

# *The Agency at a Glance*





## What is Frontex?

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, supports EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries in the management of EU's external borders and fighting cross-border crime.

The agency is a centre of excellence for border control activities at the EU's external borders, sharing intelligence and expertise with all EU Member States, as well as neighbouring non-EU countries affected by migratory trends and cross-border crime.

Among its many tasks, the agency coordinates the deployment of border and coast guards, along with boats, airplanes, patrol cars and other equipment, to EU countries facing exceptional pressure at their external borders.

## Main responsibilities

**FIELD DEPLOYMENT** The agency provides law enforcement officers from Member States and Schengen Associated Countries, along with vessels, airplanes and border surveillance equipment to external border areas in need of additional assistance. In addition to border control, Frontex operations cover tasks related to maritime safety, security checks, search and rescue and environmental protection.

**RISK ANALYSIS** Frontex assesses risks to EU border security. It builds up a picture of patterns and trends in irregular migration and cross-border criminal activities at the external borders. The agency shares its findings with EU countries and the European Commission and uses them for planning its future activities. All Frontex activities are guided by risk analysis.

**SITUATION MONITORING** Frontex constantly monitors the external borders of the European Union, delivering updates and alerts to EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries, the European Commission and other agencies.

**VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT** The agency carries out annual evaluations of the capacity and readiness of each Member State and Schengen Associated Country to face challenges at its external borders, including migratory pressure. Frontex deploys liaison officers to EU Member States to help the agency maintain a comprehensive picture of border control at EU level.

### EUROPEAN COOPERATION ON COAST GUARD FUNCTIONS

The agency supports the cooperation of law enforcement authorities, EU agencies and customs at maritime borders. Boats and planes deployed in its operations also collect and share information relevant to fisheries control, detection of pollution and compliance with maritime regulations.

**SHARING OF INTELLIGENCE ON CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES** The agency shares the intelligence gathered at the borders with relevant national authorities, Europol and other European agencies. This includes information on persons suspected of involvement in criminal activities, such as migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings and terrorism.

**RETURN OPERATIONS** Frontex is playing an increasingly important role in returning people who are not entitled to remain in the European Union to their home countries. The agency helps Member States in coordinating and financing return operations, but can also launch them on its own

initiative. For this purpose, Frontex can charter flights and book seats on commercial flights. The agency also helps with obtaining the necessary travel documents for the returnees and providing experts to assist with the return operations.

**EXTERNAL RELATIONS** Cooperation with countries outside the EU and the Schengen zone is an integral part of the Frontex mandate and one of the strategic priorities for the agency. To ensure implementation of the European integrated border management (IBM), Frontex develops and maintains a network of partnerships with border authorities in non-EU states, particularly those neighbouring the EU and countries of origin and transit of migrants. The agency also deploys liaison officers outside the EU affected by irregular migration.

**RAPID REACTION** Frontex is able to quickly deploy border and coast guards and equipment to EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries facing an emergency at their external borders. Member States must provide up to 1500 officers from the rapid reaction pool upon request by the agency.

**RESEARCH AND INNOVATION** Frontex brings border control experts together with research and industry to make sure new technology meets the needs of border control authorities.

**TRAINING** Frontex develops common training standards for border authorities, to harmonise border and coast guard education in EU and Schengen Associated Countries. This is intended to ensure that wherever travellers cross an external EU border, they will encounter uniform border-control standards. It also enables border and coast guards from different countries to work together efficiently while deployed in Frontex operations.

## Joint operations

Joint operations are the most visible among the agency's activities. Frontex deploys hundreds of border and coast guard officers, along with boats, cars, airplanes and other equipment to assist Member States facing challenges at the EU's external borders. These operations take place at Europe's sea and land borders, as well as international airports. Currently Frontex mostly relies on EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries to provide the specialised officers and the equipment for its operations, but the agency is moving towards leasing and buying a large portion of its own equipment. Frontex can also count on a pool of at least 1 500 officers who can be deployed within five days to deal with emergencies at Europe's frontiers.

While the agency's sea operations taking place in the Mediterranean support Italy, Greece and Spain in dealing with migratory pressure, all of the agency's operations also help tackle various forms of cross-border crime. The sea operations include additional tasks, such as monitoring of pollution and illegal fishing. These are implemented with the cooperation of other EU agencies, especially Europol, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA).



## Law enforcement

Frontex plays an essential role in strengthening the internal security of the Schengen zone by the monitoring its external borders, conducting security checks and return operations and cooperating 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 sharing intelligence about suspected criminals. Officers deployed by Frontex are trained to detect persons who might be linked to terrorism.

## Role of Frontex in search and rescue operations

Participation in search and rescue operations has always been a priority for Frontex and is enshrined in the EU regulation that created the European Border and Coast Guard. Frontex is obliged to provide technical and operational assistance at sea in support of rescue operations that may arise during border surveillance operations.

Search and rescue activities are also a specific objective of the operational plan of the every Frontex sea operation.

Between 2015 and 2018, Frontex contributed to the rescue of 300 000 people in the Mediterranean Sea.



## Fundamental rights

Frontex considers respect for and the protection of fundamental rights to be at the heart of all its activities. Agency staff and national officers participating in Frontex operations receive training on fundamental rights and access to international protection. Safeguards and obligations for reporting potential violations of fundamental rights are integrated into all operational plans. An independent Fundamental Rights Officer and a Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights that includes NGOs and international organisations are embedded into the agency's structures. Frontex has established a complaint mechanism to allow persons affected by its operations to report any possible violations of their rights.



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Publications Office

Paper version:  
TT-06-18-235-EN-C  
ISBN 978-92-9471-256-1  
doi:10.2819/330849

PDF version:  
TT-06-18-235-EN-N  
ISBN 978-92-9471-267-7  
doi:10.2819/433500

FPI 18.0120EN