



FRONT**EX**



EUROPEAN BORDER AND
COAST GUARD AGENCY

2024

Annual Report

of the Frontex Fundamental Rights Officer



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EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD

European Border and Coast Guard Agency – Frontex

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Foreword by the Fundamental Rights Officer



In 2024, in a context of geopolitical change both global and regional, war, unrest, climate change and natural disasters continued to ravage countries and uproot people. As a result, the number of persons displaced around the world continued to rise; while most were hosted by neighbouring and developing countries, some also tried to reach and seek protection in Europe. At the external borders of the European Union (EU), access to territory and asylum remained keenly needed. Respect for fundamental rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants continued to constitute a necessary integral part of border management.

In the EU, bringing to fruition years of effort, significant strides were made through the adoption of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, with strong measures to ensure compliance with fundamental rights, EU and international standards. Frontex has been given an important role in the practical implementation of the legislative package, including in the context of screening, and border and return procedures.

At national level, 2024 presented a mixed picture. As required by the Pact, work on the establishment of independent mechanisms to monitor compliance with fundamental rights at the borders was taken up or continued. At the same time many fundamental rights concerns in border management could also be observed. In this context, the work of Frontex's independent Fundamental Rights Office (the Office) in monitoring, advising on and promoting fundamental rights compliance is as crucial as ever. The Office aims at achieving impact on the way the Agency and national authorities conduct border management.

Efforts will also be invested to strengthen strategic compliance with fundamental rights as well as in support of national monitoring mechanisms. The Office will continue supporting Frontex with advice and assistance on the fundamental rights compliance of operational activities, within and beyond the borders of the EU, in line with the third-country engagement priorities set by Frontex and in accordance with the wider legal and policy framework.

As an example of activities conducted by the Fundamental Rights Office during 2024, around 1,850 days were spent in the field on monitoring missions in 24 countries; more than 50 serious incidents reports were launched; some 500 on-site days were devoted to delivering training on fundamental rights; and over 200 return operations were monitored.

Frontex underwent organisational changes, including the operationalisation of the new chain of command and the setting up of regional contingents of standing corps officers. In view of this progression as well as the expected further growth of the Agency, in 2024 the internal structure of the Fundamental Rights Office was amended to better align with the Agency's new structure. Work on follow-up to recommendations of two evaluations of the Fundamental Rights Office commenced, including development of a Vision for the Office as a strategic guide for the future.

We hope that the report provides for a relevant and interesting read.

Jonas Grimheden

Fundamental Rights Officer, Head of the Fundamental Rights Office
European Border and Coast Guard Agency

Introduction

This report aims at informing the general public of activities carried out by the independent Fundamental Rights Office within the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), and identified fundamental rights concerns in the European border and coast guard community, in particular the Agency.¹

Since 2019, the current European Border and Coast Guard Regulation (EBCG Regulation) has guided the strengthening of border management within the EU, with expanded mandate and resources assigned to Frontex. An important component of this is the independent mandate assigned to its Fundamental Rights Office. This report is structured in five chapters that capture this work.

Chapter 1 presents the main findings derived from the monitoring of activities at the external borders and in third countries.

Chapter 2 focuses on return-related activities, covering the monitoring of return operations, main recommendations on return operations by air and the Frontex reintegration programme.

Chapter 3, on accountability mechanisms and use of force, outlines the main findings from the two main accountability mechanisms under the mandate of the Frontex Fundamental Rights Officer: the complaints mechanism² and serious incident reports.³

Chapter 4 focuses on the Office's advisory functions and cooperation. After providing an overview on the advice provided on operational activities and fundamental rights concerns, on cooperation with third countries and risk analysis, this chapter deals with the Agency's Fundamental Rights Action Plan and the Technical and Operational Strategy on European Integrated Border Management, among other policy frameworks relevant for compliance with fundamental rights by the European border and coast guard community.

Chapter 5 presents the Office's considerable engagement in terms of training and capacity building, with activities addressed to internal and external stakeholders, and often organised in cooperation with external partners.

The Annual Report concludes with a presentation of the Fundamental Rights Officer's priorities for 2025.

¹ The 2024 Annual Report of the Fundamental Rights Officer is published in compliance with Article 109(4) of the European Border and Coast Guard (Frontex) Regulation. [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/1896 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 November 2019 on the European Border and Coast Guard and repealing Regulations \(EU\) No 1052/2013 and \(EU\) 2016/1624.](#)

² The Frontex complaints mechanism was established in 2016 to monitor and ensure respect for fundamental rights in all the activities of the Agency. It is an administrative mechanism where the Fundamental Rights Officer is responsible for handling complaints in accordance with the right to good administration.

³ The serious incident reports mechanism requires participants in Frontex activities to report, inter alia, potential violations of fundamental rights directly to the Fundamental Rights Office, designated handler for such cases. The Office will then follow up and, where reported information meets the threshold of a serious incident, launch investigations into cases.



CHAPTER 1.

Monitoring of activities at the external borders and in third countries



In 2024, the Frontex Fundamental Rights Office spent around 1,850 days in the field, an increase of more than 10 percent in comparison with the previous year, monitoring Frontex activities in 24 countries.

The map and chart below provide overviews of the monitoring days in the field conducted by the Fundamental Rights Office:

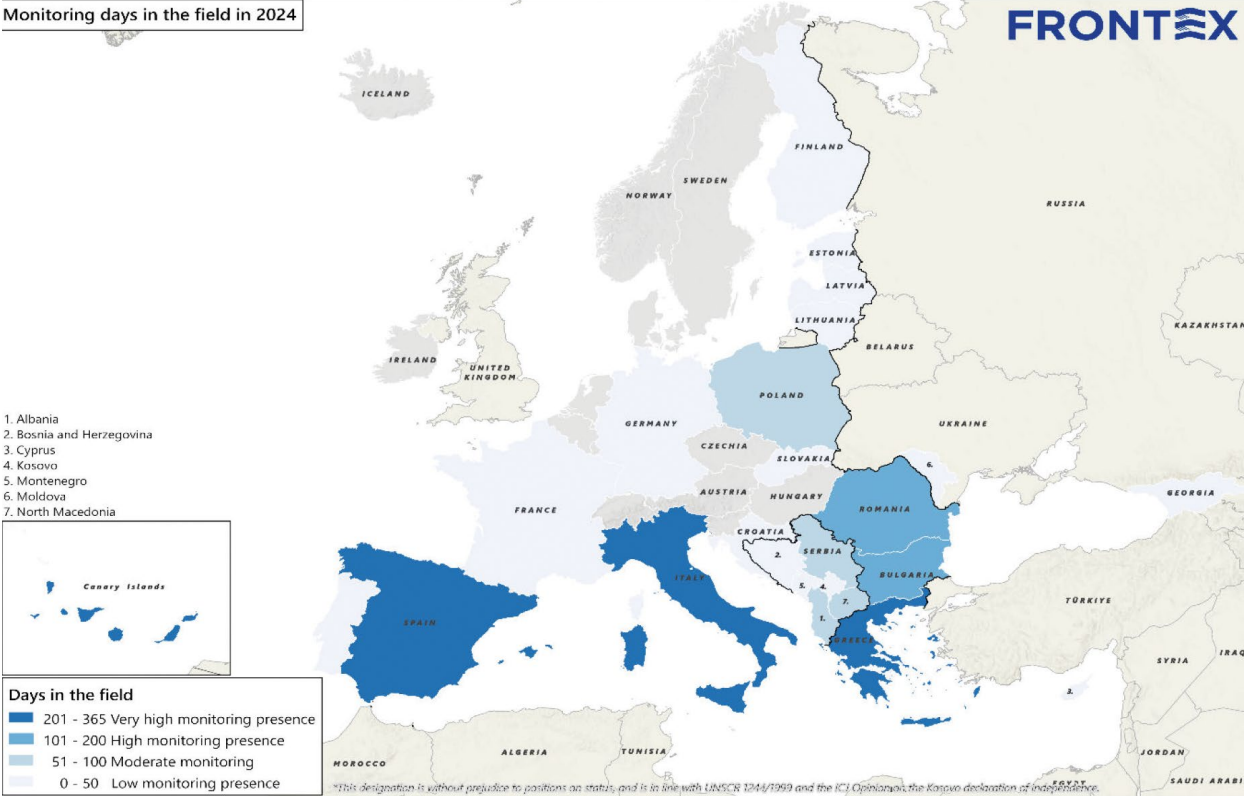
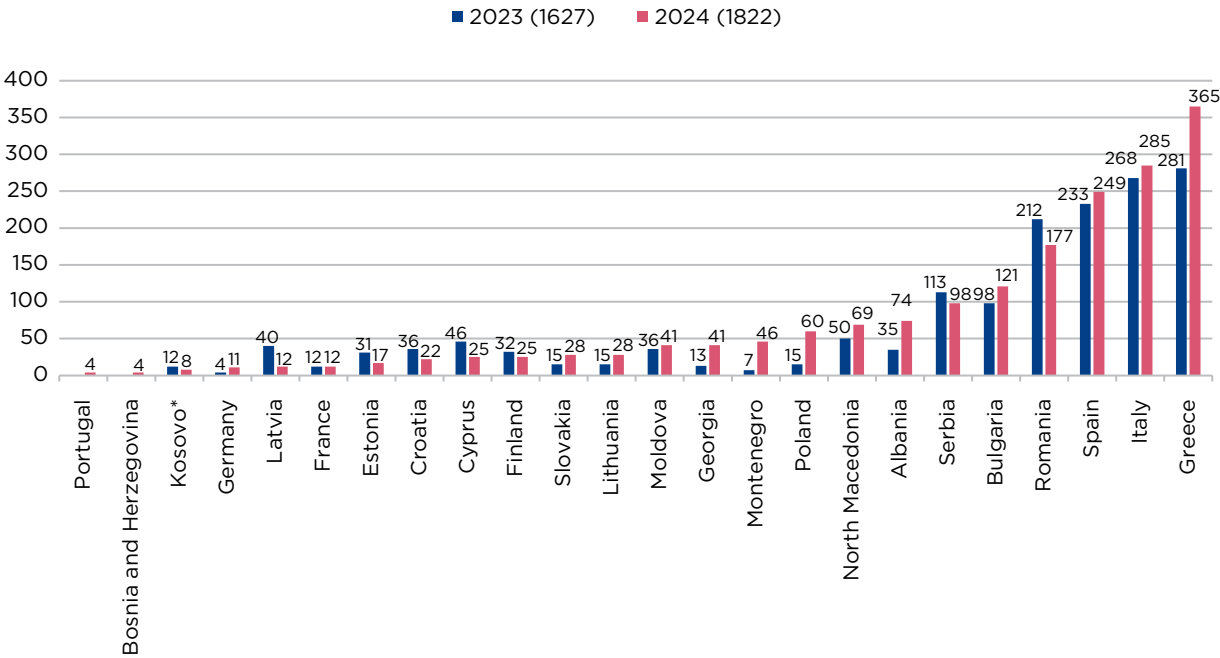


CHART 1. Monitoring of operational activities
Number of field days by country (2023-2024)



1.1 Access to operational areas and activities

Improvements were observed in the Office's access to operational areas, activities and documents (including databases managed by Frontex). In general, the fundamental rights monitors had access to all areas in which Frontex operational activities took place and to all documents relevant for their implementation.

In some cases, however, the Office continued to report limitations in accessing operational areas or activities. In Slovakia, monitors were initially denied permission to monitor joint land patrols for border surveillance, although authorisation by the national authorities was granted

in 2025. In Italy, national authorities did not authorise the monitors' participation in maritime patrols onboard national co-financed assets. And in Serbia, during the second half of 2024, monitors were denied authorisation to join land patrols, in contrast with previous practice.

Notwithstanding this, a particularly positive development involved instances of fundamental rights monitors being granted access to locations outside the Agency's operational areas, as a result of trust-based cooperation between the Fundamental Rights Office and the national authorities of Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Moldova, and Serbia.

