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About the European Border and Coast Guard Agency

The **European Border and Coast Guard Agency** has been built on the foundations laid by Frontex, which had been coordinating the operational cooperation of EU Member States at the external borders for more than a decade.

The concept of European Board and Coast Guard comprises **the European Border and Coast Guard Agency** and **national authorities** responsible for border management, including coast guard.

While the responsibility for the management of the external borders remains primarily with the Member States, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency supports border control at **land, air and sea borders** by reinforcing, assessing and coordinating actions of member states at the external borders of the European Union.

It coordinates the deployment of technical equipment (vessels, helicopters and boats) and specialised border guards to those EU countries which face an increased migratory pressure.



Joint Operations

Joint operations are the most visible among the agency's activities. The agency deploys hundreds of border guard officers, along with vessels, vehicles and aircraft to assist Member States facing challenges at the EU's external borders. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency can count on a pool of at least 1 500 officers who can be quickly deployed to deal with emergencies at Europe's frontiers. It can also lease and buy its own equipment.

While the agency's two best known maritime operations taking place in the Central Mediterranean (Themis) and Eastern Mediterranean (Poseidon Sea) focus on supporting Italy and Greece in dealing with migratory pressure, all of the agency's operations also help tackle various forms of cross-border crime. In addition, the sea operations have coast guard functions components, including monitoring of pollution and illegal fishing. These are implemented with the cooperation of other EU agencies, including the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA).

Fighting cross-border crime

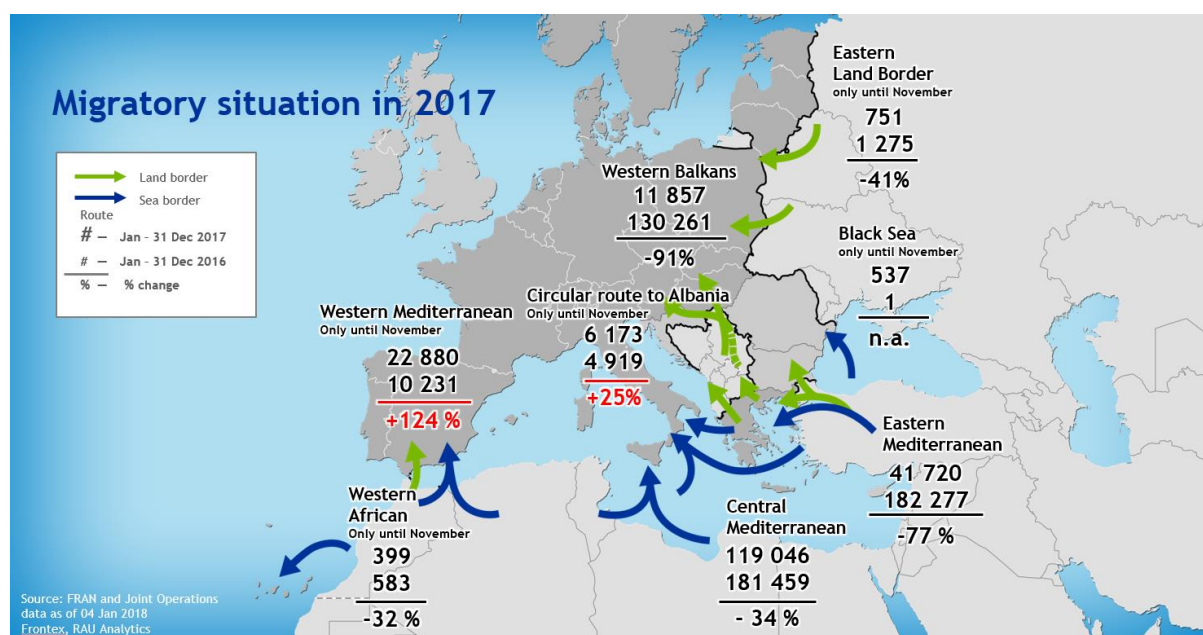
Frontex, with its new mandate as European Border and Coast Guard Agency, has strengthened the European response at the external borders in order to better manage migration and improve the security situation at the borders and, by consequence, within the EU. Thanks to its new mandate Frontex is now also a fully-fledged internal security actor with new possibilities and extended scope of processing of personal data.

This is done through the monitoring of external borders, border and migration management, security checks, return operations, processing of personal data, cooperation with national authorities and Europol.

