

# FRONTEX

 EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD AGENCY



*The role of Frontex in*  
**European  
Coast Guard  
Functions**

# Border Control

Border control is a key aspect of European Integrated Border Management. Frontex, together with national authorities of the Member States, is responsible for implementing it. Border control aims to prevent and combat cross-border crime, including people smuggling, trafficking in human beings and terrorism. Every year, around 700 million people cross Europe's external borders. In 2021, Frontex registered about 126 520 detections of illegal crossing by sea through the main sea routes (Western Africa, Central Mediterranean, Western Mediterranean, Eastern Mediterranean). One of the biggest challenges is detecting illegal activities without creating delays for *bona fide* travellers.

Border control facilitates legitimate border crossings and provides adequate measures for people in need of international protection. Frontex is a cornerstone when it comes to supporting Member States in ensuring the highest standards of external border control with available experts and technical equipment.

In 2019, Frontex gained new responsibilities and tools to support EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries more effectively, with the new European Border and

Coast Guard Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 coming into force. The regulation brought major changes for European coast guard stakeholders, and offered new opportunities for Member States and Schengen Associated Countries with the creation of Europe's first uniformed service - the European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps, deployed since 1 January 2021.

This new standing corps, composed of Frontex statutory staff and European Union (EU) Member States' officers, support Member States facing challenges at their external borders. The new regulation also provided new capabilities in the Law Enforcement domain, contributing to the efforts made by Member States in detecting, preventing and combating cross-border crime<sup>1</sup> at external borders.

The regulation stresses even further that cross-border crime is a part of European Integrated Border Management (EIBM) and is to be understood beyond the sole definition of illegal immigration. With the new regulation in place and the possibility to acquire its own technical equipment, Frontex develops and better fulfils the shared responsibility to protect the EU's maritime external borders, and becomes more active outside the EU by developing international cooperation.

<sup>1</sup> According to Art. 2/12 of Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard, "Cross-Border Crime" means any serious crime with a cross-border dimension that is committed or attempted at, along or in the proximity of the external borders."





## Search and Rescue (SAR)

International law obliges all vessels to provide assistance to any person found in distress, making search and rescue (SAR) a priority for everyone operating at sea. Participation in SAR operations has always been a priority for Frontex and is enshrined in the EU regulation that created the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. If tasked, Frontex assets are obliged to provide assistance at sea to Member States and non-EU countries in support of rescue operations that may arise during border surveillance activities.

In 2021, Frontex maritime surveillance operations contributed to the improvement of search and rescue capacities of Member States. Vessels in maritime operations helped rescue 12 228 people in distress at sea during their patrolling activities. In addition, Frontex Multipurpose Aerial Surveillance (MAS) service contributed to SAR operations that concluded with the rescue of about 22 696 individuals.

Within the framework of the maritime Joint Operations (JO) or Multipurpose Maritime Operations (MMO), Frontex

also organises Search and Rescue workshops to enhance coordination and cooperation among all operational actors involved in SAR operations.

In 2021, despite the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, Frontex succeeded in organising and implementing two SAR workshops in the Black Sea Region, respectively in Constanta (Romania) and Burgas (Bulgaria), within the framework of Frontex Multipurpose Maritime Operation (MMO) Black Sea.



## Maritime Safety

Frontex is cooperating with the Member States in the field of maritime safety, especially during joint operations, multipurpose maritime operations, pre-frontier surveillance and related activities. Since 2017, the Agency has been using aerial surveillance services under a multipurpose aerial surveillance concept, completing

more than 13 860 flight hours during more than 3 379 contracted operational days, and contributing to enhanced maritime safety. In 2021, Frontex Surveillance Aircraft completed more than 3 313 flight hours during 453 operational missions in the Central Mediterranean, Ionian and Adriatic Seas.



