

FRONT≡X

# 2020

IN BRIEF



EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY





**FABRICE LEGGERI**  
Executive Director

**2020 WAS A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER, FOR THE WORLD, FOR EUROPE, BUT ALSO FOR FRONTEX, THE EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY.**

2020 was a year like no other, for the world, for Europe, but also for Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

Despite the global pandemic, our work to secure the European Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, did not stop. On the contrary, we explored new ways to support our partners during this difficult time.

In 2020, Frontex has not only demonstrated resilience, but also flexibility – in our operational activities, in return support, when training the European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps, and in supporting the fight against cross-border crime.

Frontex has proven to be a reliable partner for national and European authorities, providing crucial input for the EU's crisis management.

The growth of the agency continued at a fast pace. In 2020, we surpassed the number of 1000 staff members, including the new Frontex standing corps recruits.

The standing corps is a game changer for Frontex and for the entire European Border and Coast Guard. It brings extraordinary benefits for the proper functioning of the external borders and will give our Agency more flexibility in how we deploy our officers and where we can deploy them.

The new corps will give us a broader scope of action in migration management, law enforcement and coast guard spectrum. Frontex will no longer be just a fire brigade riding that drives in with flashing lights when there's an emergency at the borders. It will allow for better reporting from our operational activities. The standing corps will enable Frontex to continue its transformation from an EU Agency to a law enforcement operational actor and partner. In the not too distant future, there will be more Frontex staff working in the field than at the Warsaw headquarters.

COVID-19 has highlighted the fact that border control plays an essential role to protect the Schengen border-free area from threats to public health, especially those related to pandemics. Similarly, the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), in which Frontex is about to play a central role, will also help assess whether people travelling to the EU may pose a high epidemic risk.

In our operational activities, we will continue to take account of COVID-19 when deploying the standing corps and supporting Member States. And, of course, we will remain in constant contact with relevant EU agencies and Commission services active in health and sanitary matters.

At the same time, we are reinforcing the agency's fundamental rights framework in cooperation with the Fundamental Rights Officer ad interim, Management Board, Consultative Forum, Fundamental Rights Agency and European Commission. We are committed to ensuring the highest standards in all that we do and the respect of fundamental rights is an essential component of effective border management.

# Highlights of the year

○ Frontex gets more than 7000 applications for the new European Border Guard Officers



Frontex selects the first group of future members of its standing corps



Frontex launches rapid border intervention on Greece's external borders

JAN

MAR

MAY

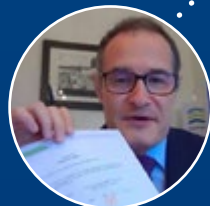
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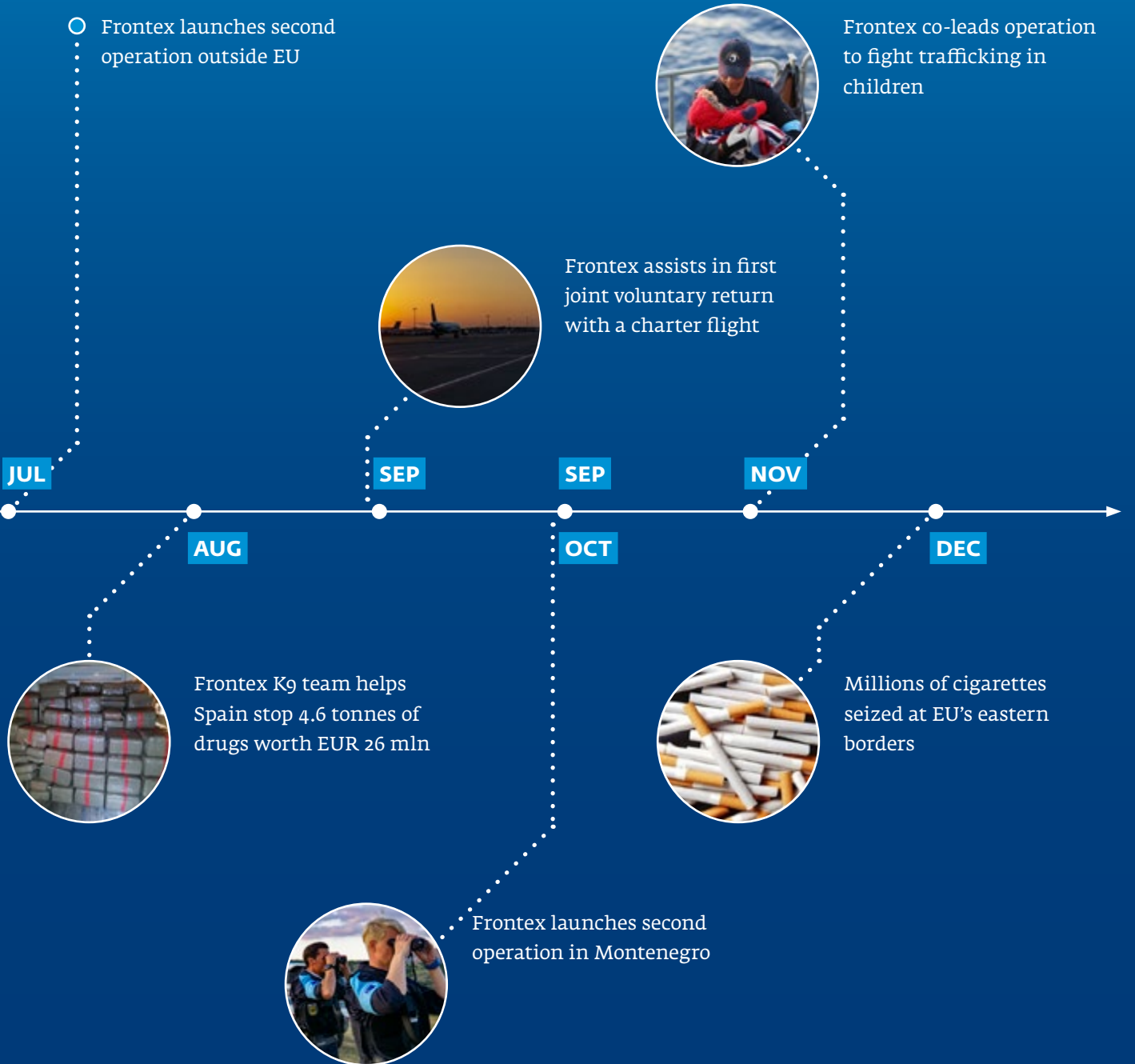
European Commission Vice President Schinas and Commissioner Johansson visit Frontex



