FRONTEX

Strategic Risk Analysis

2022

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Foreword by the Executive Director

Recent months have seen monumental events and challenges that have affected the safety and wellbeing of all Europeans and will transform the entire picture of EU border and migration management for many years to come. From COVID-19 to the instrumentalisation of migration, to the invasion of Ukraine, which has brought millions of refugees streaming across our borders – all these events have changed our lives, making crisis management a permanent feature of EU border management.

The shifting world is also highlighting the importance of trustworthy forecasting and strategic risk analysis for policymakers and strategic planners at the EU and national levels. Reliable and proven analysis is invaluable to understanding these changes as they ripple through the many facets of European Integrated Border Management (EIBM) – from migration to cross-border crime to terrorist and hybrid threats.

For these reasons I am proud to present the Strategic Risk Analysis 2022 prepared by the analysts at Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, in cooperation with our many stakeholders. This document provides strategic foresight to identify threats, challenges and opportunities in the field of EU border management and return over a 10-year horizon. SRA 2022 focusses on six megatrends that have the greatest impact on the EIBM and its components, and offers alternative future scenarios to facilitate strategic conversations at both EU and national levels.

It is an ambitious exercise that aims to provide long-term foresight and future scenarios for effective policymaking, strategic decision-making and capability development planning in a turbulent global environment.

The unprecedented challenges for EIBM also spotlight the role Frontex will play over the coming years. The Agency will continue to provide a comprehensive picture of what is happening at our external borders and help Member States to secure them, while protecting fundamental rights that will be increasingly challenged by the global trends. The reinforced Frontex, with the strong operational backbone of the European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps, stands ready to answer the many challenges of our changing world.

Aija Kalnaja
Executive Director a.i

Executive summary

The **SRA 2022** provides foresight on how megatrends and possible future events will develop and affect EU border and migration management between now and 2032.

The EU has faced several crises in quick succession over the past two years (i.e., the instrumentalisation of migration by certain third countries, COVID-19, Russia's war on Ukraine and the associated refugee crisis). These events will have long-lasting effects that will be experienced between now and 2032, **making crisis management a permanent feature of EU border management**.

The war in Ukraine has further fuelled geopolitical competition and is driving humankind in the direction of a hostile multipolar world. Its effects will be experienced throughout this decade through military conflicts, hybrid warfare and/or other actions short of war. Many countries will try to increase their strategic autonomy and serve their strategic interests through balance of power politics. Existing or new political, security and economic alliances will antagonise rival countries or blocs of countries. The geopolitical environment will influence all megatrends including **international cooperation on issues of major importance** (e.g., sustainable development goals).

In the next decade, EU border management will experience **a higher occurrence of migration/refugee crises** (or disproportionate pressures) that will test the effectiveness of border controls. The complex interplay of geopolitics, security conflicts, and other megatrends will influence different regions of the world, including countries in close proximity to Europe. The EU may encounter **'migration blackmail' attempts** by neighbouring third countries that instrumentalise migrant and refugee flows for political purposes. In this context, **returns** will be a key capability of European Integrated Border Management (EIBM) as migration management depends heavily – beside establishing legal pathways and integration - on effective returns carried out in a fast, orderly, humane and dignified manner. Efficient cooperation with third countries in the EU neighbourhood, the Middle East, Asia and Africa will be crucial, too.

Cross-border crime (CBC) activities will evolve and further affect Europe, as it is a major market for illicit goods. Criminal networks will demonstrate their ability to exploit any opportunities both domestically and beyond national borders. Criminals will use modern technologies and new *modi operandi* to achieve their objectives and avoid detection. The deteriorating security situation on the EU's eastern borders with Belarus and Ukraine will have negative consequences. Trafficking in human beings and smuggling activities (e.g., weapons, explosives and ammunition, narcotics) will most likely increasingly affect the EU borders. Other well-known threats (e.g., cocaine and heroin smuggling) will emanate from complex international routes and the exploitation of shipping container transportation.

Terrorist threats will be ever-present in Europe as hostile geopolitics, conflicts and instability will contribute to the spread of extremist ideas and radicalisation. Modern technologies will serve as key enablers of terrorism. Terrorist groups might use migration flows to cross into Europe and recruit new members from among international migrants. EU border authorities will play an increasingly important role in the fight against terrorism in Europe through timely sharing of information, early detection and warning, and operational responses. The Schengen Information System (SIS), the Entry/Exit System (EES), the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), and the interoperability of EU information systems, will strengthen EU border security and counter-terrorism efforts.

Hybrid threats (i.e., hybrid influencing, interference, and warfare) will be characterised by higher frequency, sophistication and impact, involving state and non-state actors adapted to the hostile security environment. These actors might exploit legal and operational vulnerabilities – such as cyberattacks against border infrastructure, artificial creation of migratory routes or weapons smuggling for terrorist purposes – to harm the EU's external and internal security. Hybrid actors might use 'wedge' strategies[1] to hinder EU operational responses at the external borders. By targeting the humanitarian and human rights dimension ('lawfare') they will try to destabilise the EU, divide political and public opinion, and harm the EU's reputation. Hence, a coordinated EU response is essential to protect both the EU borders and fundamental rights (i.e., contingency planning, training, crisis preparedness, capability development and deployment of EBCG Standing Corps).

In the next decade **fundamental rights** – and international human rights more globally – will be increasingly challenged by the global trends. Currently, it is possible to observe that when Member States are confronted with increased migratory pressure, they may take measures

which are inconsistent with the EU and international legal framework on fundamental rights. In order to avoid widening gaps within the EU, EIBM will need to renew its commitment to the respect of EU and international law.

This report presents **four alternative scenarios** for consideration by policymakers and strategic planners at EU and national level. The geopolitical and security megatrend will influence all scenarios in many ways: a hostile security environment that poses major challenges for EIBM (worst-case scenario); a stabilised security environment that significantly reduces pressures and challenges at the EU's external borders (best-case scenario); the projection of current security threats into the future (baseline scenario); and key security factors and thematic phenomena of interest to EIBM, such as instrumentalisation of migration, cross-border crime, respect of fundamental rights (security scenario).

Significant threats and challenges will be faced in the next decade requiring strategic adjustments, 'externalisation' of EU border management in third countries through trusting cooperation and comprehensive operational responses to **improve the effectiveness and crisis preparedness of EIBM**. Consistent policy implementation and further development of the 15 IBM components will allow for effective management of existing, emerging or unforeseen threats. The war in Ukraine and the emergence of a hostile security environment should be closely monitored and assessed because it will have serious geopolitical, security, and socio-economic implications on EU border management too.

1. Introduction

Every two years Frontex prepares a Strategic Risk Analysis (SRA) for European Integrated Border Management (EIBM) in close cooperation with EU Member States. The SRA is submitted to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, as stipulated in the EBCG Regulation (art.29 EBCG).

The SRA is a strategic foresight report that aims at identifying threats, challenges and opportunities in the area of EU border management and returns over a 10-year horizon. It has an extensive scope, assessing megatrends, their interplay, and their effects on the thematic areas of interest (e.g., migration, cross-border crime, terrorism). The assessment covers all relevant IBM dimensions in line with the legal framework of the EBCG 2.0 and juxtaposes the findings of megatrend analysis with existing and emerging security issues at the EU's external borders to anticipate possible future developments. It is an ambitious exercise in futures thinking which aims to provide long-term foresight and future scenarios for effective policymaking, strategic decision-making, and capability development planning in a turbulent global environment.

The establishment of EIBM is stipulated in the EBCG Regulation. The European Border and Coast Guard implements IBM as a shared responsibility of the Agency and all national authorities responsible for border management (art.7 EBCG). Effective management of the external borders is of crucial importance for the EU, and specifically, for the protection of Schengen as an area of freedom, security and justice. External border security shields the EU from various threats and ensures a high level of internal security within the Union. Irregular migration, cross-border crime, terrorism, and any future threats must be managed at the external borders in full respect of fundamental rights and criminal law – consistent with national and international legislation as appropriate – safeguarding the abolition of internal borders and the right of free movement within the EU.

In total, EIBM consists of 15 components of which fundamental rights, education and training, and research and innovation are overarching components for its implementation (art.3 EBCG). The effectiveness of EIBM is ensured by the European Commission and EBCG through the 'Multiannual strategic policy cycle for European integrated border management' (art.8 EBCG). To further promote and support this integrated process, EBCG also establishes a 'technical and operational strategy for European IBM' (TO strategy EIBM).

In the SRA 2020, the assessment of megatrends concluded that migratory and crime patterns in the European Union will be greatly affected over the next decade by environmental, health, socio-economic, political and technological developments, and related challenges.

The Commission prepared the policy document developing a multiannual strategic policy for EIBM in accordance with Article 8(4) of the EBCG Regulation, which was published in May 2022, based on the SRA 2020. The policy document acknowledges that the challenges identified in the SRA 2020 have been confirmed and complemented by events that have taken place since, such as the situation on the EU-Belarus border, which demonstrated how instrumentalisation of migration can create a hybrid threat, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led to an unprecedented number of people fleeing to the EU.

The SRA 2022 report provides an update on how these global forces are expected to shape worldwide developments and impact EU border and migration management. From the overall 14 megatrends[2], in consultation with all stakeholders, six megatrends were chosen for SRA 2022 purposes as having the highest impact on EIBM and its components: security, demographics, climate change, inequalities, health challenges, and governance systems. The SRA 2022 also offers alternative future scenarios to facilitate strategic conversations at the EU and national level.

The SRA 2022 is the outcome of a systematic joint effort by Frontex and its EU partners, which made insightful contributions and assisted in steering the work in the right direction. The strategic foresight process benefited significantly from a collaborative approach and modern practices in strategic planning.

This report first examines the impact of megatrends and their interplay and then looks into thematic areas relevant to Frontex's mandate, namely Migration and Returns, Terrorism, Cross-border crime and Hybrid threats to identify the core threats and challenges for EIBM. After that, it provides four future scenarios identifying both challenging and less challenging developments for Frontex and the EU in general. The concluding chapter provides an outlook with key findings for consideration.

2. The impact of megatrends on EIBM

2.1. Security paradigm

The ***security paradigm***, a megatrend which has changed tremendously in 2022, relates to the changing global security environment and the associated challenges for EU border management. External border security is affected by phenomena such as geopolitics, migration, cross-border crime, terrorism, and hybrid threats that are fluid and multidimensional in nature, thus requiring a flexible approach to their understanding, analysis and management.

Major geopolitical shifts[3] and intense competition among nation states have created **new conflict zones** around the world (e.g., the Russian invasion in Ukraine, sovereignty disputes, conflicts over energy, scarce resources and spheres of influence) posing serious threats to international peace and stability. In this context, new military technologies and the emergence of different areas of confrontation (e.g., Ukraine, Taiwan, South China Sea [Spratly Islands], East China Sea [Senkaku Islands], Arctic, Space) have changed the global security landscape profoundly. Modern warfare has become more sophisticated with new lethal weapons (e.g., hypersonic missiles, unmanned aerial drones) which will transform military capabilities and future battlefields. A key risk indicator of the changing security and defence environment is **'world military expenditure'**, which passed USD 2 trillion for the first-time last year.[4] Russia's war on Ukraine, and the strong support for **Ukraine** from NATO countries, risks not only a new arms race, but also increases the possibility of catastrophic nuclear war. This major conflict and its side-effects (e.g., refugee crisis, economic sanctions, food crisis, high energy prices) will have far-reaching consequences for the international order; most likely leading to a more hostile multipolar world.

Dynamic forms of cross-border crime and terrorism will remain key threats

EU border management faces both existing and emerging security threats from cross-border crime and terrorism, including the criminal-terrorist nexus. These threats are evolving dynamically. For example, information from **Frontex debriefing activities** indicates how the **criminal economy intersects with militant and terrorist groups' economic and political ambitions**. Their portfolio includes various types of illegal smuggling (e.g., drugs, weapons, tobacco, natural resources), money laundering, trafficking in human beings, and smuggling of irregular migrants to the EU, as demonstrated by the involvement of jihadist groups in Syria. At the EU's external borders, two types of terrorist threats are identified: (i) known individuals such as Foreign Terrorist Fighters (**FTFs**) included in databases that should be checked during border controls; and (ii) unknown **high-risk individuals** (not necessary linked to any terrorist groups) who may still pose a major challenge for the internal and external security of the Union.

On the other hand, international criminal markets and transnational crimes typically exploit lucrative business opportunities across the spectrum of human activity. Well-known, high-risk crimes such as narcotics and contraband **smuggling will continue to increase** despite enforcement actions.[5] While the pandemic brought about a measurable drop in urban crimes due to stay-at-home restrictions[6], it also caused a displacement of illicit activities to the internet, resulting in a **surge of online crimes**[7].

As regards the ***interplay with other megatrends***, the security megatrend is linked directly and indirectly to almost all other megatrends. This deserves in-depth analysis to identify the complex nature of these relationships, but that goes beyond the scope of this assessment. It is obvious, however, that migration, cross-border crime, terrorism and hybrid threats represent key dimensions of the security megatrend that interact with, and are themselves affected by social, political, economic, technological, legal, governance, demographic, consumerist, urbanisation, and other major trends worldwide. The emergence of a multipolar world characterised by intense competition between nation states and different alliances, indicates the primacy of geopolitical considerations from now on. **Security threats will therefore proliferate** in the next 10 years due to the combined effects of the hostile geopolitical climate and all other megatrends.

Human mobility will continue to be affected by geopolitics, geoeconomics, regional and domestic conflicts, wars, natural and human-induced disasters, climate change, environmental degradation, social inequalities, health challenges, educational challenges, changes in the nature of work, urbanisation trends, and demographic imbalances. These factors will influence population movements domestically and internationally. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), for example, around the globe over 40 million new internal displacements – 9.8 million caused by conflict and violence and 30.7 million caused by natural disasters – were recorded in 2020.[8] At the time of writing, the war in Ukraine has already forced six million Ukrainians to flee their country and many more millions have been displaced within

Ukraine.[9] Hence, complex causal mechanisms involving **several megatrends and their interplay will be driving domestic and international migration** over the next decade.

Among other influencing factors, technological progress and hyperconnectivity will facilitate and create ample opportunities for illegal smuggling (e.g., drugs, weapons, commodities, natural resources) and trafficking in human beings for sexual and economic exploitation. Due to technological advances, criminal and terrorist organisations have been rapidly adapting to the highly interconnected and borderless global environment, adjusting their business models and organisational and operational posture accordingly. Their dynamic adaptation also stems from a constant interaction with global trends pertaining to the economy, technology, social inequalities, political mobilisation, activism and violence, or human mobility across national borders.

In recent years, the terrorist focus has steadily shifted from the Middle East to the **Sahel region**. Al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates have exploited the security and political vacuum to improve recruitment, hone their capabilities, and project power in the Sahel. While violence has so far remained local, the strategic objectives of terrorist groups may include future attacks in the EU by operatives infiltrating into migratory flows, for instance.

Impact on EIBM

Geopolitical conflicts and the exploitation of irregular migration will continue to shape EIBM in an increasingly hostile multipolar landscape

The evolution of the security megatrend – in particular, geopolitical developments and military conflicts – will have a profound effect on other megatrends in the next decade. **Hostile geopolitics will significantly influence international relations** between nation-states and blocs of countries. The EU will find itself in an antagonistic relationship with various third countries, which will affect EU border management, creating new threats and operational challenges. In other words, third countries through their actions (or failures to act) will increase the risks of migration, cross-border crime, terrorism, and hybrid threats in an attempt to exert pressure and secure concessions from the EU.

A hostile multipolar world will likely transform the megatrends landscape affecting, among other things, EU border security. The exploitation of irregular migration – among other geopolitical/economic factors – will continue to be used by neighbouring third countries as a primary political tool for exerting political and economic influence on the EU. Recent developments at the EU's eastern and southern external borders showed clearly how migration can be instrumentalised for political purposes. Besides that, Russia's war on Ukraine, the economic sanctions against Russia, and the massive refugee flows into the EU represent some of the 'costs of war'[10] that will have long-term security consequences for the EU. **Instability at the EU's eastern borders** and the emergence of any new conflicts might test EU border management repeatedly. Border porosity will remain a major issue for the EU as well as for many third countries in terms of exercising effective control over large portions of their territories (e.g., detecting people movements, cross-border crime and terrorist activities across borders). The **increased militarisation of the EU's external border** due to the proximity to conflict zones as well as in response to future hybrid threats will be one of the key considerations for EU border management over the next decade.