# Maritime Security

With the EU Maritime Security Strategy adopted in 2014 and revised in 2018, European maritime security has significantly improved in recent years in several dimensions, including international and regional cooperation, information sharing, capability development, risk management and training. Frontex deeply engages in the implementation of actions according to its mandate, also taking advantage of cooperation initiatives developed under interagency cooperation with the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) and the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) as well as with EU's Common Security and

Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

Cooperation with European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EU NAVFOR MED) has been renewed after the launch of operation IRINI in 2020, and many synergies are developed relying on a dedicated working arrangement and with a deployment of an IRINI associated expert in Frontex headquarters and Frontex associated expert in IRINI headquarters.

Frontex is also supporting the EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM) with border

management and coast guard functions related expertise.

The agency works closely with NATO sea operations in the Aegean, with the aim of exchanging information on the migratory situation in the area.

Related to maritime security, Frontex supports Member States with the identification of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) as part of its mandate related to the fight against terrorism. The agency is also involved in many working groups and conferences developed under the remit of several NATO centres of excellence addressing maritime security issues.

# Fisheries Control

In recent years, Frontex has increased its cooperation with the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) in the detection and fight against illegal fishing. As part of this cooperation, Frontex hosts fisheries inspectors from EFCA on board its vessels. The two agencies also work together when it comes to information exchange.

All vessels and aircraft participating in Frontex maritime operations send

information related to fisheries activities to EFCA for possible further action; for that purpose, the use of a dedicated fishing vessel sighting form has been agreed. In 2021, 577 fishing vessel sighting forms were shared. Moreover, in 2020, Frontex surveillance aircraft shared the Framework contract capacity for aerial surveillance services with EFCA, supporting with dedicated deployments for

fisheries control in operational area of Cyprus, the Adriatic Sea, and the Strait of Sicily. On top of that, Coast Guard Functions Officers of the Standing Corps deployed in International Coordination Centre of the Joint Operations coordinated by Frontex receive tailored briefings on fisheries control delivered by EFCA, to be able to support operational cooperation for fisheries purposes.



# Customs Control

Frontex is increasingly active in cooperating with authorities involved in customs control. The development of operational cooperation with customs authorities is key to successful and enhanced protection of the borders and at the same time prevention and detection, as well as investigation of cross-border crime.

In recent years, Frontex established a solid strategic and operational collaboration with the customs community. Frontex is gradually enhancing its position as a reliable partner, thanks to contacts with national authorities and the Council's Law Enforcement Working Party (Customs).

The agency is aiming to involve more customs authorities within its operational activities as well as deploying customs officers to Frontex operational activities. The European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) framework provides an additional dimension of operational collaboration.



# General law Enforcement at sea

In recent years, Frontex has strengthened the European response at the external borders to better manage migration and improve the security situation at the borders and, by consequence, within the EU. Frontex is expected to address not only migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, but also any other serious cross-border crime that adversely affects the security of the EU's external borders and terrorism. This may include smuggling of stolen vehicles and parts, drugs, firearms, excise goods (tobacco products, mineral oils, and alcohol), trafficking of hazardous materials (medical, chemical, biological, radiological), and counterfeit goods. It could also concern environmental crimes such as waste or wildlife trafficking.

