



## **PRESS PACK ON THE GENERAL MIGRATORY SITUATION AT THE EXTERNAL BORDERS OF THE EU**

September 2015

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## About Frontex

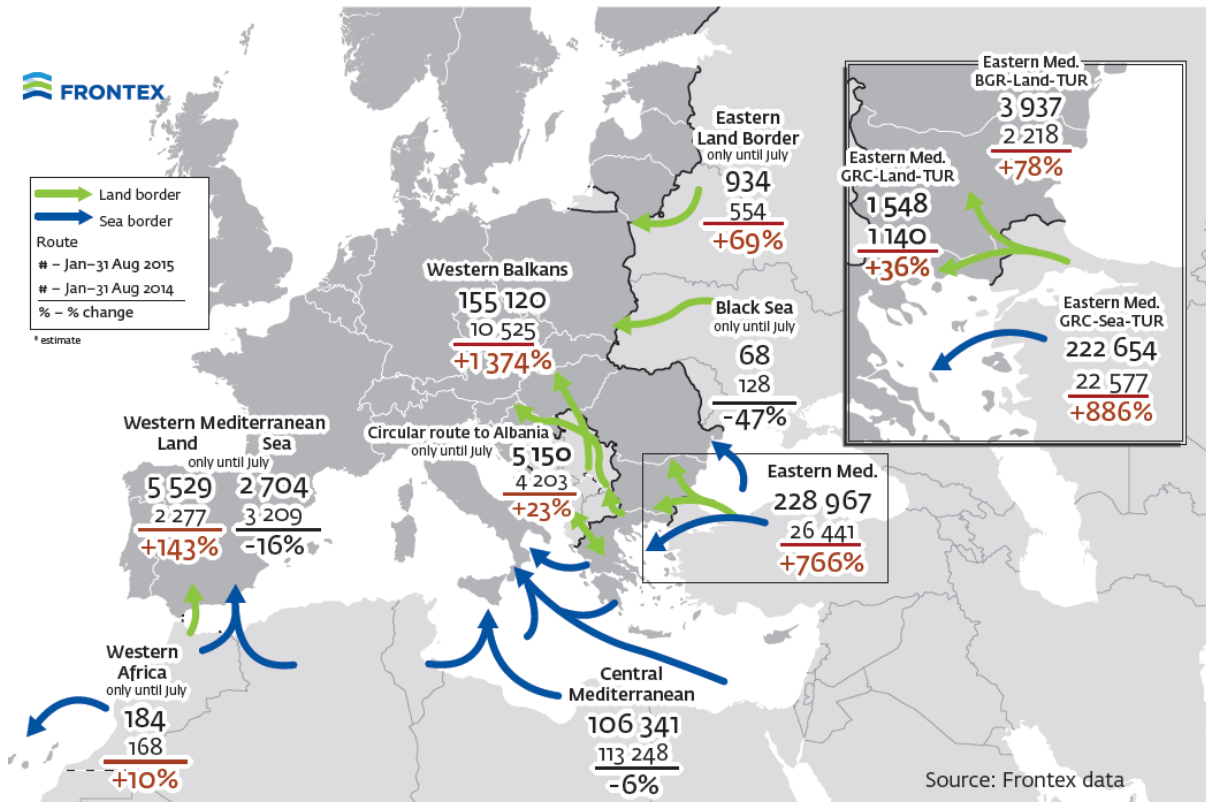
Frontex is a European Agency which coordinates the deployment of technical equipment (vessels, helicopters and boats) and specialised border guards to those EU countries which face an increased migratory pressure. Frontex coordinates a number of maritime operations, for example in Italy and Greece, but also at various external land borders including Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Slovakia and many others. Frontex is also present at dozens of various international airports across Europe.

It is important to stress that Frontex **does not** have its own equipment. Instead, it relies on vessels, aircraft and other assets provided by various EU member states. Frontex reimburses the costs of petrol and basic maintenance of such equipment for the period of its deployment.

