

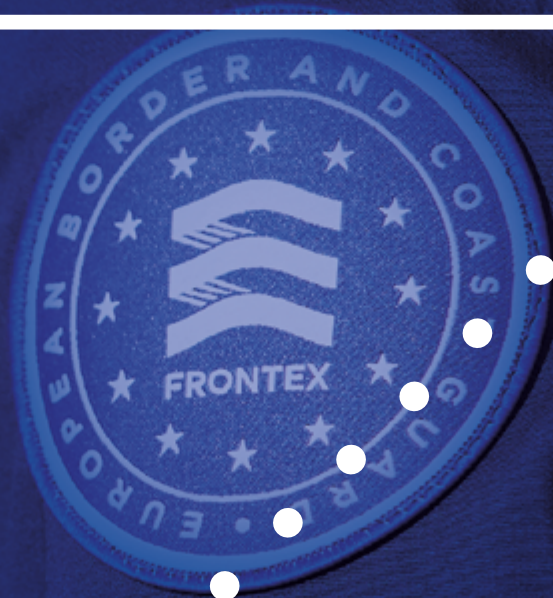
**FRONT**X



EUROPEAN BORDER AND  
COAST GUARD AGENCY

# 2021

IN BRIEF







**FABRICE LEGGERI**  
Executive Director

## A BREAKTHROUGH YEAR FOR FRONTEX

The year 2021 was a game-changer for Frontex and for the European Border and Coast Guard.

With COVID-19 still ever-present, we managed to post the first standing corps officers to the EU's external borders in January and continued to recruit, train and deploy them throughout last year.

The establishment of the standing corps is a breakthrough for Europe because it constitutes the European Union's first uniformed law enforcement service. It embodies the European spirit of solidarity and cooperation.

At the end of the year, the result is impressive. There are some 2 000 standing corps officers all along the external border, working shoulder-to-shoulder with their national counterparts.

Frontex officers are present in all locations at the EU's external borders where Member States required additional support to deal with migratory issues, as well as cross-border crime.

The officers, coming from nearly all European countries, were tested in various countries and under a variety of conditions. They have worked at Finland's South-eastern border, responded to the hybrid threats at the Eastern borders, assisted with evacuations from Afghanistan in Georgia and with border management in Cyprus.

Of course, there were many other places where Frontex was active in 2021. At the moment we have a record 19 operations running in the EU and beyond.

We are expanding our footprint in the Western Balkans. In 2021 we started an operation in Serbia and marked two years of our involvement in Albania. Our officers are also present in Montenegro.

But Frontex is not only about deployments. The establishment of the standing corps has allowed the Agency to expand the variety of services we provide to Member States in the area of border control – from fighting cross-border crime, to return, tailored risk analysis, aerial surveillance, training of law enforcement officers and other efforts described in this report.

In the coming years, the way people travel in the EU's Schengen Area will change, to increase our security, and Frontex will play a key role in this process.

We are setting up the Central Unit of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). Once ETIAS becomes operational, the staff of the Central Unit will process and screen applications from visa-exempt travellers who apply for an ETIAS travel authorisation and perform helpdesk assistance functions to support ETIAS applicants and carriers. We expect that the number of ETIAS Central Unit staff will grow to over 200 in the coming years.

All these achievements go hand-in-hand with increased fundamental rights safeguards. In 2021, the Agency adopted the Fundamental Rights Strategy, recruited our new Fundamental Rights Officer and Fundamental Rights Monitors who regularly observe our operations.

The establishment of the standing corps, which truly transforms Frontex into an operational arm of the EU, with more staff in the field than at headquarters, also means that the Agency must transform the way we organise and run our operations. This will be our focus for the coming months.

