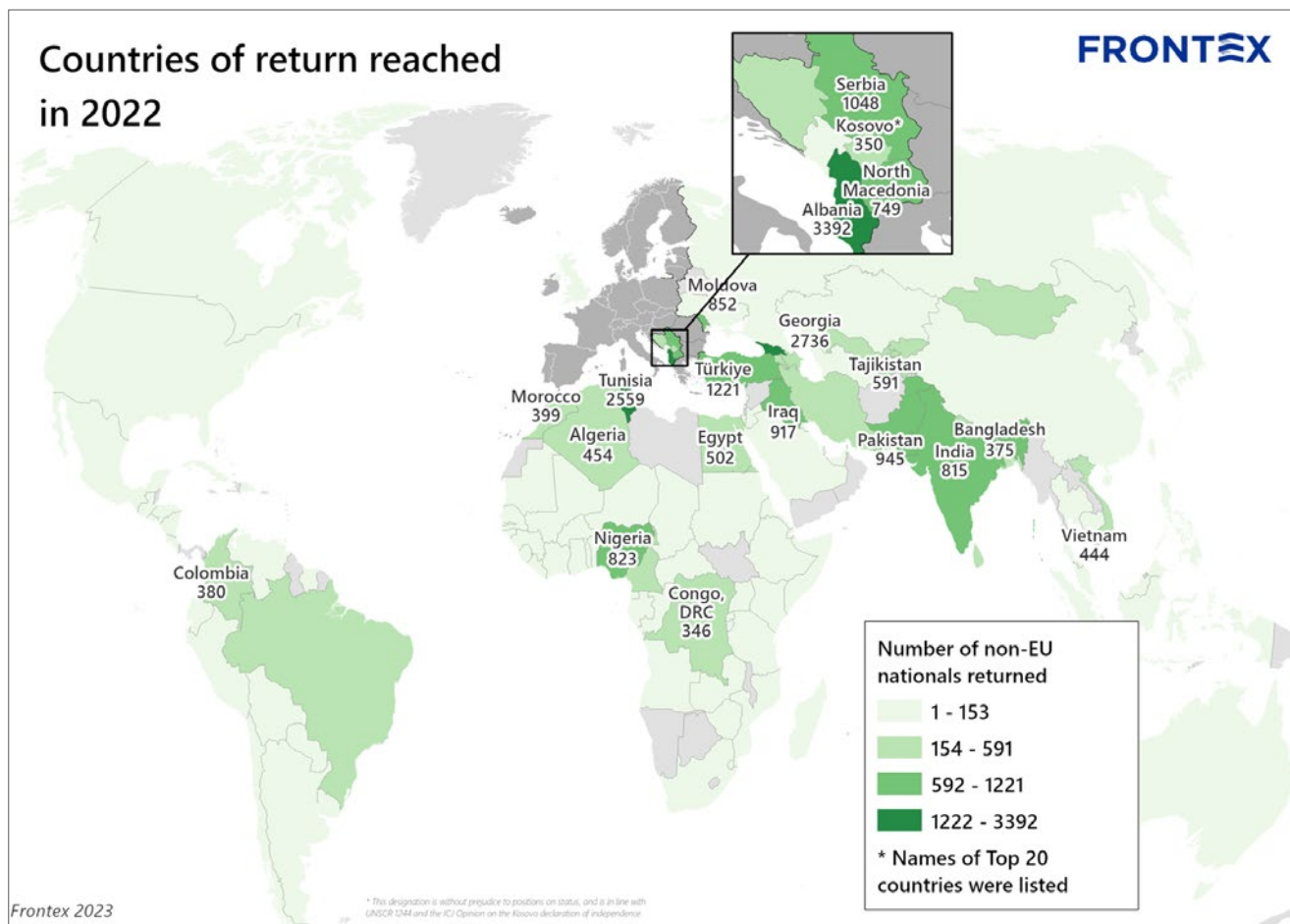
SF - Scheduled flights

Voluntary- 'Voluntary returns' refer to the process of an illegally staying third-country national going back on a voluntarily basis from the Member States' territory to his/her country of origin or other third country where he/she will be accepted, regardless of whether the third country national concerned is subject to a return decision or removal order or not.

Forced- 'Forced returns' refer to forced removal of a returnee from Member States' territory to his/her country of origin or other third country where he/she will be accepted.