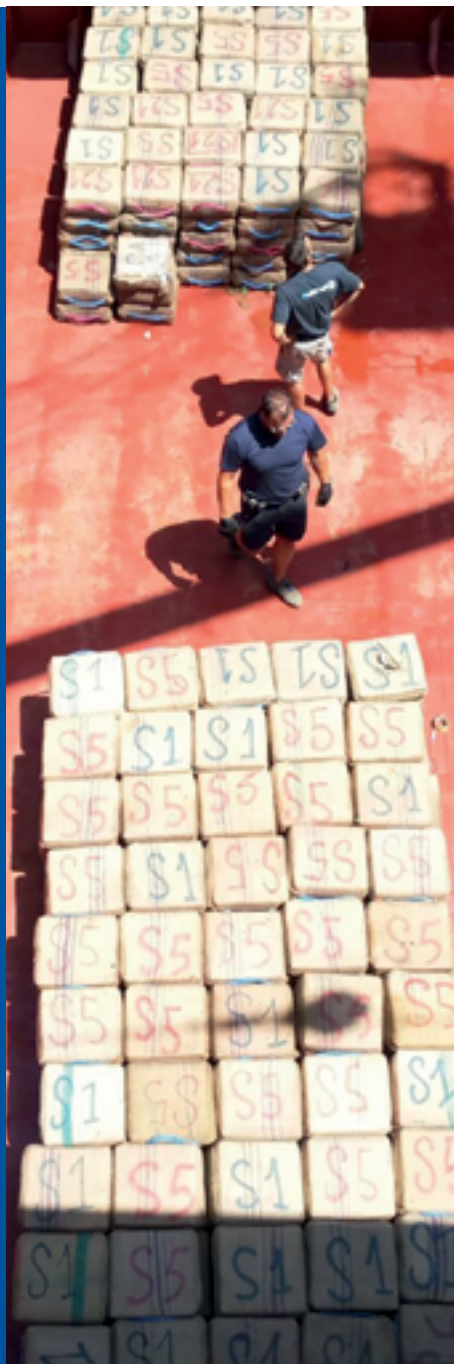
Practically, Frontex operational activities contain an element of tackling cross-border crime.

In 2021, 16.2 tons of drugs were seized during Frontex maritime Joint Operations. The operational activities also contributed to the detection of a wide range of other cross-border crimes such as the detection of at least 1 172 human smugglers and 1 853 smugglers of goods.

In addition, in the framework of MMO Black Sea 2021 a common operational coordination centre - composed by Border Police, Customs, Frontex staff and other law enforcement agencies - was established in Constanta, Romania, with the main aim of performing joint analysis of suspected vessels and container traffic.

Through this cooperation 17 cases of illegal waste were identified, counting over 3 575 tons of waste, loaded in 151 containers, and one criminal investigation initiated for illegal transport of seven containers with raw tree logs. In addition, six cases of cigarettes smuggling with more than 5 260 000 pieces of cigarettes were identified, three cases of IPR infringements - 10 containers containing 188 905 suspected to infringe the property rights, with an estimated value of EUR 1.3 million, and one case of attempted fraud related to import - two containers involving four vehicles of approximately EUR 50 000 in duties and taxes.

Moreover, 5 698 Customs Controls in BCPs were performed during MMO Black Sea.





# Environmental Protection



Environmental crime has become an increasingly alarming threat. Therefore, Frontex has been involved in the EU EMPACT Environmental Crime (ENVICRIME) priority within the framework of the EU Policy Cycle 2018-2021 for organised and serious international crime to cooperate with Member States/Schengen Associated Countries, non-EU countries, EU and international agencies, and other international organisations and partners in finding and implementing the best ways to protect the maritime environment from criminal activities. In addition, the cooperation in this field is crucial for building strong synergies with other partners working in the field of environmental crimes and to foster a multidisciplinary approach.

According to the EMPACT Environmental Crime Operational Action Plans 2020 and 2021, Operation 30 Days at Sea 3.0 in Europe was one of the activities under the Operational

Action 2.3 "Pollution at Sea" focused on marine pollution. The operation aimed at enhancing the global law enforcement response to pollution crimes leading to marine pollution, with the ultimate objective of enhancing sea quality and tackling criminal networks involved in these crimes. The operation was coordinated by INTERPOL globally (300 Agencies across 67 countries), in cooperation with Europol and Frontex in the European Region. Frontex support to the operation focused on European Border Surveillance System Fusion Services (EFS) during the Tactical Phase in March 2021. As the main result of 30 Days at Sea 3.0, a total of 33 500 inspections at sea and inland waterways, coastal areas, and ports to detect marine pollution violations were conducted. Preliminary results from the operation's tactical phase involved the detection of 1 485 marine pollution offences, 397 illegal acts of pollution committed at sea (including oil discharges, illegal shipbreaking, and

sulphur emissions from vessels), 977 pollution offences in coastal areas and in rivers (including illegal discharges of sewage, mercury, plastics and other contaminants) and 111 cases of waste trafficking through ports.