1.2 Border surveillance

The Office continued to observe Frontex border surveillance operations on land and at sea across various operational contexts. For instance, monitors participated in land patrolling of border areas, maritime activities on board vessels and aerial assets, mobile surveillance systems' activities, night surveillance and transfer and registration procedures following apprehension of migrants.

In general, the Office reported that the activities effectively monitored were conducted in compliance with fundamental rights. However, as detailed below, some fundamental rights concerns were also raised during the year.

1.2.1 Collective expulsions and related fundamental rights violations

The Office received allegations of collective expulsions and ill treatment of migrants, particularly in the context of operational activities in Bulgaria (at the Bulgarian-Turkish border), Serbia (at the border with Bulgaria) and Greece (sea and land borders with Türkiye). Similar allegations, although on a smaller scale, were also reported to the fundamental rights monitors during missions in Albania (border with Greece), Poland (border with Belarus), and Latvia (border with Belarus). The Office assessed all those allegations, some raised by independent actors, examining more thoroughly under the serious incident report procedure those supported by concrete evidence and of a more serious nature (mainly those in Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia, as further described below).

Collective expulsions are a serious breach of fundamental rights under the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human

Rights.⁴ They may result in arbitrary denials of access to asylum procedures and violations of the principle of *non-refoulement*. The abovementioned alleged cases of collective expulsions were often accompanied by inhumane and degrading treatment of migrants, use of violence by border guards (frequently with the involvement of masked actors of unknown affiliation, use of masks by the border police or unorthodox maritime procedures), the deprivation or destruction of migrants' property and unlawful deprivation of liberty.

On a positive development, North Macedonian authorities' alleged practice of transporting (and informally returning) apprehended migrants to the border with Greece seems to have stopped. Apprehended migrants were transported to reception centres for registration and screening, and were informed about their right to apply for asylum.

⁴ Collective expulsions, sometimes referred to as "pushbacks", are a violation of Article 19 of the [Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union](#), and Article 4 of [Protocol No. 4 to the European Convention on human rights](#). Collective expulsions are defined as "any measure compelling aliens, as a group, to leave a country, except where such a measure is taken on the basis of a reasonable and objective examination of the particular case of each individual alien of the group." See European Court of Human Rights, [Factsheet on collective expulsions of aliens](#), October 2024.

Important rulings of the European Court of Human Rights

In 2024, the European Court of Human Rights issued several judgments on cases involving collective expulsions. The Court found that EU countries such as Cyprus, Hungary, Greece and Poland had acted in breach of Article 4 of Protocol No. 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights prohibiting collective expulsions (see the judgments in the cases of [M.A. and Z.R. v. Cyprus](#), [M.D. and others v. Hungary](#), [K.P. v. Hungary](#), and [Sherov and others v. Poland](#)).

At the beginning of 2025, in the case of [A.R.E. v Greece](#), the Court found strong indications suggesting a systematic practice of collective expulsions of third-country nationals from the Evros region to Türkiye by Greek authorities. The Court also concluded that the investigations conducted by the national authorities had fallen far short of satisfying the effectiveness requirements established by the European Convention of Human Rights. This judgment followed a decision rendered in December 2024 in the case of [G.R.J. v. Greece](#) in which the Court, although declaring the application inadmissible, found that there were strong indications to suggest that at the time of the events a systematic practice of “pushbacks” from the Greek islands to Türkiye existed.

Bulgaria. Serious concerns regarding fundamental rights violations, including collective expulsions and ill-treatment of migrants at the Bulgaria’s border with Türkiye, were on multiple occasions brought to the attention of national authorities during the monitoring of operational activities and in the context of investigations of serious incidents. Similar concerns were raised by independent external actors.⁵

Noting that effective measures to improve fundamental rights compliance had not been taken, on 11 June 2024 the Fundamental Rights Officer issued an Opinion on the fundamental rights situation in Frontex operational areas in Bulgaria. The Fundamental Rights Officer expressed serious concerns regarding collective expulsions and related incidents (reported mostly in 2022 and 2023) and warned the Agency of significant legal and reputational risks of operating in a context where widespread violations of fundamental rights by Bulgarian border police officers were well documented, and where Frontex officers may have been directly or indirectly involved in such violations.

This Opinion addressed a series of urgent recommendations to Frontex and Bulgarian authorities to ensure that all persons detected and apprehended in connection with

irregular border crossings were registered and referred to appropriate procedures, as prescribed under EU and national legal frameworks. The Fundamental Rights Officer noted that the continuation of Frontex activities in Bulgaria, and particularly any increase of detection capabilities, should be made conditional on stringent fundamental rights safeguards, including but not limited to measures concerning operational reporting, systematic involvement of Frontex officers in key operational activities and establishment of a national independent monitoring mechanism in line with EU standards.⁶

The recommendations of a more operational nature in the Opinion were included in the Operational Plan and shall be fulfilled during the implementation of Joint Operation Bulgaria 2025. Moreover, the Opinion triggered an extensive consultation process between Frontex and national authorities, resulting in a draft joint action plan encompassing measures to strengthen fundamental rights compliance (finalised and adopted in the first half of 2025), within the framework of the Frontex Fundamental Rights Compliance Panel (see box below). The Fundamental Rights Office acknowledges the positive efforts of Frontex as a whole and the Bulgarian authorities in the follow-up to the Opinion.

⁵ These include the [Report on the fact-finding mission to Bulgaria](#) conducted by the Council of Europe Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees in September 2023 (published in January 2024). These concerns are consistent with previous observations by several independent sources including the Council of Europe [Commissioner for Human Rights](#), the latest published United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees-Bulgarian Helsinki Committee annual border monitoring reports (2021 and 2023), as well as Concluding Observations by the [UN Committee Against Torture](#) and the [Human Rights Committee](#).

⁶ The current mechanism, based on a tripartite agreement between the Border Police, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, has a broad mandate and considerable expertise. However, the existing framework does not envisage any involvement of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria and does not offer adequate investigative powers. Moreover, there are concerns as to its financial sustainability and the solidity of its institutional framework (lack of a separate legal personality and permanent secretariat). See also European Agency for Fundamental Rights (September 2024). [Monitoring fundamental rights during screening and the asylum border procedure – A guide on national independent mechanisms](#).

The Frontex Fundamental Rights Compliance Panel

In December 2024, the Executive Director issued a Decision establishing a Fundamental Rights Compliance Panel, chaired by the Deputy Executive Director for Operations. The Panel focuses on addressing fundamental rights compliance issues that cannot be handled effectively at the operational level due to their strategic and cross-divisional nature. The Fundamental Rights Officer contributes to the activities of the Panel in an advisory capacity, with no prejudice to their independent role or their responsibilities under the EBCG Regulation. At the time of writing, the Panel has been structured with two dedicated geographical sub-groups on Bulgaria and Greece, to ensure a more effective follow-up, complemented by a horizontal sub-group to address key thematic cross-cutting issues with an impact in some or all Frontex operations. The establishment of the Panel, drawing on the experience of an earlier working group, is a positive step to ensure that strategic fundamental rights issues are promptly brought to the attention of the Agency's management and addressed effectively. The ability to invite external experts to Panel meetings, including from national authorities and civil society organisations, brings an added value to this new initiative.

Greece. Following the issuance of three Fundamental Rights Officer's Opinions in 2022, highlighting serious and persistent fundamental rights concerns in border management practices in Greece, the Greek authorities adopted an implementation plan setting out actions addressing such concerns. The implementation plan was concluded in 2024. The Fundamental Rights Office and Frontex jointly assessed the execution of the plan. The Fundamental Rights Office acknowledged the efforts of the Greek authorities to implement the recommendations included in the plan even though much remains to be done.

As part of the measures adopted under the Greek implementation plan, fundamental rights monitors attended daily joint coordination board meetings with all the operational actors, and incidents involving co-financed assets were recorded with cameras purchased under the plan. On the Aegean islands, when Frontex land patrolling teams were involved in incidents, follow-up was performed until migrants were handed over to the reception authorities, resulting in a substantial reduction of allegations of collective expulsions of migrants after their landing on these islands.

Despite this progress, continued reports of allegations of collective expulsions and ill treatment at sea and on islands where Frontex was not operating with land patrols, as well as at the land border in Evros region, keep raising significant fundamental rights concerns. Recently, these concerns were confirmed by rulings of the European Court of Human Rights making reference to *pushback* practices at the time of the adjudicated events (see separate box on important court rulings). Drawing on lessons learnt, the Fundamental Rights Officer recommended further fundamental rights safeguards to be implemented by Frontex and national authorities in the context of the 2025 Operational Plan.

Serbia. Allegations of collective expulsions and ill treatment of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Serbia were reported during debriefing interviews conducted in Bulgaria or by those migrants who were apprehended by Frontex operational officers at the border areas in Serbia or Bulgaria. This triggered the opening of serious incident reports, which in the course of 2024 concluded that collective expulsions had likely occurred. In some cases, photographic evidence showed injuries compatible with the migrants' accounts of the incidents. Generally, the Serbian authorities rejected the allegations, arguing an absence of formal records or evidence. Various actions were taken in 2024, including a dedicated mission to the country and targeted exchanges with the Management Board and the Executive Director. The Office will continue to raise these concerns both with the Agency and with the Serbian authorities to ensure that allegations of fundamental rights violations in Frontex operational areas are properly addressed.

Factors increasing the risk of collective expulsions.

Several factors contributed to an environment where collective expulsions were more likely to occur. These included: (1) missing or incomplete operational reporting, making it difficult to retrieve information on alleged incidents; (2) the tendency of some national authorities to avoid deploying Frontex officers in sensitive border areas (such as areas in proximity of border fences or areas where most of incidents of irregular border crossing and apprehensions occurred) or in sensitive tasks (such as the apprehension of groups of migrants);⁷ (3) reduced accountability due to the presence of multiple law enforcement and national security forces in certain border areas, with unclear mandates and divisions of tasks, operating outside of the scope of Frontex joint operations; (4) the failure of some participants in joint operational activities to fulfil their duty to report potential fundamental rights violations, sometimes for fear of

⁷ This situation has been observed in countries such as Bulgaria, Greece, or Serbia. In other cases, such as Poland, Frontex is not present at the green border, while at border crossing points its presence is very limited.

negative repercussions; (5) the lack of effective national investigations into alleged fundamental rights violations in some operational contexts; (6) inadequate cooperation of national authorities in the follow-up processes on allegations of serious incidents; (7) absent or weak national independent monitoring mechanisms; and

(8) insufficient training of officers deployed in border surveillance tasks. Concerted efforts by Frontex and national authorities to address these underlying factors are key to reducing the risk of collective expulsions at external borders.

The impact of emergency legislation on fundamental rights in the context of border surveillance

As in previous years, the Office raised concerns regarding emergency border procedures and legislation in several countries at the EU's Eastern border. In Finland, the *Act on temporary measures to combat instrumentalised migration*⁸ was adopted in July 2024. To respond to instrumentalised migration, the Act allows border guards to turn away asylum seekers at the country's eastern border. Exceptions are envisaged for certain categories of asylum seekers considered particularly vulnerable and for persons in a real or imminent danger of persecution. A joint decision by the Government and the President is needed to activate the emergency provisions under the Act. No such decision was taken in 2024.⁹ Similar laws were adopted in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and submitted for adoption in Poland.

These emergency provisions are in tension with the Member States' core fundamental-rights and international-protection obligations, particularly as regards the prohibition of collective expulsions, the prohibition of *refoulement*, and the right to asylum.¹⁰ The limited safeguards and exceptions envisaged for particularly vulnerable persons might be difficult to implement in practice, especially if border guards are not specifically trained in assessing vulnerabilities and/or risk of persecution and considering the fact that such assessments require appropriate facilities and setting (e.g. interpreters) to be conducted effectively. In many respects, the migration instrumentalisation-related provisions adopted by said Member States go beyond the derogations allowed under the New Pact.¹¹

While reiterating its concerns regarding the fundamental risks stemming from the application of national laws on instrumentalised migration, the Office commended national authorities in Finland and Estonia for involving fundamental rights monitors, in an observer and advisory role, during dedicated training sessions and contingency planning exercises, signalling their commitment to consider fundamental rights aspects in the implementation of emergency procedures.