A defining feature of the security megatrend with serious implications for law enforcement, counterterrorism and border management authorities will be the **availability of numerous crime and terrorism enablers**, such as: Internet and social media, encrypted communication technologies, cyberattacks, artificial intelligence/machine learning technologies, money laundering, cryptocurrencies, state actors, disinformation, terrorist financing, economic and industrial espionage, dual-use technologies, military equipment, legal business structures, offshore companies with obscure beneficial ownership, weak governance systems, legal vulnerabilities, corruption and violence. Criminal groups have quickly adapted their business models to use these and other enablers to expand their reach and gain higher profits. As a result, crime services are being offered on multiplatform messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook). Terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, distribute globally vast amounts of ideological and propaganda material through social media platforms.[11] Advanced technologies at the disposal of criminal and terrorist groups will also increase the risks to EU-based organisations, communities, and infrastructures. Cybercriminals, for example, could target public services and critical infrastructures exploiting any vulnerabilities (e.g., large IT systems, databases, data centres, information exchange systems). Their actions could seriously impair the capacity of the targeted organisations to maintain business continuity inflicting great societal and economic harm. Terrorists, using military grade weaponry acquired, for example, from the war zone in Ukraine, could launch indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population or high value/symbolic targets in the EU. EU border authorities, infrastructure and personnel could also be targeted by criminals and terrorists alike.

Consequently, situational awareness, risk/intelligence analysis, national and international cooperation, information exchange among all relevant authorities, contingency planning and crisis management will continue to be of paramount importance to better understand, detect and respond to these threats effectively.

2.2. Increasing influence of international governance organisations and systems

The global political landscape is marked by the increasing appearance of various non-state organisations, institutions and systems, and international cooperation is essential to deal with common global issues

In the 21st century, there has been a proliferation of regional and international governance systems and organisations across the spectrum of megatrends. Collective action on many fronts is enabled through various international organisations (e.g., United Nations, World Health Organisation, NATO) and systems of political and diplomatic relations and international law. Besides intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), the global political landscape has opened up to a variety of non-state actors, such as international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and civil society groups, multinational corporations (MNCs), epistemic communities, social movements and even private individuals. These actors assume a more influential role in international affairs by progressively taking on the work traditionally reserved for governments; that is, enforcing new governance schemes, setting norms and standards, as well as implementing and monitoring activities.

Global governance, however, is fraught with concerns over legitimacy, accountability, representativeness, inclusiveness, geopolitical/economic effects, the tension between political and epistemic authority (technocracy), and its effectiveness. Without substantial improvement in international relations and cooperation, the delivery of global public goods will be negatively affected over the next 10 years. Moreover, the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDG) will not be achieved through the efforts of individual countries alone, as it depends heavily on effective systems of multilateral governance and coordinated policy responses.

As regards the interplay with other megatrends, governance systems are directly or indirectly linked with all megatrends. International cooperation through governance systems, either governmental, non-governmental or international, is essential to deal effectively with all megatrends. However, legitimacy and accountability issues as well as the hostile multipolar environment characterised by intense geopolitical/economic competition, nationalistic interests and armed conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine, present major obstacles to peaceful co-existence, stability, and development. Obviously, the different and sometimes conflicting governance systems in the world and the weakened role of the UN cannot resolve issues of major importance and contain the spread of insecurity.

Impact on EIBM

EU border authorities will face significant security challenges due to the ineffectiveness of international, regional, and other types of governance systems inside a hostile multipolar world. The weak governance systems of less developed countries will compound the overall problem of governance

Enhanced awareness of the situation in third countries and neighbouring third countries (i.e., the first and second tiers of the 4-tier access model of EIBM) should be continuously provided via the liaison network, EU delegations and other political, diplomatic and operational channels/tools in order to anticipate major developments and assess their possible impact on EU border security. Pre-frontier early warning and intelligence would be instrumental in avoiding strategic surprises that may lead to social unrest, regime overthrow, sectarian violence, armed conflicts, or refugee and humanitarian crises. The EU most certainly has the possibility of further pooling its resources to enhance its forecasting and foresight capabilities.

The political situation in third countries will always have an impact on various thematic areas of EIBM (i.e., irregular migration, cross-border crime, terrorism). For example, sudden changes in foreign and migration policies of countries of origin and transit (e.g., border controls, readmission agreements, returns) can have a knock-on effect on the EU's external borders. It is also important to learn from past experience of power transitions and other events to be prepared for political changes that could have significant consequences around the world and in the EU neighbourhood. Aggressive foreign policies can influence international relations and the functioning of national, regional and international governance systems. Inside a highly interconnected and hostile multipolar world, any type of ties can be instrumentalised to inflict harm on rival countries (e.g., economic, technological, and cultural ties). Individual countries or hostile coalitions of third countries might engage in various forms of hybrid interference to put political pressure on the EU (e.g., sponsoring migration, facilitating the movements of foreign terrorist fighters, adopting an uncooperative stance on serious political issues, or blackmailing in relation to the provision of energy or other scarce resources). Besides emerging issues, long-standing disputes over energy resources, sovereignty claims, revisionist policies and zones of instability in the EU's wider geopolitical neighbourhood should be considered by EU border management to enhance general/crisis preparedness and capability/capacity building through strategic planning and the effective management of the 15 IBM components.

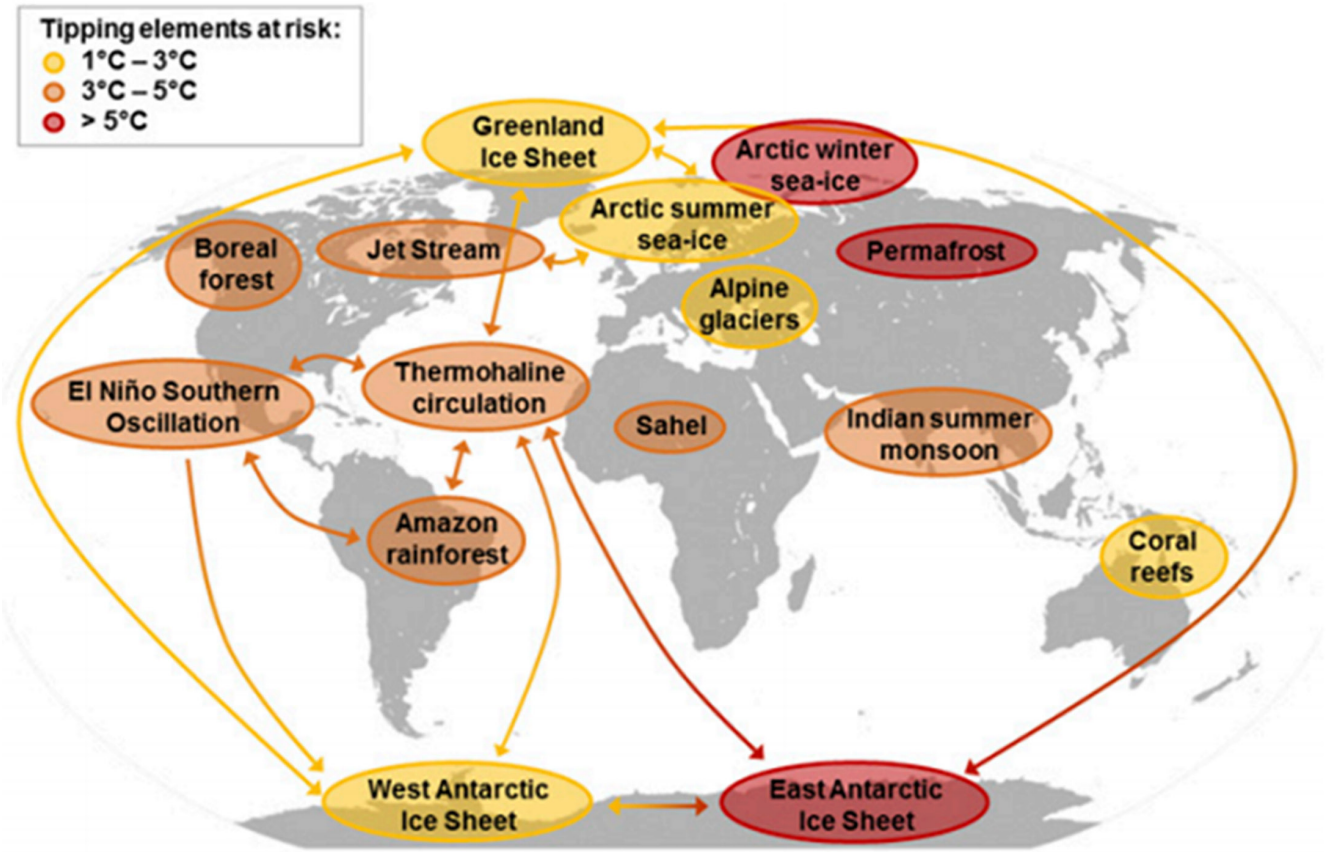

Figure 1 **Global map of potential tipping cascades**[16]

2.3. Climate change

Climate change will be one of the most significant defining factors for analysing world politics; it comes with a great variety of associated challenges

Climate change poses some of the most serious challenges for humanity. There is ample evidence of an increasing number of extreme weather events due to the profound effects of human-induced climate change worldwide[12], and the processes of climate change will likely accelerate over the next decade. Climate change will cause desertification, soil degradation, food insecurity[13], melting icecaps, rising sea levels, and biodiversity loss across various regions, potentially triggering tipping points, as shown in Figure 1 above. Experts have proposed different warming scenarios (i.e., 1°C-3°C, 3°C-5°C, and >5°C higher than pre-industrial levels) that all have serious consequences for both developed and developing nations.

Currently, the efforts of the international community are off track in terms of limiting global warming well below 2°C, which is one of the key targets of the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement. This underscores the difficulty in achieving climate targets since the "*implementation of the Paris Agreement requires economic and social transformation, based on the best available science*"[14]. In this context, the EU's goal is to become a climate neutral continent by 2050. An intermediate target is to reduce the bloc's net emissions by at least 55% by 2030. The rationale behind this transformative goal is reflected in the statement of the European Commission's Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans: "*This is the make-or-break decade in the fight against the climate and biodiversity crises.*"[15] The EU's efforts alone will not be sufficient to stem the global climate crisis. Nonetheless, the ambitious EU climate plans may serve as a catalyst for positive change, provided that the international community moves in the same direction. To avoid future hothouse scenarios, all countries of the world should act decisively to achieve net zero emissions and control global warming (preferably at 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels) by investing in renewable and alternative energy sources.

As regards the **interplay with other megatrends**, climate change will possibly have the greatest effects on border security in the future. Climate change will affect other megatrends in varied degrees, exerting socioeconomic pressures – especially on low-income countries and the most vulnerable and deprived communities[17] – and deepening structural inequalities around the world. The increasing frequency of extreme weather phenomena and the resultant environmental degradation, resource scarcity and lack of access to basic goods such as food and water will have a great impact upon health, economies, security, migration and competition over limited resources. This situation will affect both developed and less-developed states, but especially those who do not possess the capacity or mechanisms to adapt and deal effectively with climate cascades. Recent studies also indicate that climate change could force animal migrations, facilitating viral transmissions to other species and to humans, thus triggering

new pandemics.[18] The rapid increase of the global population along with urbanisation and consumerism trends constitute additional factors that will intensify resource scarcity and environmental degradation. These combined phenomena will cause a continuous flow of irregular migration through third countries of origin and transit towards developed economies, especially the EU.

Impact on EIBM

The most adverse effects of global climate change will likely be experienced more intensely in the poorer and least developed regions of the world, which are already grappling with an array of socio-economic issues

The inability to deal with the multidimensional effects of climate change, in combination with other megatrends, will eventually exacerbate the internal situation of many low-income countries and might provoke civil unrest, wars and cascades of events related to food, water and energy in areas where many people depend on agriculture and their ability to adapt is limited[19]. In this turbulent global environment, the EU will likely experience not only a **significant increase in economic migration and asylum** applications but could also see for the first time the impact of climate change and extreme weather phenomena on population movements from the most affected countries. Hence, it is paramount for EU border management to enhance cooperation with specialised governmental agencies and NGOs involved in the management of migration or the provision of humanitarian assistance – especially those active in third countries. EU border management should have better situational awareness about climate change and other megatrend-related developments in third countries by including the environmental dimension into migration-related risk analysis and intelligence work. This would provide early warning information and help develop more accurate forecasts. Contingency planning for EU border authorities will also need to be enhanced and tested regularly. Strategic planning and capability development of Frontex and Member States need to be adapted to meet the new technological surveillance requirements and technologies should be adopted in response to extreme weather phenomena.

2.4. Demographic imbalances

Demographic imbalances in less developed areas will worsen the socioeconomic situation and increase push factors for migration to more prosperous areas of the world

Demographic imbalances will remain one of the defining megatrends of this decade. This megatrend alone will have the potential to exacerbate other megatrends (i.e., environmental degradation, resource scarcity, urbanisation, inequality). If left unchecked, it will have deleterious effects at a global scale. According to the United Nations, our planet will be home to 8.5 billion people in 2030 (up from 7.7 billion people today), 9.7 billion in 2050 and 11 billion by 2100. But the growth will be uneven and take place at varying speeds across world regions. While places such as Europe, Japan, South Korea and Singapore will experience population declines, Africa will become the main epicentre of population growth. Between now and 2050, this region alone is expected to grow by half, adding another billion people to our planet.

The search for economic opportunities will further drive the exodus towards urban areas where the lack of adequate infrastructures can lead to a host of other social problems. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have not yet been fully grasped, could further exacerbate economic and social instability in the region. In 2020, there were 87 million international migrants in Europe (from both within and outside the continent). This is the largest number of any world region. As Europe's population ages and birth rates decline, the share of working-age adults will fall below 50%, likely leading to labour shortages across various sectors of activity. The continent will thus continue to be a prime destination for migration, not only by the educated youth of the global east and south, but also by those fleeing poverty and conflict in neighbouring regions where solutions to protracted problems and new global challenges may not keep up with population growth.

This megatrend will become more important over time, considering its interplay with other megatrends such as governance systems, inequalities, climate change, environmental degradation and resource scarcity. The **expected demographic explosion in Africa and south-east Asia** will worsen the socioeconomic situation and capacities of third countries to cater for the basic needs of their populations, creating strong push factors for domestic, regional and international migration. Lack of action to stem the climate crisis will have serious effects, especially on low-income countries exposing their structural deficiencies. Climate change, along with environmental degradation and resource scarcity, will further weaken the governments of third countries, triggering social grievances, dissent and calls for reform due to the perceived ineffectiveness of existing policies. This will likely cause a cascade of events sparking various forms of violent and non-violent social resistance. In certain countries, it could result in widespread social unrest reminiscent of the 2011 Arab Spring. Regardless of the outcomes of social unrest, such developments will increase instability in neighbouring countries and regions, or in the EU neighbourhood, worsening the push factors for irregular migration as well as increasing the possibilities for migratory/refugee crises.

Impact on EIBM

Increased migration flows are expected at the EU's external borders as a result of demographic growth and the demographic imbalances observed in less developed areas worldwide

In the next 10-15 years, certain third countries and regions of the world such as Africa and south-east Asia will experience rapid demographic growth. In combination with the effects of climate change, health and socioeconomic factors, structural inequalities (incl. gender issues) and urbanisation trends. This will worsen the living conditions of the affected populations in numerous megacities and will compound push factors for irregular migration. This may trigger intra- and inter-regional migratory movements to the EU and certain emerging economies, which will continue to be attractive destinations for economic migrants and refugees.

The population flows will comprise not only migrants and asylum seekers in search of better conditions away from home, but also forcibly displaced persons currently hosted by developing nations, some of which are close to the EU, where support systems are already straining under enormous pressures. Simultaneously, high levels of emigration, especially by young and educated people, will further harm the economies of sending countries, by accentuating a brain drain where human capital is lost in regions where such loss would have the most impact. The growth of irregular migration will result in an increase in the activities of criminal networks as a response to the higher demand for smuggling services. This might also lead to an increase in other organised crime activities. This could pose serious challenges to EU border management in terms of handling disproportionate flows at the external borders, saving lives at sea and identifying vulnerable groups. Therefore, international cooperation and agreements (e.g., readmission agreements, technical assistance, training, return activities) with third countries, together with development aid are important to mitigate the impact of this megatrend.

2.5. Shifting health challenges

Health challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, constitute a threat that affects every aspect of socioeconomic life and world politics

The COVID-19 pandemic reignited the debate about the vulnerability of modern societies. The world has seen a number of major health crises in the 20th and 21st centuries. The outbreak and subsequent transmission of a novel coronavirus has severely tested healthcare systems, societies and economies. Besides the major impact on public health, the COVID-19 crisis has also affected socioeconomic life worldwide. The world has been managing two crises simultaneously: public health and the economy. To counter the uncontrolled life-threatening spread of the coronavirus, restrictions of movement were imposed around the globe, gradually creating smaller and smaller cells of free movement. The Schengen area was one of the first zones of free movement to be affected by re-introduced border controls, travel restrictions and the closure of borders.

The potential for criminal misuse of biological pathogens to generate new pandemics is a possibility that needs to be considered seriously, requiring improvements in intelligence sharing, pandemic surveillance and public health systems.

As regards the interplay with other megatrends, pandemics pose a systemic risk, as we have experienced with COVID-19. Considering the increasing importance and far-reaching effects of climate change, food insecurity, growing inequalities, and rapid demographic growth in less developed regions of the world (e.g., Africa and SE Asia), it is essential to reduce vaccine inequalities by improving access to inoculation programmes for low-income countries. Solidarity from developed countries towards less developed regions of the world is needed to deal with future health challenges. Moreover, health risks are directly linked to the security megatrend due to the possible misuse of biological pathogens by bioterrorists for political, ideological or religious reasons. The wide scope of health challenges increases the gap between developed and less developed countries, as well as the threats and challenges to the EU's internal and external border security.