# Highlights of the year



Frontex deploys the first EU standing corps officers



Frontex and OSCE discuss preventing document fraud

○ Frontex, EMSA and EFCA strengthen cooperation on coast guard functions

JAN

MAR

MAY

FEB

APR

JUN

○ Renewal of working arrangement with Georgia



Frontex expands presence in Western Balkans with operation in Serbia

○ Operation 30 Days at Sea 3.0 reveals 1,600 marine pollution offences worldwide





Frontex launches rapid intervention in Lithuania



EU Justice and Home Affairs agencies present key achievements

144 people smugglers arrested in Frontex-led operation

JUL

SEP

NOV

AUG

OCT

DEC



Next batch of standing corps officers ready to be deployed

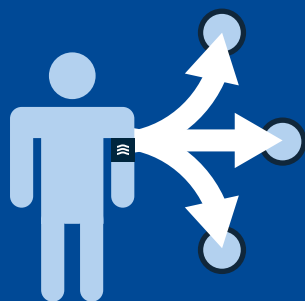


Frontex supports Member States in the Channel and North Sea region



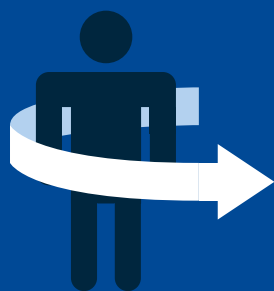
Frontex tests aerostat systems in Greece for border surveillance

# The year in numbers



2000

EU STANDING CORPS OFFICERS DEPLOYED



18300

PEOPLE RETURNED WITH  
FRONTEX SUPPORT



1050

PEOPLE SMUGGLERS  
IDENTIFIED



184

STOLEN CARS  
SEIZED

\* Preliminary data



# 468

AERIAL SURVEILLANCE FLIGHTS

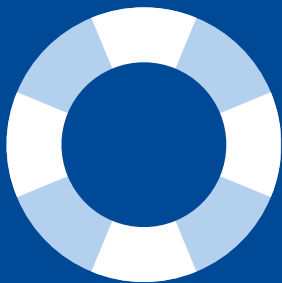
---



# 19

ONGOING OPERATIONS

---



# 34349

PEOPLE RESCUED

---



# 6100

FRAUDULENT  
DOCUMENTS  
DETECTED



# 16000

KG OF DRUGS  
SEIZED

# Why Frontex





Frontex has undergone a profound transformation to become an operational arm of the European Union, working side-by-side with national authorities of Member States to watch over and protect our common external borders.