1.2.2 Aerial surveillance activities and support for search and rescue in pre-frontier areas

Throughout the year, the Fundamental Rights Office multipurpose aerial surveillance services, operating both ensured continuous monitoring and advice on the Agency's

⁸ Act on Temporary Measures to Combat Instrumentalised Migration (482/2024), available at: [Laki väliaikaisista toimenpiteistä.. 482/2024 - Säädökset alkuperäisinä - FINLEX *](#).

⁹ These concerns are also combined with the observation that current monitoring bodies have either limited mandates (e.g. non-discrimination) or lack sufficient resources, and a national independent border monitoring mechanism has not yet been specifically tasked with monitoring fundamental rights compliance at EU external borders.

¹⁰ Similar concerns have been expressed by external observers. For example, in the case of Finland: [Finland's deportation law puts EU's migration norms to the test - POLITICO](#); [YK:n pakolaisjärjestö UNHCR kritisoi eduskuntaan edennytää käännetytslakia: "Vaarallinen ennakkotapaus" - Maailma / HS.fi](#). In February 2025, the European Court of Human Rights held preliminary hearings on three cases concerning collective expulsions in contexts of instrumentalised migration: [R.A. AND OTHERS v. POLAND, H.M.M. AND OTHERS v. LATVIA, and C.O.C.G. AND OTHERS v. LITHUANIA - Grand Chamber hearings concerning Latvia, Lithuania and Poland - ECHR - ECHR / CEDH](#).

¹¹ The Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation ([Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1359 of the European Parliament and the Council of 14 May 2024 addressing situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum and amending Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1147](#)) establishes a legal framework for EU member states to respond to exceptional migration-related situations, including instrumentalised migration. The Regulation does not allow Member States to adopt measures that would constitute a breach of fundamental right obligations under the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union and conditions the application of emergency derogations to the basic principles of the right to asylum and the respect of the principle of non-refoulement.

in the Central Mediterranean Sea (pre-frontier areas) and within the framework of Frontex Joint Operations.

The Fundamental Rights Office had full access to the European surveillance room, the heart of the aerial surveillance services provided by Frontex, and was able to provide effective monitoring. The Office developed a stand-by-duty system (implemented as of 2025) to ensure continued monitoring.

In the course of 2024, regular exchanges with Frontex entities were held to provide advice and to advance the implementation of the recommendations outlined in an Opinion on the Central Mediterranean by the Fundamental Rights Officer,¹² as well as recommendations made by the European Ombudsman when concluding her inquiry on Frontex's obligations relating to search and rescue related to maritime surveillance activities.¹³

Recommendations issued by the Fundamental Rights Office aimed at strengthening the protection of the right to life of persons in distress at sea by including procedural safeguards in the operational documents and reporting tools of aerial surveillance services provided by the Agency. In 2024, the Office worked with other Frontex entities for the adoption of Frontex internal guidelines related to the issuance of "Mayday relay" signals which take into account fundamental rights safeguards and indicators.¹⁴ In addition, the Office contributed to the development of a sighting report template aiming at promoting compliance with protection obligations. The Office also assessed, launched and investigated serious incidents related to events in EU and non-EU search and rescue regions (see Chapter 3 *Accountability mechanisms*

and report on use of force incidents – Section 3.1 *Serious incident reports*).

The Office considers the contribution provided by the Agency in supporting search and rescue operations in pre-frontier areas with Frontex deployed aerial assets critically important for saving lives of persons in distress at sea. However, the Fundamental Rights Office has highlighted and shared its concerns with Frontex entities on issues related to the protection of the right to life and the principle of *non-refoulement* in the context of the support provided by Frontex in search and rescue operations, especially when the Agency is sharing sightings of boats with third countries with a poor track record of human rights protection for migrants. In this respect, the Office submitted a number of fundamental rights risk assessments and final evaluations of multipurpose aerial surveillance service requests in pre-frontier areas.

Overall, striking the right balance between obligations stemming from maritime international obligations, the protection of the right to life of persons at sea in emergency situations, and the principle of *non-refoulement*, in a vast area with a high rate of mortality and limited surface maritime assets, remains challenging. Discussing these concerns and challenges, and how they could be better addressed to reinforce respect for fundamental rights, including through cooperation with non-EU countries and non-state actors, is a prerequisite for identifying and implementing solutions. To this end, the Office continues to engage in an open dialogue with the EU institutions, national authorities, international organisations and non-state actors.

1.2.3 Support for search and rescue activities in the context of joint operations

Support for search and rescue operations at sea was a crucial operational activity performed by the Agency. National authorities, with the support of Frontex maritime assets in the context of joint operations, continued making notable efforts to rescue people at sea and disembark them in ports of safety. This significantly contributed to saving lives at sea.

Thanks to cooperation with the host Member States, fundamental rights monitors had access to monitoring sea patrolling onboard Frontex maritime assets and in some cases (Greece and Spain) on Frontex co-financed vessels. Granting full access to the monitoring of this activity (see limitations encountered during 2024 in Section 1.1 – *Access to operational areas and activities* above) will further strengthen the role of the Office in

¹² In July 2023, the Fundamental Rights Officer issued an Opinion on fundamental-rights concerns related to sending alerts to the Libyan Joint Rescue Coordination Centre and on search and rescue operations in the Central Mediterranean.

¹³ European Ombudsman, [Decision on how the European Border and Coast Guard Agency \(Frontex\) complies with its fundamental rights obligations with regard to search and rescue in the context of its maritime surveillance activities, in particular the Adriana shipwreck \(OI/3/2023/MHZ\)](#).

¹⁴ In general - A May Day relay (more commonly called a mayday relay) is a distress procedure used in radio communications, primarily in maritime and aviation contexts. It occurs when one vessel or aircraft transmits a distress call on behalf of another that is in urgent danger but cannot communicate directly with rescue authorities. In Frontex operations the "mayday relay" is transmitted on VHF Channel 16. The call is repeated usually every 30 minutes if no acknowledgement is received. The process involves repeating the word "mayday relay" three times, followed by details about the vessel or person in distress, their position, and the nature of emergency. This allows other stations or rescue coordination centres to be alerted to the situation by a third party.

providing advice, and in identifying and sharing best practices to strengthen the protection of persons at sea in the context of search and rescue operations conducted with the support of Frontex and coordinated by the host Member States.

For those reasons, the Office continued to highlight the importance of increasing Frontex deployed resources, such as maritime assets, in various operational areas in France, Greece, Italy and Spain. This would help reinforce maritime surveillance and search and rescue capabilities

at the national level, allowing Frontex to further support the national efforts to save lives at sea.

The Office was requested to contribute to the assessment of the general situation in a third country made in accordance with the External Sea Borders Regulation.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Office provided its contribution to the annual report submitted within the context of the evaluation of the External Sea Borders Regulation, related to establishing rules for the surveillance of the external sea borders in the context of operational cooperation coordinated by Frontex.

1.3 Migration management activities

1.3.1 Collecting information at disembarkation points

In line with the observations already made in 2023, throughout 2024 the Fundamental Rights Office continued to note the need for a clearer regulation of the activities performed by the Agency at disembarkation points. To this end the Office strongly recommended the inclusion of specific guidelines and fundamental rights safeguards in the operational plans.

During the reporting period, the Office continued reporting on potential risks to fundamental rights while gathering information at disembarkation points. In some locations in Italy, activities at the disembarkation points were at times conducted by Frontex teams before the provision of immediate assistance (such as water/food) to the migrants, or before the migrants had undergone preliminary health screenings/first medical checks. On other occasions, these activities were performed right after disembarkation, without considering the vulnerable state of the disembarked migrants who, in some instances, had experienced particularly traumatic circumstances during the journey, such as shipwrecks or loss of family

members. Notwithstanding this, the Fundamental Rights Office also took note of significant improvements in the manner in which those activities were performed in some operational locations (e.g. in Lampedusa, Italy), duly implementing the Office's recommendations.

While the overall progress is notable, the Office considers that additional efforts are needed to ensure uniform adherence to fundamental rights safeguards across all operational locations, further guaranteeing that fundamental rights in activities at disembarkation points are fully protected. The Agency should ensure that operational plans include clear guidelines on such activities, specifying, *inter alia*, the purpose, objective and sequence of those activities as well as applicable safeguards (including on fundamental rights). In the absence of such guidelines, the Agency should consider refraining from gathering general information for risk analysis purposes at disembarkation points (see also Section 1.3.3 – *Screening and debriefing activities*).

1.3.2 Identification: registration and fingerprinting of migrants

The Fundamental Rights Office observed fingerprinting of migrants in a number of countries with Frontex operations (i.e. Spain, Italy, Greece). In general, this was carried out without any major challenges and without raising

fundamental rights concerns. The Office recommended reinforcing the provision of information on the obligation to provide fingerprints, on the purpose of the activity, and on the manner in which the data of the migrants

¹⁵ [Regulation \(EU\) No 656/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 establishing rules for the surveillance of the external sea borders in the context of operational cooperation coordinated by the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union.](#)

is to be processed, as required by the 2013 Eurodac Regulation.¹⁶ The Office also recommended the Agency clarify in the Operational Plans the age limit which must

be respected by the members of the Frontex teams when fingerprinting migrants (given the existence of different standards across national legislations).

1.3.3 Screening and debriefing activities

The Fundamental Rights Office was involved in monitoring and providing advice on Frontex screening and debriefing activities performed in different operational contexts. As in previous years, the Office continued to recommend the Agency strengthen the safeguards applicable to debriefing and screening activities (particularly when collecting information for risk analysis purposes).

Acknowledging this need, and further to the European Data Protection Supervisor's Opinion of June 2022¹⁷ (see further Chapter 4 *Advisory functions and cooperation* – Section 4.8 *Recommendations from external stakeholders*), in October 2024 the Frontex Executive Director adopted a decision on conditions for screening and debriefing activities.¹⁸ This decision provides for a minimum set of fundamental rights safeguards to be ensured in all Frontex operational activities, taking on board practical recommendations made by the Office on issues previously identified in the context of the Office's monitoring activities, with the purpose of enhancing the fundamental rights safeguards applicable to both screening and debriefing interviews performed by Frontex teams and mitigating possible fundamental rights risks linked to the performance of these activities. Although the adoption of this decision is an important step, the Office considers it essential to fully integrate the new safeguards in the Operational Plans in order to fully ensure that fundamental rights standards and guarantees are always in place.

Screening activities. Frontex supported national authorities by deploying officers for interviewing migrants to establish their assumed nationality and contribute to the identification process. In 2024, the Office observed that in most locations, screening interviews were generally conducted in line with the existing fundamental rights safeguards and under adequate conditions.

However, concerns over the place where screening interviews were performed, and its impact on privacy and confidentiality of the interviews, were raised in certain locations in Spain and Greece. The lack of a standardised screening form was reported in Albania. Cases of inadequate registration of the age of unaccompanied children by the Frontex teams or national authorities were also reported in Spain. In this regard, the Office stressed the need to systematically apply the principle of presumption of minority where there may be a legitimate doubt as to the age of the migrant concerned, also in relation to those who claim to be adults (hence referring the presumed child to the relevant authorities for age assessment and other relevant procedures).

On Greece, the Fundamental Rights Officer issued an Opinion on assumed nationality during screening activities¹⁹ in response to certain practices observed by the monitors. The Fundamental Rights Officer stressed that the assumed nationality indicated by Frontex during the screening interview cannot be considered

¹⁶ [Regulation \(EU\) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of fingerprints for the effective application of Regulation \(EU\) No 604/2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes, and amending Regulation \(EU\) No 1077/2011 establishing a European Agency for the operational management of large-scale IT systems in the area of freedom, security and justice \(recast\)](#), repealed in 2024 by [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1358 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on the establishment of 'Eurodac' for the comparison of biometric data in order to effectively apply Regulations \(EU\) 2024/1351 and \(EU\) 2024/1350 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Directive 2001/55/EC and to identify illegally staying third-country nationals and stateless persons and on requests for the comparison with Eurodac data by Member States' law enforcement authorities and Europol for law enforcement purposes, amending Regulations \(EU\) 2018/1240 and \(EU\) 2019/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation \(EU\) No 603/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council](#).