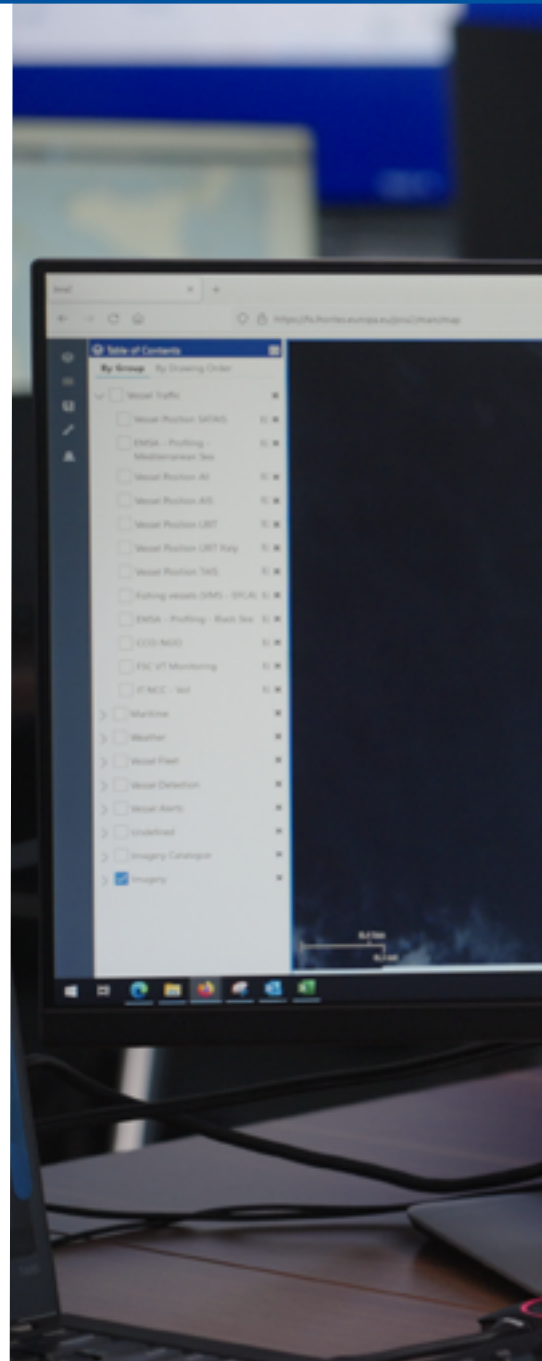
In addition, within EMPACT activities related to Coast Guard functions, Frontex was involved in Operational Action 2.1 in illegal fishing.