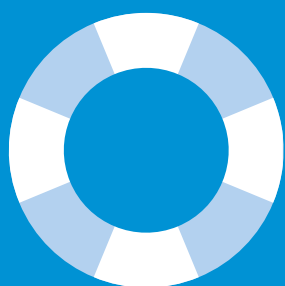
Frontex and the EU Fundamental Rights Agency agree to establish fundamental rights monitors



Member States continue to support Frontex operations in Greece



# Year in numbers



13 170

PEOPLE RESCUED WITH FRONTEX SUPPORT



3 885

FRAUDULENT DOCUMENTS DETECTED



742

PEOPLE SMUGGLERS IDENTIFIED



453

DRUG SMUGGLERS IDENTIFIED



# 1 030

MULTIPURPOSE AIR SURVEILLANCE FLIGHTS

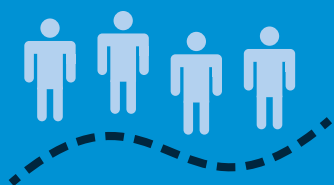
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# 420

STANDING CORPS OFFICERS TRAINED

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# 1 000

FRONTEX OFFICERS AT EU'S BORDERS  
EACH MONTH

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# 146

WEAPONS SEIZED



# 147

TONNES OF  
DRUGS FOUND



# Building EU's First Uniformed Service





# Building the EU's First Uniformed Service

Frontex has established Europe's first uniformed service: The European Border and Coast Guard standing corps. The standing corps brings extraordinary benefits for the functioning of the external borders to strengthen the free movement of hundreds of millions of Europeans, foreign residents and visitors within the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice.

The standing corps gives Frontex more flexibility in how it deploys its officers and where it can deploy them. It provides a broader scope of action in migration management and return, security and law enforcement including at sea.

The standing corps consists of three categories. The first is made up of officers employed directly by Frontex, not individual Member States. The second category brings together national

officers who are seconded to Frontex for at least two years, while the third category are national officers who are deployed to the Agency's operations for shorter periods of time, usually several months.

With the newly created standing corps, Frontex is present in the places where European countries need support, working together with them for a safer, more secure Europe.



BORDER CHECKS

BORDER SURVEILLANCE

COAST GUARD FUNCTIONS INCLUDING SEARCH AND RESCUE

RETURNS



FIGHTING CROSS-BORDER CRIME

COLLECTING AND SHARING INFORMATION

# Flexible support



Border guards directly employed by Frontex wear a unique European uniform, representing the entire European Union. They are able to perform tasks such as verifying a person's identity and nationality, allowing or refusing entry into the EU and patrolling between border crossing points. They also participate in return

operations. We offer flexible operational support, sending officers and equipment such as planes and vessels to areas where national authorities need them most, and European standing corps officers play a key role in this process. They can be quickly deployed at EU's external borders and beyond.



#### November 5

Finally we'll train together! The first recruits for the European Border and Coast Guard have now headed out to two locations in Poland to begin their in-person training. Until now, all 260 of them had to take part in online courses because of restrictions related to [#COVID19](#). Now, they'll test in practice all the things they learned on line. Despite all the challenges, they're on track to complete their training this year and be ready for deployment starting in January.

Frontex launched the first recruitment campaign for the first category of the standing corps in October 2019, drawing 7500 applications from around the continent for 700 positions. Those selected spent most of 2020 training for deployment around Europe's borders. This first class of border guards serves as the backbone of the new corps, which will provide permanent support to national authorities facing challenges at their external borders. Corps members may even work outside the European Union, in countries that have signed Status Agreements with the EU. Now the first recruits are ready to put on their blue Frontex uniforms and be deployed at the external borders early in 2021.