# Boots on the ground

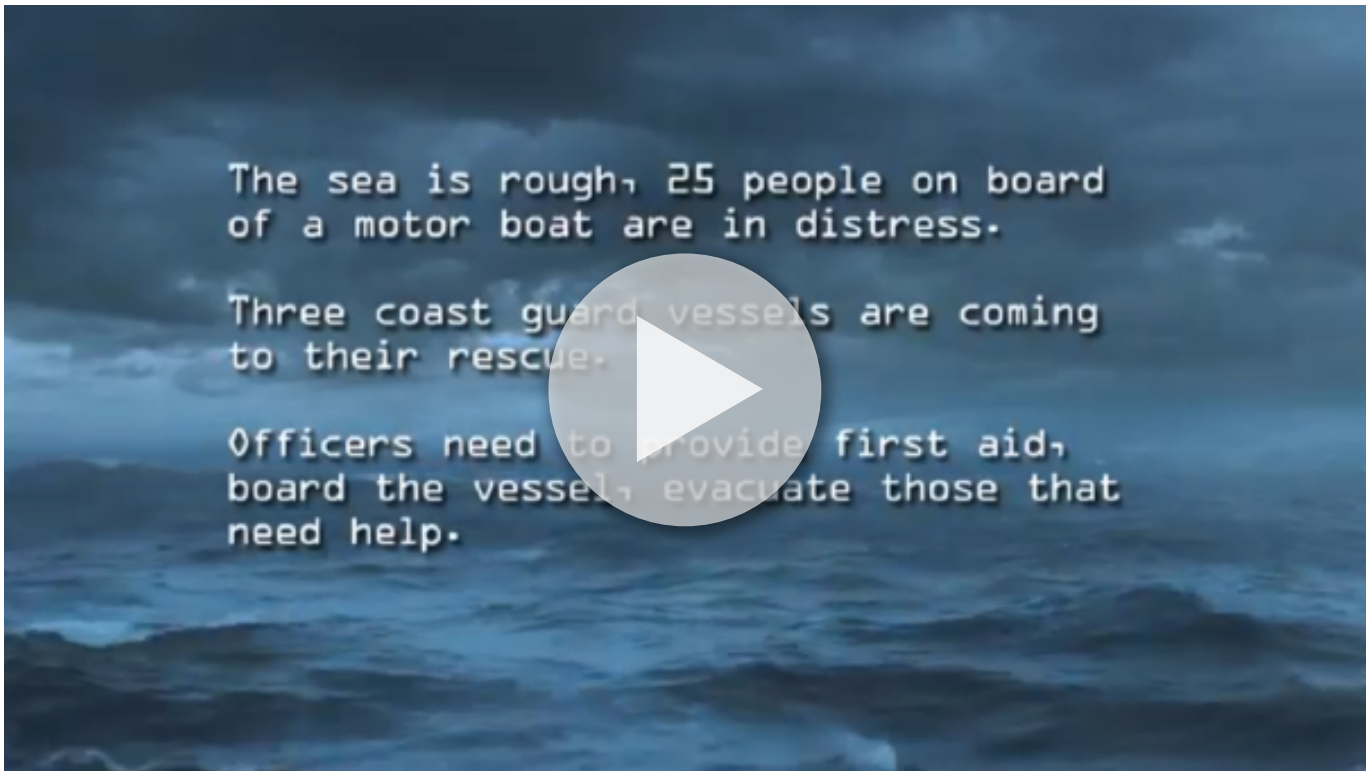




Thanks to the newly established European Border and Coast Guard standing corps, Frontex has hundreds of officers working hard in numerous operations at the external borders of the European Union and beyond. They accomplish a variety of tasks, including border surveillance, assisting in return operations, fighting cross-border crime, detecting document fraud and collecting information on people smugglers.

To perform their duties, they have at their disposal patrol cars, vessels, planes, thermovision vehicles, mobile offices and other equipment. A growing share of this equipment belongs to or is leased by Frontex.

# Keeping watch 24/7



Of course, our Agency has a variety of other responsibilities related to our external borders. Frontex monitors them 24/7, collects and analyses streams of data from all around Europe to create a full picture of what is going on at the borders. This comprehensive information helps Frontex and Member States to identify and address weak spots and future challenges to better protect our borders.

We work closely with national authorities and EU agencies, including Europol, to stop cross-border crime, from drug smuggling to stolen cars and the trafficking of human beings. Frontex is among the most engaged participants in activities under the European Multi-disciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) targeting organised crime and provides support in combatting the gateway crime of document fraud.

## MAIN OPERATIONS BY SIZE OF DEPLOYMENT



The designations employed and the presentation of material on the map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the European Union concerning the legal status of any country, territory or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

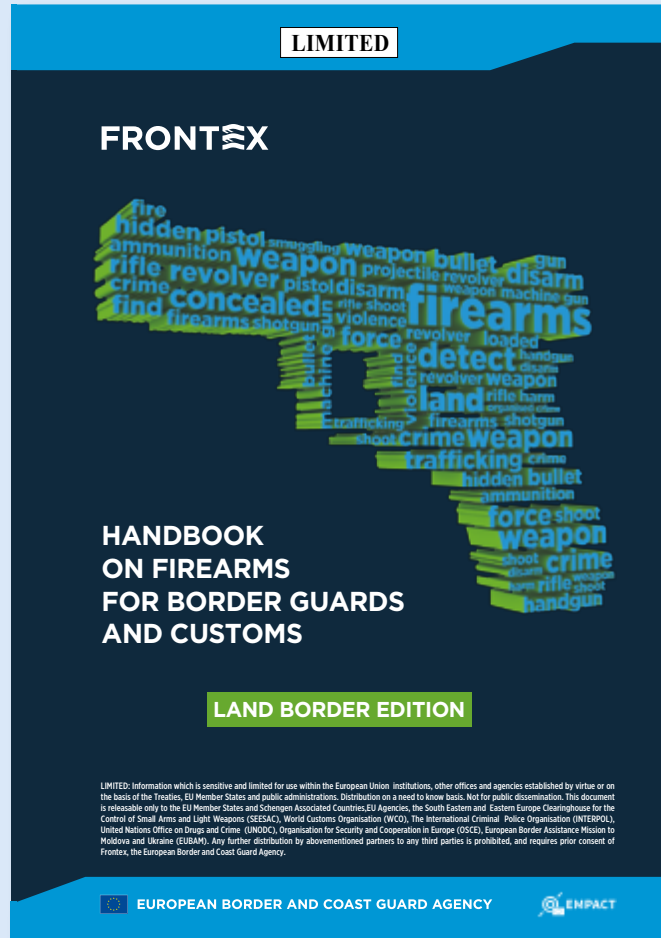


# In focus: gun smuggling



Illegal firearms play a key role in many of the most violent crimes affecting our societies, including terrorism-related threats. Combatting firearms smuggling is one of the key priorities for all law enforcement authorities in their duty to protect EU citizens.