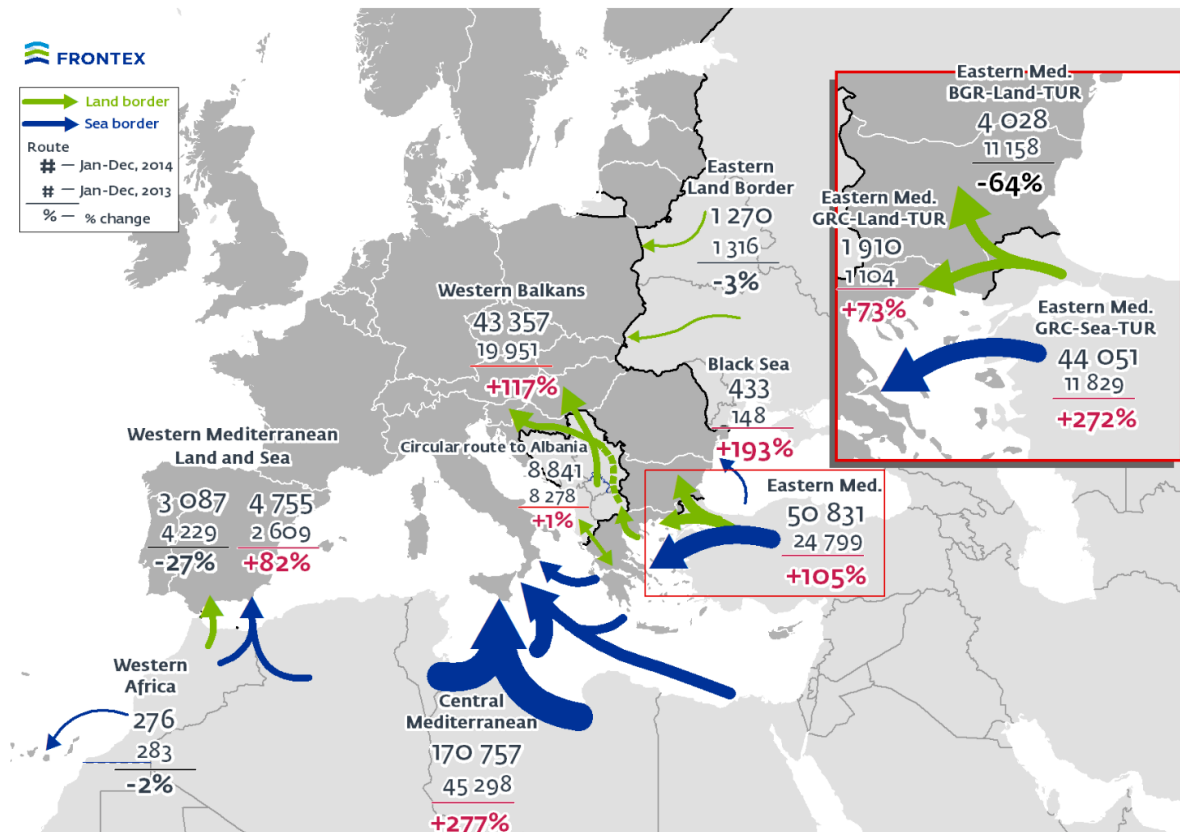
While operations are the most visible part of Frontex's activities, the agency also covers other areas including:

- **Risk analysis** - analysing trends in unauthorised border crossings and various forms of cross-border crime;
- **Rapid response** - coordinating the short-term deployment of European Border Guard Teams at the request of Member States;
- **Research and development** - linking border control authorities with research and industry;
- **Training** - developing harmonised curricula and training standards for border guards in all 28 EU countries;
- **Joint returns** - coordinating joint repatriation flights of third country nationals between member countries;
- **Information sharing** - enabling swift and reliable data exchange between border authorities.

## Migratory situation at the external borders of the European Union (January-August 2015)



## Migratory situation at the external borders of the European Union for the entire 2014



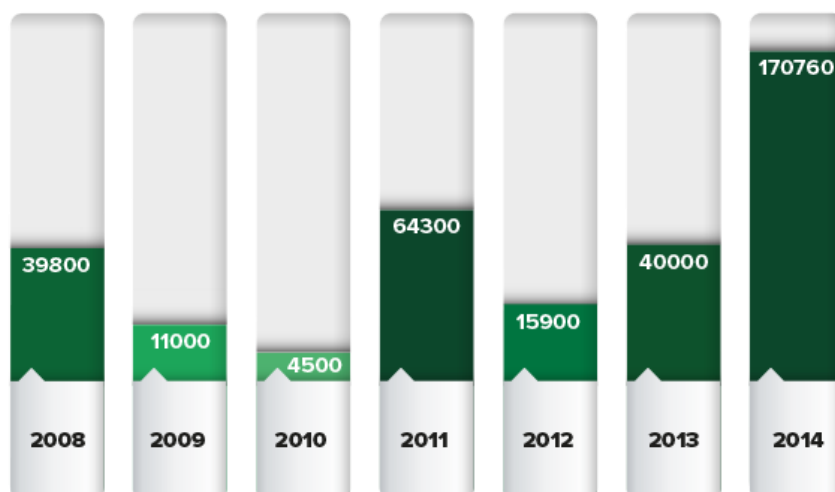
## Central Mediterranean route (Italy, Malta, Libya, Turkey)