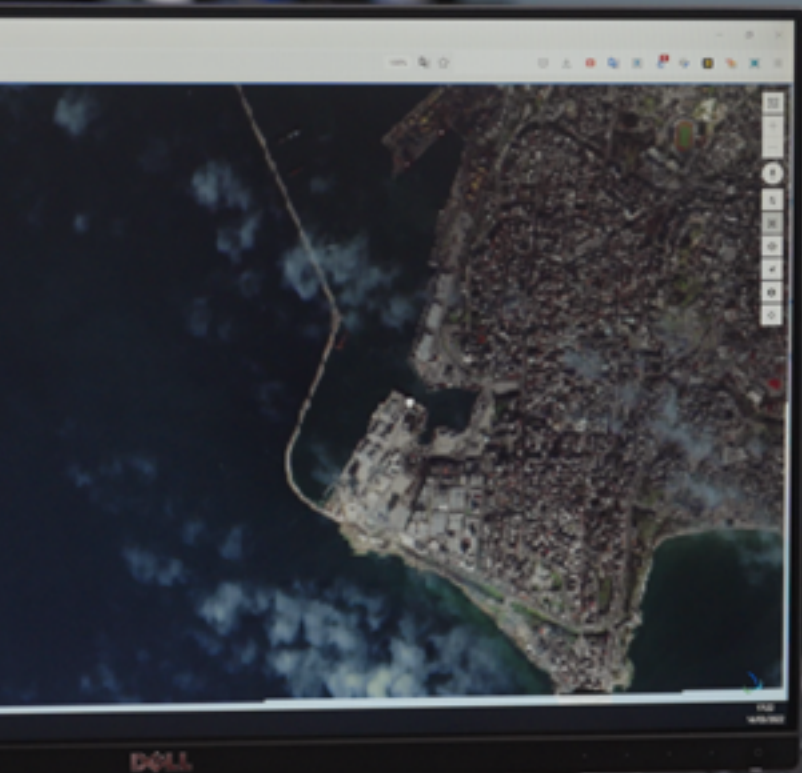
Frontex also cooperates with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) developing commonly a sighting form to be used by all vessels and aircraft participating in Frontex maritime operations for reporting any information related to potential marine pollution. Besides, European Coast Guard Functions officers of the Standing Corps deployed in International Coordination Centres of the operations coordinated by Frontex receive tailored briefings delivered by EMSA regarding marine pollution.

# European Border Surveillance System Fusion Services

EUROSUR Fusion Services (EFS) add value to common operational activities, provide essential components to compile the European Situational Picture (ESP) and support the Member States and their existing systems in enhancing their situational awareness and reaction capabilities. Aligned with the operational needs, the services are delivered to EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries via a variety of communication channels, including the EUROSUR network and JORA. Tailored EFS packages for all operational domains, including maritime, have been specially designed and tested to provide operational support to all stakeholders. The EFS derive data from a variety of sources, including platforms deployed under the Common Application of Surveillance Tools as well as external institutions and commercial providers. Detailed information on EUROSUR Fusion Services can be obtained via the Service Catalogue available for Member States and Schengen Associated Countries National Coordination Centres.

The Agency coordinates the EUROSUR Fusion Services to supply the national coordination centres, the Commission and itself with information on the external borders and on the pre-frontier area on a regular, reliable, and cost-efficient basis. In this context, the information shared may derive from selective monitoring of designated third-country ports, coasts or maritime areas which have been identified as of interest for illegal migration or cross border crime. The main aim of the activity is to detect, identify and track vessels or other craft suspected of, or identified as, being used for illegal immigration or cross border crime. Upon detection, early alerts are delivered to the agency's partners. With the aim to improve the efficiency of the surveillance activities, several initiatives were launched. The initiative of the Maritime Bi-weekly Dialogues (MBDs) was launched in December 2020. Having as base the EUROSUR Network, the MBDs work as a platform where the agency exchanges with national experts information as regards suspicious vessels identified with the execution of EUROSUR Fusion Services. In the context of the MBDs in 2021, 60 vessels of interest were raised to the attention of the Member States.









# A reinforced European Coast Guard Cooperation with the Standing Corps Deployment

Starting in January 2021, Frontex deployed its first members of the European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps. The European Union's first uniformed law enforcement service is an essential part of Europe's efforts to safeguard the area of freedom, security and justice, helping to guarantee safe, secure, and well-functioning EU borders to fight against cross-border crime and enhance cooperation among the border and coast guard community.

The Standing Corps includes a dedicated profile for European cooperation on coast guard functions: the European Coast Guard Functions Officers (ECGFO).

This is an official of a competent national authority of a Member State or an Agency's statutory staff member, deployed to Frontex maritime operational activities to support the implementation of coast guard functions. These officers, after receiving a tailored training developed in cooperation with EFCA and EMSA, are deployed within any Frontex maritime activities, acting as facilitators for enhancing operational cooperation and exchange of information between coast guard national administrations and EU agencies to foster the operational response related to coast guard functions.