¹⁷ European Data Protection Supervisor, [EDPS Supervisory Opinion on the rules on processing of personal data by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency \(Frontex\) \(Case 2022-0148\)](#), June 2022.

¹⁸ Conditions for screening and debriefing activities under the host country command and Standard operating procedure for debriefing activities based on the Agency's instructions. Annex to the Decision of the Executive Director No R-ED-2024-57, adopting the conditions for screening and debriefing activities under the host country command and Standard Operating Procedure for debriefing activities based on the Agency's instructions.

¹⁹ See the Fundamental Rights Officer's Opinion on the assumed nationality during screening activities in Greece, issued on 27 February 2024.

as a nationality assessment and replace the thorough evaluation that should be carried out during the asylum procedure by the competent national authority. The Office had identified a practice of making the presumed nationality assessment conducted by Frontex teams the decisive element, leading to the rejection of asylum requests by the national authorities, and accordingly the Fundamental Rights Officer suggested a number of measures aimed at mitigating possible fundamental rights risks. The proposed measures included adding a disclaimer in the screening form on the scope of the screening activity and its limitations in relation to the indication of the presumed nationality; and developing guidelines on how to establish presumed nationality to

improve the consistency and transparency of the process, including the recording of the indicators leading to the presumption of a certain nationality, especially when this may be different from the one claimed by the migrant.

The Office also raised concerns on the safeguards applicable to screening activities when questions for risk analysis purposes were asked during screening interviews (in Greece, Spain, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). As noted above, safeguards applicable to this type of interview must be enhanced, to mitigate the risks deriving from the non-applicability of safeguards inherent to debriefing and guarantee migrants' consent and the confidentiality of the information provided.

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum

The year 2024 was marked by the adoption of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum and the amendments of key EU legal acts relevant to migration management, followed by the adoption of a common implementation plan setting milestones for all Member States.²⁰ Among other requirements, the New Pact introduces an obligation for Member States to establish independent mechanisms to monitor compliance with fundamental rights during the screening of new arrivals and when assessing asylum claims at external borders.²¹ In this context, the Office started to support the Agency's efforts to guarantee the implementation of the Screening Regulation, which sets uniform rules for screening across the Member States. The Fundamental Rights Officer intends to maximise synergies with the national bodies tasked with carrying out monitoring functions under the New Pact. This may entail exchanging information, sharing good practices, co-facilitating training activities, conducting joint missions, collaborating in the context of investigations and supporting independent monitoring mechanisms in an advisory capacity (see box on *Engagement with national independent monitoring mechanisms* under Chapter 4 *Advisory functions and cooperation*).

Debriefing activities. These activities aim at obtaining information useful for risk analysis products from persons who crossed the external borders without authorisation, to corroborate analytical findings and identify trends and emerging threats. During 2024, the fundamental rights monitors were granted full access to debriefing interviews in all the locations in which this activity was performed. Overall, in most of the locations where Frontex officers performed debriefing activities, debriefing interviews were conducted under adequate conditions and in line with fundamental rights safeguards, including those relating to anonymity, confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the interview. Members of the Frontex teams correctly introduced themselves, and explained the purpose and objective of the interviews and the applicable fundamental rights safeguards (Greece, Italy, Spain).

However, some concerns were occasionally reported, mostly related to the manner, place and conditions in which interviews were performed. For instance, in Greece (Evros) Frontex teams conducted interviews only with migrants who had been previously selected by Hellenic Police officers, in their presence, while the migrants were in detention. Information provided on the objectives, purpose and safeguards applicable to debriefing interviews was at times limited. This is a key aspect of debriefing that should be strengthened. Prior to the debriefing interview, it is important that its objective and purpose are clearly explained, that migrants are made aware of the potential further use of the information and personal data shared during the interview, and that sufficient information on the privilege against self-incrimination and on the possible referral of the interviewee to the national authorities is provided.

²⁰ The New Pact, adopted on 14 May 2024, comprises 10 legislative acts which aim at reforming the entire EU framework for asylum and migration management. The provisions under the New Pact will be applied from June 2026.

²¹ Article 10 of the Screening Regulation ([Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament of the Council of 14 May 2024 introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders and amending Regulations \(EC\) No 767/2008, \(EU\) 2017/2226, \(EU\) 2018/1240 and \(EU\) 2019/817](#)) and Article 43(4) of the Asylum Procedure Regulation ([Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1348 of the European Parliament and the Council of 14 May 2024 establishing a common procedure for international protection in the Union and repealing Directive 2013/32/EU](#)). Also see European Agency for Fundamental Rights, [Monitoring fundamental rights during screening and the asylum border procedure – A guide on national independent mechanisms](#), September 2024.

The Office also raised concerns regarding the conditions of the facilities where debriefing interviews took place. In a location in Spain (Canary Islands) multiple interviewing rooms were located in a single container, without proper separation and acoustic isolation, which affected the confidentiality of the interviews. In Italy, the performance of debriefing interviews outdoors or in places outside the regular deployment locations brought significant challenges for ensuring all the safeguards of debriefing activities. Also, requests were on occasion made to conduct interviews right after the migrants had been transferred from the disembarkation point, even at night after rescues at sea.

Based on these findings, during 2024 the Office *inter alia* reiterated its recommendations that migrants be selected on the basis of objective criteria to avoid unlawful profiling; consent and anonymity be fully guaranteed; a clear line be drawn to differentiate debriefing interviews and other type of interviews such as criminal investigations; information collected during debriefing interviews be processed only within the dedicated reporting system; and migrants undergo medical checks prior to any debriefing interview. The Office also provided advice on how to ensure fundamental rights compliance during debriefing interviews on matters such as gathering information recorded in electronic devices, building upon findings of the fundamental rights monitoring missions.

1.4 Border checks

Fundamental rights monitors observed the performance of border checks at land, sea and air border crossing points. This included first-line border checks (i.e. travel document checks of passengers and vehicle checks) and second-line border checks. Overall, fundamental

rights monitors observed that Frontex teams in Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain conducted their activities in compliance with fundamental rights.

1.5 Persons in vulnerable situations: pre-identification and referral

One of the tasks of Frontex deployed officers is to proactively identify vulnerable persons (pre-identification) and refer them to national authorities (referral). In 2024, important initiatives were taken to further improve pre-identification and referral as well as the reporting of persons in vulnerable situations.

Lampedusa in Italy. The development of those guidelines, as well as the close engagement and cooperation of Italian authorities involved in border management with external actors active in the field (e.g. international organisations, non-governmental organisations and EU agencies), is considered as a good practice.

The Office noted some good practices. In some countries, operational guidelines were issued to support first-contact officials in pre-identifying vulnerable persons and to ensure that adequate assistance was guaranteed during interactions with law enforcement officials. In some locations, Frontex teams were effectively observed identifying and referring persons in vulnerable situations during registration and screening. In Bulgaria, the *National commission for combating trafficking in human beings* and civil society organisations were invited to conduct regular visits and assess trafficking risks in the context of the Schengen accession process. Also, with a view to further operationalise the procedures outlined in the *Handbook for the identification, referral and care of persons with vulnerabilities*,²² Italian authorities drafted a *Standard operating procedure for Lampedusa*, with consultations with partners including Frontex and its Fundamental Rights Office. This initiative contributed to streamlining the procedure to identify persons in vulnerable situations in the specific context of the island of

Throughout 2024 the Fundamental Rights Office also reported on gaps in pre-identification and referral of persons in vulnerable situations. In many operational activities, the referrals were mostly conducted for persons with visible vulnerabilities (e.g. children, pregnant women, persons with disabilities, persons with medical conditions), while less visible vulnerabilities, including potential victims of trafficking in human beings, were often not identified. Additionally, in several cases, vulnerable groups were not systematically given priority or given access to adequate facilities in the registration procedures or during first line border checks. Concerns were also expressed about the lack of safeguards for persons in particularly vulnerable situations at border crossing points (e.g. children, single parents with minors, the elderly, persons with disabilities or in need of medical support). The Office's 2024 recommendations on the matter focused on the need to strengthen the focus on pre-identification and referral of vulnerable persons in the context of Frontex operational activities (see, for instance, Albania, Bulgaria,

²² [Handbook for the identification, referral and care of persons with vulnerabilities entering Italy and within the protection and reception system](#), 2023.

Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, North Macedonia, Poland and Serbia).

When it comes to reporting, on occasions Frontex officers referred persons in vulnerable situations orally to their national team leader, and in some cases, they made brief reference to the referrals in the daily reports. Nevertheless, improvements in reporting of cases involving identification and referral of persons in

vulnerable situations were noted. Internal reporting forms have been amended to include dedicated sections to be filled in by Frontex deployed officers (with good practices recorded in Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Spain). However, the accuracy, consistency and comprehensiveness of the Agency's internal reporting on this matter still need improvements to ensure that potential fundamental rights risks are properly addressed.

1.6 Identification, referral and provision of information to persons in need of international protection

Members of the Frontex teams should also support the identification of persons in need of international protection and their referral to national authorities, in compliance with the guidance provided by the EU Agency for Asylum and Frontex on access to the asylum procedure.²³ Asylum seekers referred by Frontex officers to the national authorities should be handed over to the relevant host authorities for examination of their status and further processing of their case. Also, everyone seeking international protection, or who may need it, should be informed of their right to apply for asylum, and on the procedure to lodge an application in accordance with EU law.

In this light, while conducting monitoring missions to joint operations the Fundamental Rights Office regularly assessed whether the information provision on access to asylum was appropriate. In many operational areas, the staff of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or the EU Agency for Asylum were responsible for providing information and distributing materials on

the right to apply for international protection. This was observed both upon disembarkations (e.g. Italy) and during the first reception procedures taking place in the reception facilities (e.g. Greece, Italy). In Spain, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the EU Agency for Asylum have also developed information materials on international protection in various languages. At the Chisinau international airport, in Moldova, the presence of local monitors from non-governmental organisations contributed to guaranteeing unhindered access to asylum for potential asylum seekers.

In the context of joint operations, the Office reported on good practices, such as the appropriate provision of written information and the proactive engagement of Frontex teams (for example, some locations in North Macedonia or Spain). However, gaps in providing information to persons in need of international protection or the lack of relevant leaflets with information on access to asylum were also observed in many operational locations in which the Frontex teams were present.

1.7 Reception conditions

Reception and detention conditions in the locations where Frontex operational activities take place are primarily the responsibility of the host Member States. However, these conditions, when critical (such as overcrowded centres, prolonged stays, or poor reception conditions more generally), may have an impact on the fundamental rights compliance of the Agency's operational activities, particularly when they affect facilities in which Frontex officers perform their duties. The Fundamental Rights Office continues to recommend the Agency and the host countries work towards improving conditions.

In 2024, the Fundamental Rights Office reported on notable improvements in certain locations, such as the hotspot of Lampedusa (Italy), with swift and frequent

transfers to the mainland; in the first reception facility in Roccella Ionica (Italy); and in the closed control access centres of Lesbos, Kos and Samos, in Greece (with regard to waiting areas and access to registration facilities).

With regard to a number of operational locations, the Office continued to express concerns regarding the material reception and living conditions, particularly when involving children or persons in particularly vulnerable situations. For instance, in Spain, in the first reception centres of Almeria and Cartagena, on occasions children were separated from parents during their short stay or placed together with adults when unaccompanied. In the Canary Islands, due to the high migratory flows, the capacity of the shelters for unaccompanied minors

²³ European Union Agency for Asylum & European Border and Coast Guard Agency, [Practical Guide on Access to the Asylum Procedure / European Union Agency for Asylum](#), 2023.

became an issue of concern that affected their prompt transfer from the first-reception facilities to dedicated centres. In Italy, reception conditions in the first reception facility of Crotone remained challenging, particularly when involving prolonged stay of minors in inadequate facilities.