For several years most migrants entering the European Union by the sea departed from Libya, which acts as nexus point where migrants from the Horn of Africa and Western African routes meet before embarking on their journey to Europe.

People smugglers put the migrants heading for Italy on old, unseaworthy fishing boats or rubber inflatable boats, which are very overcrowded and prone to capsizing. They are equipped with poor engines and navigation systems and often don't even have enough fuel to reach Europe. All these factors put migrants' lives at serious risk.

Since Frontex started collecting data eight years ago, the highest migratory peak was registered in 2014, when some 170 000 migrants reached Italy, mainly from Libya. The situation of a de-facto failed state in Libya, where law enforcement is virtually absent, has created favourable conditions for the people-smuggling networks to flourish and operate with impunity. 2015 shows worrying trends as already in mid-April, some 23 000 migrants were detected in Italy.

*Illegal border crossings on the Central Mediterranean route in numbers.*



For more information on this and other migratory routes, see [Frontex Risk Analysis reports](#).

## Smuggling networks on the route from Libya

What is characteristic to the smuggling networks in Libya is the proliferation of actors, ranging from ordinary Libyan citizens offering their services to migrants, to former militiamen and law enforcement officers engaged in the logistics of people smuggling. Due to the rising number of people involved, the business starts to become even more risky – the networks start to compete with each other, which is affecting the security of the migrants even more.

The logistical chain of smuggling requires a high degree of organisation, suggesting involvement of people with experience in running larger operations.

**The travel for Africans** to Libya used to take up to several months as the migrants would have to stop in several locations to earn further passage. The network seems more integrated now and the journey usually takes a few weeks. It is still a gruelling one that for many involves a dangerous desert crossing on an open vehicle speeding to avoid the authorities and criminals alike. It is nearly impossible to calculate the number of people who do not survive this trip, but we fear the number is very high. Usually different smuggling groups organise various legs of the journey.

When it comes to the **route from Eritrea**, there is one sophisticated network managing the whole journey, starting from Eritrea going through Sudan, and then into Libya. This means that the payment is made to the same network. When it comes to the payment system usually the *Hawala* system is used. In some case it is possible for Eritrean nationals to be smuggled not just from Eritrea to Libya or from Eritrea to Italy, but also from Italy to other countries in the EU.

Another group of people leaving the Libyan shores are **migrant workers and contractors** who had lived in Libya over the recent years, such as Bangladeshis who worked on oil and gas projects. Fearing the increasing level of violence, many decide to make the dangerous journey to make it to Italy.

The absence of the rule of law in Libya since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi appears to have created near-perfect operating conditions for criminal gangs. This is where most migrants departed from before 2011. As a comparatively rich Muslim nation, Libya was a destination country in its own right for workers from around the world. Many of these, still resident in Libya, have found new work as 'recruiters,' liaising between the Libyan-controlled criminal gangs and would-be migrants pouring in to the city.

The tentacles of the gangs stretch deep into the Libyan interior. Frontex analysts have identified two principle overland routes to Tripoli. The eastern one, leading from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan towards Al Kufrah in the eastern Libyan Desert, is the most highly organized. The western route, from Mali, Nigeria and Niger up to Tripoli via Qatrun and Sabha, is more informal. In both cases, however, the Libyan leg of the journey is jealously controlled by local militiamen, whose ranks have been swollen by former soldiers of the Gaddafi regime.

## Operation Triton

Frontex launched Operation Triton on 1 November 2014.

While the primary focus of Operation Triton is on border control and surveillance, saving lives remains an absolute priority for Frontex. Since the beginning of the operation, on many occasions Frontex vessels and aircraft were redirected by the Italian Coast Guard to assist migrants in distress in areas far away from the operational area of Triton.