Impact on EIBM

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated both the vulnerability of the EU's external borders to sudden health challenges and the need for enhancing EU border management capabilities to deal with such threats

External border measures play a key role in the protection of public health, as the EU's external borders can act as a filter for movements of people and help mitigate or suppress epidemics and pandemics before they spread into the community. Border management can also enable the detection of bioterrorist threats. The internal and external aspects of pandemic management require a complementary approach involving preventive and reactive measures at the EU's external borders and in third countries. A coordinated EU response encompassing all relevant authorities, coupled with an early warning mechanism, will enable operational and strategic responses against pandemic threats and other major public health challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic was a wake-up call for the need to exercise vigilance regarding any future disease transmissions to human populations, which could rapidly become a global threat due to the high level of international mobility across sea, land and air borders.

The EU should therefore consider ways to augment EU border management capabilities, including the use of the EBCG Standing Corps, not only to manage external border security, but also to protect the public health and economic interests of the EU. Specifically, this would require

better coordination and harmonisation of IBM-related measures during health crises, such as best practices in cooperation with public health authorities, guidelines for implementation and monitoring of border closures, and adjustment of measures between different border sections.

2.6. Widening inequalities

Widening inequalities in less developed countries around the world in combination with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic pose various risks of social unrest and destabilisation

Widening inequalities are a persistent global problem for humanity. Inequalities that do not reflect people's inherent value, abilities and potential can be observed within and across developed and developing nations, as well as at the macro (international/nation-state), meso (organisation/community) and micro (group/individual) level. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the structure of global vaccine-related inequities and their consequences in both advanced economies and low-income countries.[20] Social deprivation, marginalisation and limited educational and professional opportunities create profound socio-economic barriers that are nearly impossible to overcome. However, it is not only these inequalities that are widening the gap between rich and poor nations, social classes and individuals. Structural inequalities represent a wider taxonomy of systemic and persistent differences. World progress and sustainable development depend significantly on the closure of inequality gaps between countries. Hundreds of millions of people in Africa and Asia will be increasingly affected by the worst effects of structural inequalities. The economic slowdown will increase the number of people living in extreme poverty (most people living on less than USD 1.90[21] a day live in sub-Saharan Africa), further exacerbating current trends due to, among other factors, the effects of poor economic growth, climate change and the global demographic explosion.[22] Structural inequalities, therefore, represent a complex set of factors that will likely trigger international migration, criminality, violence, and armed conflict in the next decade.

Inequalities are mutually reinforced in complex ways by their **interplay with other megatrends**, such as security, geopolitics, economics (e.g., higher inflation), demographic growth, climate change, technological asymmetries, urbanisation trends and health challenges. Inequalities on their own, and in combination with other global forces, will present extremely complex, resistant and challenging problems. The increasing gap between developed and less developed countries coupled with, for example, limited employment and education opportunities and uncontrolled urbanisation will deepen social and economic inequalities in low-income countries. Due to the multifaceted nature of inequalities, policy responses aimed at alleviating some of the most pressing problems in less developed countries will likely have limited effectiveness.

Impact on EIBM

Widening inequalities will increase push factors for international migration and lead to rising pressures at the EU's external borders

With growing inequalities at all levels and increasing levels of crime, victimisation, unemployment, gender inequality, corruption and violence, there will be a great risk of social unrest and destabilisation in less-developed regions of the world. This will require radical changes across different policy domains such as foreign policy, security, economy, employment, education and human rights, which low-income countries might be unable to implement without external assistance. The inequality gap between third countries and the affluent EU will likely exacerbate push and pull factors for migration to the latter. It may also be the cause of major political disagreements, increasing the chances of state-sponsored migration being used as a pressure tool against the EU.

The EU will face great challenges due to the higher numbers of economic migrants, refugees, unaccompanied minors and families at its external borders. This might cause tensions between local communities and migrant populations, hardening the migration policies of frontline Member States or the EU. Preventative and development measures will be essential in mitigating inequalities in third countries and hence reduce threats at the EU's external border. Foreign direct investments (FDI) in third countries could also play an important role in mitigating inequalities by creating jobs and boosting economic growth in the targeted economies.

Structural inequalities plaguing many countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia will be one of the key drivers of international migration, criminality, violence and armed conflict. These mounting threats to the EU's external borders will require substantial improvements in general/crisis preparedness of EU border management in the next decade.

Table 1. **Overview of the impact of megatrends on EIBM**

Megatrends	Interplay with other megatrends	Impact on EIBM	Possible actions
Security paradigm	■ Technology ■ Inequalities ■ Climate change ■ Environmental degradation ■ Resource scarcity ■ Migration	■ Hostile multipolar world ■ Instability in EU neighbourhood ■ Emergence of new conflicts and hybrid threats ■ Instrumentalisation of migration by third countries for political purposes ■ Use of technology and social media for online propaganda and radicalisation by terrorists and cybercriminals ■ Militarisation of EU's external borders	■ National and international cooperation ■ Situational awareness ■ Risk/intelligence analysis ■ Information exchange among all relevant authorities to better understand, detect and respond to the threats to EIBM
Migration (due to its significance and high impact, this megatrend is not mentioned in chapter 2 among the other megatrends but in chapter 3 in a dedicated part)	■ Security paradigm ■ Demographic imbalances ■ Health challenges ■ Inequalities ■ Climate change ■ Environmental degradation ■ Resource scarcity	■ Instrumentalisation of migration ('migration blackmail') by certain third countries for political purposes ■ Conflicts and strategic surprises in the Middle East and Asia could exacerbate push factors for migration to Europe ■ Interplay of megatrends in Africa could trigger massive migratory flows to Europe	■ Policy and organisational measures to enhance migration governance and crisis preparedness of EU border management ■ Policy coordination between European IBM and EU external action ■ Status agreements and close cooperation with third countries ■ Enhanced presence of EBCG Standing Corps in pre-frontier areas, and additional capacity at impacted border sections ■ Increased cooperation between Frontex and EUAA
Demographic imbalances	■ Governance systems ■ Urbanisation ■ Inequalities ■ Climate change ■ Environmental degradation ■ Resource scarcity ■ Migration	■ Worsening socioeconomic situation in third countries ■ Disproportionate flows at EU external borders due to the status of the EU as an ideal destination ■ Increased criminal activities due to higher demand for smuggling services	■ Enhanced international cooperation ■ Agreements with third countries (e.g., readmission agreements, technical assistance, training, return activities) ■ EU Development aid ■ Legal pathways for migration to Europe
Climate change	■ Environmental degradation ■ Resource scarcity ■ Urbanisation ■ Growing consumption (consumerism) ■ Health challenges ■ Migration	■ Increased frequency of extreme weather phenomena ■ Social unrest and conflicts between countries related to food, water and energy resources ■ Climate-related problems in worst affected areas could result in domestic, regional, and international migration affecting Europe as well	■ Cooperation with governmental agencies and NGOs involved in migration management and humanitarian assistance ■ Better situational awareness on climate-related developments in third countries of origin and transit (e.g., using information from liaison officer network) ■ Green initiatives, technological adaptation, and sustainability focus in Frontex and Member States' strategic planning and capability development
Shifting health challenges	■ Security paradigm ■ Climate change ■ Environmental degradation ■ Urbanisation ■ Demographic imbalances ■ Inequalities ■ Migration	■ Public health problems (incl. malnutrition, epidemics) within third countries of origin and transit exacerbate push factors for migration ■ Health-related inequalities between low-income and developed countries create additional push/pull factors for migration ■ Bioterrorism threat	■ Preventive and reactive measures employed at the EU external borders and in third countries ■ Coordinated EU response with all relevant authorities (incl. a pre-warning mechanism) ■ Use of EBCG Standing Corps to contribute to border control measures relating to public health policies
Widening inequalities	■ Demographic imbalances ■ Education and learning ■ Changing nature of work ■ Growing consumption ■ Urbanisation ■ Health challenges ■ Security paradigm ■ Migration	■ Rapid demographic growth and growing urbanisation trends in Africa and SE Asia ■ Limited employment and education opportunities compound push factors for migration to the EU	■ Better situational awareness on systemic inequalities in third countries of origin and transit and their effects (e.g., using information from liaison officer network) ■ Improvements in general/crisis preparedness of EU border management in the next decade ■ EU external action (e.g., promotion of legal migration, EU foreign aid, trade agreements, and FDI in third countries)
Governance systems	■ Security paradigm ■ Climate change ■ Environmental degradation ■ Resource scarcity ■ Health challenges ■ Migration	■ Hostile geopolitical/security environment ■ Lack of international cooperation on issues of global importance (e.g., climate change, UN 17 sustainable development goals ■ Inability of third countries to deal with socioeconomic problems, climate change, security, demographic growth, and inequalities ■ Increasing number of conflicts in the EU's neighbourhood and beyond ■ Growing migratory pressures and other security threats at the EU's external borders ■ Direct impact on European geopolitical/security situation and external borders	■ EIBM policy, strategic planning and capability/ capacity building to better prepare for a hostile geopolitical and security environment (e.g., armed conflicts, hybrid threats, CBC, terrorism, migration crisis) ■ Improvements in general/ and crisis preparedness of EU border management (incl. the 15 IBM components) over the next decade

3. Migration and Returns

3.1. Migration

Migration has always existed and is directly influenced by all megatrends in varied degrees; it will remain an issue of concern on the global and European scale

Certain factors play a larger role in migration (e.g., geopolitical competition, wars, socioeconomic factors, demographics, environmental degradation and resource scarcity), while other megatrends influence it alongside globalisation dynamics that contribute to an increase in overall human mobility. The COVID-19 crisis showed that public health issues can influence migration significantly. Besides global transportation disruptions and lockdowns that restricted human mobility, the public health crisis affected the economies of all countries. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., economic slowdown, supply chain crisis) will likely reverberate across the globe for a long time, influencing migration from low-income countries.

It is worth recalling the 2011 Arab Spring and the 2015-2016 migration crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean. These events were major turning points for EU migration governance. In 2015, more than 850 000 Syrian migrants and refugees moved through Turkey to Greece and then to other EU Member States. The defining characteristics of the migration crisis were the treacherous Aegean Sea crossing that claimed many migrant lives, as well as the ruthless activities of criminal groups that found ways to cater for an extremely high demand for smuggling services. These events underscored that a major crisis could erupt in the EU neighbourhood and population movements could reach unprecedented levels before being contained through special measures (e.g., EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, EU-Turkey Statement, establishment of hotspot facilities on Aegean Sea islands, reinforcement of border-control activities in the Western Balkans). A repeat of these events is a real possibility in the future.

Source and transit countries for migration will be affected by economic challenges possibly triggering a new crisis for EU border management

Instability, security, economic challenges and various other uncertainties will affect source countries of migration in Asia, the Middle East and other countries that host large Afghan or other migrant diasporas (e.g., Pakistan, Turkey, Iran). Pakistan itself is a key country of origin for legal and irregular migration to Europe, whereas Turkey has hosted millions of Syrian refugees since the civil war. The existence of conflict zones (Syria, Libya) and areas hosting high numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees (Turkey) in relative proximity to Europe will be of particular concern in the foreseeable future. Long-lasting pressures on key host and transit countries may decrease their overall ability to support large refugee populations and migrant diasporas or provide them with adequate living standards, education and employment opportunities. This, in turn, could affect their relations with local populations, thus increasing push factors for migration to the EU.

In this turbulent environment, strategic surprises and new crises should be expected. In Iran, for example, the succession of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei could trigger a power struggle throwing the country into disorder. This could have a domino effect: social unrest, civil war and massive refugee outflows that could reach Europe. Hence, extremely complex situations in third countries and in the EU neighbourhood will affect Europe's Mediterranean borders, which will continue to be at the forefront of EU border surveillance and control operations.

The EU's eastern borders were impacted recently by major events that will have long-term consequences

Political tensions between the EU and Belarus heightened following the August 2020 contested elections in Belarus, the May 2021 forced landing of Ryanair Flight 4978 in Minsk to arrest a journalist, and the EU sanctions against Belarus that followed. In autumn 2021, EU-Belarus relations collapsed due to Belarus' creation of an artificial migration route: state institutions organised migration from the Middle East to Belarus with the explicit goal of retaliating for EU sanctions. The case of Belarus exemplifies third countries' instrumentalisation of migration for political purposes. Apparently, certain states in the EU neighbourhood perceive 'migration blackmail' as an effective method/element of a hybrid attack intended to exert pressure on the EU's external borders to further their geopolitical interests and extort concessions from the EU.

On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, a direct neighbour to four EU Member States. After three months, the military confrontation had forced almost seven million people to flee from Ukraine – the majority of whom sought refuge in the EU – creating the largest population displacement in the world. In response,

the EU used the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) (Council Directive 2001/55/EC) to provide immediate, temporary protection for all displaced people from Ukraine, demonstrating an exceptional degree of solidarity and coordination in this unprecedented situation.

Ukraine has become a conflict zone in an extremely serious geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the countries providing military and financial assistance to Ukraine. As the war continues, further escalation and destabilisation of European security, with asymmetric responses and effects in areas outside the conflict zone cannot be excluded. The number of internally displaced persons (estimated at 7.7 million by UNHCR) and Ukrainian refugees seeking protection in Europe increases on a daily basis. UNHCR estimates that another 13 million people are currently unable to leave and are stranded in war-torn areas of Ukraine.

The as yet uncertain outcomes of this major crisis raise serious policy questions. For example, what might be its long-term implications in relation to the integration of millions of Ukrainians into Europe? Or their return to a devastated Ukraine when the situation stabilises? The European Commission issued a Communication in relation to the challenges of humanitarian assistance, integration, return, support of neighbouring countries and the protection of the EU's external borders, including measures to avoid abuse of TPD applications.[23] Moreover, Ukraine will have to bear the massive costs of reconstruction to address its financing gap and rebuild its destroyed cities and agricultural, technological, industrial and transportation infrastructure.[24] To support Ukraine, the European Commission has outlined a reconstruction plan that is expected to last more than a decade, with significant financial assistance and mobilisation of resources from the EU and other international partners.[25] In this uncharted territory, many challenges remain. The current situation will also generate socio-economic impacts sustaining push factors for migration from Ukraine long after the conflict subsides (According to EIU[26], Ukraine's GDP will not recover to pre-war levels for a decade).

Many African countries will remain source areas for migration while they experience economic problems, high levels of unemployment, widespread poverty, social unrest, or political crises

The Horn of Africa also faces a variety of socioeconomic, environmental, security and humanitarian challenges (from drought, floods, locust invasions, regional conflicts [Tigray region, Somalia], to terrorism). These challenges will continue to affect Somalia, Kenya and other countries in the region, thus contributing to the flow of migrants and refugees along the East African route.

The Sahel region and sub-Saharan countries face socioeconomic, political, security and climate-related challenges that will likely cause internal displacements and international migratory movements towards the EU. More specifically, the deterioration of security characterised by increased terrorist activities and banditry will likely cause additional IDPs and refugee movements to neighbouring countries. This could affect littoral states, which recently recorded their first terrorist attacks. Moreover, military coups that recently destabilised Mali, Chad, Guinea and Sudan could be experienced by other countries too.

These challenges will likely persist over time, generating significant irregular migratory flows towards the Western African, Western Mediterranean and Central Mediterranean routes. The projected demographic explosion in Africa in combination with the impacts of the climate change and security issues might inflate migratory phenomena further in the course of the next decade.

Cooperation within the border management domain between the EU and the North African countries remains a priority, as well as cooperation with other partners in the area of migration management. This includes supporting capacity building to enhance border management and to improve fundamental rights in the region.

The forthcoming migration trends will also be influenced by factors such as remittances, geopolitical interests and foreign influence

Certain additional factors will play a potentially significant role in future migration trends. Remittances from established diasporas will remain an important financial resource for third countries, thus providing strong incentives for their governments to support international migration. Foreign influence – directly or via local proxies – in source countries of migration will persist in the context of broader geopolitical interests. The presence of foreign actors in Africa will increase mainly due to global competition over natural and finite resources. Local militias, armed groups and terrorist groups will likely benefit from the competition among international players and other factors exacerbating the security situation. Lastly, certain African countries will be particularly vulnerable to targeted disinformation campaigns aimed at influencing political and public opinion.

Impact on EIBM

Legal and irregular migration will continue to be at the top of political agendas at national and EU level

Since 2015 the EU has been constantly improving migration governance and crisis preparedness in order to deal with a broad array of security and humanitarian challenges, especially at the southern external borders. Border security has been reinforced, including border and coast guard capacities; procedures have been put in place at hotspots to effectively identify, register, accommodate and return irregular migrants; and financial assistance has been provided to third countries. These efforts also culminated in the EBCG 2.0 Regulation and the creation of the Standing Corps of 10 000 border and coast guards by 2027.