# Meet the recruits



Meet Jelena from Croatia 🇪🇺, one of the first recruits of the [#Frontex](#) standing corps, Eu's first uniformed services. I see Frontex as an opportunity to serve my community on a higher level. When I am protecting EU's borders I am protecting my own country as well [#MigrationEU](#) [#standingcorps](#)



Meet Raquel, a [#Frontex](#) [#StandingCorps](#) recruit from Portugal 🇵🇹: I applied to [#Frontex](#) because I wanted to work beyond my home country. Learning how to detect forged or false documents came as something totally new to me. But the most difficult part is to be far away from my children.



Meet Diego, a Frontex [#StandingCorps](#) recruit from Italy 🇮🇹: I joined because I want to fight organised crime, which doesn't know borders [#MigrationEU](#)

Meet Nicolae, a Frontex [#StandingCorps](#) recruit from Romania 🇷🇴: I love challenges, and working for [#Frontex](#) dealing with fighting cross-border crime will be one. I have a solid experience in law enforcement and I hope to expand it in areas like document fraud [#MigrationEU](#)





# Operational support during Covid-19





# At the borders



April 21

So far this month, #Frontex planes delivered 1.8 tonnes of sanitary equipment to Greece, including more than 10 000 masks, for officers who are helping at its borders.

Even as COVID-19 affected every part of our lives and institutions in 2020, Frontex continued to provide operational support to Member States along the EU's external land and sea borders.

Each month, more than 1000 Frontex officers were working in Greece, Italy, Spain (including the Canary Islands), Cyprus and the Balkan region, helping the European Union deal with challenges at its external borders.

COVID tested all of us and showed the resilience of Frontex in the face of this novel adversity. We quickly introduced a wide range of protective measures recommended by national health authorities.

In April, as an immediate response to the crisis, the Agency acquired two tonnes of protective equipment (including 30 000 face masks)

and established a strategic buffer of 250 000 masks in case of a sudden shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Frontex set up a logistical centre in Thessaloniki that serves as the main distribution hub for all supplies for our operational activities in this important region.

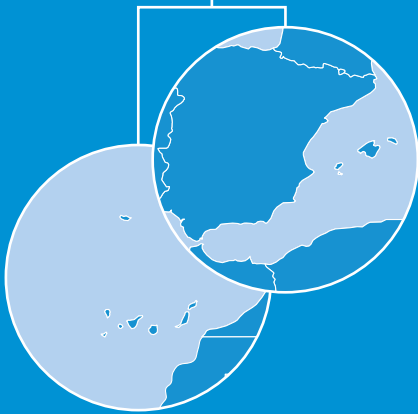
In September, together with 48 EU agencies and institutions, Frontex launched an inter-institutional open tender for the provision of Personal Protective Equipment and sanitary items for the safety of all our staff in the field.

With commercial flights suspended and land borders closed in the spring, Frontex transported officers to and from our operations with chartered planes to make sure that all of them were in place and to ship essential PPE equipment.

## AREAS OF KEY FRONTEX OPERATION

### SPAIN

OPERATIONS INDALO  
AND MINERVA



### ITALY

JOINT OPERATION  
THEMIS



### BULGARIA



### GREECE

JOINT OPERATION POSEIDON SEA,  
RAPID BORDER INTERVENTION  
EVROS IN GREECE




### WESTERN BALKANS

ALBANIA,  
MONTENEGRO



March 23

Stay safe and [#stayathome](#)! No rest to protect Europe's borders, [#Frontex](#) operations remain in place. 1000 officers are working to keep our borders safe, supporting EU member states with operations in Greece, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain 

# Rapid border intervention in Greece



In March, Frontex agreed to launch a rapid border intervention to assist Greece in dealing with the large numbers of migrants at its external sea and land borders.

At the Frontex Management Board meeting, the European Commission proposed a declaration of solidarity with Greece that was supported by all Member States, mentioning the need for a rapid intervention.

