

Frontex – Management of Europe's borders

Frontex is the Agency which helps those EU Member States facing strong migratory pressures to secure the EU's external borders, through coordinating deployment of equipment and border guards made available by Member States. In recent years, Frontex has managed a number of operations off the coasts of Greece, Italy and Spain, as well as on the Union's eastern land borders. With the continuing influx of migrants seeking to enter the Union by ever-increasing routes and methods, many experts underline the limited resources available to Frontex and call on the EU and its Member States to increase their contributions to the Agency.

Mediterranean operations

Frontex has been assisting Italy in dealing with the arrivals of irregular migrants off its southern coasts since 2006 in a series of operations. Border guards and equipment supplied by other Member States through Frontex have contributed to Italy's efforts, operating under Italian command. Frontex funding is not used to purchase equipment but only to cover the basic running costs of equipment supplied by Member States.

In November 2014, Frontex launched the joint border control and surveillance operation [Triton](#) in succession to Italy's 'Mare Nostrum' operation. Triton deploys both screening teams and debriefing teams to support the Italian authorities in collecting intelligence on the people-smuggling networks operating in the countries of origin and transit. The operational area of Triton covers Italian territorial waters as well as parts of the search and rescue zones of Italy and Malta.

Saving lives is a top priority for Frontex, and in the first two months of Operation Triton, some 5 894 migrants were saved in 36 separate search and rescue (SAR) incidents. In 2012, there were 169 SAR incidents in which Frontex operations were involved, with 5 757 migrants saved, while in 2013, there were 683 such incidents and 37 036 migrants saved.

Criticisms

A number of observers have criticised Frontex for failing to prevent fatal incidents involving third-country nationals trying to reach Europe through irregular and unsafe channels, in particular by boat in the Mediterranean. There have been [allegations](#) of pushbacks with a potential infringement of the 1951 [Refugee Convention](#) and of the principle of [non-refoulement](#). Others [argue](#) that the Agency's powers are limited and that the responsibility for operational activity at sea continues to lie largely with the Member States.

Mandate, structure and budget

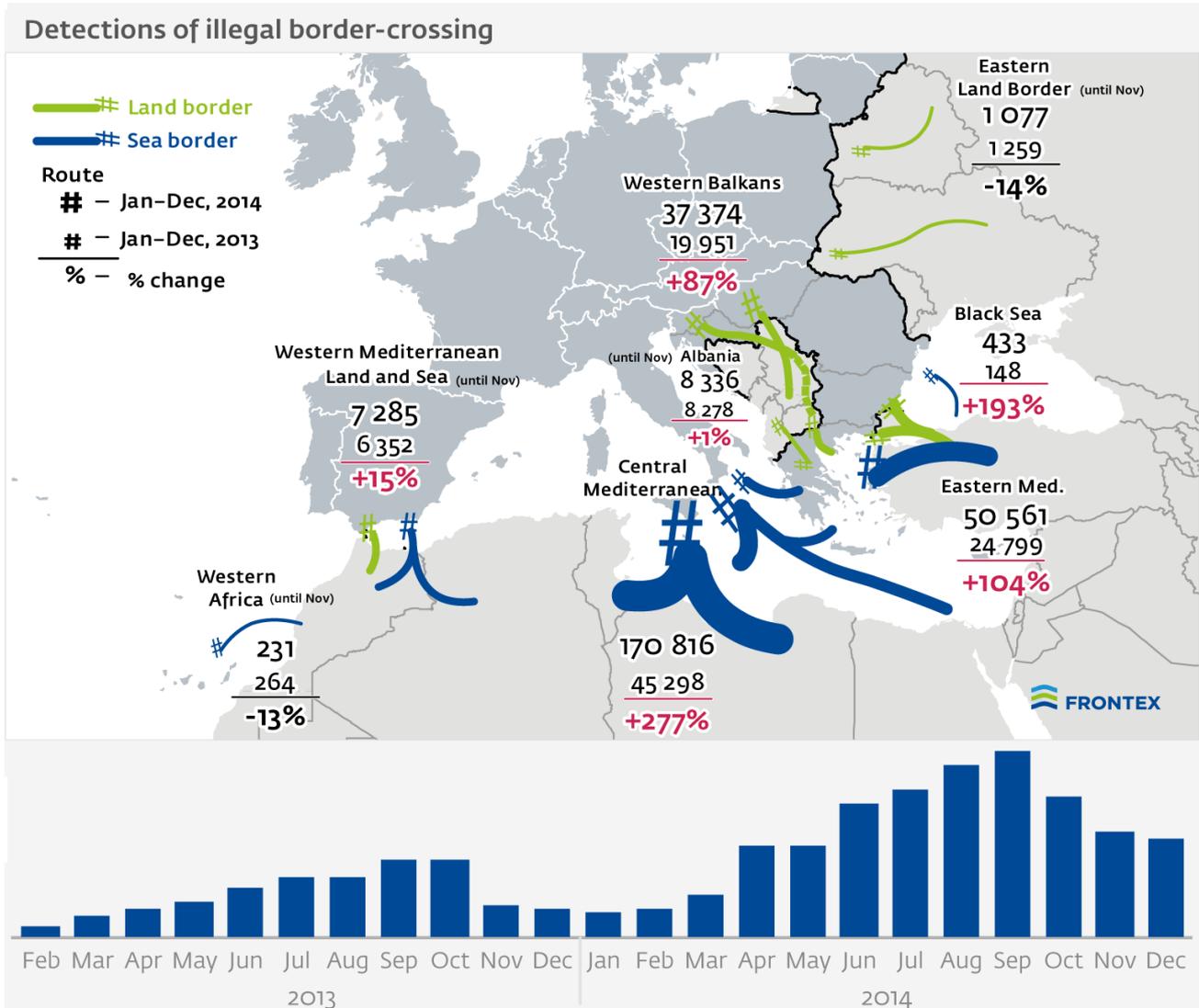
[Frontex](#), the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union, was established in 2004 by a [Council Regulation](#), [amended](#) in 2011. Its underlying goal is to fight against irregular migration, people-trafficking and terrorist infiltration. It can initiate joint operations at the EU's land, sea and air borders, and assisting Member States in organising joint return operations of irregular migrants. Furthermore it provides border security risk analyses, training of national border guards and support for research and development in the field of border security. Frontex's [budget](#) for 2015 amounts to €114 million (compared to €97 million in 2014) of which 72% goes to operational expenditure. The Agency currently has 316 staff members.

The 2011 Regulation enables Frontex to create **European Border Guard Teams (EBGT)** for deployment in joint operations and rapid border interventions. The EBGT are composed of border guards from EU Member States, experts in different areas of border management including land and sea border surveillance, dog handling, identification of false documents and second-line activities such as establishing nationalities of irregular migrants detected at a border.

Annex: latest trends

According to figures from Frontex, the number of illegal border-crossings detected in 2014 was around 278 000. This compares to a figure of 107 000 for 2013 and is almost double that for 2011 (141 000), the year in which the Arab Spring got under way. The increase is seen as largely due to the continuing displacement of people from the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

The map shows the change in detections of illegal crossings from 2013 to 2014.



Map supplied by Frontex.