Frontex also contributes to the fight against terrorism by assisting Member States in tightening controls at the external borders and to support in the detection of suspicious travels of potential foreign terrorist fighters. As the external borders should be seen as the first line of prevention, Frontex also acts in the detection of smuggling of firearms in cooperation with Europol and the EU Member States. The agency helps to create risk profiles which allow border guards to more effectively screen the passengers at EU's borders.

Migratory situation at EU's borders

January - December 2017



In 2017, the number of detections of illegal border-crossings into the European Union dropped for the second year in a row due to lower number of migrants reaching Italy and Greece. According to preliminary data, there were some 204 300 illegal border-crossings in 2017, 60% fewer than the previous year. Meanwhile, Spain saw the number of irregular migrants detected at its Western Mediterranean borders more than double to the highest level since Frontex began systematically collecting data in 2009.

Joint Operation Themis (Italy)

The Joint Operation Themis began in February 2018 and replaced operation Triton, which was launched in 2014. Operation Themis have an enhanced law enforcement focus while continuing to include search and rescue as a crucial component.

Its operational area will span the Central Mediterranean Sea from waters covering flows from Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Turkey and Albania. Officers deployed by the agency also support the Italian authorities in the registration of the arriving migrants. Debriefing officers collect intelligence about people smuggling networks operating in Libya and other African countries on the smuggling routes. The agency shares this information with the Italian authorities and Europol.

All assets deployed within the framework of Operation Themis operate under the command of the Italian Ministry of Interior.

In 2017, assets deployed by Frontex in Central Mediterranean were involved in the rescue of more than **21 500** people.

Current deployment (26 February - 4 March 2018)

Technical Equipment: 5 vessels, 2 aircraft, 1 helicopter, 12 mobile offices

Personnel: 258 including 92 border surveillance officers/crew members, 54 fingerprinting and registration officers, 23 debriefing and 24 screening experts

Participating countries: 28 EU MS / SAC

Central Mediterranean Route (Italy, Malta, Libya, Turkey)

The sudden plunge in the number of irregular migrants reaching Italy in mid-2017 was arguably the most significant development at the external borders of the EU since the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement in March 2016. After the monthly totals in the first half of 2017 roughly mirrored those seen a year earlier, the figures dropped suddenly starting in July. The total for the year stood at an estimated 119 000.

Nigerians accounted for the most arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route, accounting for about one out of every seven migrants. They were followed by nationals of Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

Joint Operation Poseidon Sea (Greece)

Frontex supports Greece with currently almost 700 guest officers, who perform border surveillance, assist in the identification and registration of incoming migrants, as well as debriefing and screening. Operation Poseidon Sea is increasingly becoming a multipurpose operation covering a number of aspects of cross border crime including smuggling of illegal substances, weapons, detection, forged documents and many others. It also covers several coast guard functions such as SAR, detection of illegal fishing and maritime pollution.

In 2017, vessels deployed by Frontex were involved in the rescue of almost **13 000** people in the Aegean.

The agency continues to support Greece in border surveillance, search and rescue, registration and identification of the migrants, but it also assists the Greek authorities in returns and readmissions from the hotspots.

Debriefing officers deployed by the agency collect intelligence about people smuggling networks operating in Turkey and migrants' countries of origin. The agency shares this information with the Greek authorities and Europol.

Current deployment (26 February - 4 March 2018)

Technical Assets: 13 vessels, 22 patrol cars, 6 buses, 3 TVVs

Personnel: 799 including 232 border surveillance officers/crew members, 52 fingerprinting and registration officers, 9 debriefing, 19 screening experts and 9 advanced level document officers

Participating countries: Currently there are 27 EU MS / SAC taking part in joint operation Poseidon

Eastern Mediterranean Route (Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus)

At EU's external border with Turkey, the migratory pressure in 2017 remained roughly on level with the previous year's figures after the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement. However, the number of detections in the second half of the year was higher than in the same period of 2016. This reflected the continued attempts by smuggling groups to circumvent border surveillance in spite of sustained commitment of the Turkish authorities to border management.

In all of 2017, there were some 41 700 detections of illegal border-crossings, both at sea and land borders, less than a quarter of the total in 2016.

Syrians and Iraqis remained the top two nationalities arriving in Greece last year on the Eastern Mediterranean route.

Operations in Spain

Due to its proximity to Africa, Spain's sees a significant number of migrants arriving at its shores, although the totals are well below those seen in Italy and Greece. The agency has been assisting the Spanish authorities not only at sea, but in various sea ports and international airports.