May 21

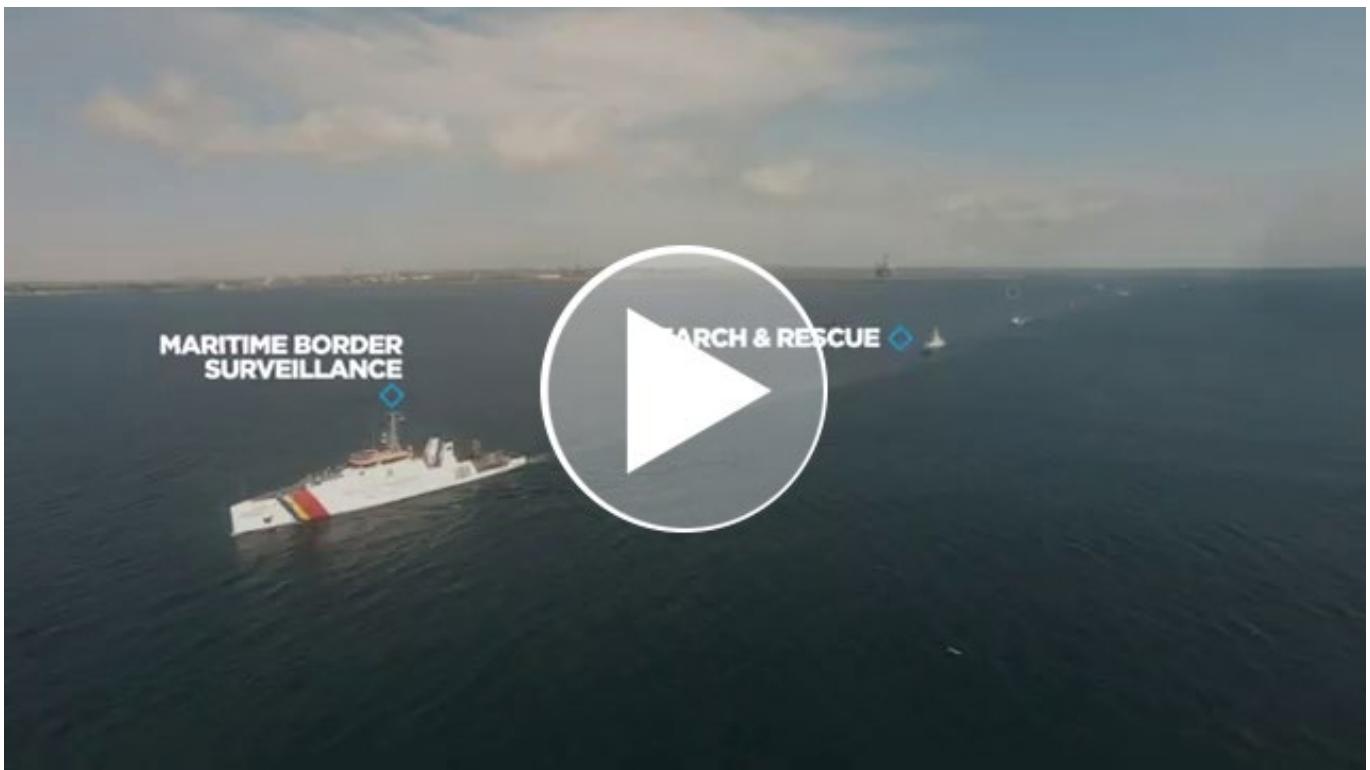
#Frontex has agreed to extend its rapid border interventions in Greece until the beginning of July. We will continue to support Greece in protecting Europe's land and sea borders with additional officers and equipment #EuropeanBorderGuard



Any operational activity run by Frontex is preceded by careful risk analysis and situation assessment. In 2020, the Agency produced analytical reports on nearly all border sections, cross-border crime phenomena and developed scenarios how COVID-19 might affect the work of Frontex. This included risk analysis reports that provided strategic foresight on future threats and challenges for EU border management.

To strengthen EU Member States' capacity to respond to challenges at the borders, in 2020, Frontex produced 29 assessments. The Agency checked the availability of the Member States' technical equipment, systems, capabilities, resources, infrastructure and staff necessary for border control and analysed the situation along particular border sections. This is how Frontex contributes to an efficient, high and uniform level of border control at the external borders of the EU.

# Multipurpose support



Frontex constantly keeps an eye on the situation at Europe's borders and beyond. With an array of services at hand, including situation monitoring, real-time video streaming from surveillance aircraft and risk analysis, Frontex's support is multipurpose.

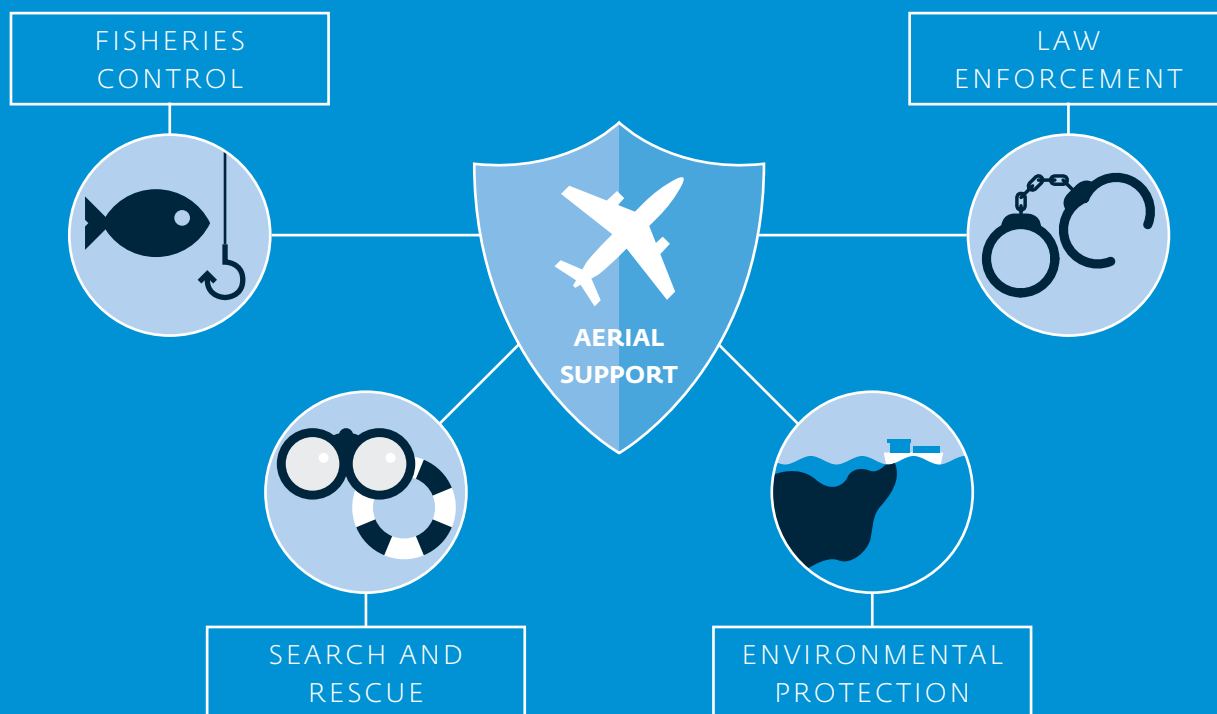
In 2020, Frontex planes flew more than 1000 missions, supporting Poland with the dismantling of an international tobacco smuggling ring, Cyprus with the detection of illegal fishing and Italy and Greece with border control, search and rescue and detection of marine pollution.