Italy detected nearly 13 000 migrants in the month of August, nearly half the number from the same month of last year. These were mainly people from Eritrea and a number of Sub-Saharan countries who arrived from Libya, although an increasing number of them departed Turkey.

Since the beginning of the year, 106 000 migrants were rescued in the Central Mediterranean, 6 percent fewer than in the same period of last year. It is important to note that most of the rescues took place closer to the Libyan coast than to the EU sea borders.

### Triton after reinforcement

February 2015	Strengthened Triton	Percentage increase
2 aircraft	4 aircraft	+100%
2 offshore patrol vessels (OPVs)	6 offshore patrol vessels (OPVs)	+200%
6 patrol boats	12 patrol boats	+100%
1 helicopter	2 helicopters	+100%
3 debriefing teams	9 debriefing teams	+200%
3 screening teams	6 screening teams	+100%

All assets deployed within the framework of Operation Triton operate under the command of the Italian Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with *Guardia di Finanza*, as well as the Italian Coast Guard. This is why a representative of *Guardia di Finanza* is always present on board of every patrol vessel, boat or aircraft. Their role is to ensure swift coordination with the local authorities.

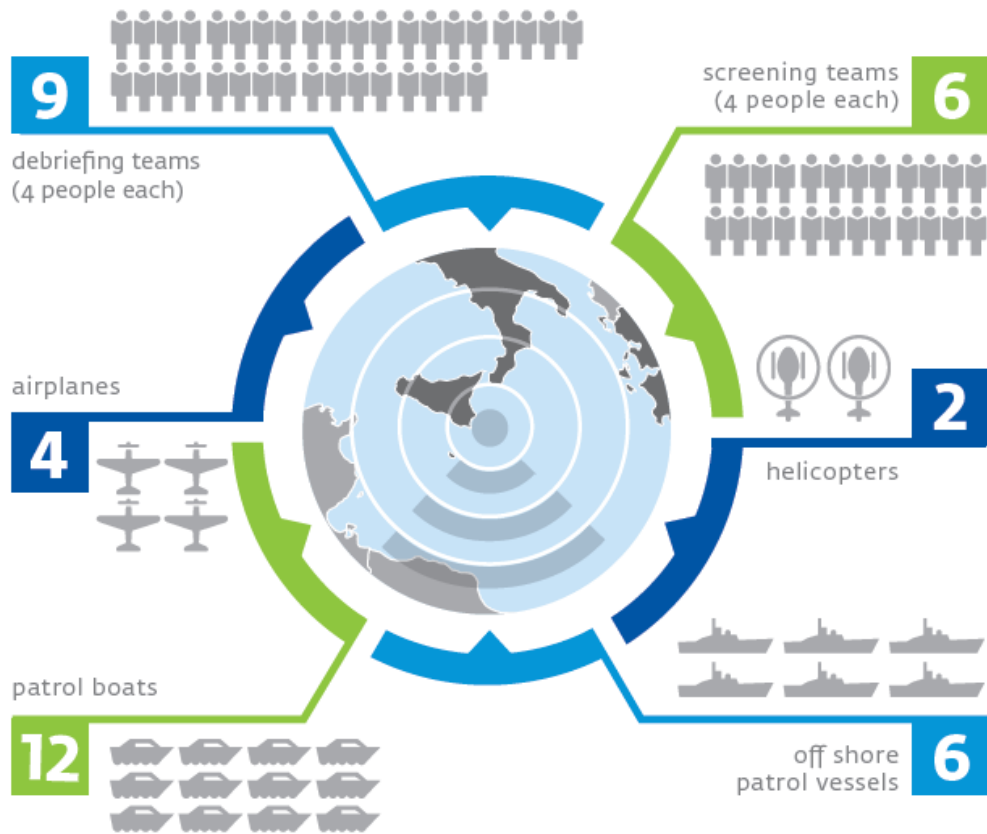
The operational area of Triton covers the territorial waters of Italy as well as parts of the search and rescue (SAR) zones of Italy and Malta. The operational area of the reinforced Triton will be extended to 138 NM South of Sicily.

At present there are 27 Member States taking part in Operation Triton by deploying experts and/or technical equipment: Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Croatia, Luxembourg and Norway.

The European Commission will soon provide Frontex with additional EUR 26.25 million to strengthen Operation Triton in Italy and Poseidon Sea in Greece from June 2015 until the end of the year. The budget for Triton for this year will stand at EUR 38 million and EUR 18 million for Poseidon Sea.