In the future, migration will remain at the top of the political agenda at national and EU level, as one of the most heavily contested topics, with differing views on migration policies towards economic migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. One-sided viewpoints favouring either open borders or 'fortress Europe' will contribute to political fragmentation and polarisation. Nonetheless, EU border management will have to uphold the rule of law, focussing on a broad array of security threats and the protection of people in need of asylum and international protection in equal measure.

EU border management will experience disproportionate migratory pressures between now and 2032

Recent migration and refugee crises on the southern and eastern borders indicate that the EU will most likely encounter a higher frequency of such events. The interplay between complex geopolitics, a turbulent security situation, and other megatrends inside a hostile multipolar world will most likely instigate major changes, affecting various regions and third countries profoundly. Since certain neighbouring third countries might attempt to instrumentalise migrant and refugee populations for political purposes, the EU could also face instances of the 'migration blackmail' scenario (see below).

As future migration crises (and other security threats) will most likely affect the integrity of the external borders and test the effectiveness of EU border control systems, a comprehensive set of policy and organisational measures should be considered to enhance the level of general and crisis preparedness of EU border management. In this framework, all components of EIBM (art.3 EBCG) might be enhanced for effective policy implementation.

The enhanced focus on the first and second tiers of the four-tier access control model for IBM might become an effective tool to curb irregular migration flows towards the EU

In the future, the ability and willingness of Middle Eastern and African countries to maintain effective border management and control of migratory flows towards the EU will be essential. The EU may conclude status agreements with relevant third countries, establishing closer cooperation and working arrangements, in accordance with article 73 of the EBCG Regulation. In this way, Frontex can implement its full mandate and provide technical and operational assistance to third countries of origin and transit while respecting fundamental rights.

To curb irregular migrations flows to the EU, these pre-frontier measures should complement other measures aimed at strengthening the EU's external borders. Such measures should be comprehensive, as recent experiences have shown that migration crises and other disproportionate pressures affect vast sections of the Mediterranean Sea and the EU's eastern land borders. Also, since irregular migration trends are characterised by displacement effects in response to increased border controls, border management should be flexibly adjusted to the dynamically evolving situation in the field. The EBCG Standing Corps could play an important role in addressing operational needs and requirements, such as maintaining a presence in certain pre-frontier areas, providing additional capacity at impacted border sections, and swiftly responding to any new migratory patterns. A critical factor here is the adequate staffing and reaction capacity of the Standing Corps, which is one of the most important EBCG assets in dealing effectively with irregular migration and border security threats. Successful implementation of these measures in the pre-frontier area and at the external border will also have an effect on secondary movements within the Schengen area.

Finally, for the implementation of EIBM to be successful, it must take place in conjunction with external initiatives and internal EU policies, such as the promotion of legal migration to deal with labour shortages (e.g., due to an aging population), the smooth integration of migrants into host societies, as well as EU foreign aid, trade agreements, and FDI in third countries.

3.2. Returns

With international migration exerting constant pressure on the EU's management of migration, asylum and return over the next decade, cooperation with third countries will play a key role

The need for return operations will largely depend on the recognition rates of asylum seekers and refugees. This will be a dynamic process. Large mixed-migration flows towards the EU are to be expected, some of which will be eligible for return.

The recent geopolitical developments in the EU neighbourhood, the Middle East, Asia and Africa indicate the paramount importance of permanent and sustainable cooperation with third countries to ensure comprehensive, lasting and efficient migration management.

The European Council has repeatedly called upon the EU to create and apply "the necessary leverage, by using all relevant EU policies, instruments and tools, including development, trade and visa, to achieve measurable results in terms of preventing illegal migration and returning irregular migrants". This requires a coherent, integrated and coordinated approach to EU-third country cooperation. The New Pact on Migration and Asylum highlights the importance of effective cooperation with external partners on return, readmission and reintegration via "comprehensive, balanced, tailor-made and mutually beneficial migration partnership" with third countries. It paves the way for a common EU system for returns of which the EU's relationships and

partnerships with third countries is a vital element.

Frontex has been increasingly involved in assisting Member States with return activities to further boost and facilitate cooperation with third countries. In this context, Frontex has effectively increased operational support for Member States in all stages of the return process and applied a variety of other instruments and tools aimed at enhancing cooperation with third countries, including the deployment of the European Return Liaison Officers (EURLOs) and the new "Technical Assistance Projects for third countries in the field of Return, Readmission and Reintegration" (TAP4RRR). The external dimension of returns is complemented by the support provided to the Member States and Schengen Associated Countries in the different stages of the return process and the different types of return (voluntary and non-voluntary, various means of transport and formats) as well as support in the area of post-return and reintegration.

Streamlining all phases of the return process and aligning with EU and non-EU partners is critical to meet the growing challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, the impact of these on migration, the geopolitical impact if migration itself, and the subsequent pressure on the EU's external borders.

The streamlined, and in certain cases obligatory use of a border procedure for asylum and return, as proposed by the European Commission since 2016, could have a positive impact on the effective return of third country nationals whose application for asylum has been rejected, by limiting the risk of absconding. This impact would however be limited by the capacity of the Member States to implement such a border procedure and to assess asylum applications on time (12 weeks was the timeframe envisaged by the European Commission), particularly in front-line arrival countries if relocations remain limited in the frame of the procedure.

The impact of the border procedure will also depend on the type of migrants. If they arrive unidentified or undocumented, which is often the case in search and rescue procedures, issues will still exist in terms of identification and documentation of the migrants, and their acceptance by third countries. In any case it would mean even closer focus on support to front-line Member States as well as additional deployment of resources in those regions (and more need for alignment with Member States in terms of return sponsorship). Additional support and alignment between front-line Member States and the Agency, also in relation to return sponsorship would be required.

Impact on EIBM

Returns have become a prominent part of EU border and migration management and will become even more important. The mixed migratory flows since 2015 have made clear that migration management can be effective only in tandem with effective return practices. The conflict in Ukraine, Belarus' hybrid activities and the millions of refugees showcase the importance of bolstering the EU's capacity and crisis preparedness for returns in order to facilitate the work of numerous stakeholders. All returns must be carried out in a fast, orderly, humane and dignified manner with respect for human rights and the safeguards provided by the Return Directive. However, the efficiency of the EU's return policy depends on addressing the external and internal dimensions of returns effectively.

As regards the external dimension, almost all Council Conclusions and Communications of the European Commission have acknowledged an urgent need to identify, coordinate and implement all relevant EU policies and measures for improving the efficiency of the EU's return system. Frontex has increased efforts to support Member States' effective returns and will continue to do so. Member States' cooperation with Frontex will provide reliable near real-time situational awareness and improve their return systems and processes. Additionally, the Agency's capacity to organise its own return operations will be further developed in order to alleviate the operational and administrative burden on the Member States. Through enhanced coordination, as well as the availability and deployment of additional resources, Frontex will consolidate its role as the operational arm of the EU return system.

Post-arrival and post-return support to Member States by Frontex will increase through the Frontex Reintegration Programme. Procedures will be streamlined, allowing for diverse reintegration packages in terms of type and value. Reintegration will promote cooperation with third countries and consolidate Frontex as a key player in the area of return.

EU financial support and cooperation with third countries on return will likely gain even more importance in the upcoming years with new bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation frameworks and agreements, as returns remain a critical element of EU migration management. Frontex return activities continue to compliment other areas of cooperation with third countries (e.g., technical and operational assistance, border control support, capacity building and training).

The development of the legal framework on returns would allow the establishment of safe and legal pathways as well as capabilities for legal and orderly migration. Agreement on the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and the Return Directive could create a legal basis for the faster processing of international protection applications and efficient return procedures for higher numbers of returnees.

Return systems and processes will benefit from digitalisation. The return data collection mechanisms, central repositories of information, Return Case Management System (RECAMAS) and online communication tools will allow efficiency gains and give more accurate statistics. The performance of national return systems will increasingly depend

upon their digital transformation. Frontex will become a central hub for research and innovation, setting common standards and requirements for ICT systems, both within and outside the EU, promoting the optimisation of return processes. Digitalisation will also help third countries manage returns through the reference model for non-EU governmental return case management systems. Despite wide recognition of the importance of digitalisation, the challenges of harmonisation, integration and interoperability will likely persist in the future due to the different technologies used by national return systems. Increased digitalisation will also raise data protection concerns.

In addition, new EU legislation will lead to the introduction of new return procedures at the border.

In the next decade, EU returns will increasingly depend on the efficiency of the internal and external dimension of EU return policy. Given the turbulent international environment and the growing impact of migration into the EU, there will be a pressing need for significant and sustainable improvements on the EU return system to substantially increase the number of effective returns.

4. Cross-border crime

Migrant smuggling will remain one of the key crime areas which affects the EU's external borders as well as internal security

More than 90% of irregular migrants that reach the EU make use of smugglers during some or all of their journey. Push factors in third countries (i.e., unemployment, insecurity, other socio-political reasons, demography, natural disasters, conflicts) combined with pull factors in the EU (e.g., high living standards, employment opportunities) form the preconditions for migration. Migrants turn to smugglers when they lack information (when, where, how to enter the EU) or means (including technical) to reach the EU. The instrumentalisation of migration for the benefit of state actors has been a worrying new trend in recent years. The dehumanisation of migrants as a 'weapon' for political and strategic gains has been a feature of the increasingly hybrid nature of the challenges faced at the external borders.

Migrant smuggling activities are rooted both in third countries, where smugglers try to attract migrants and offer their services, as well as in the EU, where criminal networks facilitate secondary/internal movements, integrate migrants into national and EU (financial) schemes and further exploit them. The EU Action Plan for migrant smuggling 2021-2025 establishes the development of dedicated and tailor-made Anti-Smuggling Operational Partnerships with third countries or regions along migratory routes towards the EU, reinforcing efforts to prevent these crimes before the problem reaches EU territory. Even though the application and success of these partnerships rely significantly on the level of engagement of third countries, strengthened cooperation with countries of origin and transit is undoubtedly crucial to suppressing the threat. Another important factor is the use of modern technology in criminal activities. The online environment and widely available digital tools are thoroughly exploited at all stages of migrant smuggling, from advertising and recruitment of clients or low-level facilitators to communication with irregular migrants or among smugglers, to sharing travel guidance, provision of fraudulent documents and countermeasures against law enforcement.

Document fraud is and might remain one of the fastest evolving enablers of various types of cross-border crime

Document fraud is the misuse of travel and ID documentation, and other supporting/breeder documents used to identify holders. Associated crimes include migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings or cross-border movements of third-country nationals. These illegal services are offered both to migrants attempting to enter the EU and to those who have successfully entered the EU. Facilitation of secondary movements of irregular migrants already present in the EU and legalisation of residence status are key threats to the EU's internal security. They unfold in an increasingly networked environment, with document fraud and legislation expertise provided as a service. The introduction of new border management technologies (i.e., smart borders package/Entry Exit System and ETIAS) might stimulate crime groups to assess vulnerabilities in an attempt to overcome border and security controls. While travel and selected identification documents very often include advanced security features protecting them against unlawful alterations or reproduction, this does not automatically guarantee full protection against fraud. When new technologies are introduced, they become available for legitimate producers of documents as well as for criminals. While manufacturers are implementing the latest optical physical security features in combination with electronic components, fraudsters can also access advanced technological solutions. Concerning document fraud, smugglers are adjusting their business model through the use of messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram in order to acquire fraudulent or genuine documents. The use of these apps and the data communicated cannot be easily detected by law enforcement agencies. Moreover, the complexity of sophisticated security features in travel documents may lead to vulnerabilities in the detection of unlawful alterations of these documents, as it requires time, expertise and equipment.

As regards particular *modi operandi*, impersonation (which falls under identity fraud) is considered one of the most prevalent types of fraud due to the challenges in reproducing or altering the latest generation of EU travel documents. Another form of identity fraud, such as fraudulently obtained genuine documents, is even more difficult to detect. It is anticipated that this *modus operandi* will grow in the coming years. According to findings on the asylum-seeking process, fraudulently obtained visas quite frequently pass EU border checks undetected. Other advanced techniques and sophisticated methods of document forgery (such as various types of image

alterations including morphing) will continue to pose difficulties for their detection at the borders in the coming years.

It can be assumed that new procedures such as ETIAS, EES and the VIS regulation will, on the one hand, lead to more irregular migration on the green and sea borders as migrants try to evade controls. On the other hand, travellers will use deceptions concerning their identity if they have not received traveller authorisation or a visa. Document and identity fraud will be a field of great importance in the future.

Trafficking in human beings, especially of victims originating in third countries, is a lucrative criminal business which will continue to grow

In the EU, in a single year, criminal revenues from trafficking in human beings (THB) for sexual exploitation, which is the most prevalent purpose of THB, are estimated at about EUR 14 billion. The economic cost of trafficking in a single year is estimated at EUR 2.7 billion.[27] The EU is a key destination region for victims of THB originating in third countries. Sexual exploitation is the prominent form, followed by labour exploitation. Forcing victims into crime has been on the rise, interlinking trafficking in human beings with other criminal activities, like drug distribution and property crime. Despite the differences between migrant smuggling and THB,[28] the underlying and facilitating factors that drive both criminal activities are intertwined. Thus, strategies and actions to curb smuggling may be applicable to THB and vice versa. The lack of legal and safe travel routes exposes irregular migrants to various forms of trafficking and creates opportunities for big profits for criminal networks. Criminal networks offer similar services (document fraud, facilitation of transportation, safehouses, etc.) and migrants might also be or become victims of trafficking during or following the smuggling process.[29]

Conflict-induced migration and internal displacements have been a growing concern in recent years as the rising number of persons on the move due to armed conflicts and socio-political turmoil expose vulnerable groups to the influence of organised crime. The rising number of unaccompanied children on the move during health and humanitarian crises significantly increases the risk of child exploitation. An estimated 42% of all forcibly displaced people in 2020 were children[30] – a sign of exposure to violence and exploitation in origin, transit, and destination countries. In this regard, the war in Ukraine might have a significant effect in the coming years as the flow of people fleeing the war and other indirectly affected regions included vulnerable groups that may be exploited by criminal groups. The use of profiling and risk profiles by border control authorities is one way to detect THB, but awareness and close cooperation between all the actors involved remains a strong approach towards countering the phenomenon.

Smuggling of goods, including drugs and firearms, constitutes a serious threat to the internal security of the EU

Ninety percent of intercontinental trade uses maritime routes, thus a wide array of *modi operandi* used by organised criminal groups operating in drugs, weapons, and counterfeit goods smuggling occur in the maritime domain. Containerised transportation is the main area of the maritime trade supply exploited in transnational criminal activities. 500 million containers are shipped worldwide every year and by 2050 this number might have tripled.[31] Less than 2% of these containers are inspected[32], and the insignificant decline in the number of reported incidents in 2020 and 2021, despite the operational constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, indicates that crime groups can quickly adapt to any conditions.[33] This already challenging environment will see further complexity in the coming years. The emergence of new transport routes like China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) and the Artic Route, the current use of autonomous or even unmanned vessels, the increasing use of AI in all port management-related activities, and the growth in capacity of cargo vessels are examples of developments that will impact the global management of seaborne trade and the management of the EU's external maritime borders. These developments are particularly relevant for the smuggling of illicit goods, which follows the same routes as licit commodities.

There has been a continuous increase in detections of **drug smuggling**[34] on the EU borders in recent years. Recent changes in Europe's illicit drug market, largely linked to globalisation and new technology, include innovations in drug production, trafficking methods, the establishment of new trafficking routes and the growth of online markets. In the global context, Europe is an important market for drugs, with South America, West Asia and North Africa being the main source areas, while China and increasingly India are source countries for new psychoactive substances, drug precursors and related chemicals. Cannabis is the most popular drug in the EU, with cocaine coming in second. Operational estimates have indicated 2021 as another record-breaking year for drug seizures in Europe. Moreover, huge drug busts in main producer countries and *en route* to Europe, combined with revelations from disrupted encrypted communications, showed an alarming picture of the magnitude of drug-related crimes in recent years. Drug trafficking networks have become more aggressive, seizing every opportunity to make a quick profit by offering ever larger quantities.

Consecutive record-high quantities of cocaine seized in Europe every year since 2017[35] indicate an expanding supply to the EU. Furthermore, cocaine cultivation and production potential in Latin America has increased significantly over the past 10 years, indicating that the supply to the EU will persist. Although the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan is not expected

to significantly affect heroin smuggling into the EU in the short term, in 2021, the amount of heroin seized in the main transit country, Turkey, as well as several large-scale seizures at EU seaports, suggest that heroin trafficking has returned to its pre-pandemic levels.

The consequences of climate change and geopolitical changes in the context of the war in Ukraine can have a significant impact on drug markets, smuggling/transport routes and countries of origin. This crime area will certainly remain relevant for IBM and will develop dynamically, so must remain under constant analysis.