The development of this dedicated profile takes advantage of the outcomes of the pilot project on European Coast Guard Functions Officers profile launched in 2018.

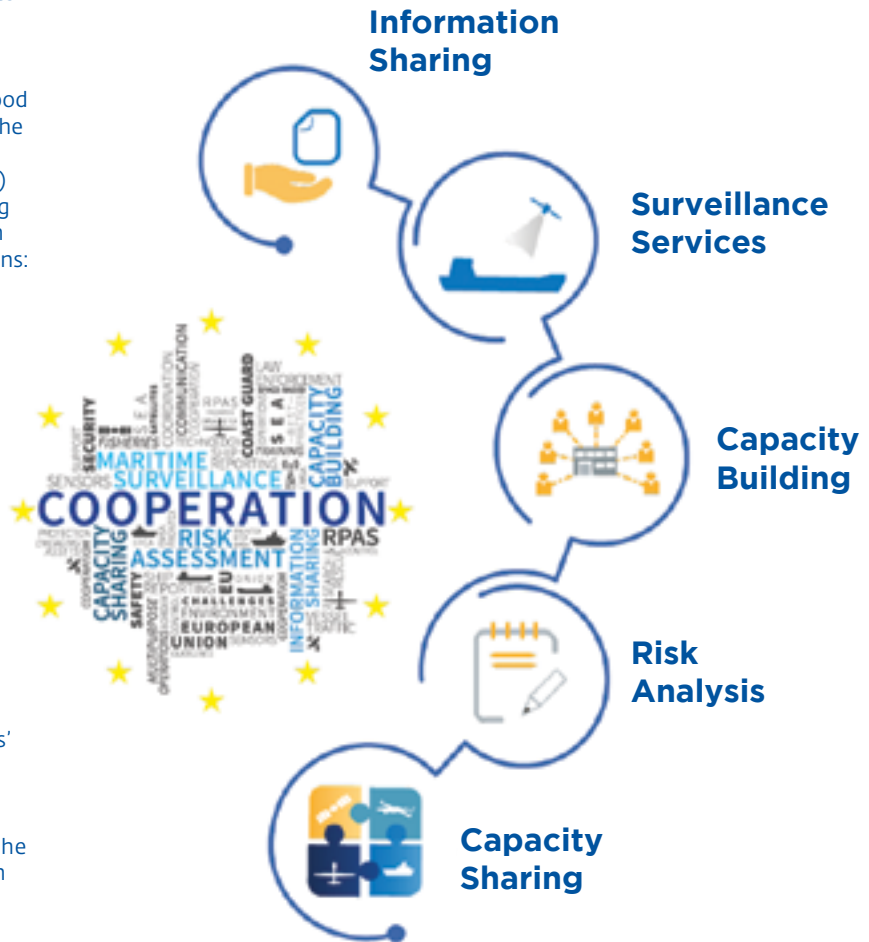
# European cooperation on coast guard functions



European cooperation on coast guard functions describes the efforts of EFCA, EMSA and Frontex to join forces and streamline activities in order to support national authorities carrying out coast guard functions at national and EU level, and where appropriate, at international level. Coast guard functions are understood as those commonly referred to by the three agencies and outlined in the Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/1222 of 20 July 2021 establishing a 'Practical Handbook' on European cooperation on coast guard functions:

EFCA, EMSA and Frontex support European cooperation on coast guard functions in a coordinated manner with each agency working in the areas of its mandate and responsibilities, by ensuring:

In 2016, their cooperation was formalised with a legislative proposal by the European Commission leading to the amendment of the three agencies' founding regulations with the insertion of a common article on "European cooperation on Coast Guard Functions". In 2017, the agencies took a significant step in structuring their cooperation by signing a Tripartite Working Arrangement. On 18 March 2021, the agencies further strengthened the European cooperation on coast guard functions, as the Tripartite Working Arrangement was renewed for an indefinite period.



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