# OPERATION TRITON

Operational area:  
138 NM south from Sicily



27 countries take part in operation Triton



## Eastern Mediterranean Route (Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus)

Frontex defines the Eastern Mediterranean route as the passage used by migrants crossing through Turkey to the European Union via Greece, southern Bulgaria or Cyprus. Since 2008, this route has become the second biggest migratory hot spot, with the European Union external border with Turkey serving the main nexus point on this route.

The top three nationalities of migrants on this route are Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis.

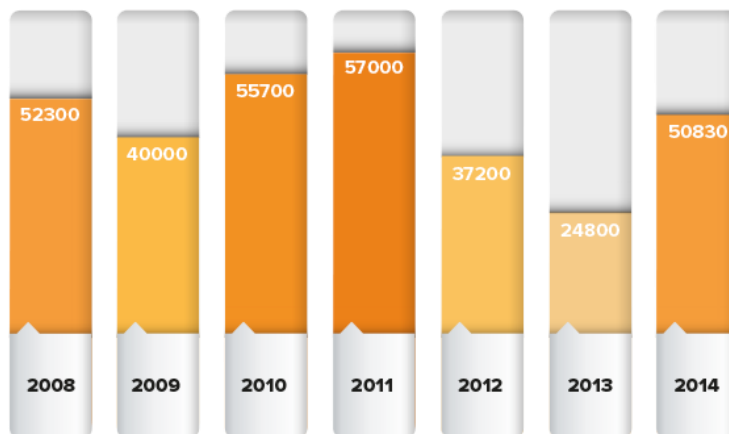
In 2014, the Eastern Mediterranean route was the second largest area for detections of illegal border-crossing in the European Union, almost twice as much as in 2013, but still fewer than in the record 2011 (Arab Spring). In 2014, the growth in migratory pressure was most significant in the Eastern Aegean Sea, while detections at the land border decreased compared to the previous year.

### Situation in 2015:

On the Eastern Mediterranean sea route the number of IBCs detected has never been higher with a nearly tenfold increase in detections on the Greek Eastern Aegean Islands in relation to 2014. The increase can be attributed to four main nationalities, namely Syrians, Afghans, Pakistanis and Iraqis.

Although most of the migrants were Syrians fleeing the conflict at home, the migratory flows were mixed, as was the case of the Central Mediterranean route.

### *Illegal border crossings on the Eastern Mediterranean route in numbers*





## Operation Poseidon Sea

Due to the fact that the migratory pressure on this route dramatically increased in 2014, Frontex has strengthened operation "Poseidon" at the Greek sea borders with Turkey and Greek islands. Twenty three EU and Schengen area member states are taking part in it with land, sea and air forces, technical equipment and officials.

Since the beginning of the year, more than 200 thousand migrants have arrived to the Greek islands. The Greek islands again saw the biggest number of detections in August at 88 000, an 11-fold rise compared to the same month last year. Nearly three-quarters of the people arriving from Turkey were Syrians.

In August only, almost 90 000 irregular migrants were registered; 49% of them arrived on Lesbos, 17% on Kos, 15% on Samos and 11% on Chios. The main nationalities were the same as in previous months, Syrian (69 664), Afghan (15 934), Iraqi (2 779) and Pakistani (1 508).

Currently there are 23 Member States taking part in the Operation: Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom. Greece is hosting the Operation.

The current budget of the operation after the latest reinforcement is EUR 18 000 000.

### Average deployments per month:

1 Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV), 1 Fixed Wing Airplane (FWA), 1-2 Helicopter (HELO), 1-2 Coastal Patrol Vessel (CPV), 7-11 Coastal Patrol Boats (CPB), 3-4 Thermo Vision Vehicle, 5-7 Joint Debriefing Teams (JDT) working in cooperation with Screening Teams.



## People smuggling on the Eastern Med & Western Balkans Route

It is important to note that the Eastern Med route and the Western Balkans are closely interconnected (the latter serves for secondary movements of the migrants who originally enter Greece).

We believe there is no single network that controls the entire route: from the country of origin till a particular country in Europe. Especially in Turkey we have to do with numerous small networks which facilitate the sea crossing through the Aegean. Each of these networks seem to control specific departure area.