Firearms smuggling is another distinctive business for organised crime groups and one of the most dangerous transnational crimes. As smuggling was severely affected by travel restrictions and more intensive controls during the pandemic, 2021 was marked by a return to previous levels of seizures at the EU's external borders[36]. The majority of criminal networks (around 60%) employ violence as part of their criminal businesses[37], and therefore this demand for weapons will continue to require a coherent counteraction from the law enforcement and border guard authorities. Conflict areas around the globe have been proven countries of origin for weapons which are afterwards used either within the EU for illicit activities (organised crime and terrorism) or outside in other war zones. The fact that the distribution of military-grade weapons such as hand grenades, rockets, and landmines has been a prominent business in **Ukraine** is an indicator of what could be expected in the future. The proliferation of firearms, explosives and ammunition is likely to continue and intensify due to the military conflict in Ukraine, generating a long-lasting effect similar to other post-conflict zones. Smuggling of such weapons strongly depends on the persistence of armed conflicts and the security situation, the local availability and demand for such equipment and the control measures at the borders. For large-scale trafficking, access to ports or other major flows of goods (to hide contraband in other cargo in lorries and freight trains) will play a crucial role.

The value of risk profiling in the smuggling of goods and particularly in weapons trafficking is of utmost importance. According to WCO, in 2019, 45 countries reported 8 190 unique cases of weapons and ammunition trafficking, a significant increase compared to 2018, when 42 countries reported 2 869 cases. The most common method reported for the detection of weapons and ammunition was risk profiling, which accounted for 82.2% (6 735) of 2019 cases[38]. It is advisable to enhance this approach and use it to corroborate other existing technologies for maximising results.

Counterfeiting tobacco products is a highly lucrative business for the criminals trading in them

This trade has a significant financial impact on Member States' budgets due to the substantial loss of excise revenue it entails.[39] A recent study carried out by the EUIPO and the OECD estimated that counterfeit and pirated goods worth EUR 119 billion were imported into the EU in 2019, representing up to 5.8% of EU imports.[40] China and Russia are the main countries of origin for counterfeit cigarettes smuggled into the EU, which not only is a destination for illicit tobacco products but also serves as a transit to large markets such as the United Kingdom. Illicit tobacco products are trafficked via both land and sea borders in containers passing through major international ports and free economic zones. Following their arrival at seaports, shipments of illicit tobacco products are transported to their final destinations in lorries.

The criminal networks responsible for the import and distribution of the smuggled goods in the EU are believed to be based outside the EU. These networks maintain warehouses across the EU, mostly in industrial locations and close to transportation hubs. EU-based criminal networks are responsible for the distribution of imported counterfeit goods.[41] Criminal networks involved in the production of counterfeit items are constantly monitoring consumer preferences and adapting their products to meet changing demands. From an IBM perspective, it therefore requires constant observation of the current development, the evaluation of the effects and possible reactions of the criminal groups in order to find an appropriate operative response in coordination and cooperation with all security partners.

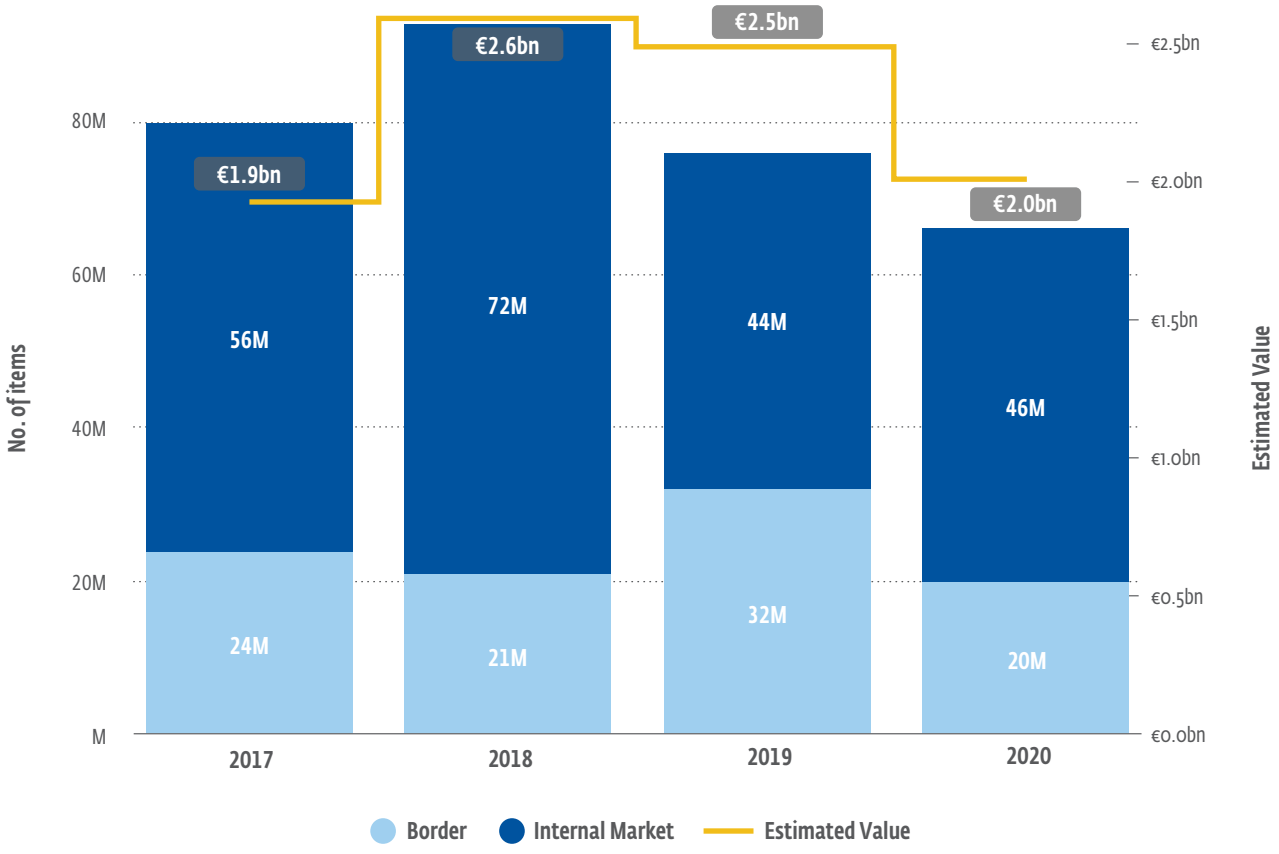

Figure 2 **Reported quantity and estimated value of items detained in 2020 (EUROPOL-EUIPO, 2022)**[42]

Vehicle crime will continue in the future, very likely encompassing electric or hybrid vehicles/vehicle parts

Even though car manufacturers have added significant technological built-in security features to prevent theft or support geolocation after theft, criminals have adapted and use modern technology to bypass security systems. There have been high levels of detections of stolen vehicles at EU external borders in past years, ranging from cars to trucks, buses, agricultural and construction vehicles. Stolen vehicles are either registered using false documentation or have altered security features or are dismantled and sold as spare parts. This trend will most likely continue in the future.

The growing adoption of electric mobility is changing the vehicle markets. It is expected that the volume of electric and hybrid vehicles stolen to be dismantled will increase due to the very high prices of their components.

Other organised property crimes such as trafficking of high value stolen property (ranging from jewellery to world heritage patrimony, cultural goods and archaeological artefacts) should be carefully considered

The trafficking across the EU's external borders of high value stolen property is sometimes challenging to detect due to concealment methods, dissimulated ownership, or minimal understanding of the process. Such property also constitutes a currency for payment for criminal activities, money laundering or trafficking of stolen goods.[43] In the event of a global recession triggered by Russia's war on Ukraine, high inflation and rising unemployment in EU Member States and third countries, it can be assumed that property crime, smuggling and receiving of stolen goods will increase.

The use of state-of-the art technology and advanced digitalisation to avoid the identification of persons involved in cross-border crime will escalate in the future

Technology brings changes which affect our everyday lives. These changes encompass illicit activities, which can be facilitated by modern technology. Criminals exploit encrypted communications, use social media and instant messaging services to expand their customer portfolio and reach a larger audience to advertise their illegal goods.

The criminal use of drones and other unmanned crafts is already a reality. There is a lot of 'criminal potential' in the use of advanced AI to avoid law enforcement and border guard controls.

The development of digitalisation as a service in criminal activities poses considerable challenges for law enforcement and border authorities. Experts in developing digital solutions for criminal use may become more active on the market for cross-border crime. A parallel supporting business may develop, independently servicing criminal clients, providing customised digital solutions for encrypted communications, travel guidance, payment of smuggling fees or provision of fraudulent documents. Currently, the

dark web and cryptocurrencies are not widely used in connection with migrant smuggling. However, in the near future, this might change.

The online environment and the wide array of easily accessible digital solutions increase the efficiency and professionalism of smugglers, allowing them to become more agile and resilient against intervention and countermeasures from law enforcement, often by minimising their direct involvement in criminal operations to avoid traceability. In such a dynamic environment, law enforcement must demonstrate not only investigative skills, but also proactivity in integrating innovative techniques into combatting migrant smuggling and identifying digital traces of such criminal activities.

Impact on EIBM

Diversity in cross-border criminal activities is underpinned by a low-risk, high-profit business model and the forging of ties between criminal groups active in third countries and the EU

Criminals on both sides of the border work together to increase their activities in the EU criminal market by exploiting opportunities in third countries as well as in EU Member States and on external borders. Vulnerabilities include low border/law enforcement capacity, lack of infrastructure and adequate technological equipment, expertise or training, etc. There is no indication that these criminal activities will decrease in the future. Instead, they are likely to change format and adapt to new methods and *modi operandi*.

Across the EU, measures to monitor accurately and consistently the movement of passengers and goods into or through the EU in conjunction with intelligence-led activities (i.e., risk profiling) will need to be enhanced. Interoperability between existing and future systems of EU law enforcement and border control will play a crucial role in increased situational awareness and forecasting activities and will allow for the enhanced use of existing resources.

There is a rising perception that crime is prospering and continually developing; operational actions have not stemmed the flow of illegal activities as criminogenic factors have not been (and potentially cannot be) addressed on a scale that would reduce cross-border criminal activities on the EU's external borders.

Some criminal activities such as smuggling of excise goods and environmental crime are still largely treated with low or even administrative penalties, allowing criminal groups to keep their profits.

Intensive cooperation between all security authorities in the EU, interinstitutional cooperation, information exchange and coordinated operational response are essential components of crime control. IBM must create the conditions for this.

The COVID-19 pandemic compelled criminal networks to devise new ways to conduct business

Relaxation of lockdown measures and the varying speeds of recovery worldwide have led to increased containerised trade flows. The surge in freight rates reached historical highs by the end of 2020 and early 2021, spreading across all routes worldwide. Licit commodities are expected to be increasingly shipped in containerised cargo, and criminal networks will try to smuggle illicit goods and exploit security weaknesses linked with the inability to carry out thorough checks of such great volumes of cargo. The digitalisation of criminal markets and the possibility of anonymised deliveries of illicit goods, for instance through small parcel shipments, will increase, making it more challenging for authorities to identify and address the perpetrators.

Modern technology and advanced techniques will be increasingly incorporated into criminal activities; new, highly sophisticated modi operandi are likely to emerge

The EU will remain an important market for illicit goods and, provided demand persists, criminal networks will continue to adjust their strategies to meet it. The use of drones for smuggling across borders, digital devices for guiding the illegal crossings and cryptocurrencies for untraceable payments exemplify the increasing use of modern technology in cross-border crime, which will make *modi operandi* increasingly sophisticated and difficult to detect.

The deteriorating security situation in the vicinity of the EU's external eastern borders is expected to hinder EU and Member State efforts to prevent cross-border crime

The deterioration of factors which affect the security situation in neighbouring countries such as Belarus and Ukraine, as well as the political situation in third countries which are either source, departure or transit countries for cross-border crime, is expected to hinder EU and Member State efforts to reduce the threat at the EU's external borders. The EBCG will be under more pressure to cope with cross-border criminal activities, and the lack of effective cooperation with countries beyond our external borders would be detrimental.

The war in Ukraine already has a direct influence on numerous facets of cross-border crime, but the long-term consequences are pivotal. Trafficking in human beings poses grave risks to vulnerable groups entering the EU, and criminal networks will focus on countries where Ukrainian refugees are residing. Firearms smuggling is another field where we may anticipate a situation similar to that of other post-conflict zones with increased opportunities for smuggling activities and an enhanced role of criminal networks. Other crime areas such as migrant smuggling, document fraud, drugs and excise goods smuggling may also allow organised crime groups to thrive.

Across the EU, enhanced measures to monitor accurately and consistently the movement of passengers and goods into or through EU in conjunction with intelligence-led activities (i.e., based on risk profiling), needs to be strengthened[44]

Interoperability between existing and future systems used by EU law enforcement and border control plays a crucial role in maintaining situational awareness and forecasting, and can enhance the use of existing resources. It is anticipated that cross-border crime will rise and have a substantial impact on the EU's external borders and internal security. The operational response at the borders necessitates coordinated efforts from all relevant agencies (border and coast guard, law enforcement, customs). The technological sophistication and digitalisation of cross-border crime *modi operandi* require the adaptation and modernisation of equipment and deterrence capacities. EIBM is a vital part of the international security infrastructure that aims to discourage illicit operations. Without it, a comprehensive strategy against cross-border crime cannot be realised.

In the context of border security, the flow of bona-fide travellers should be a priority concern both for security and contingency planning

The EU is in the process of a massive transformation of its regulated borders (e.g., EES, ETIAS, VIS), moving from essentially physical border checks to a new paradigm consisting of a border continuum with different layers. This continuum comprises not only different decision levels but also a high degree of integration at the individual traveller (interoperability) and collective levels. This will enable unprecedented capabilities for the EU, but at the same time will require proper planning to realise. Such planning is essential for correctly estimating not only the resources required for business as usual, but also to ensure that a different range of scenarios are appropriately addressed to cope with the unusual and unexpected.

Against this background, it is essential for the agencies and Member States running these systems to have a deeper understanding of bona fide travel, its tendencies, driving forces and potential disruptions. In the absence of such information, the actors in the area of border management may not be prepared to cope with such demand, ultimately resulting in vulnerabilities and materialisation of risk both at operational and law enforcement levels.

5. Terrorism

Terrorism will continue to be used by state and non-state actors and/or individuals as a tactic to channel specific political messages, or as an attempt to dismantle the current political or socioeconomic order

Violence will remain instrumental in causing a state of terror – or other psychological repercussions. Primary targets will continue to be strategically chosen to 'channel a message' to a wider audience to influence the broad political environment. **Jihadist-inspired terrorism is set to remain a primary threat for the EU**; individuals loosely linked to existing militant groups will play a major role in maintaining a constant state of insecurity and indirectly serve these groups' propaganda efforts.

As observed during the pandemic, technology will also increase the risk of exposure to extremist propaganda as people spend more time online – a condition which will continue to facilitate less sophisticated/high impact 'lone wolf' attacks in the EU. In this sense, 'we must continue to fight ISIL in cyberspace' as with growing interconnectivity social media platforms will remain the primary operational space for recruitment and disseminating propaganda. Cyberspace will also serve to direct or reactivate sleeper cells.

The Sahel is set to continue experiencing the locus of terrorist violence over the coming years

Al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliates have shown their political abilities by exploiting governance vacuums, local conflicts, and ethnic dynamics to recruit followers, hone their skills and project power southward. To date, the violence in the central Sahel has resulted in about three million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad and Niger. The recent withdrawal of the French-led Operation Barkhane and Takuba Task Force from Mali and the increasing footprint in the country of Russian mercenaries might facilitate jihadist expansion and could generate migratory pressure towards the EU.[45] In all 2021 Sahelians represented only 3% of the overall volume of illegal border-crossings on the EU's external borders.[46]

Hitherto relatively untouched, coastal west Africa is increasingly exposed to threats of terrorism and violent extremism, as confirmed by several deadly attacks in their northern borderlands attributed to militant Islamist groups in 2021.[47] While this may indicate jihadists' growing intent and capability, the overall focus of the violence so far remains local. The reasons for it are multiple.

Firstly, the Islamic State milieu in Africa faced several setbacks in 2021, chiefly related to factionalism. This often stemmed from militant groups becoming increasingly immersed in local dynamics in their attempts to play on local grievances. While on the one hand this often proved a successful strategy to enlarge their ranks, on the other it pulled terrorists into local conflicts, deflecting resources and attention from the groups' wider objectives and further polarising jihadists in the region.

Regardless of internal frictions, the expansion of Islamic State in recent years has also led to growing confrontations with al-Qaeda's Jama 'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), which is a coalition of Al-Qaeda affiliated groups.*

Overall, in 2021 Islamic State has shown some interest in expanding its footprint in Central Africa as demonstrated by the operational expansion pursued by its nominal affiliates in Mozambique and DRC.

Following political turbulence stemming from the delayed election process in Somalia, al-Shabaab has increased its tempo of attacks, which shows that the organisation continues to maintain operational momentum and an ability to strike secure points across the country.

The focus on security dynamics in Afghanistan should not distract from the threat of Islamic State in Syria and Iraq

In the Levant, IS fighters continue taking advantage of peripheral areas to strengthen their position. Their growing operational ability has been shown by attacks on Kurdish-controlled prisons to free fellow militants in a likely attempt to enlarge their cadres. In parallel, recruitment efforts allegedly continue in displaced persons' camps in northern Syria, where easy access, dire humanitarian conditions and a large population of IS fighters' family members may offer a population ripe for indoctrination.