Concerns over reception conditions were also reported in relation to non-EU countries where Frontex was operating. In Albania, those concerned the provision of food and water in the reception facilities of Gjirokaster, Kapshtice and Qafe Bote (serious incident reports were concluded with fundamental rights violations verified); in Montenegro, at the Bozaj accommodation centre, independent sources raised concerns about alleged

practices of not allowing migrants arriving during the night to enter the centre before morning opening hours, regardless of weather conditions – with exceptions made for children; in North Macedonia, about the lack of proper legal basis for the functioning of the reception centres and general safety conditions in transit centres where Frontex activities took place; and in Serbia about the overall conditions of the facilities in Pirot where registration and screening were conducted (serious incident reports were concluded, finding that fundamental rights violations had likely occurred). On the mentioned serious incident reports, see Chapter 3 *Accountability mechanisms and reports on incidents involving use of force*.

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CHAPTER 2.

Activities related to returns

2.1 Monitoring of return operations

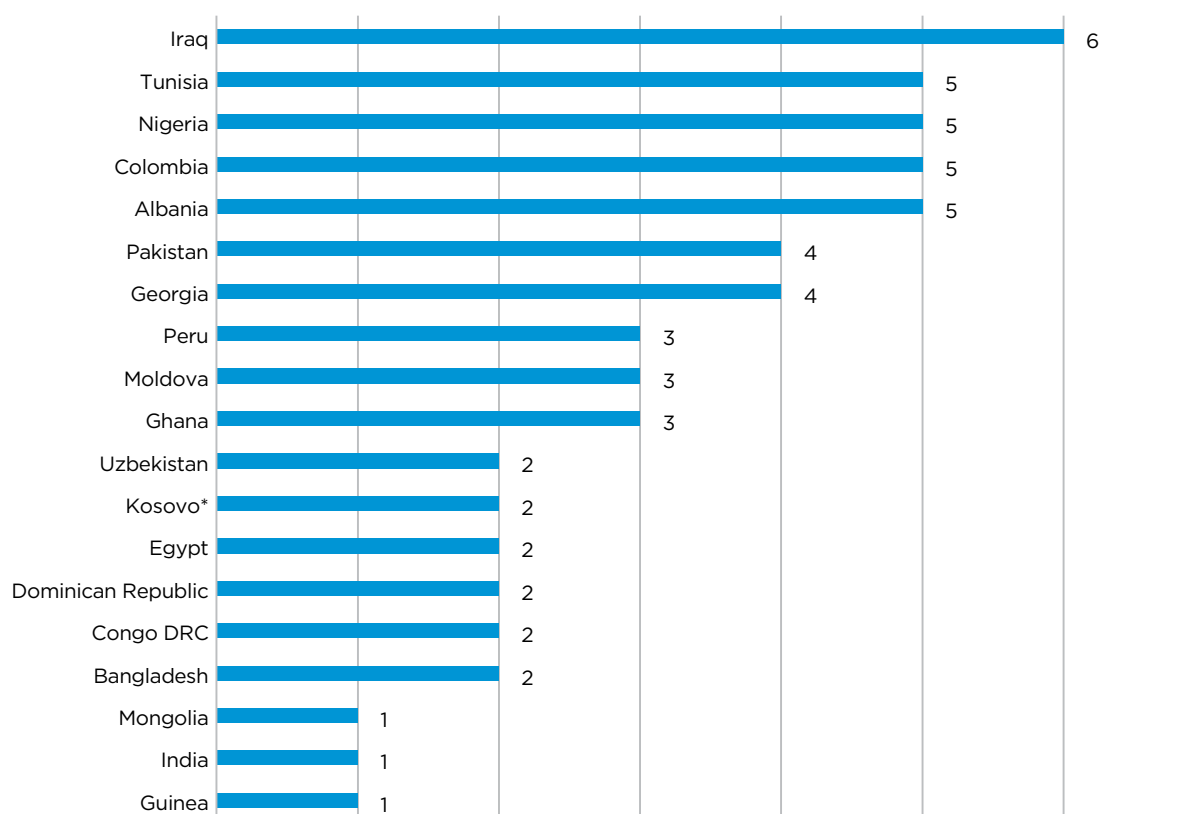
Frontex provided technical and operational assistance to 288 return operations by charter flights; 213 return operations (74%) had at least one monitor on board.²⁴ Of those, forced return monitors from the Frontex pool participated in 164 operations, and national monitors covered 52 (often together with a forced-return monitor from the Frontex pool or with a Frontex fundamental rights monitor).

In 2024, staff of the Frontex Fundamental Rights Office monitored 45 return operations (of which six had more

than one monitor on board) either as part of the pool of monitors or under the Office's general monitoring mandate. Additionally, six observers from the Fundamental Rights Office also participated in returns.²⁵

The following charts provide details on the destination, type, and the organising EU Member States for returns monitored under the monitoring mandate of the Fundamental Rights Officer.

CHART 2. Returns monitored under the Office's general mandate, by country of destination
(1 January – 31 December 2024)

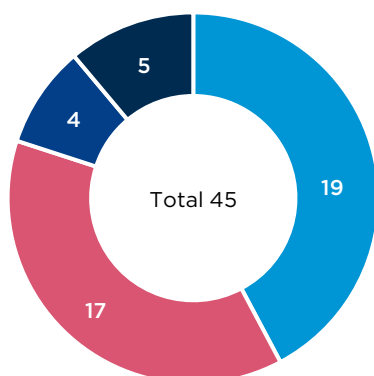


* Returns can be carried out to more than 1 country. For that reason the total number of non-EU countries does not correspond to the number of return operations

²⁴ On certain flights more than one monitor was present.

²⁵ Article 110 of the EBCG Regulation requests that “the fundamental rights officer shall assign at least one fundamental rights monitor to each operation. The fundamental rights officer may also decide to assign fundamental rights monitors to monitor any other operational activity he or she considers relevant.”

CHART 3. Returns monitored under the Office's general mandate, by type of return
(1 January – 31 December 2024)



- National Return Operations
- Joint Return Operations
- Collecting Return Operations
- Mixed Return Operations

Categories of returns by charter flights supported by the Agency:

National return operation by charter flights

When returnees from one Member State are returned to their country of origin or another non-EU country, including operations when support is provided by other Member States (e.g. forced-return monitors, forced-return escorts or aircraft provided by another Member State).

Joint return operation by charter flights

When returnees from two or more Member States are returned to their country of origin or another non-EU country on the same means of transport.

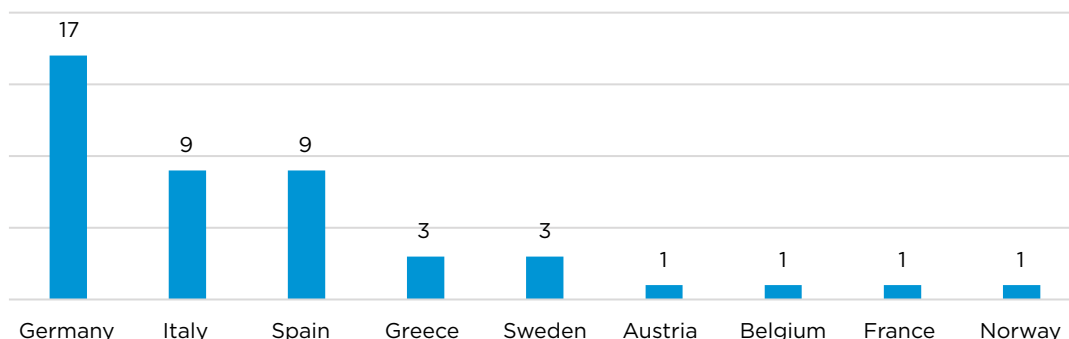
Collecting return operation by charter flights

When returnees from one or more Member States are returned to their country of origin and the aircraft and forced-return escorts are provided by the country of return (as per Article 50(3) of the EBCG Regulation).

Mixed return operation

When forced return and voluntary-based return are carried out on the same means of transport.

CHART 4. Returns monitored under the Office's general mandate, by organising Member State
(1 January – 31 December 2024)



2.2 Main recommendations on return operations by air

In 2024 the Fundamental Rights Office provided the following observations and recommendations on fundamental rights during return operations organised or coordinated by Frontex:²⁶

1. Member States should refrain from using restraints as a preventive measure when conducting return operations and encourage the introduction of changes in the national legislation in this regard.
2. Member States should make available to returnees up-to date information about the Frontex Complaints Mechanism (posters, roll-ups, leaflets) and complaint

forms in return-related activities in languages that nationals of non-EU countries understand or are reasonably believed to understand.

3. Participation in return-related training should continue, including in training for non-EU countries' participants, with a particular emphasis on strengthening awareness and knowledge of fundamental rights, and the protection thereof.
4. Member States, in cooperation with the Agency, should implement in full the recommendations of the European Ombudsman ensuring that all participants in a return operation are identifiable.

²⁶ Frontex, [Observations to Return Operations conducted in the first half of 2024 by the Fundamental Rights Officer, 2024](#); Frontex, [Observations to Return Operations conducted in the second half of 2024 by the Fundamental Rights Officer, 2025](#).

5. Member States should harmonise their return policies with the adopted *EU strategy on voluntary return and reintegration*. This would contribute to a cohesive EU

system for returns and overall efficiency of the EU migration policy.

2.3 The Frontex reintegration programme

Through the EU Reintegration Programme, Frontex provides essential support to migrants returning to their home countries. During 2024, the Fundamental Rights Office, in cooperation with the Return Division of Frontex, took part in three missions focused on reintegration assistance to Morocco, Bangladesh and Armenia. The

fundamental rights monitors visited local reintegration partners and collected feedback from returnees who had been assisted by the reintegration services. They also provided input to the overall evaluation of the EU Reintegration Programme.

2.4 Other return-related activities

In addition to the direct monitoring of Frontex-supported return operations, and the above-mentioned observations on return operations, the Office also provided observations on the Frontex Operational Activity Plan for Return 2025 and on the 2024 evaluation report on the Agency's return activities (including the 2025 implementation plans for the Frontex return escort and support officers and return specialists), now being conducted under the new contingent and chain of command structure.

To address potential risks and challenges in the field of return, the Office conducted fundamental rights assessments covering a range of third countries which are destinations for return operations supported or coordinated by Frontex, including scheduled flights.

Ad hoc fundamental rights assessments were provided with regard to North Macedonia, Ethiopia, Iran, Jordan, Pakistan, Israel, Armenia, Haiti, Ecuador, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon. These assessments undergo periodic reviews as necessary.

The Office also advised the Agency on specific return-related issues, policy papers and initiatives, such as the toolbox for children, quick-view manual for return and reintegration counsellors, and good practices on alternatives to detention in return procedures. Additionally, the Office has been extensively engaged in training development and delivery in the area of returns (see Chapter 5 *Training and capacity building* – Section 5.2 *Training in the area of return*).

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CHAPTER 3.

Accountability mechanisms and reports on incidents involving use of force

3.1 Serious incident reports

The Frontex framework on serious incident reporting provides that alleged fundamental rights violations, either by the Agency staff or which have taken place in the Agency's operational area, shall be directly reported to the Fundamental Rights Office by deployed officers and other participants in Frontex activities. Such initial reporting is followed by a preliminary assessment to determine if a case meets the requirements and threshold for launching a serious incident. Furthermore, the Fundamental Rights Office may also decide to launch a serious incident procedure based on information obtained from non-governmental and international organisations, or open sources.

Allegations of breaches of fundamental rights are then investigated, by inquiring with the Agency and relevant national authorities about the information gathered. Such investigations aim at corroborating or disproving those initial allegations, reaching a conclusion on the likelihood that fundamental rights violations may have occurred. Each serious incident report is closed with a final report

which summarises the process, the evidence found, its assessment and findings, and provides recommendations on measures to be implemented to address identified issues.

The number of serious incident reports launched depends on a variety of factors, including the number of Frontex officers deployed in certain operations/locations, their profiles and motivation to report, the number of monitoring visits conducted by the Office and the monitor's access to key locations or activities, as well as civil society organisations' access and initiative in the area of the operations. Therefore, despite its indication of fundamental rights challenges observed in a region, area or activity, the number of serious incident reports does not by itself reflect conclusively the number of fundamental rights violations, their distribution or seriousness, and should rather be contextualised and complemented by other observations and findings, such as those of the Frontex fundamental rights monitors.