The criminal networks serving specific hubs in Turkey (Izmir, Bodrum, Istanbul) are very efficiently organised: they recruit the migrants and directs them to the departure points and organise transportation to the coastal area. The networks serve specific nationalities (Syrians, Afghans, Pakistanis or Bangladeshis). They give the migrants information about the asylum process and possibly with forged document confirming they are Syrians.

The same is valid for the movements inside Greece and then further through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Attention: please DO NOT use the term Macedonia with a Greece journalist)

Migrants arriving from Turkey speak of increasingly cruel and aggressive smugglers forcing larger number of people onto the rubber boats to squeeze more money from each trip. They also disregard increasingly difficult weather conditions, which leads to tragedies at sea.

In recent months, Frontex has observed an increase in detections of fraudulent Syrian passports inside the EU, but mostly in the hands of Syrian nationals (over 80%) and very rarely also in the hands of Iraqis and Palestinians. We are aware of the existence of a black market with Syrian passports in Turkey, it is however difficult to estimate the extent of the phenomenon.

In total, in the first half of 2015 around 170 fraudulent Syrian passports detected in the EU. Fraudulent documents are also being detected inland, for example during asylum processes – Germany has reported 130 fraudulent Syrian passports this year.

## Western Balkan Route (Hungary, Romania)

The Western Balkan route describes two main migratory flows: from the Western Balkan countries themselves, and the secondary movements of mainly Asian migrants who originally entered the European Union through the Bulgarian-Turkish or Greek-Turkish land or sea borders and then proceed, through the Western Balkans, into Hungary.

A large number of the migrants arriving in Greece make their way towards Hungary, where the number of detections at its border with Serbia increased 20-fold to more than 52 000 in August, bringing the number so far this year to more than 155 000.

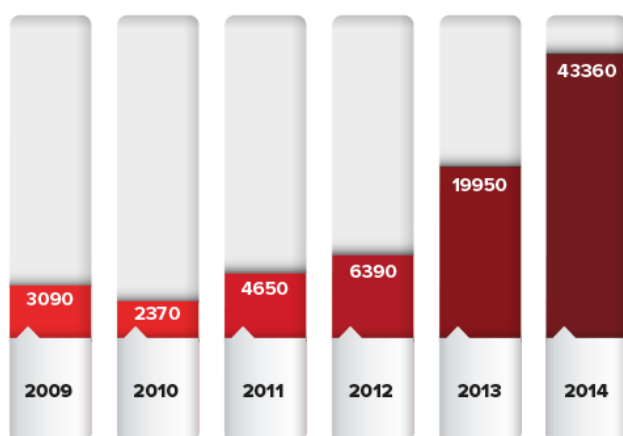
The number of illegal border crossings in the Western Balkans region rose by 65 per cent last year to 66 000, with two-thirds of the detections on the Hungarian-Serbian border. The surge of migrants across this border section was so high that at one point in December 2014 it accounted for more than half of all illegal border crossings at the EU's external borders.

The Western Balkans also increased in importance as the place of origin of migrants. Some 36 000 of the region's residents accounted for illegal crossings into the EU in 2014, double the number from the previous year. Although high, the 2014 figure was still below the levels observed prior to visa liberalisation in 2009.

Nationals of Kosovo were the main nationality detected at this border in 2014, accounting for almost four times as many illegal border-crossings as in 2013. There were also twice as many asylum seekers from Kosovo.

This development was largely driven by regional factors such as the reopening of asylum centres in Hungary in July 2014 and various rumours spread by facilitators to encourage migrants to head for the EU. The influx from Kosovo began to increase after Hungary started accommodating family units requesting asylum in open centres. The wave of migrants from Kosovo continued in the first two months of 2015 and then subsided.

*Illegal border crossings on the Western Balkans route in numbers.*



## Eastern Land Borders Route

Between January and July 2015, 717 people were intercepted crossing this route.