We are present at the external borders of the EU, including in pre-frontier areas such as the

Mediterranean, contributing to a comprehensive situational picture, and at the same time saving lives thanks to our real-time monitoring and quick reaction capabilities. In 2020, Frontex planes monitored the central Mediterranean Sea, Aegean Sea, Black Sea, Adriatic Sea and Baltic Sea. We also flew over land borders in Poland, Slovakia, Croatia and Hungary.

With experts from EU Member States, non-EU countries such as Albania and Montenegro, and EU agencies working together from the Frontex headquarters in Warsaw, the Agency has become an essential player in coordinating operational activities at Europe's external borders.

## FRONTEX MULTIPURPOSE AERIAL SUPPORT IN 2020



November 5

Watch how a [#Frontex](#) plane supports [@Straz\\_Granicza](#) in dismantling an international tobacco smuggling ring. Polish authorities arrested five suspected smugglers and seized illegal cigarettes worth EUR 1.2 million



September 28

A [#Frontex](#) plane patrolling off Lampedusa as part of operation Themis spotted a suspicious Tunisian fishing boat within Italian waters. We informed [@GuardiaCostiera](#) who deployed a [#Frontex](#) patrol vessel that intercepted the fishing boat, still with nets at sea, for illegal fishing. We send all information on illegal fishing to the European Fisheries Control Agency as part of our joint work as EU's coast guard [#EUCoastGuard](#)

# Fighting cross-border crime

The security of Europe's external borders is our priority. All along the borders, Frontex officers help national authorities fight crime. Smuggling of drugs, weapons and stolen cars, along with trafficking in human beings and people smuggling, are all challenges EU member states face at their borders. Frontex officers are trained to detect crime and sent to various places along the EU's borders to help national authorities fight crime and share their expertise.

In 2020, Frontex coordinated three and co-led two Joint Action Days – international operations that bring together national law enforcement authorities, international organisations and EU agencies, including Europol and Eurojust, to take on serious and organised crime. These operations were coordinated under the umbrella of the European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).

## Cross-border crime detection officers

Europe needs experts who will be able to spot different types of crime. This is why in early March, Frontex organised a course for officers from eight EU countries to become cross-border crime detection experts. The training course in Estonia covered crime at land and sea borders, as well as in ports. Participants practiced skills crucial for detecting and preventing cross-border crime, including document fraud, trafficking in human beings and terrorism. The officers are now being deployed in Frontex operations, including Joint Action Days.



## RESULT OF JOINT ACTION DAYS IN 2020\*



\* Frontex led JAD Danube 5, Mobile 3, Arktos 2 and co-led JAD South Eastern Europe and EMPACT Action Day on Child Trafficking

# Success stories



October 27

Authorities seize 350 stolen cars and 1000 stolen car parts in an international operation led by [#Frontex](#). It was co-led by [@Europol](#) and supported by [@INTERPOL\\_HQ](#), along with hundreds of border guards and police officers from 22 countries [#MigrationEU](#) [#standingcorps](#)



September 30

We teamed up with 34 countries, EU agencies and international organisations in an international crackdown against crime in Southeast Europe. Results? 166 arrests, 51 weapons and 47kg of drugs seized #EMPACT #StrongerTogether More info [bit.ly/eon8WFQ](http://bit.ly/eon8WFQ)

# Outside the EU



What happens outside the European Union often has a direct impact on our safety and security. This is why Frontex continues to expand its co-operation across borders with countries outside the EU, with operational activities, training, returns, and a network of liaison officers in place.