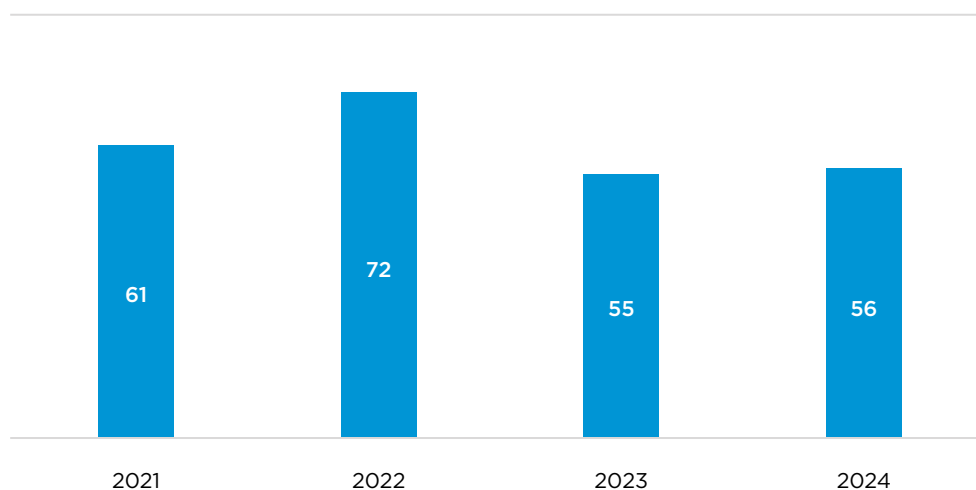
3.1.1 Serious incident reports launched in 2024

In 2024, 56 serious incident reports were launched. However, it is also important to note that they were selected from 173 reported incidents alleging violations of rights, which the serious incidents team followed

up on. Within the Fundamental Rights Office, a team of serious incident case handlers assesses the alleged fundamental rights violations based on a year-to-year consistent methodology.

CHART 5. Serious incident reports related to fundamental rights

Number of serious incident reports launched in 2021-2024





In 2024, the Fundamental Rights Office took note of the following challenges as regards submission of and follow-up on serious incident reports:

- The national authorities of many states hosting Frontex operational activities are reluctant to provide access to data for serious incident investigations and by default either deny any involvement in fundamental rights violations or are reluctant to investigate or follow up on cases;
- Based on interactions with deployed officers, the Office observes that there is likely significant underreporting of cases by Frontex officers due to reasons including

lack of awareness or knowledge and peer pressure or fear of retaliation;

- The limited presence of Frontex in certain locations may also result in the underreporting of possible fundamental rights violations.

Charts 6 and 7 disaggregate the serious incidents launched by country and the type of alleged fundamental rights violation.

Fifty-six serious incident investigations were launched following a preliminary assessment, selected – based on a unified set of criteria – out of a total of 173 reported incidents of alleged violations of fundamental rights.

CHART 6. Serious incident reports launched in 2024

1 January – 31 December; data disaggregated by host country or other non-EU country with responsibility over the incident

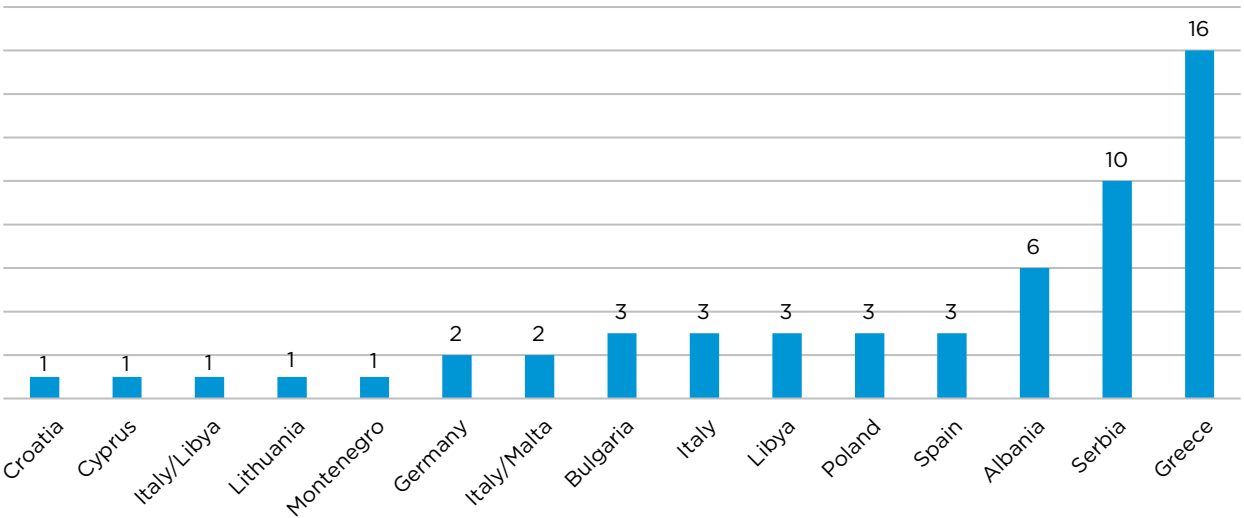
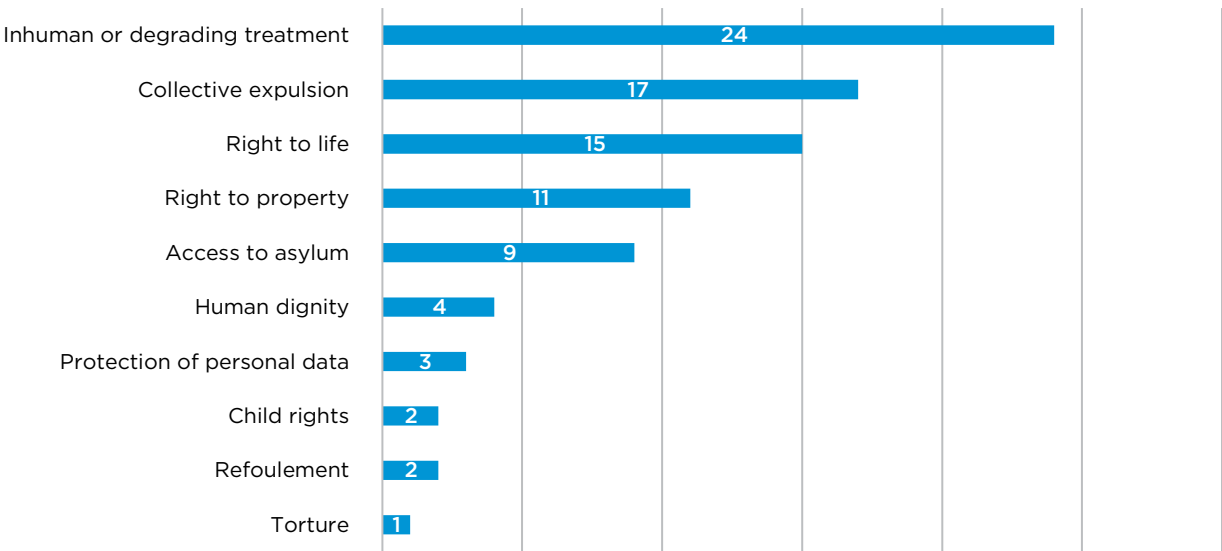


CHART 7. Type of alleged violations reported in 2024 serious incident reports

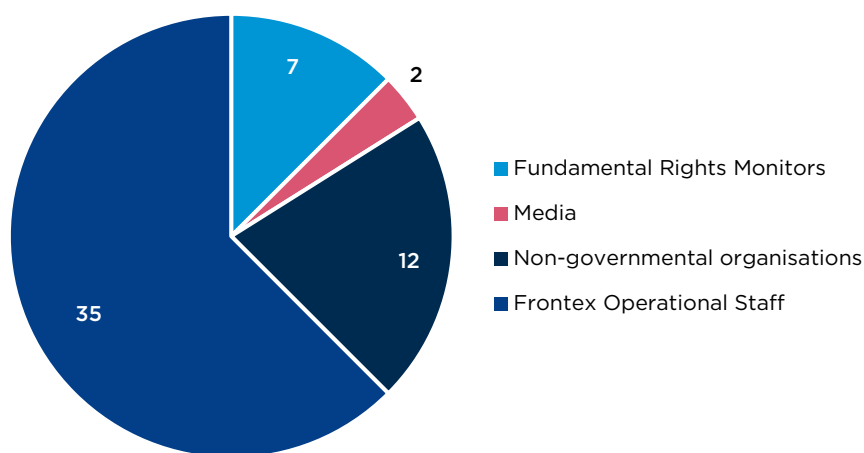
Multiple allegations possible per case



These incidents were brought to the attention of the Office by deployed officers or other participants in Frontex activities, including fundamental rights monitors; through SOS messages sent directly to the Fundamental Rights Office; Frontex internal reports; reports by civil society or international organisations; and open sources.

The following graph provides an overview of the initial sources of information that triggered scrutiny by the Fundamental Rights Office and led to launched serious incident reports.

CHART 8. Serious incident reports
Source of initial information about the incident

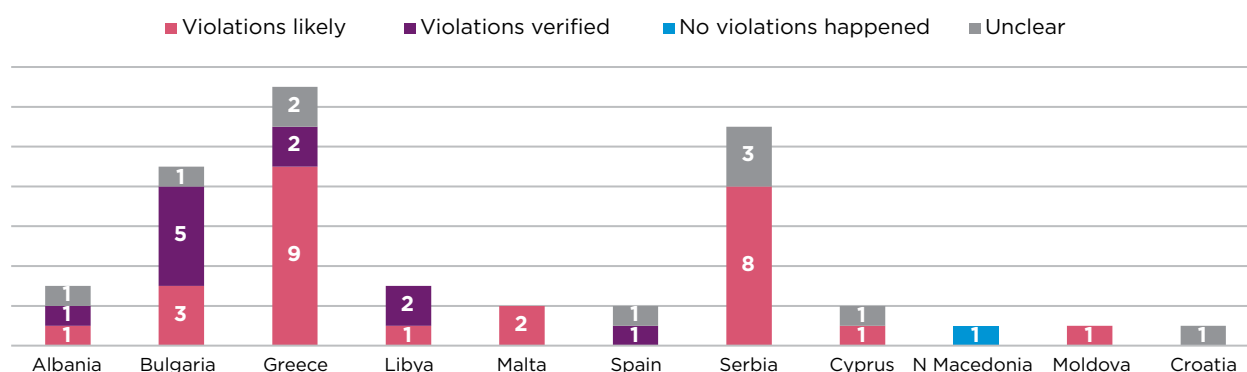


3.1.2 Serious incident reports closed in 2024, findings and recommendations

Final serious incident reports conclude investigations into initial allegations and categorise findings into one of four categories: (1) at least one violation verified; (2) violation likely; (3) unclear whether violation happened; and (4) no violation.

In 2024, 48 serious incidents were closed with a final report, an increase from 39 in 2023. Investigations confirmed for nearly 25 percent that at least one fundamental rights violation had occurred, while for more than half of the closed cases violations were found likely to have occurred.

CHART 9. Closed serious incident reports in 2024
Data disaggregated by concluded likelihood of a fundamental rights violation and by country





Among the 37 serious incidents closed with the finding that at least one fundamental rights violation had likely occurred or was verified, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Violation of fundamental rights directly by Frontex officers was observed in just one case. In all other cases (36), national authorities were found (confirmed or likely) to be responsible for the violation(s). In 10 of these 36 incidents, Frontex officers or assets were assessed as having exercised decisive influence over the course of the event.
- Thirty-one serious incidents involved inhuman and degrading treatment of migrants; 18 cases amounted to collective expulsions. Right to life was implicated in six serious incident procedures, and the right to property was violated in six cases.