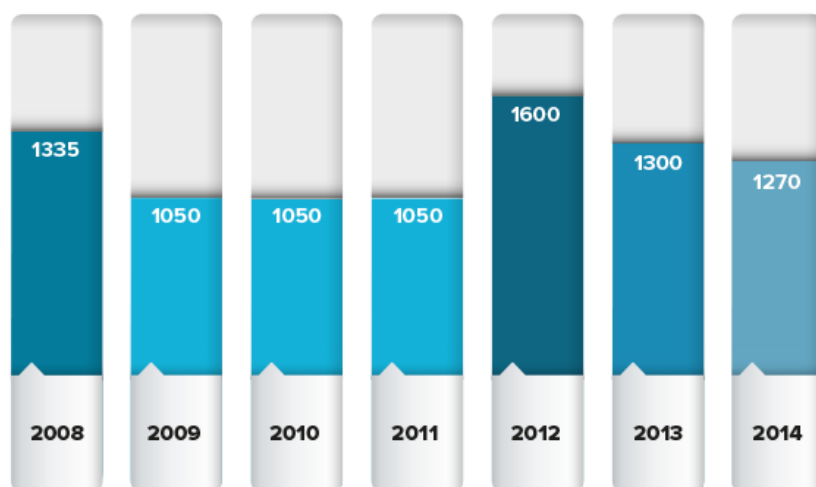
In 2014, only 0.5% of all illegal border-crossings reported by EU Member States at the external borders took place at the 6 000-kilometre-long eastern borders of the EU, totalling 1 275. Meanwhile, the economic downturn in Russia led to a decline in regular traffic flows at EU Member States' borders with the country, with the weakening rouble reducing the number of Russian travellers and shoppers crossing the EU borders. This trend was the most pronounced near the end of last year.

In contrast to the EU's borders with the Russian Federation, the number of travellers at the border with Ukraine has been growing despite the conflict in the eastern part of the country and the deteriorating economic situation in the region. The number of people who were refused entry reported by EU Member States at the eastern borders fell to almost 36 700 down from over 50 000 in 2013, although these still accounted for a third of all refusals at EU borders.

The falling value of the rouble and the Ukrainian Hryvnia, which increased the price differences between the EU and its eastern neighbours, encouraged the smuggling of goods across EU's eastern borders. The smuggling, particularly of cigarettes, occurred primarily through official border-crossing points (BCPs), although some took place at green borders (between BCPs). The methods used to bring goods across the border varied from the so-called ant smuggling through BCPs to the use of rafts on rivers to smuggle large amounts of cigarettes across the common borders. Even though 2014 was marked by fewer incidents, they involved larger amounts of smuggled illicit cigarettes.

The situation in Ukraine, the consequences of the economic crisis in Russia and its migration policy remain the most important uncertainties affecting the outlook for the region. So far the impact of the Ukrainian crisis on border security has remained limited, but it still is by far the most important source of current and future population movements in the region, considering that the number of internally displaced person in the country surpassed one million.

*Illegal border crossings on the Eastern Borders route in numbers*



## Western Mediterranean Route (Spain)

This route is defined for Frontex operational purposes as the sea passage from North Africa to the Iberian Peninsula, as well as the land route through Ceuta and Melilla. Most commonly it is used by Algerian and Moroccan nationals attempting to reach Spain, France and Italy, but over the years there have also been increasing numbers of Sub-Saharan Africans. Many migrants attempt to cross into Spain hidden in trucks and containers on ferries headed to the ports of Almeria and Algeciras.

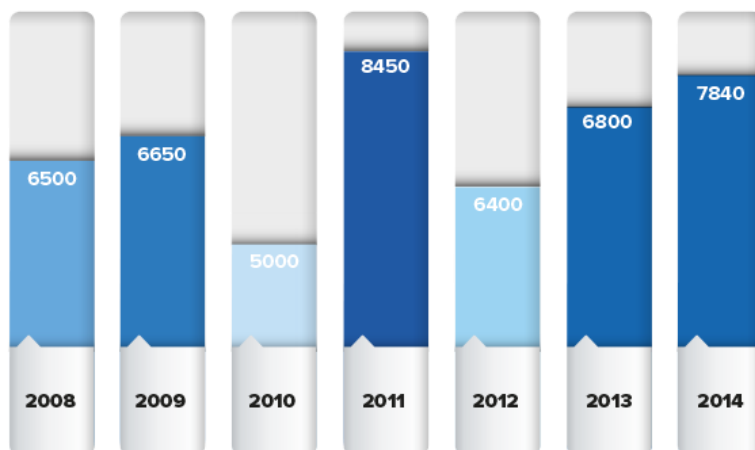
Between January-July 2015, 6 698 migrants - mainly from Syria, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire - were intercepted on this route.

In August, 341 persons were detected crossing that route.