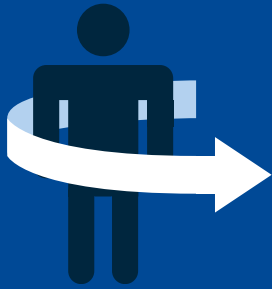


Frontex decided to help national border guard and customs authorities to fight arms-related crime and created the Handbook on Firearms for Border Guards and Customs Officers in cooperation with the border guard and customs community, as well as EU and international partners.

The handbook provides the latest information on firearms trafficking, tactics and equipment to be used during border checks. The initiative was supported and guided by the European Commission, Member States and a number of EU and international organisations. The handbook was developed under the umbrella of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).



# Assisting Member States



18 300

NUMBER OF PEOPLE RETURNED  
WITH FRONTEX SUPPORT

---



4 674

NUMBER OF PEOPLE RETURNED  
ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS

---



10 193

NUMBER OF PEOPLE RETURNED  
BY CHARTER FLIGHTS

---



8 107

NUMBER OF PEOPLE RETURNED  
BY SCHEDULED FLIGHTS

In 2021, Frontex started deploying a new profile within the European Border and Coast Guard standing corps: forced-return escort and support officers. Their main task is to escort persons who have received a return decision from national authorities, but they also identify and assist vulnerable groups or families with children. They are already present at four international airports: Rome-Fiumicino International Airport, Frankfurt International Airport, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol and Vienna Airport. Frontex plans to continue deploying return teams at other key EU international airports in the coming months.

Frontex provides many types of assistance to Member States in returning people who those countries have determined are staying illegally and do not have the right to international protection. The Agency has also put in place return support teams at several of the largest European airports.

Despite ongoing travel restrictions, Frontex's engagement in return is stronger than ever before, with a record number of over 18 000 non-EU nationals returned to 102 destination countries last year.

Frontex's support has grown significantly in line with the new mandate, with voluntary returns constituting 25% of all returns supported by the Agency, and deployment of Forced Return Escort and Support Officers to four airports.




# Stronger together



Our Agency works with numerous countries outside the EU, especially those where irregular migrants come from and those they pass through on their way to Europe. We also remain in close touch with EU Agencies and international law enforcement organisations. Frontex also collaborates with sister agencies European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) on strengthening the European Coast Guard functions.

Looking ahead, Frontex is testing new technical solutions and innovations to make border crossing safer and more convenient. We will also play an essential role in the launch of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), and have already recruited the first staff to help verify applications and perform other key tasks at the ETIAS Central Unit.

October 19

Last week, we wrapped up our multipurpose operation in the Black Sea together with  and  authorities. We detected 146 containers with more than 3500 tonnes of illegal waste, sea pollution, 263000 packs of smuggled cigarettes & other illegal goods worth more than 1.5 million EUR. 



In October, 43 new staff members took up their jobs as application handlers, team leaders and traveller & carrier support operators in the ETIAS Central Unit run by Frontex. Why do we need ETIAS? Some 1.4 billion people from over 60 countries worldwide benefit from visa-free travel to the EU. One of the main challenges for border authorities is to make crossing of EU external borders as smooth as possible for travellers, while at the same time detecting and preventing illegal activities. ETIAS will increase Europe's internal security and protect public health by providing risk assessment of visa-exempt travellers prior to their arrival at the external borders.



# EU's first uniformed service









# First European uniformed service



PHOTO: Standing  
corps graduation  
ceremony, Avila –  
August 2021

Frontex is able to provide a variety of services to Member States thanks in large part to the creation of the European Border and Coast Guard standing corps, which includes officers directly employed by Frontex, as well as national officers deployed for longer and short time spans.

