journalistic accountability
version July 2026



Gates of Europe is a Scenery production in co-production with Clin d'oeil films, VPRO, VRT and ARTE G.E.I.E.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 2

Journalistic accountability per episode 3

Episode 1 3

- OLAF report 3
- Pylos investigation/Adriana shipwreck – European Ombudsman 4
- Serious Incident Reports 4
- Aegean Boat Report 5

Episode 2 6

- Rescue operations at sea 7
- Contact Frontex - Libya 9

Episode 3 12

- Frontex recruits 13
- Poland 15
- Pushbacks 18
- Refugees in Libya 19

Episode 4 23

- Third countries 23
- Turkey & the EU 24
- Arrest of Tommy Olsen 26

INTRODUCTION

Gates of Europe is a four-part documentary series about how Europe guards its borders. Thanks to three years of access to Frontex, and through the eyes of border guards, policymakers, activists and survivors, we explore the question: can Europe protect its borders and safeguard human rights at the same time?

In this journalistic accountability document, we cite sources that support the title cards and claims in our series. We have chosen to name at least two sources, but of course there are often many more to be found. We do not claim to be exhaustive.

In the series, we chose to use as few figures as possible on the number of people migrating, because those figures are often politically coloured or framed.
See also: https://irregularmigration.eu/.

We do not claim that this document is a comprehensive source of information on Frontex or European border policy. Instead, we focus on the claims made in the series. If you are looking for more information about Frontex as an organisation and how it is structured and embedded in European frameworks, please visit the websites of Frontex and the European Parliament:
https://www.frontex.europa.eu/
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-new-era-for-european-defence-and-security/file-strengthening-frontex

Further information sources:
Aegean Boat Report: www.aegeanboatreport.com
Refugees in Libya: https://www.refugeesinlibya.org/
Doctors Without Borders (Artsen zonder Grenzen):
https://www.artsenzondergrenzen.nl/actueel/nieuws/reddingsoperatie-op-de-middenlandse-zee
Grupa Granica, Poland: https://wearemonitoring.org.pl/en/about-us/
Abolish Frontex: https://abolishfrontex.org/
The investigations into European border policy by Lighthouse Reports journalists:
https://www.lighthousereports.com/newsroom/borders/
Articles by Romy van Baarsen for De Groene Amsterdammer:
https://www.groene.nl/auteur/romy-van-baarsen

JOURNALISTIC ACCOUNTABILITY PER EPISODE

EPISODE 1 - THE BORDER AGENCY

Before executive director Hans Leijtens took office, major investigations were carried out into the Frontex agency that led to the resignation of his predecessor, Fabrice Leggeri. After his resignation, Leggeri became a Member of the European Parliament for the far-right Front National.

OLAF REPORT

The OLAF report proved that Frontex's leadership was aware of human rights violations at the EU's external borders and deliberately used its own organisation to conceal and facilitate these illegal pushbacks.
https://ec.europa.eu/olaf-report/2022/investigative-activities/investigative-mandate/internal-investigations_en.html

The investigation led by MEP Tineke Strik (GroenLinks-PvdA) was the official European parliamentary inquiry into Frontex. She was the lead rapporteur of the Frontex Scrutiny Working Group (FSWG), a special working group of the European Parliament set up in 2021, after the first major revelations by investigative journalists about pushbacks.

That journalistic investigation was led by the journalism platform Lighthouse Reports, in close cooperation with Bellingcat, Germany's Der Spiegel, the British broadcaster Sky News and the Dutch public broadcaster NOS (Journaal and Nieuwsuur).

This consortium was the first to publish irrefutable visual evidence that Frontex not only knew about illegal pushbacks by the Greek coast guard in the Aegean Sea, but was itself complicit in them.

https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/frontex-chapter-ii-complicit-in-pushbacks/

https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/10/23/frontex-at-fault-european-border-force-complicit-in-illegal-pushbacks/

https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/frontex-involved-in-illegal-pushbacks-of-hundreds-of-refugees-a-9fe90845-efb1-4d91-a231-48efcafa53a0

Meijers Committee

Shortly after investigative journalists revealed at the end of 2020 that Frontex was involved in illegal pushbacks in the Aegean Sea, the Meijers Committee drew up this report as a supporting legal framework for ongoing investigations and for the European Parliament. It was written by independent judges, professors and legal scholars (the Meijers Committee is held in very high regard internationally). This document forms an important foundation for the political and legal battle that Tineke Strik and other critics in Brussels have fought to change Frontex's course.
https://www.commissie-meijers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/cm2105_frontex_and_pushbacks.pdf

Tineke Strik/Frontex Scrutiny Working Group (FSWG)

Whereas the OLAF report focused purely on fraud and misconduct at the top, Tineke Strik's report zoomed in on the agency's systematic shortcomings in the field of human rights.
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/238156/14072021%20Final%20Report%20FSWG_en.pdf

For the broader overview of how the European Parliament subsequently voted on these findings and which recommendations Tineke Strik made on behalf of the committee, visit:
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0483_EN.html

PYLOS INVESTIGATION/ADRIANA SHIPWRECK – EUROPEAN OMBUDSMAN

Title cards in the series:

EU Ombudsman O'Reilly opens an inquiry into Frontex. The inquiry shows that Frontex repeatedly offered Greece air support. The Greeks ignored these offers and ordered Frontex to fly elsewhere.

Frontex may act only at the request of national authorities. The European Ombudsman calls for a new mandate for Frontex and for its withdrawal from Greece.

https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press-release/en/172857
https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press-release/en/182676 > conclusions of the inquiry
https://verfassungsblog.de/shipwreck-after-shipwreck/

Frontex's own Serious Incident Report (SIR) (FRO report)
The hard evidence also comes from within the organisation itself. Frontex's *Fundamental Rights Officer* (FRO) carried out an independent internal investigation and issued a *Serious Incident Report (SIR 12595/2023)*.

The report confirms that a Frontex aircraft had spotted the *Adriana* hours before the disaster. Frontex shared that information with the Greeks, but strangely did not classify the boat as a distress case and did not send out a Mayday alert to ships in the vicinity.

After handing over the footage, the agency offered the Greek authorities active assistance three times (in the form of additional surveillance aircraft). The Greeks ignored this completely. Instead of sounding the alarm about its offers of assistance for a boat carrying 750 people being met with silence, Frontex withdrew its own units from the scene of the disaster because of "bad weather conditions". The report concludes that Frontex should have monitored the situation more actively instead of blindly relying on the Greek authorities.

https://rsaegean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Pylos-Frontex-Incident-Report.pdf

SERIOUS INCIDENT REPORT

Title cards in the series:

There are now 3,500 Frontex officers at Europe's borders.
Fifty Frontex monitors oversee human rights during their missions.
Abuses at the EU's borders are rarely investigated by the member states themselves.
More often, they are denied.

From 2019 to 2024, Frontex's Fundamental Rights Office handled 262 serious incident reports (SIRs), 56 of them in 2024, according to data it shared with the FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) in July 2025.

Link to all SIRs and the FRO website:
https://www.frontex.europa.eu/fundamental-rights/fundamental-rights-at-frontex/fundamental-rights-office/

The EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA, based in Vienna) monitors compliance with human rights in all areas of EU activity. It reached the following conclusion:

For years, human rights organisations have reported serious, repeated and widespread violations of the rights of migrants and people fleeing during border management. In July 2024, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) identified systemic shortcomings in the investigation of such allegations. Only a few cases of ill-treatment and other serious allegations of human rights violations were investigated, and when they were, they were closed at the preliminary investigation stage.
https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2025/investigating-alleged-ill-treatment-borders-update

AEGEAN BOAT REPORT

Aegean Boat Report (ABR) is an independent Norwegian NGO that monitors and documents the movements of migrants and human rights violations against them in the Aegean Sea (between Turkey and Greece).