The border guard officers, vessels and aircraft deployed by the agency to Spain have been assisting the Spanish authorities in a variety of ways: not only in border surveillance, but also in search and rescues – by helping thousands of people in distress. Experts deployed by Frontex helped the Spanish authorities in detection of forged documents, stolen cars, maritime pollution, illegal fishing and import of illegal substances and excise goods.

The Western Mediterranean region has also long been a major conduit for drug smugglers seeking to bring hashish, cannabis and cocaine by sea to the lucrative European markets. Frontex vessels and aircraft assist the Spanish authorities to disrupt the drug smuggling operations.

Officers deployed by Frontex in Spain take part in various joint operations, including three focused on Spain's sea borders: Hera, Indalo and Minerva.

Current deployment (26 February - 4 March 2018)

Technical Equipment: 1 vessel

Personnel: 58 including 16 border surveillance officers & 6 debriefing experts

Participating countries: 11 EU MS / SAC

Western Mediterranean Route (Spain)

The number of migrants detected reaching Spain from northern Africa hit a new record high of nearly 22 900. This was more than double the previous record set in 2016.

The situation in the Rif region of Morocco, the main transit country for migrants heading to Spain, created an opportunity for more departures from its western coast in the second half of the year. This was coupled with a growing use of high-capacity boats capable of transporting large numbers of migrants.

Almost 40% of the migrants were nationals of Algeria and Morocco, whose numbers have been on the rise since the middle of 2017. Most of the remaining migrants on this route came from Western Africa.

Operations in the Western Balkans

The record number of migrants arriving in Greece in 2015 and in the first quarter of 2016 had a direct knock-on effect on the Western Balkan route, as the people who entered the EU via Greece tried to make their way via the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia into Hungary and Croatia and then towards western Europe. This led to unprecedented numbers of detections of illegal crossings at Hungary's and Croatia's borders with Serbia.

To assist the EU members most affected by the migratory flows on the Western Balkans route, as well as various cross-border criminal activity, the agency deploys specialised officers and border surveillance vehicles and other equipment in Hungary and Croatia. Deployed officers assist the national authorities in the detection of forged documents, stolen cars and illegal drugs.

The number of detections on the Western Balkan route remained low in 2017 with almost 12 000 illegal border crossings due to the drop of people arriving in Greece who later made their way to the Western Balkans, as well as to the close cooperation on border control among the countries of the region.

The total number of illegal border crossings in 2016 stood at 123 000.

The most migrants detected on this route this year have come from Pakistan Afghanistan and Iraq.

Current deployment (26 February - 4 March 2018)

Technical Equipment: 20 patrol cars, 10 smartdeck cameras, 3 thermovision vans

Personnel: 84 including 47 border surveillance officers, 8 stolen vehicle detection officers & 2 debriefing experts

Participating countries: 16 EU MS / SAC

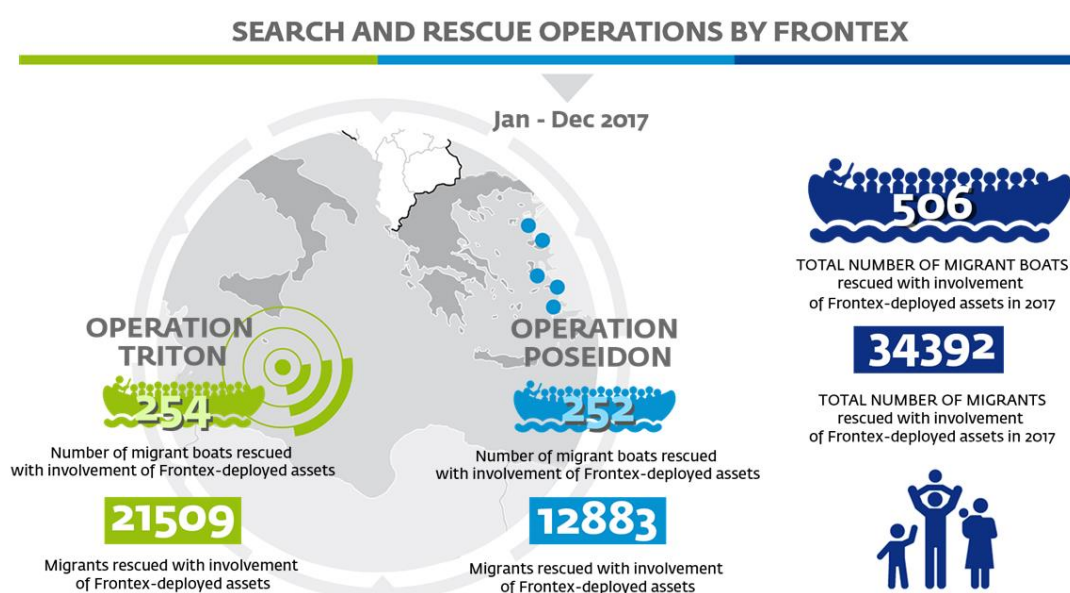
Role of Frontex in Search and Rescue operations