The formation of the standing corps is a major achievement of European integration. It brings about a real transformation of Frontex: soon, there will be more Frontex statutory staff working in the field than in the headquarters, making it a truly operational arm of the EU.



The standing corps consists of Frontex and EU Member States' officers, who support national authorities facing challenges at their external border.

#### CATEGORY 1

##### **FRONTEX STATUTORY STAFF**



#### CATEGORY 2

##### **LONG-TERM STAFF SECONDED FROM MEMBER STATES**



#### CATEGORY 3

##### **SHORT-TERM STAFF SECONDED FROM MEMBER STATES**



The aim is for the standing corps to consist of 10 000 officers by 2027, among them 3 000 category 1 officers – Frontex staff. The other 7 000 thousand will be officers from EU Member States, some working at Frontex for at least two years, others for a shorter period of time.

In 2021, Frontex deployed more than 700 standing corps officers (category 1).



# Support on the spot



In July, Frontex launched its rapid border intervention in Lithuania, followed by deployments in Latvia, to strengthen the EU's Eastern border.

The hybrid threat at EU's eastern frontier and the quick deployment of standing corps officers is proof that the service can support Member States in all types of challenges.

Responding to the increased numbers of migrants at the Polish-Belarusian border in 2021, Frontex supported Polish authorities in the area of return.

Frontex also reacted quickly to the escalation of the situation in Afghanistan and helped Member States with evacuation operations from Kabul to various European capitals, transiting through Tbilisi.


At the end of the year, the Agency deployed a plane to support Member States in the Channel and North Sea region in just three days.





August 25


#Frontex quickly reacted to the escalation of the situation in Afghanistan.

We're helping  Member States with the ongoing evacuation operations from Kabul by liaising with Georgian authorities to ensure the smooth and safe transit via Tbilisi to Europe.

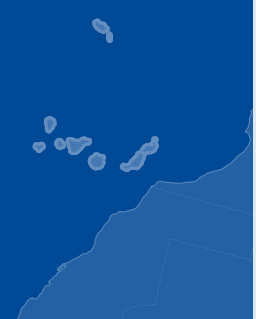


December 1

#Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri decided to deploy a plane to support French and Belgian authorities following the ministerial meeting in Calais on Sunday.

We are starting with one plane but we stand ready to reinforce our support if needed .

On the Canary Islands, the number of arrivals has been at the highest level in over 10 years. In response, Frontex set up nine mobile offices on four of the islands. Around 70 officers support Spanish authorities with nationality screening, gathering information on cross-border crime and migration management.



# In focus: Lithuania



**RUSTAMAS LIUBAJEVAS**, Head of Lithuanian Border Guard Service:

*The year 2021 was an exceptional one in the history of cooperation between the State Border Guard Service and Frontex. For the first time, the Rapid Border Intervention mechanism was activated not at the southern external borders of the European Union, but specifically in Lithuania, the eastern-most border of the EU.*

*Frontex has operationally allocated human and technical resources to counter the hybrid aggression by Belarus, which organised an influx of irregular migrants that has not been seen in our region before. Timely assistance has helped to ensure the security not only of Lithuania but the whole of Europe. I would like to thank Frontex very much for providing professional assistance to both border and migration authorities in Lithuania to overcome this crisis, and to prevent the influx of irregular migrants caused by a hybrid attack by the Belarusian regime.*





July 12

The EU stands by Lithuania. After redeploying officers to provide immediate assistance, today @Frontex agreed to launch a Rapid Border Intervention. The second MS after Greece to benefit from one. We will not allow people to be used as political tools.

Vice-President of the European Commission

**MARGARITIS SCHINAS**



September 25

On the ground at the Lithuania-Belarus border with PM @IngridaSimonyte and @Frontex Ex.Dir. Leggeri. European support by 19 countries, 200+ EU agencies staff, €36,7 million emergency assistance.

This is the European Union's external border and we will protect it.

In 2021, Frontex doubled its operational support to Cyprus in response to the high number of illegal arrivals on the island. In two mobile offices, Frontex standing corps officers support the identification and screening of migrants arriving on the island; they also gather information on people-smuggling networks.