The organisation was founded in 2017 by Norwegian Tommy Olsen and has grown into one of the most critical and detailed watchdogs in the region.

The core activities and significance of Aegean Boat Report include:

1. Live data mining and emergency assistance

The organisation acts as a kind of digital reporting point. Migrants and people fleeing who are in distress at sea in flimsy boats, or who have just been stranded on an uninhabited Greek islet, send their GPS locations, photos and videos directly to Aegean Boat Report via WhatsApp. ABR immediately shares this data with official rescue services (such as the Greek and Turkish coast guards) and humanitarian aid organisations on the islands to make sure people are rescued.

2. Exposing illegal pushbacks

ABR uses the footage and GPS locations it collects to prove that illegal pushbacks have taken place. It documents how Greek authorities (sometimes with the knowledge of Frontex) pick up migrants, disable their engines, steal their belongings and abandon them on the open sea in inflatable, engineless life rafts. Because ABR publishes this data directly on its website and social media, it is a primary source for international media (such as *The New York Times*, *BBC* and *Der Spiegel*) and human rights reports.

Target of the Greek government

Precisely because Aegean Boat Report is so effective at providing hard evidence, the organisation has come under heavy fire from the Greek government. The Greek judiciary has criminalised the founder and the NGO, accusing them of, among other things, "espionage", "membership of a criminal organisation" and "facilitating human smuggling". However, international bodies, such as the UN and *Front Line Defenders*, regard these lawsuits as politically motivated intimidation (*transnational repression*) aimed at silencing an inconvenient observer.

https://aegeanboatreport.com/

https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/tommy-olsen

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, defended Aegean Boat Report (and other similar cases).

When the situation around Tommy Olsen escalated in early 2026 because Greece demanded his extradition through a European Arrest Warrant, the UN Special Rapporteur sent a formal, urgent letter to the Greek and Norwegian governments.
https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30873

In this letter, the UN experts put their finger on a sore spot. They show that the Greek charges of "human smuggling" and "espionage" are in reality based on situations in which Aegean Boat Report simply informed the Greek authorities, by email and WhatsApp, of the GPS locations of people fleeing who were on Greek territory, so that they could apply for asylum. The UN condemns this "misleading application of criminal law" to sabotage legitimate human rights work.

EPISODE 2 - RESCUE OR PUSH BACK?

Title cards in the series:

At least 2,000 people die in the Mediterranean every year. This makes the European border the deadliest in the world.
https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean

Since the International Organization for Migration (IOM) began systematically tracking deaths during migration worldwide in 2014, more than 30,000 people have been recorded as dead or missing in the Mediterranean. No other border region in the world — including the much-discussed border between the United States and Mexico — has anything like this death toll.

The United Nations, through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), also explicitly uses this characterisation in official statements and press releases. UN spokespeople have repeatedly stated:

> *"The Mediterranean Sea remains one of the deadliest migration routes in the world."*

Research by organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch shows that the extreme death rate is a direct result of three factors:

The distance travelled: unlike land borders, migrants on the Central Mediterranean route have to cross hundreds of kilometres of open sea in wooden or rubber boats that are absolutely not seaworthy for such a journey.
https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur03/6655/2017/en/

Deliberate overloading: smugglers systematically cram the boats far beyond capacity and rarely provide enough fuel or life jackets.
https://www.hrw.org/tag/mediterranean-crisis

The vacuum in rescue capacity: since EU member states ended their large-scale active rescue operations (such as Italy's *Mare Nostrum*) and NGO ships have been obstructed through legal means, the chance that a boat in distress is spotted and rescued in time has fallen drastically.
https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/OHCHR-Report-on-assited-return-and-reintegration.pdf

RESCUE OPERATIONS AT SEA

Title cards in the series:

Far out at sea, more than 20 aid organisations carry out rescue operations.

Following the vacuum that arose after EU member states ended their own active rescue missions (such as Italy's *Mare Nostrum*), more than 20 different non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been active in the Mediterranean with their own ships or reconnaissance aircraft since 2014–2015.

Well-known names from this group include *Doctors Without Borders (MSF)*, *SOS Méditerranée*, *Sea-Watch*, *Open Arms*, *Sea-Eye*, *Jugend Rettet*, *Proactiva Open Arms* and alarm hotlines such as *Alarm Phone*. Although they were not always all at sea with a ship at the same time, the total fleet of active organisations grew to more than 20 over the years.
https://www.msf-azg.be/nl/news/nieuw-italiaans-decreet-verhindert-het-redden-van-mensen-op-zee-dodentol-zal-oplopen
https://civilmrcc.eu/

Title cards in the series:

But because of stricter Italian legislation, that number is falling every year.

https://www.msf-azg.be/nl/news/nieuw-italiaans-decreet-verhindert-het-redden-van-mensen-op-zee-dodentol-zal-oplopen
Organisations such as *Doctors Without Borders* and *Amnesty International* officially stated at the time that this legislation "deliberately minimises civilian rescue capacity at sea". Because of sky-high operating costs (from the long voyages to distant ports) and the constant legal obstruction and chains of penalties imposed by the Italian government, several smaller aid organisations have had to end their missions or have been forced to take their ships out of service.

https://www.coe.int/nl/web/commissioner/-/the-italian-government-should-consider-withdrawing-decree-law-which-could-hamper-ngo-search-and-rescue-operations-at-sea
The official letter and subsequent report in which the Commissioner for Human Rights calls on the Italian Minister of the Interior (Piantedosi) to withdraw the law, because it undermines independent rescue capacity at sea.

Rescue Case Frontex-Sea-Watch
Sea-Watch's full official response (right of reply) regarding the rescue operation of 29 July 2025 in the Mediterranean:

- Did Frontex throw a life raft to the case or was it thrown by you?

The life raft was deployed by Frontex's aircraft Sparrow 2. Seabird 2 does not carry rescue equipment such as life rafts. Our role was to spot the vessel in distress, issue mayday relays, alert all responsible authorities and maintain aerial observation. The fact that Frontex eventually deployed a life raft on July 29th does not change the fundamental timeline: the boat had already capsized by the time meaningful action was taken. Critically, a life raft dropped from the air is not a substitute for a vessel with trained rescue personnel and Frontex has both the vessels and the financial means for this. On top of this, the actual dropping of life rafts from Frontex aircraft is a recent development (beginning in 2024), was done only a handful of times at most, and no official aggregate count has been publicly released.

- What was Frontex's role, in your view, during the operation?

Frontex's aircraft Sparrow 2 arrived on scene on the evening of July 28th, roughly six hours after Seabird 2 first spotted the vessel in distress. It flew directly over the boat that night but initiated no rescue operation nor deployed any life raft. The people on board spent the entire night of July 28th to 29th without rescue. On the morning of July 29th, Seabird 2 returned and found the situation had deteriorated further, with people again falling into the water. The merchant vessel Port Fukuoka (not a rescue-equipped ship) had responded to our mayday relay and was attempting to assist when the overcrowded boat capsized. It was only at this point, some 45 minutes after the capsize, that Frontex deployed a life raft. Frontex was present for a critical window spanning the evening and night of July 28th into July 29th and took no preventive action, leaving the merchant vessel alone with over 90 persons on board, including 2 dead bodies.
Frontex's role in this operation is an example of what we witness on a daily basis: so-called "border monitoring", purely law enforcement activities, which is not synonymous with search and rescue activities. We have observed Frontex's activities for 10 years and only a very few times has the agency deployed such life rafts, while seeing persons in distress every day.