Overall, thousands of FTFs that travelled to the conflict zone – especially in Syria and Iraq – are still unaccounted for. To avoid capture some might have left one battleground to relocate elsewhere, taking with them skills and experience.

* Harakat Ansar al-Din, the Front de Libération du Macina (FLM), Al-Murabitoun, and the Saharan Emirate of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

In this sense, growing instability in the Sahel or in other areas of Africa and the world may offer them suitable options to utilise their expertise. Tracking these individuals becomes complicated as they might be staying in several countries over a long period of time before moving/returning to the EU. Hence, the need for synergies with security constituencies to strengthen multilateral intelligence sharing and cooperation and to better tackle terrorists' mobility and reduce the consequent impact on the internal security of the Schengen area.

Yet the risk of entry of high-risk individuals will not exclusively relate to FTFs; it includes what can be broadly defined as 'subjects of interest': e.g., people linked/loosely linked to terrorist violence, those who may have committed war crimes and other international crimes that may lead to their exclusion from asylum procedures, and FTFs' family members. As regards the latter, according to the UN[48], almost 60 000 such people are hosted at Al HoI, the largest camp for refugees and internally displaced people in Syria. The camp includes "individuals with varying degrees of affiliation with the IS"[49] and fighters' family members including minors, who may attempt to travel to the EU. The main challenge here will consist in ensuring accountability for those affiliated with IS in line with international law while avoiding re-victimisation.

Following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, there has been a harsh debate about the future security equilibrium of the country

The debate is primarily linked to overall concerns on whether the new government can successfully handle the Islamic State in Khorasan (IS-K) and what kind of threat IS-K might represent to the West. Following several noteworthy attacks (chiefly the one at Kabul airport during the evacuation in August 2021) IS-K has decreased its operational tempo. While this could be linked to seasonal trends, the volume of kinetic activity has also drastically fallen in urban areas.

Nonetheless, while not necessarily an immediate threat to the overall security of the country, IS-K certainly raises concerns about possible infiltration of sympathisers/affiliates amongst Afghans en route to the EU.

Impact on EIBM

EIBM mechanisms will play a significant role in tackling terrorism

The use of profiling for border control, close cooperation with the authorities responsible for countering terrorist activities and awareness of the level of the terrorist threat are just some elements to be considered into the long-term future. Nevertheless, there is an increased likelihood that technology will be used to better conceal the preparation of terrorist activities or the terrorists themselves, as well as to diversify methods of attack (cyberspace might be more heavily targeted in the future).

Widespread availability of information, communication technologies and social media applications will be a key enabler of terrorism

In the long-term, the internet, social media, encrypted communication technologies, cyberattacks, artificial intelligence/machine learning and cryptocurrencies will enable the organisation, financing and radicalisation of high-risk individuals. 'Boundaryless' information technologies are impossible to fully monitor, thus they enable terrorist groups to reach out to millions of sympathisers around the world and spread their extremist propaganda. IT will be used as a 'force multiplier' for terrorist activities.

Conflict zones and hostile geopolitics will be creating 'subjects of interest'

Serious geopolitical and socioeconomic problems in third countries, among other push factors, will increase the number of international migrants. Terrorist groups will continue to take advantage of high-volume migratory flows towards Europe. This tactic will most likely be used to conceal terrorists in the masses and help them cross into the EU undetected. Terrorist groups will also attempt to recruit 'subjects of interest' from the pool of travelling people.

Terrorism will continue to represent a major threat for the foreseeable future

The **timely sharing of information** through the creation of an information architecture for border management, migration, and law-enforcement purposes will be crucial to improve border checks and operational responses. This will include the operationalisation of the Entry/Exit System (EES), the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), the revised Schengen Information System (SIS), and the revised Visa Information System (VIS), which are to be ultimately integrated with the European Criminal Records Information System – Third Country Nationals (ECRIS-TCN) as well as Interpol's specialised databases (e.g., SLTD, TDAWN).

As for the impact on overall IBM, one of the main challenges will be to safeguard the free movement of goods and people within the EU while protecting national security interests. Over the next decade EU border authorities will be increasingly requested to operate in and adapt to a fluid and multidimensional operational environment. Beyond the political and security challenges discussed above, the EU will have to rethink cross-cutting institutional mandates and jurisdictional responsibility related to the border dimension in order to better hinder terrorist/high-risk individuals' mobility.

6. Hybrid Threats

Hybrid threats have become a recurring challenge to the European security architecture and will continue to challenge EIBM in the future

The term 'hybrid threat' refers to an action undertaken by state or non-state actors with the purpose of undermining or harming a target by affecting its decision-making process at the local, regional, and institutional level. Hybrid threats include the systematic targeting of key vulnerabilities in democratic states (e.g., open societies, free news outlets and social media, free market economies, political pluralism, legislation, legal loopholes) in pursuit of strategic objectives.[50] Ambiguity, plausible deniability and hiding the hybrid actors' true intent serve to evade the response mechanism and decision-making capability of the target.

The term 'hybrid warfare' became popular following a series of unconventional and irregular activities that in 2014 led to the seizure of Crimea and eastern Ukraine by Russia.[51] The scope of hybrid threats has been revisited from both NATO and the European Commission: NATO has underlined the fact that hybrid threats comprise both military and non-military as well as covert and overt means, such as disinformation, cyberattacks, economic pressure, use of regular forces and irregular armed groups. The European Commission has added that hybrid threats constitute a combination of coercive and subversive methods, conventional and unconventional activities (e.g., diplomatic, military, economic, technological), which can be used in a cooperative manner by state or non-state actors to achieve particular objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare.[52]

All these components will challenge border management in the future, from overwhelming flows of passengers at border-crossing points to the instrumentalisation of migration.

Among the manifold reasons for the proliferation of hybrid attacks against the EU are their relatively low costs, covertness, deniability, and the significantly increased potency of the hybrid cyber toolkit (including disinformation) in the modern information age. During the second half of 2019, Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU stressed the importance of raising awareness on the nature and scope of hybrid threats (e.g., in the financial sector) while the EU's recently released *Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (March 2022) recognised that "hybrid threats grow both in frequency and impact".[53] It can be clearly assessed that in the future the hybrid interference will be more predominant in border management.

The EU and Member States need to be prepared to prevent and respond to hybrid challenges

Although Member States themselves have the primary responsibility for countering hybrid threats, many of them face common threats that can be addressed more effectively through a coordinated response at EU level. In this context, the new Strategic Compass for Security and Defence refers to the development of the EU Hybrid Toolbox, which foresees a framework for a coordinated response to hybrid campaigns influencing the EU and its Member States. It comprises both existing and new instruments, such as the creation of EU Hybrid Response Teams to support Member States, CDSP missions and operations and third countries in dealing effectively with hybrid threats. Furthermore, the Hybrid Fusion Cell, as part of the broader Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC) will provide foresight and situational awareness to enhance the preparedness of both the EU and Member States.

Impact on EIBM

The EU's commitment to fundamental rights makes its external borders a target for so-called lawfare[54] by unscrupulously instrumentalising migration or by targeting the EU's economic and energy security through coercion

The use of border policy to achieve and promote the foreign and security policy interests of third countries is one method of hybrid influencing. Hybrid activities against a Member State represent in most cases a continuation of a political or economic dispute. Such activities aimed at border areas will not always have a similar character to those that took place in 2014 in Crimea and the eastern provinces of Ukraine.

A state aggressor will rely on an extensive catalogue of hybrid activities to achieve their aims and objectives. However, if those aims are not achieved, they employ **radical methods in the form of quasi-military operations at border regions**. Events of the ongoing war in Ukraine indicate that EU border services can be among the first to encounter the effects of hybrid methods and will be forced to take some form of action. The border guard/police units and their resources are always close to areas of potential conflict. One can predict that a hybrid (quasi-military) conflict will have

a limited geographical scope (i.e., external border section and adjacent region) and duration. Also, the aggressor's forces will be limited in line with the scope of the planned actions.

Further military actions by the aggressor will likely happen only if the conflict escalates due to disproportionate actions by the attacked side, risking all-out warfare that is not always the goal of either side. The neutralisation of a hybrid conflict that has already taken the form of quasi-military operations is a difficult and complex task. In principle, EU Member States should have the ability to discourage any opponent from deploying hybrid methods against them in the first place.

Hybrid interference is not limited to border areas between neighbouring states; it can have potentially global reach and implications

Third countries can provide political or material support to civil resistance movements to achieve regime overthrow and a host of other foreign policy objectives. Hybrid operations in third countries may employ a variety of measures to cause political and socioeconomic instability as well as influence irregular migration, organised crime and terrorism. The interference of private military and security companies (PMSC) and state support in Libya's civil war is an example of hybrid strategy in action with broader negative effects.

Propaganda, the spread of fake information on visa and migration policies as well as criminal networks can be employed by potential aggressors to facilitate migrant journeys

The use of propaganda and fake information can be used by potential aggressors and result in increased migration, flows of dangerous goods (narcotics, weapons and ammunition) and infiltration of terrorists. Also, numerous scenarios can be realised in the maritime domain (seaports, territorial waters, exclusive economic zones, and on the high seas) by state and non-state actors exploiting a target state's vulnerability to hybrid threats and the major importance of socioeconomic activities in this domain (Hybrid CoE, 2019). In this way, an aggressor could exert considerable pressure on a target state's leadership, confuse authorities and test their actions, and affect domestic policy. The ultimate goal behind this power game may be to put specific demands on the negotiation table – possibly linked to a broader strategic agenda – and influence the opponent's political decision-making.

In the future, European IBM could be faced with a growing frequency of hybrid threats of increasing sophistication

Looking ahead, there are several reasons for strategic actors to employ hybrid campaigns against the EU, some closely linked to the systemic vulnerabilities of EU democratic states and institutions and their commitment to fundamental rights. Most importantly, hybrid threats (including migration blackmail) constitute an asymmetric strategy that attempts to offset an EU that in purely conventional terms (economic and military) is more powerful than almost all of its immediate neighbours for the foreseeable future. This conventional superiority is reinforced if EU Member States act collectively. The hybrid 'temptation' also stems from the deniability that some hybrid actors may credibly maintain. In states with weak governance capacity in particular, this deniability may rest on the proclaimed inability to disrupt the business of people-smuggling networks, by socioeconomic push factors that are due to external shocks and thus out of control, or the independent agency of migrants exploring new migratory routes. All these arguments can be easily linked to demands that purport to address the roots of the problem. Indeed, as migration flows can be a major source of revenue (e.g., in the 2021 Belarusian case, high fees were charged to migrants), certain countries and their governing elites (directly and indirectly) could profit from it – a powerful incentive for certain authoritarian states.

7. Future scenarios for EIBM

This chapter presents four alternative scenarios about the possible directions of future events over the next decade. It includes challenging situations in the global and European environment. Of course, the unpalatable developments should be avoided by all means. The scenarios below are hypothetical – albeit plausible – stories (not predictions or prognoses) that could have an impact on EIBM.

7.1. Baseline scenario

Competition between global powers affects international cooperation and leads to a deglobalisation trend in which strategic autonomy is the dominant tendency

In a multipolar world, intense competition between the great powers (i.e., United States, EU, Russia and China) characterises the global landscape between now and 2032. The world order changes, creating ripple effects that influence all megatrends and EIBM. This situation has significant knock-on effects. Among other things, the pursuit of hegemony and the geopolitical aims of the great powers results in a breakdown of European and international cooperation involving many other countries that support them. In particular, there could be insufficient cooperation between countries inside and outside the EU to find effective and lasting solutions to major global problems (e.g., global security, geopolitics/economics, protection of global public goods, climate change, inequalities, 17 sustainable development goals).

The new world order is characterised by aggressive foreign and security policies, hybrid interference using a combination of soft and hard power, and permanent crisis management of extreme events, conflicts and crises. Globalisation processes are affected, resulting in a slowdown or reversal of key trends observed until now. The work of international organisations is systematically undermined and/or influenced by the prevailing interests of the key actors, forcing them to perform mainly symbolic roles. The legitimacy and accountability of global and regional governance systems are seriously challenged by nation-states and their alliances. Countries show a preference to act alone instead of supporting multilateral efforts through international organisations, European bodies/institutions/agencies or NGOs. This also makes them vulnerable to economic attacks.

Strategic autonomy becomes a key consideration for all countries as they try to find ways to reduce their vulnerabilities, exposure and dependence on other countries. Almost all policy areas are affected by intense competition and hybrid interference turning them into arenas of contestation. Countries perceive these policy areas as areas to defend or fight over considering the associated risks and opportunities for competitive advantage. This hinders cooperation between agencies (law enforcement but not exclusively).

Irregular migration, state-of-the-art technology and instrumentalisation of migration will continue to be main policy choices for third countries in order to put pressure on the EU and reach their geopolitical goals

The security megatrend gains significant importance as warring alliances prioritise their security, resulting in a modern arms race. They weaponise / instrumentalise everything in an unyielding pursuit of dominance and power. Connectivity and interdependencies are exploited to inflict harm on each other. The opposing great powers and alliances deploy various tactics of hybrid interference using their competitive advantages. Hybrid operations cause great harm around the world (in certain cases greater harm than war itself).

Irregular migration could return to pre-pandemic levels exerting considerable pressure on the EU's external borders, despite significant increases in IBM capabilities for border control and surveillance. Push and pull factors continue to play an important role and, in their search for a better life, aspiring migrants perceive the EU as an attractive destination. Unpredictable events lead to a sharp increase in migratory flows and the interplay of megatrends amplifies the pressure. Eastern Europe emerges as a new region for international migration, requiring particular attention from the EU. Certain third countries use illegal migration as a tool to blackmail the EU and/or specific Member States. Low-income countries that rely significantly on foreign remittances from their diasporas resort to migration blackmail or request development aid from the EU. Countries of origin of migrants instrumentalise migration in order to exercise influence in international relations (e.g., demand effective integration of migrant diasporas in the EU). This general context could affect cooperation with third countries, at least for four of the elements of the EIBM: border control, search and rescue, return operations and risk analysis.

In the digital era, smartphone and social media addiction rises due the

irresistibility of these products. Powerful actors continue to shape and form public opinion and the views of specific target audiences. Online radicalisation and mobilisation to violence increase through the use of social media (e.g., various messaging platforms, forums, online images, videos and publications) contributing to the evolution of terrorist threats. The biggest threats are known individuals (FTFs) and unknown high-risk individuals – not necessarily linked to any terrorist groups. But the threat will evolve not only in operational and organisational terms, but also in relation to the type of terrorism. Among other things, terrorists target the vulnerabilities of critical infrastructures and digital technologies since they play important roles in modern societies. Large-scale information systems used for border control purposes could also be affected, generating vulnerabilities in border control.

In the context of an increasing global population, the exacerbation of push and pull factors will trigger increased migratory pressure towards the EU

The demographic boom in Africa and Asia increases migratory pressure on the EU's external borders. The EU's ageing population and workforce shortages in certain industries require the creation of legal avenues for migration into the EU. In parallel, the EU experiences a hardening of stances on migration in the political discourse as a consequence of these growing migratory flows.

Climate change and environmental degradation will worsen over the next decade unless bold steps are taken by the international community. Existing socioeconomic inequalities, security instability and insecurity in Africa and Asia displace large segments of national populations internally as well as externally towards the EU and certain emerging economies. Low-income countries are increasingly affected by natural disasters, and extreme weather phenomena which cause significant damage.

The COVID-19 crisis showed the importance of the health megatrend (e.g., non-pharmaceutical interventions, vaccine development, equitable distribution of vaccines, funding for pandemic research and pandemic surveillance). The crisis put an additional burden on developing regions of the world. Their severely affected economies and the uneven distribution of vaccines indicated the problem of vaccine inequalities, which continue to exist in this scenario. EU border management plays a role in the management of future epidemics as certain measures should be taken at the external borders.

Systemic inequalities continue to increase within and across countries. The multilateralism crisis further weakens international cooperation aimed at reducing political and socioeconomic inequalities (e.g., Africa is underrepresented in international organisations such as the UN Security Council). The poorest states are unable to respond to major societal and structural challenges (employment, education, gender issues, climate change, sustainable development goals).

EIBM is challenged by growing instability in the first and second tier exacerbated by hybrid challenges

The whole EU project and the cohesion of the Schengen Area is tested by major developments in the global security landscape. Major external threats and growing instability in the EU neighbourhood lead to a gradual militarisation of the EU's external borders for national security purposes. This requires a rethink of the role of EU border management and the need for coordination with security and defence actors at EU and national level. The EU Policy Cycle on IBM entails significant multi-level and cross-pillar cooperation (i.e., CSDP missions, EU defence capabilities, Frontex Standing Corps, and national border coast guard agencies).

Cooperation between Frontex, Member States' national agencies and third countries increases further. However, cooperation with some third countries remains complex and difficult to manage. Political differences do not necessarily affect cooperation at the level of border management, but this varies depending on the context. In certain cases, the level of cooperation may deteriorate as rival states and alliances try to undermine European cohesion. The dual mission of EU border management – that is the protection of external borders and fundamental rights/humanitarian responses – poses operational challenges due to hybrid interference by rival countries. Even though certain countries attempt to break up the EU's cohesion, the external threats contribute to the creation of a united front among EU Member States.