# Specialised assistance



Document fraud experts, dog handlers, return specialists: these are only some of the profiles of the standing corps, EU's first uniformed service. They are at the forefront of EU's efforts to secure its external borders and fight serious cross-border crime.

The standing corps officers have a variety of skills. Depending on the need, they are sent to airports, land or sea borders, as well as non-EU countries that have signed a status agreement with the European Commission.

Now more than ever, the EU Member States need the reinforcement offered by the standing corps to face geopolitical challenges and increasing hybrid threats at the external borders.

## PROFILES OF FRONTEX STANDING CORPS OFFICERS



BORDER GUARD OFFICER



DEBRIEFING OFFICER



CROSS-BORDER CRIME DETECTION OFFICER



DOG HANDLER



FORCED RETURN ESCORT AND SUPPORT OFFICER



COAST GUARD FUNCTION OFFICER



INFORMATION OFFICER



ADVANCED-LEVEL DOCUMENT OFFICER



MOTOR VEHICLE CRIME DETECTION OFFICER



FRONTEX TACTICAL SUPPORT OFFICER



RETURN SPECIALIST



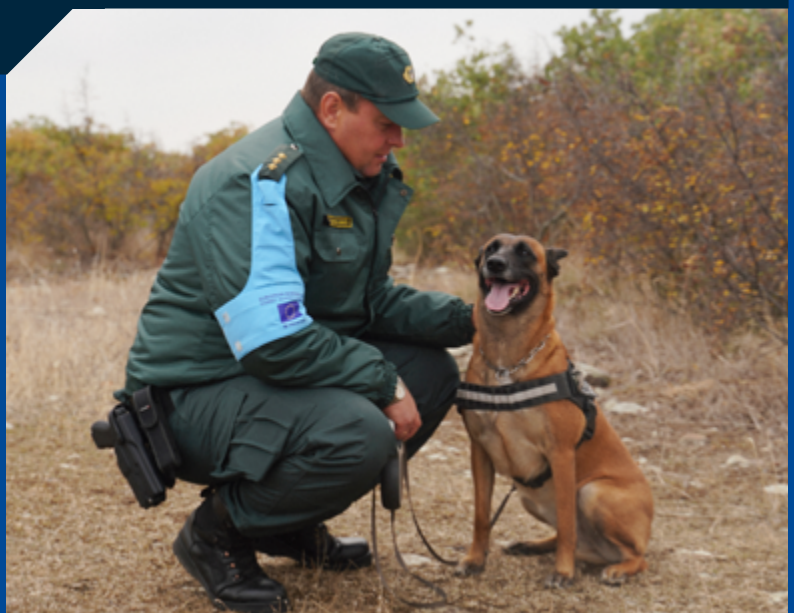
CREW MEMBER



# Meet the standing corps

## SERGEJS, LATVIA

I have been working as a dog handler for 22 years. I'm now working with Vittoria, a 4.5 year old Belgian Shepherd. I am currently deployed in Greece, where I support the local authorities with border control.



## ELEFThERIA, GREECE

I am deployed at the Bulgarian-Turkish border as an Advanced Level Document Officer. Every day, I deal with a countless number of documents issued by different countries and institutions. How do we check whether a document is authentic? It takes a lot of practice. We analyse the security features of documents and consult databases.





**RADU, ROMANIA**

I joined the Frontex standing corps after 15 years of service in the Romanian Border Police. I had been seconded to a number of Frontex missions, so joining the standing corps was a natural career path for me. Most recently, I was deployed in Lithuania as Frontex Tactical Support Officer as part of the operation at the border with Belarus.

**MARISA, PORTUGAL**

I joined the Frontex standing corps after 24 years of service in the Portuguese Army and the National Republican Guard. I am deployed to the Agency's headquarters as an Information Officer at the Frontex Situational Centre.



# Making the EU safer

Last year, Frontex standing corps officers helped Member States detect criminals, protect victims of human trafficking, seize drugs and fight against environmental crime.



DRUGS SMUGGLING



EXCISE GOODS



FRAUDULENT DOCUMENTS



STOLEN CARS



PEOPLE SMUGGLING



TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS



ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

September 27

He might have escaped from prison, but this bank robber was no match for Bulgarian border guards and Frontex. 🤝 A fugitive who spent a good part of his life behind bars was on the run after escaping from prison in Germany. Soon after, he robbed a bank in Austria and got away with 160,000 euros. But his luck ran out when Bulgarian and Frontex standing corps officers became suspicious as he was trying to cross the border into Serbia.