Search and Rescue (SAR) is always a priority for everyone operating at sea. International law obliges all captains of vessels to provide assistance to any persons found in distress at sea. SAR is also a specific objective of the operational plan of every Frontex joint maritime operation. For this reason, vessels deployed by Frontex to an operational area are always ready to provide support to the national authorities in SAR operations.

It is important to stress that all SAR operations are coordinated by the national Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCC). The MRCC orders those vessels which are either the closest to the incident or the most capable ones (due to the specialised training of the crew, or the vessels specifications, etc.) to assist in the rescue. These may include national commercial or military vessels, vessels deployed by Frontex, private boats and others.

During a standard border control operation, Frontex-deployed vessels operate under the command of the International Coordination Centre (ICC), but when contacted by the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre and redirected to a SAR operation, it is the MRCC that takes command. Once Frontex assets reach people in distress, they first provide immediate medical assistance and give them food and water. Once a rescue operation is completed, migrants are disembarked and handed over to the national authorities for identification and registration.

In 2017, Frontex assisted with the rescue of more than 34 000 persons in the Central Mediterranean and Aegean combined.



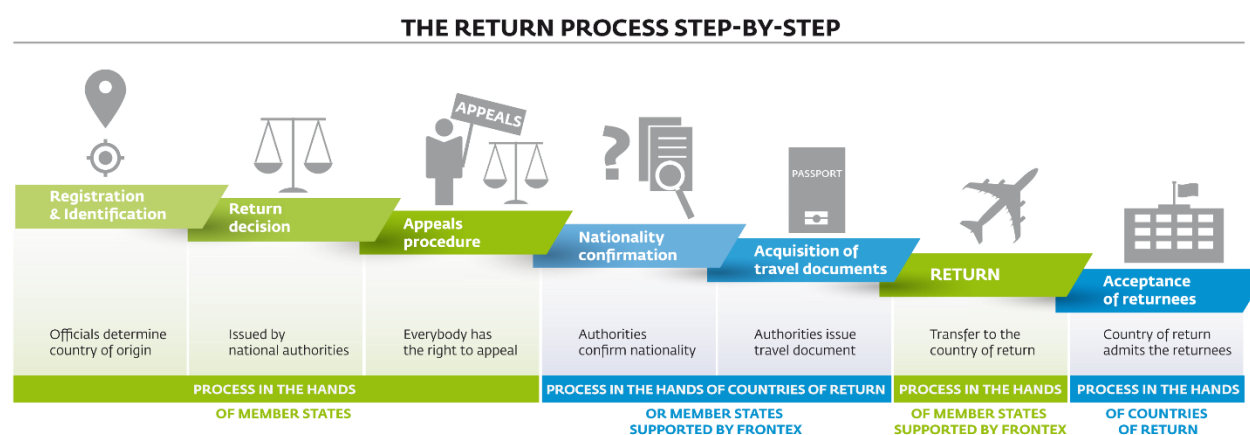
Role of Frontex in return operations

Frontex is responsible for the coordination of return operations at a technical and operational level, including voluntary departures. In practice, this means that Frontex offers support in the organisation and implementation, including financing or co-financing, of return operations organised from individual Member States. The number of returns organised by the agency has increased significantly in the past two years from about 3,500 in 2015 to more than 14 000 in the total of 2017.

Frontex can assist Member States upon their request or on the agency's proposal in carrying out return operations through:

- 1. organising or coordinating both national and joint return operation;**
- 2. assisting Member States in both forced return operations and in voluntary departures;**
- 3. organising or coordinating collecting return operations.**

Frontex is responsible for the coordination of return operations, but it is crucial to understand that the decision about who should be returned is always taken by the judicial or administrative authorities of the Member States. According to European legislation, the individual is always given the possibility to appeal against this return decision. Frontex does not enter into the merits of return decisions issued by the Member States. This is the exclusive responsibility of Member States.



Frontex budget for returns

Frontex **budget** for return operations increased significantly from €13 mln in 2015 to almost €54 mln in 2018

www.frontex.europa.eu

For more information please contact press@frontex.europa.eu

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