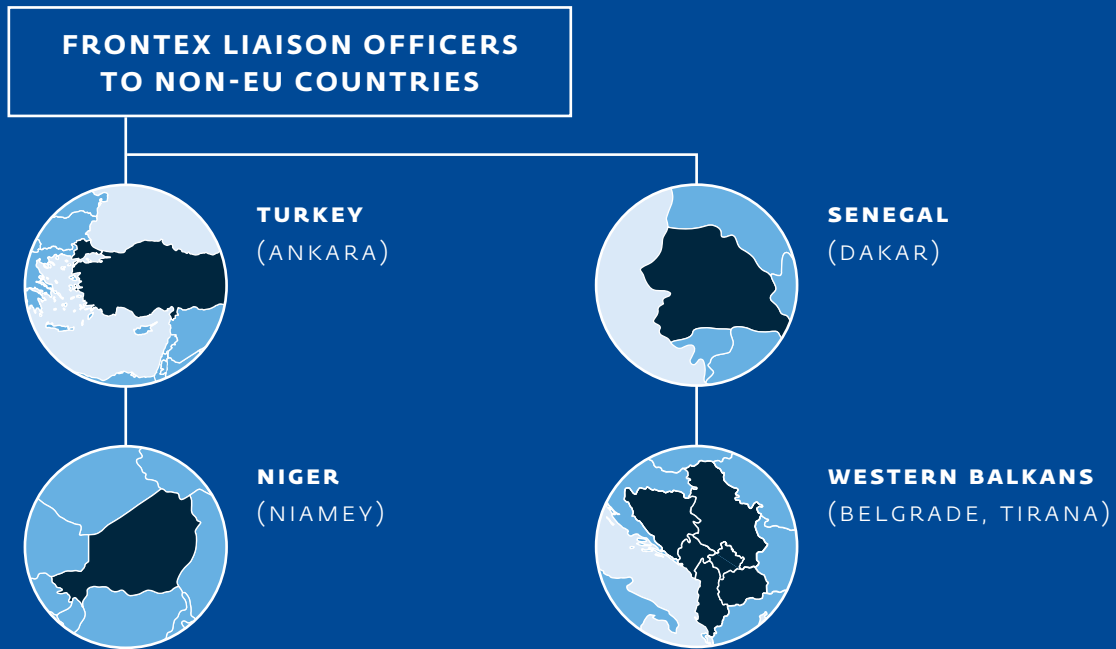
The wider network of Frontex liaison officers, as well as increased capacity building activities continues to promote trust with countries in the EU's neighbourhood and beyond. In January 2020, Frontex deployed its liaison officer to Dakar, Senegal, its fourth liaison officer outside the European Union.

Following the Agency's first operation outside the EU in Albania in 2019, this year Frontex launched two operations in Montenegro – one at its land borders and another at sea.

## **FIGHTING CROSS-BORDER CRIME IN ALBANIA**

Thanks to information provided by Frontex officers deployed to Albania, local authorities were able to launch a police operation that led to the arrest of 15 people smugglers and seizure of 50 cars in eight successful police actions this year. In many of them, the suspected criminals were caught red-handed.

## FRONTEX OUTSIDE THE EU IN 2020



### Health at the borders

The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that Frontex has a role to play when it comes to protecting the health and safety at the borders.

In response to COVID-19, Frontex has been strengthening its partnership with public health, sanitary, customs and law enforcement authorities. Together, we also provide support to authorities of non-European countries.

Frontex added the topic of health and safety at the borders to its EU4BorderSecurity project supported by European Commission's DG NEAR, which aims to enhance joint efforts in different areas of border management and security between countries of the EU and those of the Levant and the North of Africa.

In December, Frontex also organised a webinar with IOM to explore the topic of health, border and mobility management.

# Fighting child trafficking

Frontex and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have teamed up to support the fight against the trafficking and smuggling of children in the EU, the Middle East and Northern Africa. In the first of a series of joint activities, the Agency brought together child protection experts, law enforcement and policymakers to introduce tools for combatting child trafficking and smuggling.

One of these is the training of border guards, who many times are the first and often the

last law enforcement officers who may be able to identify the victims of this heinous crime. Frontex has been active in this field for years in cooperation with specialised UN agencies and NGOs, producing handbooks for border guards on how to detect potential victims and refer for assistance.

For the occasion, we also issued an Arabic version of the *Frontex VEGA Handbook: Children at Airports* handbook, which provides border guards and airport workers with guidance in assisting vulnerable children.



# Effective returns



As flights came to a standstill throughout Europe in early 2020 and the crossing of borders was severely limited due to the COVID-19 outbreak, Frontex was forced to quickly adapt its return operations to the new reality.

We did this by widening our return support to the Member States to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on authorities' return-related work across Europe.

The Agency started to finance COVID-19 tests for participants of return operations, made it