- Why didn't you report the cooperation on scene with Frontex in the press statements, instead claiming that no rescue operation was initiated by them?

"No rescue operation was initiated" refers specifically to July 28th, the hours when intervention could have prevented the capsize and the deaths. Our press statement was accurate to the chronological facts. It is absurd to now accuse us of omitting that Frontex exchanged a few radio calls with us after the boat had already capsized, while people were dying in the water.

What Frontex did on the morning of July 29th, after the capsize, was not a rescue operation in any meaningful sense of the word. Describing it as such would mislead the public and, frankly, insult the people who died. As I mentioned before, a life raft dropped from the air is no substitute for a vessel with trained rescue personnel and with a budget exceeding €1 billion in 2025 as well as vessels deployed across the Mediterranean, Frontex cannot claim it lacked the means to respond differently.

- Leijtens and his press officer suggest that 'you probably have an interest in not mentioning positive cooperation with Frontex. That this doesn't fit your agenda'. What is your response?

CONTACT FRONTEX - LIBYA

Title cards in the series:

According to journalists at Lighthouse Reports, Frontex shared the locations of people at sea with the Libyan coast guard more than 2,000 times over three years.

Lighthouse Reports states that aid organisations were not informed, even when their rescue ships were closer.

https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/2200-frontex-emails-to-libya/
https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/frontex-and-the-pirate-ship/

Amnesty, the European Ombudsman and Frontex's own Fundamental Rights Office warn that Frontex may be complicit in human rights violations.

https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/eu-frontexs-lack-of-transparency-on-libyan-cooperation-to-be-heard-in-court/

https://media.un.org/unifeed/en/asset/d353/d3536288

https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/libya-urgent-action-needed-remedy-deteriorating-human-rights-situation-un (investigation throwing light on the human rights situation in Libya)

https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/nl/decision/nl/178917

The FRA (Fundamental Rights Agency) within Frontex also reaches that conclusion:
As a general practice, when migrants are detected/intercepted at sea in the Libyan search and rescue region, the Agency's aerial surveillance service sends alerts to a list of email addresses, which are presumed to belong to the Libyan Coast Guard. This is a concern, given that there is no clear knowledge of the type of email account used, the number and type of the recipients, and the security of the service provider in terms of data protection.
In addition, there is no knowledge on the Agency side of how information is further shared within Libyan institutions and other local actors. Risks related to the sharing of sightings between different Libyan authorities and the use made of this information should be carefully considered, in particular:

- Information shared with the SSA may lead to migrants being brought to detention centres run by governmental structures accused of committing human rights violations and to which international organisations providing minimum humanitarian support have no access.
- Information included and/or generated by the sighting can be potentially shared and/or used by other Libyan institutions, including Libya's Deterrence Apparatus for Combating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DACOT), the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) and the Internal Security Agency (ISA) and its leadership, which were repeatedly found to be involved in violations and abuses.
- As part of a human rights best practice policy when dealing with third countries, a proper vetting procedure should be conducted to ascertain the actual recipients of these emails. Vetting procedures should also take into consideration that Libya does not possess suitable legislation on data protection and sharing which can be assessed in line with

European Union law and fundamental rights standards. The above risks and concerns also have implications for data protection obligations.

Source: Warsaw, 18 July 2023
Internal ref. FRO/O-17/2023, Opinion of the Fundamental Rights Officer, Multipurpose Aerial Surveillance Services — Fundamental rights concerns as regards sending alerts to Libyan authorities and SAR operations in the Central Mediterranean (second opinion)

In the episode, Frontex spokesperson Chris Borowski says that Human Rights Watch visited their office to discuss this issue.
This is correct and it took place on 2 April 2025:
https://www.linkedin.com/posts/we-thank-human-rights-watch-for-their-visit-share-7313216253316280320-HoAU/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAAAXNj0BJwo-uyHqxvn3vA2xRRmmcXO7ORY

RESPONSE FROM HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH
Human Rights Watch representative Judith Sunderland attended this meeting.
"We had a long conversation with, among others, Hans Leijtens, but also a representative of the FRO. They maintained that they cannot inform rescue NGOs on their own initiative. We do not agree with that interpretation. They can inform the NGOs autonomously, and they can also put much more pressure on the member states to do so. When they enter into an agreement with a member state and its coast guard, they can demand it. We will therefore continue to monitor and lobby for a change to their mandate."

Press release following the meeting with Frontex:
https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/14/eu-border-agency-use-aerial-surveillance-save-lives-

EPISODE 3 - BORDER POWER

World Border Congress
The World Border Security Congress (often informally called the World Border Congress) is a leading, international, three-day congress for senior officials in the fields of border management, migration policy and national security.
In March 2025, the congress took place in Madrid (at the *Eurostars Madrid Tower*) with the Spanish Guardia Civil acting as co-host. Hundreds of delegates from dozens of countries around the world attended.
https://world-border-congress.com/

The congress is essentially a large meeting place for two groups:

> Policymakers and border guards: senior officials from customs services, ministries and border authorities (such as the US Border Patrol, European agencies and UN organisations).
> The commercial tech industry: companies specialising in 'BorderTech'. Here, they demonstrate and sell the latest border surveillance technologies, such as biometric systems, AI passport checks, thermal imaging cameras, drones and radar technology for detecting signals.

During workshops and plenary sessions, participants debate the future of border management. The central question is often how countries can, on the one hand, create 'smart and fast borders' for legitimate travellers and, on the other, crack down hard on illegal migration, human smuggling and cross-border crime.

What does Frontex do there?
As the European Union's central border agency, Frontex plays a prominent role at this congress. Its presence and activities fall into three main areas:
> International cooperation and networking (diplomacy)
Frontex uses the congress to strengthen ties with border authorities from outside the EU (such as African and Western Balkan countries). Because migration flows are global, Frontex tries to forge partnerships here to manage migration at an early stage (outside Europe). Frontex staff members regularly appear as speakers on panels.
> Knowledge sharing and 'Risk Analysis'
At congresses like this, Frontex presents itself as Europe's centre of expertise. It shares data on modal migration routes, smugglers' latest tactics and trends in document fraud.
> Scouting new technology (BorderTech)
Frontex has an enormous budget to modernise Europe's external borders and to coordinate the deployment of satellites, surveillance aircraft and drones. On the exhibition floor in Madrid, Frontex looks at which private tech companies offer the best surveillance equipment, AI software and biometric identification systems to further digitise border controls in the near future.