The most frequent findings of the final conclusions of serious incident reports of the Fundamental Rights Office are:

- Frontex staff are often allocated/tasked by host state authorities in a manner seemingly designed to keep them away from locations or situations where fundamental rights violations are reported. The Office recommends that Frontex staff be integrated in the Agency's operational activities in a manner which would allow for oversight of border management activities to assess fundamental rights compliance.
- In some contexts, at both land and sea borders, the information reported by the national authorities to the Office and to the Agency did not reflect the operational reality – actual deployments, movement,

and activities of assets and forces. This created reporting gaps preventing the audit and verification of operations, and has occasionally been instrumentalised to divert attention from the consistent perpetration of fundamental rights violations.

- Whenever Frontex officers and assets are involved in the detection, interception, and/or apprehension of migrants whom they subsequently hand over to the national authorities, the Agency should ensure that strong safeguards are applied by Member States/third countries, especially in the context of frequent reports of collective expulsions and/or ill-treatment.
- Serious incident report inquiries, in particular when allegations are substantiated and verified, do not reduce the responsibility of the Member States/third countries to conduct independent and thorough investigations. National authorities often fail to follow up on cases where allegations of fundamental rights violations by their officers are reported.
- Instances of Frontex staff being re-assigned following their reporting of possible serious incidents continue to be reported. Simultaneously, the Office supported instances of protective re-deployments of those reporting, and registered first terminations of deployments of standing corps officers (category 2) connected with cases of non-reported fundamental rights violations.
- The ability of Frontex staff to identify potential fundamental rights violations through a culture of reporting of not only evidence-based but also suspected cases should be strengthened. Protection of reporting persons, and their ability to report exclusively and directly to the Fundamental Rights Office, remains essential.

3.2 Complaints

The following section covers information on the complaints mechanism, including details on the findings and the

follow-up on complaints by the Agency and national authorities.

3.2.1 Complaints received and assessed

In 2024, 84 complaints were received. After an admissibility assessment, only one complaint was declared admissible and forwarded to the relevant Member State's authorities for further handling, as well as to the Frontex Executive Director for his information. Assessment of 26 complaints is undergoing.²⁷

Furthermore, nine pending complaints from 2023 were declared inadmissible and four were discontinued due to a lack of response from the complainants to the Fundamental Rights Officer's request for additional information.²⁸

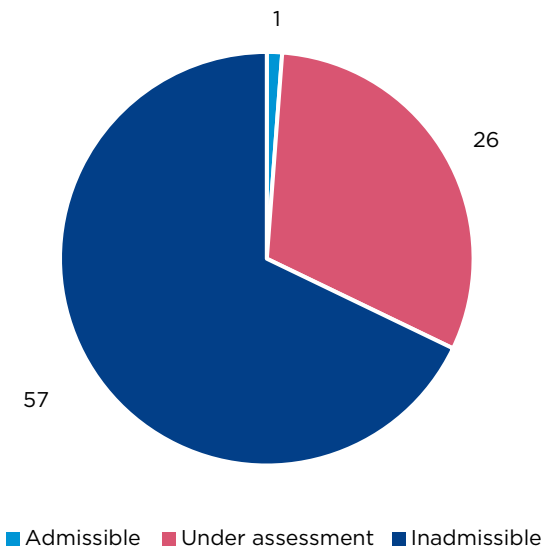
²⁷ Of the 26 complaints still pending assessment, six were declared inadmissible in January 2025. Of the remaining 20 complaints under the admissibility assessment, 13 have not been assessed because the complainants are not responding to the Office's request for information. If contact with the complainants cannot be established and information obtained in one year, these cases might be discontinued as foreseen by the Article 6(3) of the Agency's rules on the complaints mechanism.

²⁸ Article 6(3) of the Agency's rules on the complaints mechanism.

Admissible and inadmissible complaints are regularly reported by the Fundamental Rights Officer to the Management Board. The conclusions and findings of admissible complaints are presented in the following

sub-section, including references to the Agency’s and Member State’s findings and follow-up to the complaints as per Articles 109(4) and 111(9) of the EBCG Regulation.

CHART 10. Complaints received in 2024
Data disaggregated by the status of the complaint (1st January - 31 December 2024)



Compared to the 64 complaints received in 2023, 2024 ended with a total of 84 complaints received. However, while four complaints were found to be admissible in 2023, only one was considered admissible in 2024.

The admissible complaint submitted in 2024 concerned two Frontex-financed and -coordinated forced-return operations from Poland, and contained allegations of inhuman or degrading treatment and denied access to the asylum procedure.

CHART 11. Breakdown of the reasons for inadmissibility of complaints
(1 January - 31 December 2024)

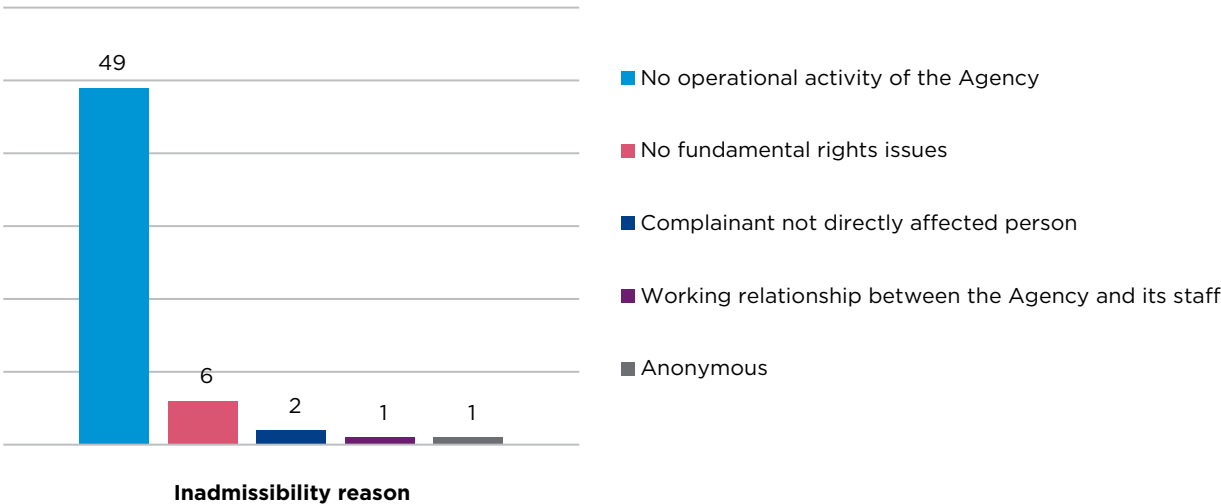
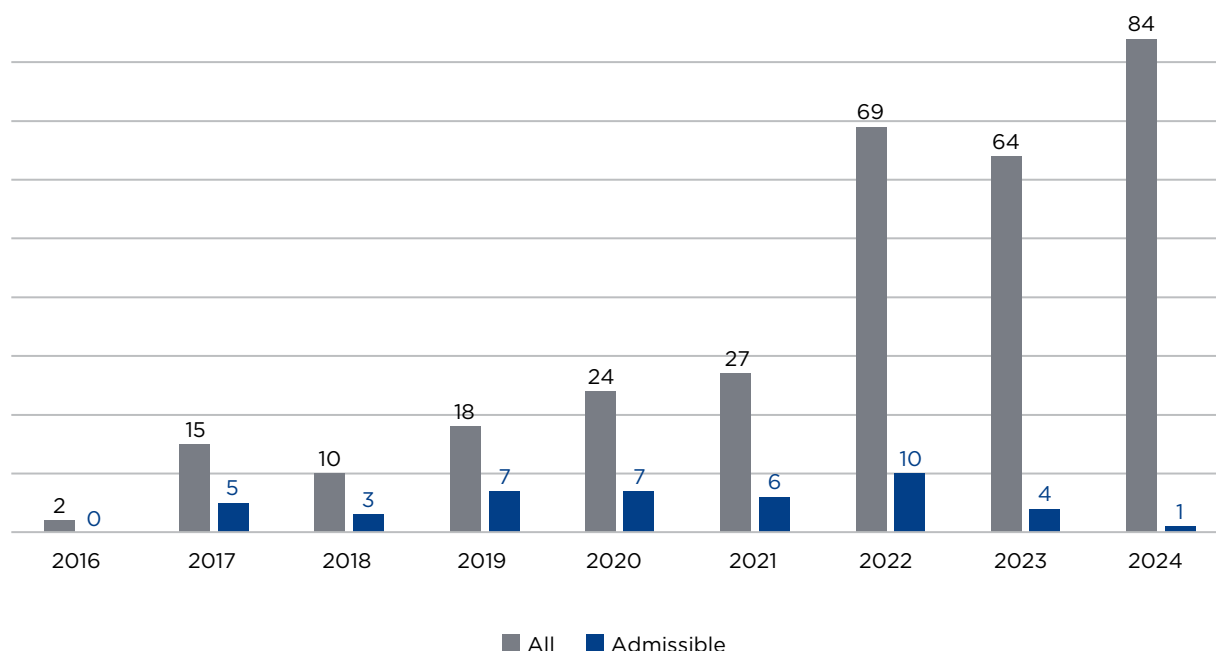


CHART 12. Overall complaints received via the Frontex Complaints Mechanism
(October 2016 – 31 December 2024)



In accordance with the operational plans, information posters on the Frontex complaints mechanism were, in most cases, displayed at prominent spots with high visibility in most of the premises where Frontex operational staff was deployed. However, such materials must be made even more visible and accessible to the general public crossing the external borders of the EU.

In 2024, activities related to the complaints mechanism also included capacity building in the form of training and awareness-raising sessions for Frontex staff (including the staff of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS)), the EU Agency for Asylum, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Greece) (see Chapter 5 *Training and capacity building*). Better awareness on the complaints mechanism was also achieved through development of new language versions of information materials, creation of location-specific

posters and new, durable formats of roll-ups for different geographical areas as well as their increased dissemination across Agency's operational areas.

Furthermore, to ensure cooperation on complaints regarding alleged violations of fundamental rights on the territory of third countries where Frontex implements operational activities, in 2024 the Fundamental Rights Office continued to engage with the respective Ombudsman institutions. The Office worked with the Ombudsman of the Republic of North Macedonia to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding on their cooperation as regards complaints related to actions by Frontex during its operational activities in North Macedonia (see Chapter 4 *Advisory functions and cooperation* – Section 4.2 *Advice on cooperation with third countries*).

3.2.2 Closed admissible complaints

In 2024, the Fundamental Rights Officer closed eight admissible complaints, as summarised below. Other admissible complaints were pending and not ready for closure.

Six closed complaints concerning Greece. Six complaints (complaints n. 2022-00001, 2022-00032, 2022-00034,

2022-00040, 2022-00042 and 2023-00015) concerned alleged collective expulsions from Greece to Türkiye and ill treatment of migrants. Other allegations included the endangerment of life; denied access to an asylum procedure and to an effective remedy; unlawful detention; infringement of the rights of the child; and theft of property. Following their examination, all the complaints

were deemed unfounded by the Greek authorities on the basis that the complainants had not been detected in Greece.

Notwithstanding the conclusions of the national authorities, the Office expressed strong concerns about the protection of fundamental rights in the operational area of the Agency at the Greek border with Türkiye. These concerns were based on the fact that since 2020 the Fundamental Rights Officer has launched 72 serious incident reports concerning collective expulsions from Greece to Türkiye, while nine complaints have been declared admissible on the same grounds.

To this purpose, the Fundamental Rights Officer recommended the Hellenic authorities consider reinforcing the existing system of preventative measures (e.g. targeted training modules with a particular emphasis on the rights of vulnerable persons, especially children) and enforcement measures (e.g. efficient investigative practices, and effective operational and disciplinary procedures) within the border control context.

Two closed complaints concerning Bulgaria. Two complaints (complaints n. 2023-00007, 2023-00011)

concerned alleged collective expulsion from Bulgaria to Türkiye and ill treatment of migrants. Other allegations included denied access to an asylum procedure, unlawful detention and theft of property. Following examination, both complaints were deemed unfounded by the Bulgarian authorities on the basis that the complainants had not been detected in Bulgaria.