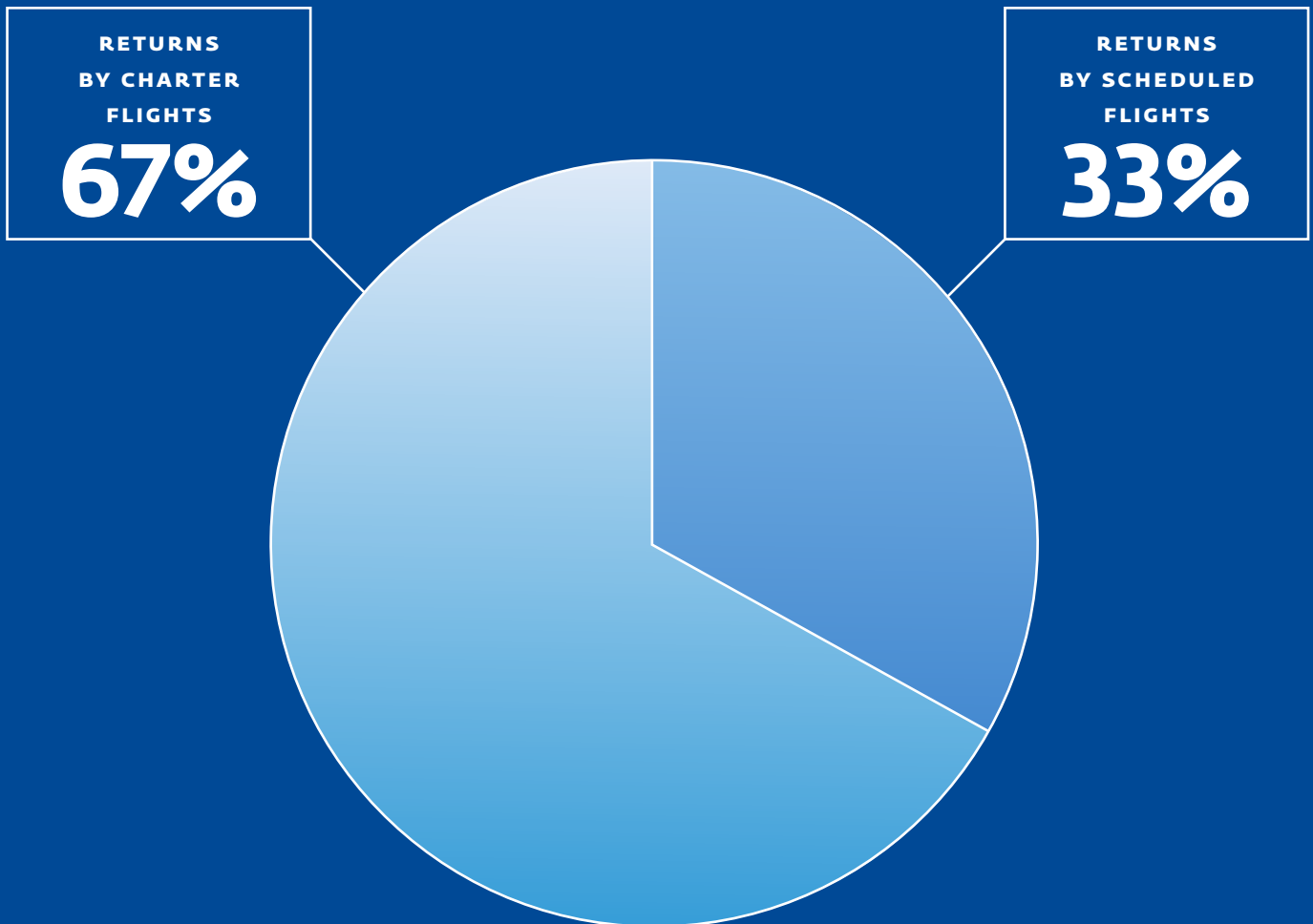
easier for Member States to cancel or rebook return flights and started supporting voluntary returns.

Frontex also continued helping national authorities in the identification of returnees, including via videoconferencing systems and supported the work of nine European Return Liaison Officers to non-EU countries.

Thanks to these efforts, Member States returned over 12 000 non-EU nationals with the support of the Agency, only 24% fewer than in 2019.



## RETURN OPERATIONS IN 2020



In 2020, the agency coordinated 232 return operations by charter flights to 28 destinations, increasing the number of flights to the Western Balkans.

Frontex also assisted Member States in returning 3 981 people to 83 destinations on scheduled flights.



# Voluntary returns: a new area for Frontex

In January, Frontex started supporting EU countries in an entirely new area – voluntary returns. With these type of returns, people who have received an order to leave a country do so of their own free will.

Frontex can support national authorities by providing technical support to voluntary returns

on both scheduled and charter flights, including chartering of aircraft. At the end of the year, this type of return already made up nearly one out of every five people returned with the support of Frontex and is expected to keep growing. Frontex will soon start offering reintegration assistance to people returning to their home countries.

## Digitalising the return process

Frontex continued its efforts towards the digitalization of the return process. In 2020, the Agency presented an updated version of its return case management system and several Member States already requested support to align their national IT systems with the model.



May 27

#Frontex supported Cypriot authorities in the return of 107 Georgian nationals from Larnaca to Tbilisi. The Georgian citizens could return safely to their home country yesterday. It was the largest voluntary return coordinated by Frontex so far.

# Coordinated crisis response



In 2020, Frontex has not only demonstrated resilience, but also flexibility: in our operational activities, in return support, when training the European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps, and in supporting the fight against cross-border crime.

Frontex quickly adapted to the COVID-19 circumstances in the field and at the headquarters.

The Frontex Situation Centre produced a daily COVID-19 report with updates about the latest

measures at Europe's borders and a widely cited map of COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the Member States. We shared it with national border authorities around Europe, the European Commission and other European institutions.