Police Conference Berlin
In April 2024, Frontex attended the European Police Congress (*Europäischer Polizeikongress*) in Berlin. This is the largest international conference on internal security in Europe.
https://www.european-police.eu/program/

This edition focused on the following:
> The key players: both Frontex chief Hans Leijtens and deputy executive director Lars Gerdes took an active part in major debates and panels on migration, integration and border control.
https://www.icmpd.org/news/icmpd-director-general-michael-spindelegger-holds-keynote-at-the-european-police-congress-in-germany
> Focus on AI and Big Data: one of the main pillars of the congress (and the accompanying tech fair) was how law enforcement and border agencies can use artificial intelligence and mass data for surveillance, 'predictive policing' (predictive police and border work) and risk analysis.
> Surveillance and BorderTech: alongside the discussions, commercial companies on the exhibition floor showcased their latest technologies in biometric identification, drones and border surveillance software — precisely the innovations in which Frontex is investing heavily as an agency to build 'smart borders'.
https://www.biometricupdate.com/202605/frontex-sets-biometrics-ai-research-agenda-for-horizon-europe-2028-2034

FRONTEX RECRUITS

Title cards in the series:

Since 2020, Frontex has been training its own officers.
The training takes one year.

Frontex is now the largest European Union agency
with a budget of 1.13 billion euros a year.

https://www.frontex.europa.eu/careers/standing-corps/training/
https://www.frontex.europa.eu/careers/

Frontex employs people of 27 nationalities. Since 2026, the training of category 1 Standing Corps officers has moved from the police academy in Ávila (Spain) to Warsaw.

The Standing Corps – Frontex's permanent border and coast guard force – is essentially made up of different categories of staff, so that it can respond flexibly to situations at Europe's external borders. Although EU legislation technically has four categories, there are three main operational categories of officers who are actually deployed in the field.

In short, these are the three categories:

Category 1: Frontex's own permanent staff (statutory staff)

These are border guards and officers employed directly by Frontex itself as European civil servants.

- Characteristics: they wear the official Frontex uniform, are armed and fall under the direct authority of the agency's executive director.
- Deployability: they form the permanent core and can be deployed permanently, for an indefinite period, anywhere at the EU's external borders (and in certain countries beyond them). This type of staffing is meant to make Frontex less dependent on member states' immediate willingness to send people.

Category 2: Long-term seconded staff from member states

These are experienced border guards, police officers or customs officers employed by their own national authorities (such as the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee or the Belgian Federal Police), but loaned to Frontex for a longer period.

- Characteristics: a Category 2 secondment usually lasts several years.
- Deployability: during their secondment, they work entirely under Frontex's operational flag and command. At the end of their term, they return to their own national force.

Category 3: Staff from member states deployed short-term (the flexible layer)

These staff members simply continue working in their own country, but are on a stand-by list so they can be called up quickly in case of acute need.

- Characteristics: they are sent to a Frontex operation for a short, specific period (usually for a maximum of 4 months per calendar year).
- Deployability: this category serves as the 'flexible layer' of the border force. If a sudden migration peak or crisis arises at a specific border (such as in Greece or the Baltic states), these officers can be activated immediately to reinforce the permanent team.

(Note: behind the scenes there is also a Category 4, but this concerns the so-called Rapid Reaction Pool. This is an emergency reserve of national border guards that can be mobilised within a few days, but only in extreme crisis situations.)

https://www.frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/standing-corps/standing-corps/

By 2027, Frontex must have 10,000 field officers ready. The wish to triple this to 30,000 was expressed by Ursula von der Leyen in 2024, during her re-election. The European Commission has now officially tabled this plan as part of the major Frontex Mandate Review. The Commission wants this new target of 30,000 officers to be enshrined in law over the coming years in order to transform the external borders into a fully-fledged European border force.
See:
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2026/785662/EPRS_BRI(2026)785662_EN.pdf
and:
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-new-era-for-european-defence-and-security/file-strengthening-frontex

A detailed overview of the adopted annual budget and its breakdown by priority can be found in the European Commission's publication on the annual budget. It officially specifies the allocation of €1.13 billion to Frontex under the heading of border management.

https://commission.europa.eu/news-and-media/news/2026-annual-budget-fund-eu-priorities-addressing-global-challenges-2025-06-04_en

For a critical analysis of Frontex's historical transition (including the budget increases since 2005 and the expansion into 'Third Countries' in Africa), consult the data files and reports compiled by the research organisation Statewatch. This organisation systematically tracks all internal and public border agency documents. Statewatch is a group of activists, researchers, lawyers and journalists who expose state power and fuel resistance in Europe and at its borders. They started in 1991 and have no plans to stop any time soon.

Title cards in the series:

Governments and defence companies meet every year at a multi-billion-euro market for military drones, big data and AI.

Frontex is not merely a passive visitor here; it now acts as one of the most important organisers and buyers in this market.

Frontex formally invites the defence and tech industry (the so-called *industry leaders*) to pitch their latest innovations directly to European border and coast guard experts. In its official tenders and programmes, Frontex explicitly asks for demonstrations of:

AI and Machine Learning: for automatic pattern recognition and biometric surveillance. Big Data & Data Fusion: platforms that combine satellite imagery, radar and internet data to increase "situational awareness". Digital Twins: AI simulation systems with which crisis scenarios and migration flows can be re-enacted virtually to determine tactics.

https://www.frontex.europa.eu/innovation/announcements/shape-the-future-of-eu-borders-join-frontex-industry-week-2026-7PyllG

https://www.frontex.europa.eu/innovation/announcements/industry-days-digital-twin-for-border-management-HTEtTq

Research reports: 'Lobbying the Border'. Various NGOs and investigative journalists have exposed the money flows and the symbiosis between defence companies and Frontex.

The Corporate Europe Observatory report: *'Bordering on Danger: How the border industry shapes EU migration policies'*. This in-depth investigation shows how defence companies have successfully lobbied the European Union to allocate billions to a "militarisation of the border", with Frontex as the main implementing body. https://corporateeurope.org/en/lobbying-fortress-europe

The RAND Europe study: an official study commissioned by Frontex itself (RAND: AI capabilities for the European Border and Coast Guard) sets out the roadmap for how Frontex should integrate 'front-end AI' (drones, thermal cameras) and 'back-end AI' (automated databases).

The independent watchdog Statewatch maintains a huge, continuously updated digital archive in which it collects all documents, freedom of information requests (Wob/Woo) and critical analyses concerning Frontex. https://statewatch.org/news/2026/april/frontex-uses-border-capacity-review-to-argue-its-own-value/

POLAND

Title cards in the series:

Since 2024, Poland has been refusing asylum applications at the border, in breach of European rules.

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk announced the plans in the autumn of 2024 in response to 'hybrid warfare' by Belarus and Russia, which deliberately steer migrants towards the Polish border. In early 2025, the plan was officially enshrined in Polish law and immediately put into practice.
https://www.euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2025-06/2025_asylum_overview_poland_en.pdf

Human rights organisations and independent courts have ruled that this Polish legislation directly contravenes higher law. The European Commission immediately stressed at the time that, while member states may protect their borders against hybrid threats, this must *always* happen within the framework of European asylum law; a blanket refusal at the border is not permitted under EU law.
https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/poland-blocking-access-to-access-violating-human-rights-on-the-border

The political aftermath reveals a deep paradox. On the one hand, there are now unequivocal court rulings (such as the one in Olsztyn) and reports by the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights that prove in black and white that refusing asylum seekers is illegal. On the other hand, the political reality in Warsaw *and* Brussels in 2026 is a resolute choice for the hard line: the law remains in force, the asylum suspension keeps being extended and, in practice, border guards continue to refuse asylum applications.
https://www.europeanlawyersinlesvos.eu/blog/a-groundbreaking-court-decision-on-polands-suspension-of-the-right-to-seek-asylum
https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/poland-commissioner-concerned-over-suspension-of-asylum-and-removal-practices

The asylum suspension announced by Tusk has drawn criticism from migration law experts:
https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/polish-law-restricting-the-right-to-asylum-at-borders/?print=print

Title cards in the series:

Frontex is not present at this border and therefore cannot monitor compliance with human rights.