October 5

Successful drug bust by #EUStandingCorps and Albanian authorities. A young 🇲🇰 man was stopped after he tried to smuggle 20 kg of cannabis into the 🇪🇺. Inside his car, officers found 17 plastic bags packed with drugs.

#Frontex #StrongerTogether

October 10

50 lorries and trailers worth more than 5 million euros got stolen in Austria over the summer. 🚚 An Austrian Frontex standing corps officer learned about the crime from their authorities. 🇦🇹 As he was deployed to a border crossing point between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, he shared the information with his local colleagues.



# We protect



November 18

Today is European Day on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

#EUStandingCorps officers help protect them through:

- ✓ early identification and referral
- ✓ training of law enforcement officers
- ✓ operations targeting people smuggling

Frontex standing corps officers seek to detect and identify criminals who smuggle people, putting their lives at risk. They also assist national authorities in identifying and safeguarding victims of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

**Specialised training:** Identification of children at risk on the move requires in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon, and of emerging forms of exploitation. Border guards play a crucial role in the early detection of victims, so it is important that their knowledge and skills are constantly improved. We integrate specialised training into ongoing Frontex operations at all types of borders.



1. Palm to camera and tuck thumb



2. Trap thumb

We taught our officers about a worldwide sign used by victims of abuse. The signal, created by the Canadian Women's Foundation for people to indicate that they need help, has spread in the past year, largely through TikTok.





# Operations targeting people smuggling and trafficking in human beings

Frontex takes part in Joint Action Days, international operations that bring together national law enforcement authorities, international organisations and EU agencies to take on serious

and organised crime. These operations are coordinated under the umbrella of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT).



**223**  
PEOPLE  
SMUGGLERS



**550**  
STOLEN  
VEHICLES



**840**  
KG OF  
DRUGS



**4**  
STOLEN  
BOATS



**572**  
FRAUDULENT  
DOCUMENTS



**463 380**  
EUROS



**8 000**  
LITRES OF  
ILLEGAL FUEL



**452**  
PIECES OF  
AMMUNITION



**171 296**  
LITRES OF  
ALCOHOL



**46 750 909**  
CIGARETTES



# What's next



With hundreds of standing corps officers already in place to help secure Europe's borders, Frontex is continuing to build the EU's first uniformed law enforcement service. This year we will recruit and train more officers, along with additional staff for the Central Unit of ETIAS, the EU's Travel Information and Authorisation System.

The recent escalation in the use of irregular migration as a hybrid threat has underscored the need for European-level support to Member States in protecting the EU's external borders, while assuring respect for fundamental rights.

As Frontex continues to expand the standing corps and acquires and leases more equipment over the coming years, the Agency will solidify its position as a reliable partner for Member States.

The Agency will also strengthen the range of other border control services provided to Member States, including aerial surveillance with a growing fleet of aircraft, as well as return support teams working at more European airports.

Frontex will also play an essential role in the introduction of the Entry-Exit System and ETIAS, alongside Member States, to make sure these important upgrades make our borders more secure while making passage easier for travellers.

**FOLLOW US ON**

---



[facebook.com/frontex/](https://facebook.com/frontex/)



[twitter.com/Frontex](https://twitter.com/Frontex)



[linkedin.com/company/frontex/](https://linkedin.com/company/frontex/)



[youtube.com/user/FrontexEUAgency](https://youtube.com/user/FrontexEUAgency)

© European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), 2022

Plac Europejski 6  
00-844 Warsaw, Poland  
[frontex@frontex.europa.eu](mailto:frontex@frontex.europa.eu)  
[www.frontex.europa.eu](http://www.frontex.europa.eu)

Print version:  
TT-09-21-548-EN-C  
ISBN 978-92-9467-162-2  
doi: 10.2819/65749

PDF version:  
TT-09-21-548-EN-N  
ISBN 978-92-9467-161-5  
doi: 10.2819/039733



■ Publications Office  
of the European Union

FPI 21.0116