A strong reaction encompassing enhanced forward thinking, monitoring of secondary movements and robust cooperation between Member States under the Frontex umbrella is launched to safeguard the efficiency of EIBM

In a more turbulent environment, EU border management requires more proactive and future-orientated risk analyses focusing on strategic foresight, anticipation of future events, preparation of alternative scenarios in support of operational deployment and border responses in general. The operational deployment of thousands of Standing Corps officers necessitates both regular and ad hoc operational reporting across thematic areas. This involves the development of both centralised and decentralised analytical capabilities. Migration, cross-border crime, terrorism and hybrid threats require specialised analytical capabilities and capacities to support the production of actionable thematic analyses. This practical requirement leads to a reorganisation of the analytical functions at Frontex and at national level.

Frontex and its partner agencies at national level place particular attention on the need for pre-frontier intelligence and risk assessments in order to provide essential understanding and warning on existing and emerging threats. Vulnerability assessments identify external border sections and BCPs that should be reinforced to counter external border

threats. Large-scale information systems and EU databases are protected against the increasing occurrence of cyberattacks. EU border management also focuses on the need to control secondary movements within the Schengen Area, while at the same time avoiding the introduction of permanent internal controls that would go against the spirit of Schengen (abolition of internal controls).

Member States harmonise and strengthen the implementation of EU and national IBM strategies by establishing national **quality control mechanisms**. This further supports the existing Schengen Evaluation and Vulnerability Assessment mechanisms.

SAR operations in the Mediterranean are carried out in such a way as to limit the possible involvement of non-state actors in order to avoid the facilitation or encouragement of migratory flows.

Research and innovation efforts lead to the development of various applications to support the analytical and operational capabilities for more effective border security. In this context, strategic autonomy considerations allow EU border management to become more resilient and sustainable while limiting its dependence on third countries and providers of critical technologies.

Frontex plays an important coordinating role in the field of returns by complementing the activities of Member State agencies. However, the gap between return decisions and effective returns persists due to a host of complex issues (e.g., conflict zones, unsafe third countries, lack of cooperation by third countries triggering the need to focus on return flights limited only to some destinations).

The **education and training** of EBCG Standing Corps and border and coast guards at national level is upgraded in view of the scope of external threats as well as the growth of EU border staff. The EIBM model and the sharing of technical expertise and best practices are promoted in third countries (e.g., training courses for third countries' border personnel). Technical equipment and infrastructural investments complement such initiatives.

7.2. Best-case scenario

In the context of ensuring and constantly developing good relations with the countries neighbouring the EU as well as the states in the first and second tier, the impacts of climate change and the demographic megatrend are low

In 2032, despite continuing climate change challenges, disruptive weather phenomena and frequent large-scale natural disasters, cooperation between EU and non-EU countries remains good. Climate change has not had any socioeconomic impacts significant enough to cause mass migration towards the EU's external borders. Formerly assessed high-level risks associated with people seeking international protection from climate change/natural disasters have seen a decreasing trend.

By 2032, EU relations on the political and economic level with the Russian Federation have restarted and are a functional status quo. The conflict in Ukraine has ended.

The situation in Syria is politically stable and will remain calm. Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon are returning home. The efforts of EUBAM Libya in close cooperation with the UN Mission and Frontex are successful, and the migration flow from Libya towards the EU via the Mediterranean Sea has constantly decreased. Refugees from these countries have meanwhile been integrated into the socioeconomic systems of the receiving EU MS/SAC or voluntarily returned to their countries of origin. The official border authorities in these regions are effectively fulfilling their tasks and powers in full respect of fundamental rights. Turkey has overcome its financial crisis, and cooperation on matters related to migration, return, security and justice has been renewed.

EU countries' and Frontex's cooperation with the Maghreb countries has risen to an almost optimal level, and there is full cooperation and exchange of information over the Eurosur system. The countries conduct joint SAR missions.

Despite the growing demographic pressure in African countries, high rates of economic growth have substantially reduced the intensity of a wide range of traditional push factors for the area. The EU External Investment Plan as well as direct aid projects supporting training and education for local populations, allied with the implementation of faster and more effective channels for regular migration from Africa to the EU, have allowed more and more migrants to choose these channels instead of irregular migration. Humanitarian impacts associated with the use of the Mediterranean and West African routes have fallen, as has the pressure on reception facilities within EU territory, allowing for better living conditions at camps, effective screening and integration procedures.

Border control will reach maximum efficiency, employing state of the art technology and joint risk analysis and developing fast reaction capabilities

The Frontex Liaison Officers (FLO) network and a well-functioning risk analysis are fully implemented and enhance the cooperation with relevant third countries. MS/SAC, neighbouring and other third countries have deployed liaison officers from all the law enforcement authorities entrusted with border control to Frontex in order to strengthen their cooperation and communication with the Agency.

Eastern Partnership projects are ongoing and, due to the support of the EU and excellent cooperation, have a positive impact on information exchange. A well-functioning system of information exchange with the Western Balkans states is developed through Working Arrangements and trust-building measures.

Working Arrangements with targeted Asian countries are implemented and close cooperation has been established, which gives the Agency the ability to assess potential threats, establish

sustainable operational partnerships as well as swiftly perform return operations.

In 2030, following the policy development, EU border control will have reached maximum proficiency, making full use of environmentally friendly technological developments. Easy access to information, in real time, based on a one-time query to all operational, analytical and support databases, corroborated with the support of artificial intelligence for the identification of risk entities (persons, goods, routes, documents, means of transportation, etc) has increased the efficiency of border checks to the maximum. This has enabled fast processing of bona-fide travellers and legitimate goods, while risk entities are identified based on risk analysis and submitted to second-line controls. Virtual fences have been built using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) for the detection of irregular border-crossings enabling rapid border intervention teams to assess the situation and intervene accordingly. After interception, the screening procedure is applied, consisting in the identification of vulnerable groups of persons or persons in need of international protection. Vulnerable migrants are referred to the responsible organisations to support their special needs.

All Member States and SACs have fully implemented the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and reached the same level of acceptance and implementation of the legal and operational standards with regard to data protection and use of artificial intelligence for law enforcement. Data which could lead to the identification of an individual will be submitted to strong safeguards in full respect of the GDPR as well as the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Search and rescue activities have reached reaction and intervention capability for 100% of persons in distress at sea, using national capabilities corroborated with Frontex and other EU agencies and bodies (EMSA, etc). These requests are addressed in full compliance with international and EU Law. The cooperation between all actors (national, European and international) carrying out SAR activity runs according to Regulation (EU) No 656/2014. Once disembarked, vulnerable people are screened and specialised support is provided according to their needs.

Existing institutional mechanisms and processes reach maximum efficiency focusing on strong cooperation under the Frontex umbrella

The **Eurosur** framework provides a full real-time bird's-eye view of detections of incidents on the EU's external borders. The system includes cohort information related to any incident detected at the external border or in the area of free movement (related to irregular migration, cross-border crime or requests for international protection). While in full compliance with respect to personal data, the information enables effective risk analysis at all levels, allowing the efficient identification of risks affecting the EU borders.

Inter-agency cooperation at national level is guided by a European framework meant to ensure an efficient approach towards border control, search and rescue, return and tackling cross-border criminality. In addition, information exchange in the scope of EIBM is carried out on a common platform at national level, to ensure that timely and relevant information is available to all actors involved and in cooperation with the national Ombudsperson.

Frontex leads the exchange, sharing and analysis of information on the areas covered by the EBCG 2.0 Regulation. All other EU Justice and Home Affairs Agencies (JHAA) are providing Frontex with data and operational and strategic information related to EIBM components. SItCEN is working closely with Frontex in assessing existing and potential threats and contributes to the exchange of information.

The Schengen evaluation mechanism, performed on a regular and ad hoc basis (announced and unannounced evaluations), has the capacity to identify all areas of expertise that require improvements or are missing. At the same time, identified best practices are efficiently implemented by all Member States. Member States fully support the Schengen evaluation mechanism with their expertise and adequate numbers of experts to perform the evaluation visits.

Regular trainings for Schengen evaluators are organised twice a year by Frontex, with full support of Member States' experts in order to enhance the Schengen evaluation mechanism. Every trained Schengen evaluator contributes to a minimum of one Schengen evaluation a year. Since the basics of the organisational structure and functioning of the border authorities in the Member States are already well-known and evaluated, the Schengen evaluation questionnaire focuses on changes and emerging developments.

The vulnerability assessment process alleviates weaknesses at the external borders

A secure, automated and user-friendly data exchange platform for the exchange of a wide range of information related to vulnerability assessment is available and managed by Frontex. Use of state-of-the-art technologies, including artificial intelligence is an essential part of the vulnerability assessment process. Vulnerabilities result from identified threats and/or evolving developments that will have a high impact on the EU's external border.

EU Member States have the capacity and capabilities to implement all necessary measures identified as areas for improvement during Schengen evaluation or/and vulnerability assessment. Capacities and capabilities are developed through clear capacity and capability development plans developed jointly with Frontex as a response to emerging developments or identified areas that need improvement. Member States also use this approach to fill gaps and vulnerabilities identified during national quality controls, performed before or in between Schengen evaluations.

Enhanced cooperation with third countries leads to effective return activities

Safe and legal pathways out of the area of free movement are guaranteed. The EU has signed readmission agreements with all countries of origin from where most irregular migrants come. An effective pre-entry screening process is in place following the provisions of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum which is now implemented. Third-country authorities deploy experts to the Member States to support identification processes. The authorities recognise their citizens and give them return travel documents. In exchange, the EU finances programmes for returnees to be accompanied through the procedure and to support their socioeconomic reintegration. Returned persons are fully supported in the framework of EU reintegration programmes in accordance with the European Strategy for Voluntary Return and Reintegration. Third countries are fully committed to cooperating in identifying, re-documenting and readmitting their nationals.

Return monitors participate in each return flight and ensure that force is only used in accordance with the principles of proportionality, precaution and necessity. The special needs of vulnerable people are considered. The application of the European Asylum system at the level of EU Member States upholds the principle of non-refoulement and people are allowed to appeal the decision during the return procedure all across Europe. This has increased the numbers of returns, also further paving the way for voluntary returns due to counselling from return counsellors.

The close cooperation within the EIBM context extends to training under the aegis of Frontex, for both EU and non-EU actors based on the threats at the EU's external borders

Training of border guards within the Schengen area is done jointly with the Frontex Standing Corps in order to achieve a uniform and highly efficient European standard level. Training will also focus on cross-border crime.

All countries within the Schengen area have investigation teams on standby to respond immediately to major forms of cross-border crime and irregular migration. Frontex teams on standby are trained and capable of physically reinforcing border control within one week where needed, with the support of technical resources.

With the development of transport technologies and economic globalisation, migration is expected to increase in the next 10 years. Migration also arises from demographic imbalances between developed and less developed countries. Legal migration will be encouraged by various migration and integration programmes within the EU, targeting identified economic and social areas of interest.

With the aim of supporting third countries, EU Member State border authorities offer their risk analysis and other expertise in the form of regular training to authorities in third countries, including on fundamental rights. Training is performed under the TAIEX mechanism as well as by Frontex.

Health challenges related not only to possible human pandemics, but also to other fast spreading and dangerous infections of plants and animals, are controlled by the WHO and the European Medical Agency. Clear and uniform guidelines are available for the control of risks at the EU's external border to support border authorities.

7.3. Worst-case scenario

In a multipolar world, most countries will take a neutral stance or maintain good relations with the adversaries of the 'West'

Over the next decade a multipolar world emerges. The attempt to remake the world in the Western image – that is, by spreading liberal democracy, integrating more countries into the open market economies of the West, and promoting fundamental rights – encounters strong resistance from non-Western countries. Many third countries reject Western ideals and pursue their own strategies. They acknowledge the fact that since the international arena is anarchic, a multipolar (or bipolar) world is better than a hegemonic order (unipolarity) characterised by despotic tendencies and lack of restraint. Multipolarity and multilateralism creates a more complex world, but in this way, countries are less dependent on Western hegemony and its undesirable effects. The Arab world, under the leadership of the rich states of the Gulf, charts an independent course, making clear that the Western quest for 'democratisation' is incompatible with their governance systems, traditions and culture.

The West has a less dominant position in the new world order. Economic and military power is distributed unevenly among four great powers and their alliances (USA, EU, China and Russia). By 2032, China has achieved superpower status due to the meteoric rise of its economic and military strength. Despite significant economic and military losses, Russia has largely achieved its geopolitical goals, changing the global and European security order.

In this turbulent decade, growing dissatisfaction with the liberal international order, the perceived need to balance unipolar power, and various power-seeking/revisionist agendas spread conflict around the world. Russia continues its aggressive efforts to allegedly create a security 'buffer zone' around its borders.

Major transformations shift the global centre of gravity to the Global East and South

There is no **grand strategy about international peace, coexistence, cooperation and prosperity**. In a multipolar world such ideas are mere fantasy. The United Nations and other international organisations continue to play largely symbolic roles unable to fill the gap in global governance. All strategic thinking by great and middle powers focuses on how to thwart enemy plans and crush opponents.

China's grand strategy is put into practice, making a real difference for its citizens. The political idea of 'common prosperity' is successfully realised, sending a clear message to friends and foes around the world.

While the situation in Europe is complex and turbulent, major political and socioeconomic transformations shift the global centre of gravity to the East. Countries in Africa, the Middle East, East and West Asia develop closer political and economic ties in response to perceived Western domination. These countries learn important foreign policy and strategic autonomy lessons from the West itself. They look carefully at Russia's war on Ukraine and the West's economic war on Russia and draw their own conclusions. Fearing loss of sovereignty and great harm to their national interests, they increasingly assume a neutral, independent and realist posture in international relations.

The countries of the global East and South see the West as pursuing global hegemony through military, political, economic and cultural means to predominately serve Western interests. In their view, since the West engages in the 'weaponisation of interdependence' by controlling the global financial system, the existing international structures and rules cannot be trusted because they limit these countries' domestic/foreign policy options and future possibilities. Realising the extreme level of their dependence and vulnerability, the countries of the global East and South pursue specific initiatives to reduce Western control (e.g., by creating new organisations and networks for economic/financial and security cooperation).

Geopolitical, economic and security competition shapes state interests

By 2032, clearly defined poles of power and spheres of influence have emerged: USA with the EU and other NATO countries (the West), Russia and China. The latter two countries are strategically aligned and cooperate closely. The development of a new world order, and the quest for power, transforms the world into an arena of confrontation. The revival of nationalist and revisionist ideas spark regional conflicts. The hostile multipolar world enters a long period of intense competition. Economy, energy and technology are critical areas for the pursuit of dominance and strategic autonomy in the fields of foreign policy and security. Many countries invest heavily on militarisation, engaging in an arms race with their competitors. Some countries try to acquire nuclear weapons technologies and/or build such weapons. Middle powers chart independent realist courses to balance their security dilemmas. Weaker states ally with the East and/or the West to manage critically important issues.

The war in Ukraine will exacerbate crime, terrorism and migration trends

The war in Ukraine has not only changed the international and European security order but has also caused an increase in **serious and organised crime in general at EU level**. The regional conflict makes weapons (ranging from pistols and assault weapons to rocket launchers) easily available, resulting in a dramatic increase in violence on the EU's external borders. The majority of CBC groups involved in various smuggling activities across the green and blue borders are heavily armed and pose a grave security threat to border patrols and Standing Corps officers.

Crime groups also turn to **environmental crimes**, such as the illegal importation of hazardous waste (e.g., medical waste generated by the COVID-19 pandemic) due to lucrative profits involved. Despite health hazards, criminals explore the possibilities of selling airborne pathogens. **Bioterrorism threats** increase significantly as terrorist groups try to acquire and weaponise them.

A high number of migrants and refugees enter the EU in the next decade (approx. 10 million persons fled Ukraine in 2022 alone). **Many new criminal enterprises become established in the EU using financial resources from war-torn areas** to create and infiltrate legal business structures. Due to serious integration issues, the populations of migrants and refugees across the EU provide great opportunities for recruitment into criminal groups.

The world will experience irreversible climate change and global famine

The average global temperature rises 2-3°C (and continues to increase) **triggering unprecedented environmental cascades** in the Amazon, Siberia, the Arctic and the Great Barrier Reef. Climate change is irreversible, and the planet starts to experience extreme 'hothouse' effects (e.g., heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, desertification, rising sea levels and floods) causing destruction, environmental degradation and human suffering. By 2032, the world has realised that a unique opportunity to manage the climate crisis has been lost. Containment of the worsening climate effects is extremely difficult, putting a huge burden on future generations.