Frontex is not a European border police force that can move in at its own discretion. Under EU law, member states decide who operates on their territory. Because Poland does not allow a Frontex operation, Frontex's independent human rights monitors are forced to remain at a distance in Warsaw, while a few hundred kilometres away asylum law is being suspended.

Frontex Regulation:
https://eur-lex.europa.eu/NL/legal-content/summary/european-border-and-coast-guard.html
The agency's founding regulation, specifically Articles 37 and 38 (Operational Plans), states in black and white that Frontex staff (including the human rights monitors) can *only* be deployed in the context of a joint operation (*Joint Operation*) or a rapid border intervention.

https://ecre.org/eu-eastern-borders-poland-ignores-commission-pressure-for-frontex-deployment-eastern-states-move-to-legalise-pushbacks-belarus-suspends-return-agreement/
This report by the ECRE (European Council on Refugees and Exiles; a pan-European network and umbrella organisation of more than 120 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) across 40 European countries) describes in detail how, in 2021, the European Commission put heavy political pressure on Warsaw to admit Frontex officers and human rights monitors to the border.

The Polish government firmly rejected this offer and deliberately chose instead to deploy 25,000 of its own soldiers and border guards, keeping Frontex on the sidelines.

Title cards in the series:

Since 2021, Grupa Granica volunteers have been providing first aid to refugees who have crossed the border into Poland.

Archive of pushbacks by Poland:
Grupa Granica documents the testimonies of people fleeing who arrive in Poland from Belarus.
https://wearemonitoring.org.pl/en/testimony/

The UN also condemns Poland's pushbacks:
https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/unhcr-urges-states-end-stalemate-belarus-eu-border-and-avoid-further-loss-life

https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/un-expert-praises-generosity-towards-ukrainian-refugees-poland-and-urges

And several NGOs report on it:
https://ecre.org/poland-four-deaths-at-belarus-border-expose-dire-situation-of-stranded-refugees-unhcr-requests-access-as-poland-deploys-more-soldiers/

Brutal Barriers: pushbacks, violence and the violation of human rights on the Poland-Belarus border:

https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/brutal-barriers-pushbacks-violence-and-violation-human-rights-poland-belarus-border

Fact check
In the series, Ola claims that Belarus tortures people fleeing. Is there evidence for this?

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has published several extensive investigative reports on the situation at the border.

Main report: *"Die Here or Go to Poland": Belarus' and Poland's Shared Responsibility for Border Abuses*. The evidence: HRW documents how Belarusian border guards hold migrants hostage in the border zone (often referred to as the *'Sistema'*). Migrants testify that they are driven towards the Polish border fences by Belarusian soldiers using violence, dogs and shots fired into the air. If they try to return to Minsk, they are beaten up. HRW concludes that the treatment by Belarus in some cases meets the legal definition of torture.

https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/11/24/die-here-or-go-poland/belarus-and-polands-shared-responsibility-border-abuses

https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/video/2021/11/23/belarus-and-polands-shared-responsibility-border-abuses

Amnesty International has also carried out in-depth research, including collecting testimonies from people who tried to travel to the EU via Belarus. The evidence: Amnesty reports that Belarusian forces lock migrants up in 'holding camps' in the forests without food, water or sanitation. Witnesses state that Belarusian guards beat them with batons and rifle butts, robbed them of phones and money (extortion), and forced them to swim across ice-cold rivers towards the EU.

https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/12/belarus-eu-new-evidence-of-brutal-violence-from-belarusian-forces-against-asylum-seekers-and-migrants-facing-pushbacks-from-the-eu/

https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur37/5460/2022/en/

Most recent reports
In large-scale investigations (such as the report *Brutal Barriers, 2025*), NGOs paint an unrelentingly harsh picture of the situation. The evidence: the reports describe the border zone between Poland and Belarus as a 'death zone'. Belarusian authorities use extreme forms of violence to drive people across the border. Victims report, among other things, beatings with knuckle-dusters, electrocution and threats of sexual violence if they refuse to climb over the Polish fence.

https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/brutal-barriers-pushbacks-violence-and-violation-human-rights-poland-belarus-border

The geopolitical tactic: 'Weaponized Migration'
All of this documentation shows that there is a coordinated tactic by the regime led by Alexander Lukashenko. Belarus issues visas (often via fake travel agencies in the Middle East and Africa), transports migrants *itself* by bus to Europe's external border, and then uses physical violence and torture to force them to enter the EU illegally. This is intended to politically destabilise the EU.

PUSHBACKS

Fact check
Ola from Grupa Granica says that Frontex carries out pushbacks and that they may call it something else. Is that still the case?

The following interactive cartographic platform contains evidence of 2,010 drift-backs in the Aegean Sea, involving 55,445 people. It covers a period of three years – from 28 February 2020, when the first 'drift-back' incident was reported and documented, to 28 February 2023. Of these 2,010 incidents, 700 took place from or off the coast of the island of Lesbos, 238 off Chios, 424 off Samos, 283 off Kos, 212 off Rhodes and 123 in the rest of the Dodecanese.

A total of 26 deep drift-backs was recorded, meaning that asylum seekers were intercepted deep within Greek waters before being taken to the border and left adrift at sea. One incident was recorded in the North Aegean, off the coast of the island of Samothraki.

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency FRONTEX was found to be directly involved in 122 of these cases and has knowledge of 417 incidents, which it coded and disguised in its own operational records as 'preventions of entry'. In three cases, the German NATO warship FGS Berlin was present at the location.

Source: https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/drift-backs-in-the-aegean-sea
Partly based on documentation by Aegean Boat Report:
https://aegeanboatreport.com/monthly-reports/

The FRO, led by Fundamental Rights Officer Jonas Grimheden, has repeatedly warned in internal reports and so-called *Serious Incident Reports* (SIRs) that this term is being misused by operational teams and member states to mask illegal pushbacks.

When the FRO investigates reports, it often finds that incidents coded in Frontex's records as a "successful prevention of entry" were in reality situations in which migrants were already on EU territory or in EU waters, wanted to apply for asylum, and were then forcibly pushed back.

https://www.frontex.europa.eu/fundamental-rights/fundamental-rights-at-frontex/fundamental-rights-office-publications/?etrans=de
https://prd.frontex.europa.eu/document/48th-fundamental-rights-officer-report-to-the-management-board/

Are there still pushbacks involving Frontex under Hans Leijtens' leadership?
Although Hans Leijtens solemnly promised when he took office in early 2023 that under his leadership Frontex would *"never again be involved in pushbacks"* and that human rights had to be central, NGOs and watchdogs report that the practices on land and at sea are still continuing. There has been a shift, however: direct involvement (as under his predecessor Fabrice Leggeri) has decreased, but Frontex is still accused of indirect involvement and complicity.
Human rights organisations point to the following ongoing issues:

1. Aerial surveillance and 'pullbacks' to Libya
The biggest criticism concerns Frontex's role in the Central Mediterranean. Frontex aircraft and drones (such as the 'Heron') spot migrant boats in distress. Instead of informing civilian rescue ships (NGOs) in the vicinity, Frontex shares the coordinates directly with the so-called Libyan coast guard. The Libyans then intercept the boats and take the people fleeing back to detention centres in Libya. This is seen as a 'pullback by proxy' (a pushback via an intermediary), to which Frontex contributes directly through data exchange.
https://glanlaw.org/