At the request of the European Commission, the Agency also issued reports with operational guidance for Member States on lifting of temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU imposed due to COVID-19.



March 16

Since the first COVID-19 case a week ago, the Frontex Strategic Crisis Response Team has been at work every day, monitoring Frontex operations at external borders while taking care of its staff, both at the headquarters in Warsaw and in the field 🇪🇺

## Crisis cell

As COVID 19 became a global issue, its impact also affected all parts of our Agency. With such a high number of personnel all over the continent, ensuring business continuity while guaranteeing the safety and wellbeing of our personnel required special measures.

This is why the COVID Crisis Cell was set up. Coordinated by the Frontex Situation Centre, it gathers representatives of all main Frontex units to allow for swift horizontal coordination of issues related to the coronavirus. The Crisis Cell allowed us to instantly identify COVID-related problems and swiftly propose concrete solutions to Frontex management.

The Crisis Cell deals with a variety of issues that affect the personnel of the Agency: monitoring the changing situation within Europe, implementing safety measures within Frontex premises, acquisition and shipping of personal protection equipment for officers deployed in our operations, liaising with local hospitals, setting up a helpline for staff, managing teleworking, coordinating shift work, monitoring closures.

# Bringing innovation to border control

Every year, millions of passengers cross the EU's external borders. Ensuring the safety and security of the EU's external borders while guaranteeing mobility will be one of the main challenges for EU Member States in the coming years.

Frontex supported Member States in their preparations for the implementation of the EU Entry/Exit System that will register information on the entry, exit and refusal of entry of non-EU nationals crossing the external borders. The Agency also helped develop innovative technologies for border control.

## **SHAPING THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATED BORDER MANAGEMENT**

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In 2020, Frontex has increased its engagement in overseeing projects under the Horizon Framework Programme for Research and Innovation related to border security.

The agency has coordinated and steered research activities in the area of border security innovation, assisting the European Commission in the development of state-of-the-art technology responding to the operational needs for advanced EU border protection.



Intuitive user interfaces and wearables supported by Artificial Intelligence, 3D facial and iris verification technology for a “real-on-the-move” border crossing experience, digital identity based on blockchain technology, handheld devices for drug detection: these are some of the projects Frontex helped develop in 2020.



March 16

We're getting ready for the future of border control. The EU is moving forward with implementing various "smart borders" solutions, including the Entry-Exit System (EES). We'll soon be testing technological solutions to make it happen.

# Main projects and events



## **REGIONAL MEETINGS WITH HEADS OF BORDER AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES**

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In September, Frontex Executive Director held a series of regional conferences with the heads of various national law enforcement authorities involved in all aspects of European Integrated Border Management (IBM). The annual meetings, which took place online, allow Frontex and EU Member States and Schengen-Associated Countries to continue crucial operational dialogue related to protecting Europe's borders and assuring the security of its citizens.

## **FRONTEX INDUSTRY DAYS**

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In November, Frontex organised virtual industry days to showcase and discuss the newest technologies and products in border management.

The event brought together 177 participants, including from EU Member States' authorities, European agencies such as EMSA, eu-LISA, EMCDDA and others; representatives of the European Commission, OLAF and European Council; international organisations such as IOM, UNHCR and Frontex.





The Industry Days provided valuable insights into latest technological developments and trends in the area of border management, in particular: biometrics, big data analysis, border check technologies and border surveillance.

#### **FIRST EURO-ARAB TECHNICAL ROUNDTABLE ON BORDER MANAGEMENT AND SECURITY**

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In December, Frontex and the General Secretariat of the Arab Interior Ministers' Council organised the first Euro-Arab Technical Roundtable on Border Management and Security. The event brought together 32 countries, among them 18 EU and 14 Arab states, to talk about the many challenges at the borders.

#### **SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BIOMETRICS FOR BORDERS**

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In December, experts from border guard authorities responsible for border management in the EU and around the world, EU policy-makers and agencies, as well as research and industry representatives took active part in the second edition of the Biometrics for Borders conference.

This year, the conference focused on the implementation of the Entry/Exit System (EES) at the European Union's external borders.

# Looking forward



The year 2021 will bring many changes and challenges.

In the coming year, we need to transform our own Agency and the way it works. We must prepare ourselves to deploy hundreds of Frontex border guards at various European borders.

Soon there will be more people based in the field than working for Frontex at our Warsaw headquarters.

We must create regional offices that will handle the deployment of Frontex border guards in Member States and prepare structures within the Agency to manage such a high number of officers – to organise their deployment, training and all other aspects of their work.

Early next year, for the first time in history, we will see officers with blue Frontex uniforms at the external borders, representing not their national authorities, but all of Europe.



But that is just one aspect of what is ahead of us.

Next year, Frontex will start preparing the ground for the 2022 roll-out of ETIAS – the European Travel Information and Authorisation System.

Frontex will run the central unit of ETIAS. The new system will enhance the security of the Schengen Area by carrying out early screening of people who can travel to the EU without a visa.

Frontex will play a crucial role in ETIAS by helping verify travel authorisation applications, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It will also make sure that the system spots potential threats to the safety of all Europeans.

## **FOLLOW US ON**

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