Returns by air in 2022



Countries of return reached in 2022



As part of emergency assistance to EU Member States, in 2022 Frontex provided Humanitarian Voluntary Return (HVR) support dedicated to all non-Ukrainian nationals and their families (including Ukrainian family members of non-Ukrainian nationals) fleeing the conflict zone, who explicitly requested to return voluntarily to their countries of origin, or other third countries, despite being eligible to stay in Member States. HVR was used to return 849 persons to 22 third countries.

While only two third countries implemented Frontex-coordinated collecting return operations, the Agency continued promoting the benefits of the concept and established a network bringing together interested third countries and the Member States.

In 2022, Frontex carried out its first two return operations organised on its own initiative – to Albania and to Nigeria. Eight third-country observers took part in five return operations by charter flights.

#### Post-return assistance

Work intensified on post-arrival and post-return, particularly through Joint Reintegration Services (JRS) - the Agency's flagship activity. Launched in April 2022, the JRS provides reintegration assistance to TCNs returning to their countries of origin. To that end, Frontex concluded specific agreements with five reintegration partners to cover a portfolio of 24 countries of origin.

## 2.4 European Travel Information and Authorisation System

Throughout the previous year, Frontex supported the European Commission in setting up a public information campaign about the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) targeting nationals of 60 visa-free countries. To increase its ETIAS-related outreach, Frontex created a press officers' network which in addition to communications experts from DG HOME, the European Council, Member States, eu-LISA and Europol, also includes press officers of the European External Action Service. Engaging EU Delegations has proven helpful in reaching out to the public and the media in the relevant third countries as well as in addressing instances of misinformation about ETIAS.

Albania	Algeria	Armenia
Bangladesh	Brazil	Egypt
El Salvador	Ethiopia	Georgia
Ghana	Guinea	India
Mongolia	Iraq	Moldova
Nigeria	Morocco	North Macedonia
Somalia	Pakistan	The Gambia
Turkey	Sri Lanka	Vietnam

Countries where the Joint Return Services are operational since 1 April 2022

## 3. Capacity building

### 3.1 Training

Tailored training courses supporting the implementation of Frontex's mandate, addressing various aspects of integrated border management were conducted for the benefit of partner third countries. The courses were offered on the basis of a thorough needs assessment while considering the operational context, identified vulnerabilities and risk analysis reports, in addition to priorities identified by the Agency.

In total, 115 participants from third countries were trained in falsified documents detection, including 'Roadshows on Falsified Documents', which involved 45 trainees from Georgia and 37 trainees from North Macedonia.

Officers from third countries benefited among others from training on firearms trafficking, ammunition and explosives detection, risk analysis methodology based on CIRAM.

The Agency also benefit 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 (CCC). Along with experts from EU Member States, 21 experts from seven third countries participated in the review.

### 3.2 Research and innovation

Within the framework of the 'Regional programme on protection-sensitive migration management', Frontex continued supporting the Western Balkans developing EURODAC compatible registration systems, by developing implementation masterplans. Piloting with North Macedonia and Montenegro, the

masterplans, once operationalised, will allow both countries to ensure that the respective national systems for identification and registration of mixed migration flows have interconnectivity and interoperability with EURODAC at the time of their EU accession.

Following a request from Montenegro Border Police, Frontex provided support in the assessment of current border checks and border surveillance systems in view of their alignment with EU standards, in particular the Schengen Borders Code. Several field visits took place, resulting in recommendations concerning border check and border surveillance practices.

In addition, Frontex delivered online presentations on Automated Border Control (ABC) Systems during three workshops on European Experiences in Border-related new Technologies organised by the European Union Advisory Mission in Iraq (EUAM Iraq) for high-rank officers from various Iraqi border authorities.

### Industry days

Exchange of expertise with the global border and coast guard community is an essential part of research and innovation. As part of its mandate, Frontex regularly meets with industry, researchers and experts from the Member States and third countries to provide a platform for discussion and help develop new technologies and innovations related to border control. Industry Days allow companies to share 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 Technical assistance projects

#### Western Balkans

In 2022, Frontex together with other Implementing Partners (EUAA, IOM and UNHCR) initiated Phase III of the EU-funded programme 'EU Regional Support to Protection-Sensitive Migration Management Systems in the Western Balkans', which will be implemented until 2025. Within this framework, Frontex leads the implementation in three priority areas: capacity to identify and register mixed migration flows, integrated return managements systems, as well as contingency planning and crisis response.