2. The Western Balkans route
Reports by, among others, Frontex's own *Fundamental Rights Office* (the agency's internal human rights watchdog) raised the alarm about operations in the Balkans. In countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary and Greece – where Frontex officers are present – violent pushbacks are still taking place on a large scale. NGOs accuse Frontex staff of witnessing these illegal actions by national border guards, but failing to intervene or to report them sufficiently internally.
https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-consultative-forum-publishes-its-13th-annual-report-jAIPdb

3. Lack of transparency and legal intimidation
NGOs such as *Sea-Watch* argue that the promised "culture change" under Leijtens is a façade. Frontex still regularly refuses to release internal reports, footage and logs of interceptions at sea. Moreover, Frontex has taken NGOs to court to recover thousands of euros in legal costs after unsuccessful freedom of information (WOO) requests, which civil rights organisations see as deliberate intimidation to keep watchdogs away.
https://sea-watch.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Sea-Watch-Factsheet-July-December-2025.pdf
https://statewatch.org/news/2025/july/frontex-chases-human-rights-activists-for-thousands-of-euros-in-court-costs/

REFUGEES IN LIBYA

Title cards in the series:

David Yambio of Refugees in Libya brings the harsh reality of the European border to politicians in Brussels.

Refugees in Libya is a protest platform and human rights network led by people fleeing and migrants themselves, founded in Tripoli (Libya) in October 2021.

The organisation differs fundamentally from traditional NGOs (such as the UN) because it is a grassroots movement: it is run entirely by people who are themselves stuck in Libya or who have survived the detention camps.

The movement was formed after a massive and violent raid by the Libyan authorities in October 2021, in which thousands of migrants were detained. Thousands of survivors went to the office of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in Tripoli and began a 100-day peaceful sit-in there. This protest was eventually violently suppressed by Libyan militias, after which the activists went underground and founded the *Refugees in Libya* network.

Because international journalists and human rights organisations have hardly any access to the notorious Libyan detention camps, the network serves as a vital source of information. Via social media and encrypted channels, they share:

- Live video and photo footage of torture, extortion and appalling conditions in the camps.
- Testimonies of illegal pushbacks in the Mediterranean by the Libyan coast guard (which is funded by the EU).

The organisation takes aim not only at the Libyan militias, but also wages a tough political battle against Europe and the UNHCR:

- Against the EU: it accuses the European Union (and the Frontex border agency) of complicity in crimes against humanity, because the EU funds the Libyan coast guard and provides it with coordinates to drag migrants back to the camps.
- Against the UNHCR: it accuses the UN refugee agency of corruption, favouritism and failing to provide real protection or evacuation to vulnerable people fleeing in Tripoli.

Although the core of the movement in Libya faces extreme repression, evacuations and arrests, *Refugees in Libya* has now grown into an international network. Spokespeople who have fled to Europe (such as co-founder David Yambio) now speak in the European Parliament, work with investigative journalists (such as *Lighthouse Reports*) and act as official witnesses in lawsuits against Frontex and European governments.

Lawsuits
Refugees in Libya has – often in close cooperation with the legal organisation front-LEX – brought a number of very specific and groundbreaking lawsuits to hold the European Union and its agencies to account.

Their legal actions target two different European courts:

The case against Frontex at the Court of Justice of the European Union *(FM v. Frontex)*
This is their main ongoing case before the Court in Luxembourg. *Refugees in Libya* and front-LEX brought this case on behalf of 'FM', a young asylum seeker from Sudan who is stuck in Libya.

- The accusation: the case revolves around "failure to act" by Frontex. The claimants show that Frontex aircraft and drones systematically pass on the exact locations of migrant boats on the open sea to the Libyan coast guard and militias.
- The aim: the lawsuit demands that the court forces Frontex to (partially) stop its surveillance activities over the Mediterranean. According to the claimants, Frontex is

violating its own legal obligations by sharing data that it *knows* lead to illegal interceptions and the subsequent torture of people fleeing in Libya.

The proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague
In addition to the Court of Justice in Luxembourg, the organisation is also turning to the International Criminal Court, where crimes against humanity are tried.

- The accusation: together with the *European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights* (ECCHR), activists and survivors from *Refugees in Libya* have submitted extensive dossiers and testimonies to the ICC prosecutor.
- The aim: they demand the prosecution of not only Libyan militia leaders (as in the recent criminal case concerning the notorious Mitiga prison), but also high-ranking European politicians and Frontex officials. The legal argument is that the European policy of funding and coordination (the so-called 'pullbacks') deliberately sustains a system in which people fleeing are systematically deprived of their liberty and exposed to violence.

In the past, lawsuits against Frontex were often declared inadmissible because the agency claimed it "only assists". Thanks to recent case law from the Grand Chamber of the Court of Justice (which ruled that Frontex has its own, independent responsibility for human rights), the judges are now obliged to fully examine the substantive evidence from *Refugees in Libya* on data sharing with Libya.

https://www.refugeesinlibya.org/post/challenging-the-complicity-of-frontex-s-aerial-surveillance-activities-in-crimes-against-humanity

https://front-lex.eu/

Desert Dumps screening

What are 'desert dumps'?

By *desert dumps*, the documentary screened in the European Parliament refers to the documented practice in countries such as Tunisia, Libya and Morocco. Security forces and guards in those countries pick up migrants (often of sub-Saharan origin) and drop them off without water or food in the scorching heat of desert areas near the borders with Algeria or Libya. According to human rights organisations, hundreds of people have died as a result.

Fact check
David Yambio says that the border guards in the countries that carry out desert dumps are trained by Frontex. Is this true?
According to Amnesty and the investigations by Lighthouse Reports, this is true. These border and coast guards are trained and facilitated by the EU and its member states, with crucial operational and tactical support from Frontex.

https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/desert-dumps/
https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2022/12/08/airborne-complicity-frontex-aerial-surveillance-enables-abuse
https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2025/07/eus-migration-cooperation-with-libya-morally-bankrupt/

Documentation of slavery and torture in Libyan camps
The UN report: *"Business as Usual"* (February 2026)

This is the most recent report available. It was published jointly by the UN mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR).

The report covers the specific period from January 2024 to the end of 2025 and is based on in-depth interviews with survivors. The key message: the UN concludes that the abuse of migrants in Libya is not incidental, but has become a structural and profitable "violent business model". Human mobility has turned into a supply chain in which human suffering is pure profit for smugglers, militias *and* government agencies. Systematic torture to extort ransoms from families, forced labour (modern slavery), gang rapes (even of girls as young as 14) and the literal 're-selling' of migrants between official and unofficial camps.

https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/unsmil-ohchr_business_as_usual_-_en_with_layout_final.pdf

In early 2026, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and local authorities made shocking discoveries in eastern Libya (Ajdabiya and Kufra) that have been included directly in international monitoring. In January 2026, illegal underground detention camps were discovered where hundreds of migrants were literally being held captive metres below ground. A mass grave containing 21 bodies was also uncovered. This proves that militias and smuggling networks hold survivors hostage and torture them to death if the ransom is not paid. The IOM uses this recent case to demonstrate the direct link between the detention camps and organised human smuggling networks affiliated with official authorities.

https://www.iom.int/news/iom-emergency-teams-support-migrants-libya-following-discovery-mass-grave-and-underground-detention-sites

Although this report is somewhat older, it remains the legal foundation for all documentation on this subject. The independent *Fact-Finding Mission on Libya* of the UN Human Rights Council carried out in-depth investigations for years.