An important challenge to the Spanish authorities on this route is trafficking of large quantities of cannabis, mostly resin (hashish), from Morocco on fast boats. Cocaine transiting through Western and Northern Africa and destined for the EU is also commonly detected in the Western Mediterranean area. In recent years, in addition to fast boats, drug smugglers have been reported to also be using small helicopters and planes.

Conflicts and violence in Mali, Sudan, South Sudan, Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad and the Central African Republic have caused the displacement of large parts of the population and have added to the economic causes of migration in the region. The migratory pressure peaked between July and September of last year, making this period most intense since 2011.

### *Illegal border crossings on the Western Mediterranean route in numbers*



## Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT) mechanism:

### Deployment

The RABIT mechanism aims to provide rapid operational assistance for a **limited period of time** to a requesting Member State facing a (crisis) situation of urgent and exceptional pressure at points of the external borders of large numbers of third-country nationals trying to illegally enter the territory of the Member State.

Frontex can only deploy the rapid border intervention teams if an EU Member State makes an **explicit request for assistance** to Frontex.

Once a request is received, Frontex evaluates the situation on the basis of risk analysis, and, within a maximum of **5 days** Frontex Executive Director decides whether to activate the mechanism.

### Operations

Frontex, together with the requesting Member State elaborate an Operational Plan which clearly defines the operational area, the type of technical equipment and the number and profiles of border guards needed.

Frontex sends the request to the Member State border authorities to contribute the technical and human resources as described above.

In terms of resources, Member States are **obliged to send border guards** for a specific deployment, unless they themselves face an exceptional situation substantially affecting the discharge of national tasks.

The members of the teams can perform border checks and surveillance in accordance with the Schengen Borders Code. They have broadly the same powers as the border guards of the host Member State. All border guards deployed by Frontex work **under the command of the national authorities** of the requesting member state.

The Mechanism has been **activated only once** by Greece in 2010. Greece requested, on 24 October 2010, the deployment of RABIT. The Operation at the Greek-Turkish border started on 2 November 2010 and ended on 2 March 2011 (when Frontex resumed the continuation of Joint-Operation Poseidon Land)

## Hotspots

### General Background

The *Hotspot* approach was tabled by the Commission as part of the European Agenda for Migration.

Recently the need for the opening of the *Hotspots* in Italy and Greece was further underlined during the Council meeting. Operational meetings and intensive technical discussion are being held between the Commission, Greece, Italy and the relevant EU agencies.

EU Commission is in the lead and consultations are ongoing with other Member States to allow for relocations as soon as possible. Please note that **Frontex will not be involved in the process of relocation**, as it does not deal with processing of asylum applications.

### Frontex's Role

In June 2015 an EURTF – A European Regional Task Force - office was set up in Catania. This office was created within the concept of the hotspots and it constitutes a platform for coordination between various European agencies – Frontex, EASO, EUROPOL as well as EUNAVFOR Med – are working together to better coordinate their assistance to the Italian authorities in dealing with the current migratory pressure. Each agency clearly works within its own mandate – Frontex in terms of operational assistance, EASO in terms of asylum support and EUROPOL in terms of criminal investigations against people-smuggling networks. Having the office where the migratory pressure is highest means not only being able to better coordinate the exchange of information and being more efficient, but it also means working directly with the local authorities on the ground.

The setting up of *Hotspots* understood as reception centres where migrants and refugees would be registered and processed are the **responsibility of the national** authorities who manage the centres.

### Screeners

Since November, when operation Triton was launched, Frontex has been deploying a number of screeners – officers who help the Italian authorities in conducting the identification of the migrants – in various reception centres in Italy. Once a Member State nominates specific reception centres as *Hotspots*, Frontex will redeploy its screeners to the new location accordingly and integrate them in any new structures that may be created.

A similar concept is currently under discussion in Greece – discussions are currently ongoing with the Greek authorities and the relevant EU agencies to open an EURTF office in **Piraeus**, along the same model implemented in Catania.

Frontex already deploys screeners on various islands in Greece and is currently significantly increasing their number. Once the Greek authorities decide to open new reception centres on the islands (or nominate the existing ones as *Hotspots*) Frontex will **redeploy** the screeners to them and integrate them in such structures.

[www.frontex.europa.eu](http://www.frontex.europa.eu)

For more information please contact [press@frontex.europa.eu](mailto:press@frontex.europa.eu)

For photos from operations visit: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/132684932@N02/>