In December 2022, Frontex also signed a Contribution Agreement with the European Commission, Directorate General for the Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR) to implement a project on 'Strengthening Western Balkans' Border Security Capacities'. The project will run from 2023 to 2026 and will support the implementation of EU Status Agreements, strengthening the overall architecture for integrated border management in the region and building capacities to work together in the EUROSUR framework, via a network of Coordination Centres compatible with EUROSUR standards.

#### Eastern Partnership region

In 2022, Frontex gave clear priority to EU pre-accession countries, particularly Moldova and Ukraine, helping them to address challenges caused by Russia's aggression. Contributing to the EU Support Hub for Internal Security and Border Management in Moldova, Frontex actively engaged with Moldovan

authorities in different technical assistance activities.

In August, Frontex organised an operational meeting with Moldovan authorities to have an exchange on potential Frontex support on counteracting firearms trafficking, involving all relevant authorities, among them Border Police, Customs, Police, Prosecutor's Office, forensic experts and others. As a result, both sides agreed to strengthen collaboration within various EMPACT fora and identified several training and awareness raising opportunities. A Firearms detection course dedicated for Moldovan authorities followed in November, in the Centre of Excellence in Border Security of Border Police in Ungheni.

In response to the urgent needs in Ukraine, Frontex initiated preparations for a technical assistance project to support the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine in view of the challenges they face, ensuring business continuity at Ukraine's Western Borders. A grant agreement for EUR 12 million was signed in January 2023 and will be implemented throughout the year, delivering winter uniforms for border guards, electric generators, portable power stations, field kitchens, patrol vehicles and other equipment.

### North Africa and the Levant

In the EU's Southern Neighbourhood Frontex continued to provide tailored technical assistance through the EU4BorderSecurity project, funded by the European Commission.

Within this framework, Frontex supported the Lebanese authorities in charge of border management with three Tactical Emergency Casualty Care trainings held in Germany and in Lebanon and hosted a visit to Hamburg Airport for Lebanese border officials to share experience and state-of-the art technology for border control.

In July, the Agency conducted a second round of courses in Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) for Jordanian and Palestinian border officials to enhance cross border cooperation in this critical area.

Several activities were also implemented in cooperation with the Arab Interior Minister's Council (AIMC), such as the workshop on human rights at borders held the Police Academy in Cairo, in September; followed by the visit of the League of Arab States Human Rights Department to Frontex; and the joint Frontex-NAUSS Regional Workshop on Document Fraud at the Border held in November in Warsaw.

In September, Frontex also organised training for consular staff of the EU Member States, based in the embassies and consulates in Tunis. The activity followed EU harmonized training for document examiners, underpinning document examination methods to be followed when examining documents.

In October, a high-level delegation from different border management and security agencies in Lebanon visited Frontex headquarters to become acquainted with the agency's work. The visit followed two technical meetings in Beirut in April and October.



Frontex workshop in Cairo, September 2022



### Strengthening Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community

In 2022, the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC) expanded. Three risk analysis cells opened in Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Mauritania, in addition to five cells that had already been operating in Niger, Ghana, Gambia, Senegal and Nigeria. With financial support of the European Commission, the cells run by Frontex-trained local analysts who collect and analyse data on cross-border crime, and who support authorities involved in border management.



Frontex opens risk analysis cell in Lomé, July 2022

Hosted in Warsaw, the AFIC plenary brought together representatives from African partner countries, EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUBAM Libya to discuss

challenges relating to border management and cross-border crime, including smuggling of migrants, human trafficking, drug trafficking and terrorism. The

event also highlighted a significant need to enhance the situational awareness on the main risks affecting integrated border management in Africa.



AFIC Plenary Meeting in Warsaw, September 2022

### Silk Route countries and Central Asia

In Central Asia Frontex contributed to capacity building via the EU-funded BOMCA project, with a number of activities carried out in 2022, including a National Train-the-Trainer course on Document Security, carried out in

February in Kyrgyzstan; a Regional workshop on the implementation of e-learning methodology in border guard training and educational institutions in Central Asia, carried out in April; and a workshop in May on human rights, gender, eliminating sexual harassment and promoting gender sensitivity.



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