This panel officially established that there are "reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity are being committed against migrants in Libya". The report explicitly highlights *slavery* (migrants being sold at slave markets for domestic work or heavy labour in construction and agriculture) and concludes that the European Union, by supporting the Libyan coast guard financially and materially, indirectly contributes to sustaining this system of detention and torture.

https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/libya/index

Further viewing: the film *Io Capitano*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRY2NZp-W8M&t=5s

The film follows Seydou and Moussa, two sixteen-year-old cousins from Dakar (Senegal). They do not live in extreme poverty, but dream of a future as musicians in Europe. Against their mothers' wishes, they secretly save money and set off on their journey.

EPISODE 4 - THE POLITICAL BORDER

THIRD COUNTRIES

Title cards in the series:

Frontex flies from Cape Verde and now also cooperates with other West African countries.

Frontex is currently active in a large number of West African countries. The agency's presence has been strategically expanded in recent years through the so-called *Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community (AFIC)* network and targeted operational deals.

The countries with which Frontex cooperates most actively fall into three categories:

1. Countries with active operational projects & liaison officers

These are the countries where Frontex officials are physically present on the ground (or in the air) to curb migration flows towards the Canary Islands:

- Senegal: Frontex has a permanent liaison officer (*Liaison Officer*) stationed in Dakar. In addition, the EU carries out intensive operational cooperation with the Senegalese navy.
- Mauritania: this is currently the main operational focus. Since mid-2025/2026, Mauritania has been carrying out large-scale preventive operations to intercept migrant boats, with heavy financial and logistical support from Frontex and Spain.
- Cape Verde: since the end of 2025, Frontex has been running an "aerial surveillance pilot project" here, together with the local authorities, in which Frontex aircraft and drones scan West African waters from the air for migrant boats.
- Gambia: since 2026, Frontex has been carrying out joint maritime surveillance operations in the waters around Gambia to detect departing boats at an early stage.

2. Countries with active "Risk Analysis Cells" (intelligence)

Through the AFIC network, Frontex has funded, set up and staffed its own intelligence cells (*Risk Analysis Cells*) within the national border structures of the following West African countries. They collect biometric data and analyses, and share them directly with Frontex headquarters in Warsaw:

- Nigeria
- Ghana
- Gambia
- Niger *(Note: cooperation was suspended after the 2023 coup, but the EU and Frontex have gradually resumed diplomatic ties and projects since mid-2025).*

3. Countries in the Sahel region

- Mali: Frontex closely monitors migration routes through Mali via intelligence systems, although direct operations on the ground are complicated by political instability.

Sources for this:

1. The Statewatch investigative report (July 2025): the in-depth report Statewatch – Exporting Borders: Frontex and the Expansion of Fortress Europe in West Africa exposes the exact rollout and infrastructure (such as the intelligence cells and drone support) in Mali, Niger, Senegal and Mauritania.

2. Frontex's own official country page: on the border agency's official partner page, Frontex – Third Countries Cooperation, Frontex confirms that it has *Liaison Officers* in Senegal (whose mandate also covers Mauritania and Gambia) and that it has active *working arrangements* with Nigeria and Cape Verde.
3. The most recent Statewatch updates (May 2026): the analysis Statewatch – How the EU coordinates migration control around Africa: a million little deals confirms that border controls by Mauritania and the Cape Verde surveillance project led to a 60-70% decrease in the number of boat migrants on the West African route in early 2026.
4. Press release from the European External Action Service (EEAS, March 2026): the official report EEAS – Securing our oceans: a regional mobilization supported by the European Union documents the joint maritime surveillance operation of February 2026 between Cape Verde, Gambia, Mauritania and Senegal with EU support.

Frontex also made its own video about its cooperation in Africa:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ho_rZO_LbjY&t=29s

Title cards in the series:

Since 2016, the EU has been funding the reception of refugees in Turkey.

More and more money is being spent on stopping migration towards Europe.

1. Official EU funding and the EU-Turkey Deal (from 2016)

- European Commission (official figures): the launch, set-up and distribution of the pledged billions through the *Facility for Refugees in Turkey* is documented in the EU's official factsheet: European Commission - Facility for Refugees in Turkey Factsheet
- European Court of Auditors (independent audit): the European Court of Auditors has critically reviewed the multi-billion project. In this report, it concludes that the money did arrive, but also criticises its transparency and effectiveness: European Court of Auditors - Special Report 11/2018: EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey

2. Shift towards border management and deterrence

- Lighthouse Reports (journalistic investigation): the leading independent investigative outlet *Lighthouse Reports* revealed in an extensive dossier (in cooperation with *Der Spiegel* and *El País*, among others) how millions in EU funding, intended for the reception of people fleeing, was used to finance deportation centres, surveillance technology and pushbacks at the Turkish borders: Lighthouse Reports - Bordering on Cruelty: EU Money Funding Turkish Deportations
- Human Rights Watch (human rights report): this report documents how the Turkish authorities, supported and funded by EU border management money, violently push back people fleeing at the borders with Syria and Iran: Human Rights Watch - Turkey: Syrian Refugees Deported to Danger
- Amnesty International (analysis of the deal): a sharp legal and humanitarian analysis by Amnesty International of how the EU-Turkey deal became the blueprint for outsourcing border control and shutting out asylum seekers: Amnesty International - The EU-Turkey Deal: Five Years of Shameful Failure

TURKEY & THE EU

Title card in the series:

Journalistic investigation revealed the systematic abuse and forced deportation of refugees from Gaziantep.

Tineke Strik travels to the Turkish border with Syria to find out how European money is being spent there on the (forced) return of Syrians. She visits the detention centre in Gaziantep from the outside and has to do so covertly, because the Turkish government does not want to be open about this with a critical MEP like Tineke Strik, nor with journalists. The film crew was accompanied by a local journalist who advised us on how far we could go, but tensions were high. Press freedom in Turkey is hard to find and the journalist travelling with us was possibly being followed. As was a high-ranking MEP like Tineke Strik.

Even if she had been able to enter the detention centre, everything would have been tidied up. Tineke also discusses this in the scene from the documentary. The journalism collective Lighthouse Reports obtained videos from people who had been held in the detention centre and verified them.

The large-scale international investigation by *Lighthouse Reports* (in cooperation with *NRC*, *Der Spiegel* and *Politico*, among others) exposed shocking abuses in the Turkish deportation system. The centre in Gaziantep – a huge complex close to the Syrian border that was partly funded with millions of euros of EU money – played a central role in this. The main findings about the centre in Gaziantep (and similar Turkish centres) are:

1. Forced and fraudulent "voluntary" return

People fleeing (mainly Syrians and Afghans) were put under heavy physical and psychological pressure to sign papers agreeing to a so-called 'voluntary return' (*voluntary return*). They were often told that the papers concerned their personal belongings or forms were signed without their knowledge or consent in order to give deportations to war zones an administrative veneer of legality.

2. Serious abuse and torture

Testimonies from former detainees and reports submitted to the UN describe systematic violence and abuse by guards. One of the most macabre findings from Gaziantep and surrounding centres was the so-called "cold room method": migrants were roughly stripped and locked for as long as 6 to 12 hours in ice-cold basement rooms where the air conditioning was running at full blast, resulting in hypothermia.