Global famine is inevitable as Ukraine and Russia, two of the largest global producers of grains have stopped exports. The severe effects of climate change, shortages in the agricultural workforce, and lack of viable replacements for depleted grain products causes a major food crisis characterised by **the steepest ever increase in global food prices.**

EIBM will face technological challenges, political bias in SAR operations and insufficient resource availability

The digitalisation of EU border control faces problems: the use of technology (including large-scale information systems) for automatic biometric controls is vulnerable to hacking, and various criminal groups manage to circumvent the security features, enabling impersonators to pass electronic border gates. Virtual fences built at the EU's external borders generate a high number of (often provoked) false alarms, whilst disabling human intervention when illegal

border-crossings take place. Following a rapid digitalisation process, Member State agencies responsible for border control lack significant human resources and their performance is hindered by IT system failures.

Search-and-rescue (SAR) operations performed as part of border management activities are hindered by political bias and consequently impact respect for fundamental rights. Returns of third-country nationals who are the subject of return decisions issued by Member States are forcibly applied based on prejudice against nationality and ethnic origin, following political tensions.

The efficient and uniform approach of EIBM is disavowed by the national authorities of EU Member States that mainly focus on serious external border challenges that are vital for their national security. The EBCG Standing Corps, Frontex equipment and the number of staff are insufficient to respond effectively to the nature and high volume of requests for assistance by EU Member States. Frontex faces a complex situation as Member States refuse to participate in Frontex-coordinated operational activities due to lack of resources. This also hinders the exchange of information and operational cooperation between Member States' agencies. EIBM is affected by a major vulnerability stemming from the extensive use of technological applications for intelligence and security purposes to the detriment of the crucially important human factor. Due to the digitalisation priority and the lack of human resources, the effectiveness of border management is limited and shows, among other things, an inability to identify serious/emerging threats and provide early warnings. Effective returns are impeded by hostile international trends and reluctance to cooperate, lack of trust and fear of or risk of conflict.

In this context, compensatory measures within the area of free movement also become less and less effective due to lack of local coordination, resources, coordination at the European-wide level and commitment from national authorities.

7.4. Security scenario

The instrumentalisation of migration continues to be used in the context of regional conflicts and growing violence which generates large inflows of IDPs and asylum seekers

Over the next decade, **political dynamics in countries neighbouring the EU continue to play a major role in the overall security of the Union.** Russia's political ambitions keep framing its foreign policy and consequently posing a security threat to the eastern flank of the EU – yet not limited to this area. This impacts EIBM in multiple ways (e.g., increasing the volume of people wanting to cross into the EU to pursue better economic prospectives or accumulations of IDPs in the broader region).

Yet threats to the Union do not solely stem from the eastern flank: Areas in the MENA region continue to serve as pressure points on the EU. The **Western Balkans** continue to offer a viable corridor towards the EU; a situation which provides malicious individuals ample opportunities to take advantage of the migratory flow. Migrants in this region are of particular concern given the presence in the region of radical religious preachers with strong ties with EU religious extremist milieus.

Overall, **migration continues to be instrumentalised to increase political pressure and attempt to influence the EU's foreign policy** by facilitating the irregular flow of migrants to the EU. This scenario requires political dialogue with source/neighbouring countries with a view to curbing these risks. Yet, this might not always prove successful. This is of particular concern considering the complex diplomatic relationship with Iran, Turkey and several countries in Africa which might decide, for example, to 'turn a blind eye' to orchestrated/coordinated flights towards countries neighbouring the Union to exercise pressure on the EU should the East/West divide continue to grow. High numbers of migrants in countries neighbouring the EU create huge potential for unilateral or coordinated multilateral instrumentalisation of migration.

The Taliban victory in Afghanistan plays on different levels in the overall recruitment of jihadists and their political/military ambitions, though the major risk to the EU from this region will likely derive from migrant outflows. **Growing violence – especially in the Sahel** – increases displacements of people. Political/security vacuums are exploited by militants to try to enter into local dynamics, foster coalition-building, and represent a tool for criminal/local groups to advance their own agendas. To this end, their ambitions are increasingly intertwined with the exploitation of migratory flows for financial gains. Infiltration by returning fighters (terrorists and subjects of interest) could have a severe impact on the EU's internal security.

This is also a concern when considering the return of individuals who travelled to Ukraine to join the conflict. The risk here for the EU's internal security is the return of soldiers with combat experience/exposure to atrocities/traumas whose behaviour might be unpredictable or dangerous. Such experience could give ideological/far right individuals credibility/legitimacy to recruit/radicalise others upon returning to their home countries. Promoting synergies with security constituencies to allow for multilateral intelligence sharing and strengthened cooperation will remain essential.

Insecurity coupled with environmental changes – mainly in Africa and central Asia – continues triggering large regional displacements of people – and could result in more conflicts over access to natural resources and more movements/accumulations of people within the region with possible deflections towards the EU.

Cross-border crime on the EU's external borders will continue to pose a grave threat to the internal security of the EU

The criminal economy continues to intersect with militants' and terrorist groups' economic and political ambitions.

Local/regional marriages of convenience further strengthen these bonds – as demonstrated by the involvement of jihadist groups in Syria in the smuggling of irregular migrants to the EU. Overall, cross-border crime poses a great threat to the EU's external borders and affects the capacity of border authorities. Drug and firearms trafficking as well as migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings are criminal acts which continue to fuel insecurity within the EU. Supply of drugs from criminal hotspots such as Latin America and Afghanistan continues to rely on demand from the EU drug market. Widespread conflicts around the world lead to an increase in firearms trafficking from and to conflict zones.

Private actors also play a role in the overall security of the EU by exploiting political instability in third countries. Specifically, private security companies offer their services in areas such as the Middle East (e.g., Syria) and Africa (e.g., Libya, Central Africa, the Sahel) and often represent political/economic interests of other countries in the region.

The abuse of fundamental rights will increase the vulnerabilities of EIBM both from the security and irregular migration perspective

The EU's commitment to fundamental rights continues to make its external borders a target of so-called lawfare which unscrupulously instrumentalises migrants.

Migratory flows enabled by a neighbouring state would rapidly overwhelm EU border controls and migration management capacities, leading to a situation where it may be very difficult to uphold migrants' fundamental rights. In the backdrop of this scenario, Member States would struggle to maintain a balance between ensuring internal security and their commitment to international law/EU values. In some cases, this would force Member States to introduce compensatory measures that may not be fully in line with international law/EU values, which may contribute to political frictions within the Union.

In this sense, political instability and insecurity in countries of origin will be detrimental for the implementation of return procedures. The authoritarian regimes developing in areas such as the Sahel, Maghreb, Middle East, Central Asia and close to the EU's eastern borders will not fulfil the minimum standards of human rights, and cooperation with the EU will deteriorate. The immediate impact would be the inability of the Union to effectively return migrants to their countries of origin, and an increase of secondary movements may be observed.

Technology used in border control will enhance efficiency but also generate vulnerabilities of hybrid nature

Technological advancements help terrorist and criminal organisations rapidly adapt to a highly interactive and communicative operational environment by shaping and re-shaping their organisational and operational posture, challenging law-enforcement detection capabilities. The use of cutting edge technology including large-scale information systems for border control could also prove to be a vulnerability for EIBM if subject to hacking. Therefore, technology increases the hybrid nature of security threats, requiring Member States to raise technological awareness and information-sharing across the larger security and IBM community and encouraging cooperation among all actors involved in border management. Document fraud remains a tool to facilitate a broad spectrum of criminal activities, e.g., the use of forged/fraudulently obtained documents, the misuse of legally issued genuine documents, legislative gaps (e.g., for persons with multiple nationalities).

As for border control measures at the external borders, one of the main challenges will be to safeguard the free movement of goods and persons within the EU while protecting national security interests. The growing volume of exchange/flow of persons and good facilitated by technological advancements will also entail more challenges for the effectiveness and efficiency of border control measures.

As observed during the pandemic, technology increases the risk of exposure to extremist propaganda as people spend more time online – a condition which continues to facilitate less sophisticated/high impact 'lone wolf' attacks in the EU.

The EU's progress in creating an information architecture for border management, migration, and law-enforcement purposes includes several new systems e.g., the Entry/Exit System (EES), the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) which allow officers to access data on the criminal history of people subject to international requests for cooperation or alerts. Interoperability persists as a challenge in the context of an increasing role of artificial intelligence and biometrics in border control.

This interconnectivity of the information systems increases the complexity of the interdependency of critical infrastructures – including both physical and information technology facilities critical for the maintenance of vital societal functions. This widens the opportunities for cybercriminals to exploit structural vulnerabilities and cause disruptions to integrated IT systems, steal data (create false identities), and disrupt communication channels, to cite just a few potential dangers. Drones, nano and quantum technologies, 3D printing, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things provide endless possibilities to be misused and cause harm on a large scale or to suppress human rights. Despite legitimate civil uses, their dual-use nature makes them prone to abuse by authoritarian rulers – let alone criminal and terrorist networks – to support, for instance, propaganda, recruitment and incitement, training, planning and coordination, fundraising and cyberattacks.

Aside from conventional methods used by crime groups to smuggle persons/drugs/arms into and within the EU, criminals will likely enhance their use of UAV or aeroplanes for these kinds of activities.

Small/medium-sized piloted airplanes or UAV, flying undetected at low altitudes, could be used to transport migrants (including persons of interest). In addition, submarines might be increasingly used for criminal activities.

Intra-agency cooperation and inter-agency cooperation between entities entrusted with border control, both at European and international level, plays an essential role in the efficiency of EIBM

Cooperation with third countries/ neighbouring third countries remains an essential pillar of the EIBM concept to ensure the overall internal security of the EU. The Union continues to invest resources in enhancing the capacity of national authorities in third countries to collect and analyse data to strengthen their countries' border management. That said, data protection/fundamental rights considerations likely hinder information exchange and cooperation with those countries.

Overall, the next decade sees EU border and coast guard authorities increasingly operating in and adapting to a fluid and multidimensional operational environment. In this sense, the military is expected to play an increasing role in responding to security issues along the EU's external borders, for example, to complement law-enforcement efforts to maintain public order along the border and/or at BCPs.

Cooperation between customs and border management authorities continues to be a challenge. A revision of the current legal framework of the agencies involved in border management likely facilitates cooperation and information exchange. Additionally, cooperation with border control authorities in countries of transit and origin for irregular migration and cross-border crime improves EIBM.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Over the past two years, **consecutive crises have erupted in the EU neighbourhood and beyond** (i.e., instrumentalisation of migration, COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid activities by Belarus, Russia's war on Ukraine and the refugee crisis), largely confirming the SRA 2020 findings. These major events will have primary and secondary effects that will be felt for a long-time, **making crisis management a permanent feature of EU border management between now and 2032**.

The war in Ukraine will have major international consequences even if it ends relatively soon through a negotiated agreement and a new geopolitical/security order. In this case, Ukraine could heal the destructive effects of war through a long process of reconstruction with international support. Otherwise, it could develop into a long-lasting conflict, the effects of which will be experienced throughout this decade through military combat, hybrid interference and other actions. In this scenario, the situation in Ukraine might evolve into another zone of instability adjacent to the EU's eastern borders. Moreover, the war could escalate further unless political decisions avert a large-scale military confrontation between Russia and the NATO alliance. Already the conflict has triggered economic turmoil, unprecedented refugee movements, an energy crisis and food shortages. Many countries report higher inflation and rising consumer prices. These problems will worsen the socioeconomic situation, possibly sparking violent protests and social unrest in low-income countries. The consequences on EIBM will range from increased pressure on the EU's external borders (both for border checks and border surveillance) to secondary movements and protection of fundamental rights.

The next decade will be characterised by intense geopolitical antagonism and tensions due to the conflicting interests of countries. Competition over economic (production/trading) activities, the availability of finite resources (e.g., energy, water, food, materials), technological issues, sovereignty disputes and military capabilities will inflame international relations and cause new security crises and instability that will also affect Europe.

The hostile geopolitical and security environment will likely affect all megatrends as well as international cooperation and coordination on issues of major importance to humanity (e.g., global public goods, climate change, sustainable development goals) and the functioning of international organisations. Demographic imbalances, climate change, public health challenges, growing inequalities, and governance challenges constitute a complex set of global problems that must be addressed; alternatively, their global effects will intensify and impact EU border and migration management.

In the next decade, EU border management will experience a **higher occurrence of migration/refugee crises** (or disproportionate pressures) that will test the effectiveness of EU border controls and surveillance. The complex interplay of geopolitics, security conflicts and other megatrends will influence different regions of the world, including countries in close proximity to Europe. The EU may encounter different 'migration blackmail' attempts by neighbouring third countries to instrumentalise migrant and refugee flows for political purposes. In this context, returns will be a key capability of EIBM, as migration management depends heavily on effective returns carried out in a fast, orderly, humane and dignified manner. Effective and lasting cooperation with third countries in the EU neighbourhood, the Middle East, Asia and Africa will be crucial to all areas of EIBM.

Significant threats and challenges will be encountered in the next decade requiring strategic adjustments and comprehensive responses **to improve the general preparedness and crisis preparedness of EU border management**. The importance of EU border management, as a key process for the EU's external and internal security, will increase further. Consistent policy implementation with emphasis on the organising framework of the 15 IBM components (art.3 EBCG) will play a crucial role in strengthening EU border security and countering threats effectively. Specifically, risk analysis, border control and surveillance, technical and operational measures, return of third country nationals, training, SAR, cooperation and coordination at national and supranational level with third countries and neighbouring third countries will require constant political and organisational attention to **remain relevant and effective in the face of existing, emerging or unforeseen threats**.

The EU, as a defender of the 'European and global security order' and champion of human rights and rules-based order, should effectively manage its strategic interests beyond its borders. Emphasis on the external dimension of EU border management through training, technical assistance, joint operations, risk analysis and pre-frontier activities is essential to manage risks proactively and prevent strategic surprises and crises. The war in Ukraine and the emergence of an increasingly hostile security environment should be closely monitored and assessed as they will have serious geopolitical, security and socioeconomic implications for EU border management.

ANNEX – Methodological Note

Strategic thinking on megatrends and their interplay is imperative to assess global risks and provide foresight and alternative future scenarios. The **Strategic Risk Analysis (SRA) supports policy formulation, decision-making and capability development planning** in the context of the multiannual strategic policy cycle on EIBM. The SRA 2022 complements and updates the findings of the SRA 2020 report, which was used by the European Commission to prepare its recent Policy Document. These two SRA reports should be read together to understand better the threats, challenges, and opportunities for EIBM.

Every two years Frontex, in close cooperation with EU Member States, prepares the SRA. It aims to identify threats, challenges and opportunities in the field of EIBM and return over a 10-year horizon. The first SRA in 2020[55] was intended for the preparation of the multiannual strategic policy cycle for EIBM[56].

The SRA 2022 employed **a proven qualitative methodology** comprising a literature review, consultations with Member State experts, megatrends implications assessment and scenario-building. Megatrends, either on their own or in combination, shape human activities now and in the future, and so require constant policy attention. To complement and update the relevant findings of SRA 2020, the present report prioritised six megatrends (i.e., security, demographics, climate change, inequalities, health challenges, and governance systems) and assessed their impact and possible influence across the thematic areas of interest (i.e., migration, returns, cross-border crime, terrorism, hybrid threats) to assist policymaking and strategic planning in the context of the multiannual strategic policy cycle on EIBM.

The **literature review** covered a broad spectrum of academic and practitioner fields involving cross-domain analysis and thematic exploration. It covered the selected megatrends, migration and returns, cross-border crime, as well as terrorism and hybrid threats, that are presented in the body of the report, with the purpose of assessing their strategic implications for EU border management.

The **Strategic Risk Analysis Network (SRAN)** and the **internal Round Table on SRA** ('expert groups') provided input to help prioritise megatrends, assess their impact on EU border management, develop alternative scenarios, and validate findings. Close cooperation and consultations with Member States' experts were crucial for the successful preparation of the SRA 2022 report.

A **megatrends implications assessment** was conducted as it is essential to improve understanding on global trends and the root causes of phenomena as well as to anticipate how they might affect the EU's external border security in the future. Megatrends[57] are hugely interlinked and constitute a complex set of equally important risks and challenges for EIBM. For SRA 2022 purposes, six megatrends were singled out as most relevant for further analysis and updating, in consultation with all stakeholders: security, demographics, climate change, inequalities, health challenges, and governance systems.

The assessment of megatrends is a demanding exercise involving cross-domain analysis, subject matter expertise, and diverse perspectives that go far beyond the border management domain. It also relies on the sensemaking abilities and intuition of experts to consider a broad array of global forces and their possible effects on EU border and migration management.

Scenario development combined narrative scenario-building and expert group consultations with the purpose of identifying possible and plausible future directions. The overall approach was qualitative and explorative allowing for a broader reflection on future events and possibilities.[58] While acknowledging the impossibility of accurate long-term future predictions, this holistic view helps in developing 'unbiased' scenarios by considering all types of futures.[59] The process was also *transparent*, *inclusive*, and *participatory* involving all internal and external stakeholders.

In line with established qualitative methodology, it was also recognised that these alternative scenarios can be "structurally different, i.e., they should not be so close to one another that they become simply variations of a base case."[60] In this way, the experts envisioned possible and plausible futures – including ominous, unexpected, and undesirable ones – and assessed their impact on EIBM.

This methodology was employed systematically in close cooperation with Member States' experts with the purpose of managing the research efficiently and delivering a quality product.

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