3. Degrading living conditions

The centre suffered from extreme overcrowding and a serious lack of hygiene. In addition, detainees were systematically cut off from the outside world: there was virtually no access to lawyers, legal assistance or independent monitors.

4. Direct deportation to dangerous areas (refoulement)

After signing the forms (whether forced or not), people fleeing were put on buses (sometimes bearing the EU flag) and taken straight across the border to Syria or sent back to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. This is a direct violation of the international *non-refoulement* principle, which prohibits sending people back to places where their lives are in danger. The investigation traced cases in which deportees were actually arrested or killed after arriving in their country of origin.

5. Complicity and looking the other way by the EU

Since 2007, the EU has invested hundreds of millions of euros in the construction, barbed wire, fingerprint systems and maintenance of these Turkish *removal centres*. Internal documents showed that European diplomats and officials in Ankara repeatedly raised the alarm internally about the deportations and the degrading conditions, but that the leadership in Brussels ignored these signals and deliberately kept the abuses out of official annual reports so as not to jeopardise the migration deal with Turkey.

https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/turkiye-growing-international-pressure-to-end-eu-financed-harmful-and-arbitrary-immigration-detention-practices

https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/turkeys-eu-funded-deportation-machine/

Title card in the series:

The new EU Migration Pact goes all-in on deals outside Europe.

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/NL/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0609

https://verblijfblog.nl/kabinet-omarmt-europees-voorstel-om-begrip-veilig-derde-land-makkelijker-toe-te-passen/

Title card in the series:

Aid workers warn that it is becoming increasingly difficult to help people fleeing.

https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/06/10/questions-and-answers-the-eu-pact-on-migration-and-asylum

https://redcross.eu/latest-news?theme_id=4

https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/grants/docs/080166e50ba7e7b3/Attachment_0.pdf

Title card in the series:

A parliamentary inquiry in Italy confirms in an official report that the intelligence services monitored Yambio for almost a year.

The main source is COPASIR (*Comitato Parlamentare per la Sicurezza della Repubblica*). This is the official, standing parliamentary committee in Italy that oversees the Italian intelligence services (the secret service).

- The finding: in an official report to the Italian parliament, COPASIR confirmed that the phones of David Yambio (together with those of NGO leaders Luca Casarini and Giuseppe Caccia of *Mediterranea Saving Humans*) were targeted for surveillance by the Italian intelligence services. According to the committee, this activity was "authorised within the law".

  https://www.fnsi.it/paragon-il-copasir-cancellato-non-e-stato-spiato-dallintelligence-italiana-fnsi-fare-chiarezza

  https://www.accessnow.org/press-release/no-normalising-spyware-italy/

  https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/italy-new-case-of-journalist-targeted-with-graphite-spyware-confirms-widespread-use-of-unlawful-surveillance/

ARREST OF TOMMY OLSEN

In March 2026, Tommy Olsen was arrested at his home in Norway following Greece's extradition request.
https://www.tv2.no/nyheter/tommy-fengsles-ikke-norge-verdig/18662573/
After five days in pre-trial detention, he was released.

Title card in the series:

Norway has definitively rejected the decision to extradite Tommy Olsen to Greece.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/may/20/norwegian-court-blocks-extradition-greece-tommy-olsen-migrant-rights-activist

Title card in the series:

Refugees in Libya has taken Frontex to the Court of Justice over its role in returning refugees to Libya.

https://front-lex.eu/litigation/challenging-the-complicity-of-frontexs-aerial-surveillance-activities-in-crimes-against-humanity/

Title card in the series:

The European Court of Justice
ruled in a historic judgment
that Frontex can no longer look away
from human rights violations:

Frontex must do more to check whether member states respect the rights of asylum seekers.

https://verfassungsblog.de/w-s-et-al-and-hamoudi-vs-frontex/

This legal analysis explains exactly why the judgment is historic. It describes how the ruling puts an end to Frontex's "structural irresponsibility". It confirms that, under EU liability law (Article 340 TFEU), Frontex can be held directly liable and must pay compensation if victims can show that the agency was involved in their pushback or illegal deportation.

https://infocuria.curia.europa.eu/tabs/affair?lang=EN&sort=AFF_NUM-DESC&searchTerm=%22C-136%2F24+P%22&publishedId=C-136%2F24+P

The official judgments of the Grand Chamber of the Court of Justice of the European Union (delivered on 18 December 2025) are available in full in the Court's database (*InfoCuria*).

Judgment C-136/24 P Hamoudi v Frontex explained:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7XP17TQs2k

Judgment C-679/23 P WS and Others v Frontex explained
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScPGDAza5xY

Title card in the series:

Stationed at the Bulgarian-Turkish border, Italian border guard and Frontex officer Silvia filed a Serious Incident Report.

She saw how Frontex officials are often kept away from critical situations.

Silvia fears that Europe's focus on security is putting refugees' rights at risk, including during the operations in which she herself takes part.

This text was added to the series at Silvia's request on 7 July 2026.

Future mandate of Frontex

The coming year will be marked by a paradox. On the one hand, there is political pressure from the member states to give Frontex more teeth through the new mandate (tougher action, operating in Africa, faster deportations). On the other hand, there is legal and societal pressure to rein in the mandate and subject it to strict human rights controls.

The coming year will therefore be a crucial turning point for Frontex, as the European Union is currently in the middle of preparations for the revision of the Frontex Regulation (Regulation 2019/1896). This evaluation and the subsequent legislative steps will determine what the organisation's mandate will look like from 2026/2027 onwards.

These are the main steps and political battlegrounds on the agenda for the coming year:

1. The legislative evaluation and the Commission proposal

The European Commission is completing the formal evaluation of the current mandate. On that basis, it will submit a concrete legislative proposal for the new, revised mandate. The focus here is on whether the agency should be given even more *operational powers in member states (and beyond), or whether the internal control mechanisms should be tightened.*

2. Expansion of operational powers in "Third Countries"

One of the most concrete and controversial steps in the coming year is the rollout of Frontex missions outside the EU.

> The mandate is expected to be broadened so that Frontex can be more operationally active in countries in North Africa, the Western Balkans and West Africa (such as the ongoing negotiations with countries like Senegal and Mauritania).

> Frontex may then not only advise, but also independently carry out border controls and coordinate deportations from the territory of those partner countries.

3. The transition to the 10,000-strong Standing Corps and beyond (30,000)

The agency is in the final phase of the transition to the full Standing Corps (its own operational force of 10,000 border guards). The coming year will be dominated by the final equipping, arming and operationalising of this enormous unit. The debate on the new mandate will determine under whose direct authority (Frontex or the host member state) these armed officers may act in incidents.

4. Implementation of the EU Migration Pact (screening & detention)

Now that the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is entering into force, Frontex will be given a key role in the new "pre-entry screening" procedure at the external borders. In the coming year, Frontex must put its mandate into practice in the new detention and screening centres, particularly in Italy and Greece, where it will be responsible for rapid identification, taking biometric data and immediately initiating return procedures.

5. The oversight (accountability) legal battle

In parallel with the political steps, legal pressure on the mandate is mounting. The rulings of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Justice (such as the Hamoudi case) are forcing Frontex to revise its internal human rights procedures. In the coming year, the European Parliament (via the Frontex Scrutiny Working Group) will debate the position that the new mandate must drastically strengthen the role of the Fundamental Rights Officer (FRO) and the independent monitors, including hard mechanisms to suspend Frontex operations (Article 46) in the event of push-backs.