Notwithstanding the conclusions of the national authorities, the Office expressed concerns about the protection of fundamental rights in the operational area of the Agency at the Bulgarian border with Türkiye. These concerns were based on the fact that since 2023 the Fundamental Rights Officer has launched 14 serious incident reports concerning collective expulsion and ill treatment of migrants by Bulgarian officers, while two complaints have been declared admissible on the same grounds.

To this purpose, the Fundamental Rights Officer recommended that the Bulgarian authorities consider reinforcing the existing system of preventative measures (e.g. targeted training modules) and enforcement measures (e.g. efficient investigative practices and disciplinary procedures) within the border control context.

3.3 Use of force monitoring and investigations

The Fundamental Rights Officer has a duty to thoroughly investigate any reported incidents involving the use of force, report without delay to the Executive Director and transmit the results of the investigations to Frontex Consultative Forum.²⁹ In line with Annex V (4) of the EBCG Regulation, the Agency shall provide safeguards in relation to the use of force, weapons, ammunition and equipment, and shall provide a stocktaking in its annual report. In 2024, none of the reports on the use of force the Fundamental Rights Officer was informed about was classified as an incident involving the use of force.

In line with the role assigned to the Fundamental Rights Officer in the supervision of incidents involving the use of force, in 2024 the Fundamental Rights Office provided

comprehensive input to the revision of the Management Board Decision 7/2021 on the supervisory mechanism to monitor the application of the provisions on the use of force by statutory staff of the EBCG standing corps. Further input was also provided to the revision of the template on the rules of the use of force as part of Annex 1 to the *Operational Plan on Tasks, Responsibilities and Specific Instructions for the Teams* (see Chapter 4 *Advisory functions and cooperation – Section 4.1 Advice on operational activities and fundamental rights concerns*).

Additionally, the Office invested considerable efforts in providing advice and training on fundamental rights and the use of force (see Chapter 5 *Training and capacity building – Section 5.3 Training on the use of force*).

²⁹ The role of the Fundamental Rights Officer, related to investigating incidents involving the use of force, is set out by the Annex V of the EBCG Regulation (in particular Section 4) and the Management Board Decision 7/2021 of 20 January 2021 establishing a supervisory mechanism to monitor the application of the provisions on the use of force by statutory staff of the European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps.

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CHAPTER 4.

Advisory functions and cooperation

The Fundamental Rights Office provides advice in various contexts: by the monitors in relation to operational activities; by the Office in the context of consultations with the Agency's business entities and with Member States and Schengen Associated Countries (as members of the European border and coast guard community); and as requested by external stakeholders (e.g. in the context of inter-Agency cooperation).

In 2024, the Office continued to advise the Agency on its expanding involvement in operations, projects and cooperation agreements, including with third countries. The Office provided a variety of Opinions, including on draft working arrangements and standard operating procedures, as well as contributing to strategic and policy

documents. In 2024, the Office also started to assess the possible impact that the new legal instruments adopted within the framework of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum will have on the activities of the Agency and the broader European border and coast guard community.

The Office also advised the Agency on ensuring that recommendations of institutional stakeholders and the Management Board were correctly implemented (see Section 4.8 *Recommendations from external stakeholders*), including a guide on the future work of the Office at a strategic level, as part of follow-up to the recommendations issued by external evaluations (see Section 4.9 *Internal procedures and external evaluations of the Fundamental Rights Office*).

Engagement with national independent monitoring mechanisms

In the context of the ongoing efforts to guarantee full implementation of the fundamental rights safeguards in the area of border management, as envisaged by the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (see *The New Pact on Migration and Asylum*, under Chapter 1 *Monitoring of activities at the external borders and in third countries – Section 1.3.3 Screening and debriefing activities*), the Fundamental Rights Office cooperated with the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights in supporting the Member States on their initial steps towards the establishment of independent monitoring mechanisms. In close cooperation with the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, in November 2024 the Office hosted the first meeting on monitoring compliance with human rights in border management, which brought together representatives of national human rights and Ombuds institutions from 15 European countries, as well as the European Commission, EU Agencies (the EU Agency for Asylum and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The objective of this meeting was to discuss the implications of the New Pact for fundamental rights safeguards, the need to establish national independent monitoring mechanisms, challenges and opportunities. The participants exchanged their experiences and best practices, and explored opportunities for further joint efforts between national and European systems, with a specific focus on monitoring human rights compliance in screening, vulnerability assessment and other border control activities.

The Office continued to pursue engagement with national Ombudspersons, human rights institutions and other national monitoring mechanisms, holding meetings and exchanging views as part of their regular monitoring activities and field visits. The Fundamental Rights Officer ensured his support to the Advisory Board of the independent monitoring mechanism of the Republic of Croatia, contributing to providing recommendations to the Croatian independent monitoring mechanism. In view of the implementation of the provisions of the Screening Regulation concerning the national independent monitoring mechanisms, the Fundamental Rights Officer also participated in consultation meetings with authorities and stakeholders in Bulgaria.

4.1 Advice on operational activities and fundamental rights concerns

With the purpose of further strengthening the Agency's compliance with fundamental rights, in 2024 the Fundamental Rights Office identified issues of concern and submitted Opinions on projects and policy matters of relevance to Frontex. The Fundamental Rights Officer addressed a number of Opinions to the Executive Director and recommendations to the Management Board; the Office also contributed to reports, policies and strategies drafted by entities within the Agency or by external stakeholders and partners in the implementation of EU policies, such as the EU Agency for Asylum.

Throughout 2024, the ongoing cooperation between the Fundamental Rights Office and other Frontex entities responsible for the planning of operational activities led to the identification of practical recommendations to address potential risks to fundamental rights within the framework of Frontex operations. In line with established practice, the Office provided input, and later issued Opinions, to all the operational plans for the joint operations starting in 2025, including the Specific Activity Plans and their General Part, as well as on amendments to a certain number of operational

plans for operations to be implemented in 2024.³⁰ The Office issued recommendations applicable to each joint operation but also overarching recommendations to all operational plans. The Office also contributed to the Agency's operational evaluation reports, delivering its observations and targeted recommendations regarding the Joint Operations implemented by Frontex in 2023 and some in 2024.³¹

Other Opinions were issued by the Fundamental Rights Officer on his own initiative to highlight recurring issues or issues of particular interest or concern, such as the Opinion on fundamental rights considerations and safeguards related to the Agency's engagement

with third countries (see further Section 4.2 *Advice on cooperation with third countries*), and the Opinion on underreporting and protecting reporting persons, which targets underreporting within the framework of the serious incidents mechanism and offers a list of action points considered essential to address its root causes (see Chapter 3 *Accountability mechanisms and report on use of force incidents* – Section 3.1 *Serious incident reports*). Other Opinions are described in the thematic sections of this chapter.

The table below presents the Fundamental Rights Officer's own-initiative Opinions addressed to the Executive Director in 2024.

Fundamental Rights Officer's Opinions	Date
Opinion on Addressing underreporting and protecting reporting persons	10 January 2024
Opinion on fundamental rights considerations and safeguards related to the Agency's engagement with third countries	12 February 2024
Opinion on use of force training	20 February 2024
Opinion on assumed nationality during screening activities in Greece	27 February 2024
Opinion on Bulgaria - Fundamental rights situation in Frontex operational areas	11 June 2024

4.2 Advice on cooperation with third countries

In 2024, the Fundamental Rights Office continued to support the Agency in matters concerning international cooperation and technical and operational assistance to third countries.

On the basis of the Agency's policy priorities defined in the multiannual strategic policy for European Integrated Border Management with regard to cooperation with third countries, and in compliance with Article 73 of the EBCG Regulation, the Office insisted on the inclusion of fundamental rights safeguards for the planned activities related to technical and operational assistance in the field of border management and return in third countries.

The Fundamental Rights Officer issued an own initiative Opinion to the Executive Director on the fundamental rights risks related to multiple forms of cooperation in which the Agency engages in with third countries, with recommended baseline safeguards to ensure compliance with EU and international human rights standards. In addition, this Opinion identified proactive measures that the Agency would need to take at an early stage against the potential risks of direct or indirect involvement in potential fundamental rights violations by its cooperation partners.

Furthermore, the Office provided the following opinions on technical assistance projects in third countries:

³⁰ In accordance with Article 109(2)(e) of the EBCG Regulation, the Fundamental Rights Officer provides opinions on the operational plans drawn up for the operational activities of the Agency. In line with Article 110(2) of the EBCG Regulation, the fundamental rights monitors shall follow the preparation of the operational activities and report to the Fundamental Rights Officer, as well as contributing to the evaluation of activities (among other tasks).

³¹ In accordance with Articles 47 and 110 (2)(a) of the EBCG Regulation.

Fundamental Rights Officer's Opinions	Date
Opinion on the donation of SAR and post-SAR equipment to Lebanon	19 February 2024
Opinion on the purchase of spare parts for three rigid-hull inflatable boats of the Lebanese Navy - Technical Assistance to Lebanese border management authorities in the framework of EU4BorderSecurity	24 July 2024

In the framework of the fundamental rights due-diligence procedure, the Office advised the Agency on the potential risks deriving from ongoing or planned cooperation with specific third countries.³² The main assessments took the form of human rights impact assessments (see list below). These assessments are analytical products which

not only indicate mitigating measures and fundamental rights safeguards for the existing or planned cooperation, but also aim at promoting wide-ranging respect and promotion of fundamental rights in Frontex engagement with third countries.

Human Rights Impact Assessments	Date
Joint roadmap of activities agreed between Frontex and Morocco (Kingdom of)	February 2024
Update on the Africa Frontex Intelligence Community Risk Analysis Cells (AFIC RACs) - Republic of Côte d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Republic of Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Tongo	April 2024
Regional Workshop on security developments impacting littoral states in West Africa & Analytical Review Meeting with Risk Analysis Cells - Republic of Benin, Burkina Faso	April 2024
Negotiations on the Working Arrangement with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (Mauritania)	April 2024
Update on the Africa Frontex Intelligence Community Risk Analysis Cells (AFIC RACs) - Republic of Côte d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Republic of Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Tongo	July 2024
Deployment of a Frontex Liaison Officer to Pakistan	June 2024

In addition to the foregoing, as stated in another section of this Annual Report, the Office conducted monitoring and on-the-spot visits to assess fundamental rights compliance in the Agency's operational activities in third countries³³ (see Chapter 1 *Monitoring of activities at the external borders and in third countries*). The Office also

supported the Agency with capacity building activities working with other entities of the Agency in the framework of cooperation with non-EU countries, mainly through the provision of fundamental rights operational briefings or trainings in third countries (see Chapter 5 *Training and capacity building*).

4.3 Advice on risk analysis

In addition to the Office's regular advice on risk analysis during operational activities (See Chapter 1 *Monitoring of activities at the external borders*), the Fundamental Rights Office continued to provide strategic support to the Agency's activities related to risk analysis, in line with established fruitful collaboration with entities within the Agency. The Office provided advice on various risk-analysis products, contributing to the strengthening of their fundamental rights aspects and safeguards.

The Office supported the Agency in enhancing the fundamental rights safeguards applicable to screening and debriefing, including by contributing to the development of a Standard Operating Procedure, which the Frontex Executive Director adopted in October 2024.³⁴ It is crucial that all the safeguards included in the Standard Operating Procedure are effectively incorporated into the operational plans, and that Frontex teams are provided

³² This Fundamental Rights Due Diligence establishes a procedure for the Fundamental Rights Office to identify and assess the fundamental rights-related risks that Frontex may incur when engaging with third countries. This procedure is currently under revision.

³³ Under the framework of Joint Operations 2024 planned and conducted in Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Georgia, Kosovo,* Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

³⁴ Decision of the Executive Director No R-ED-2024-57 adopting the conditions for screening and debriefing activities under the host country command and Standard Operating Procedure for debriefing activities based on the Agency's instruction.

with clear guidance on how to put those safeguards into practice.

Throughout 2024, a special focus was put on the possible impact and novelties introduced by the new Pact on Migration and Asylum on risk analysis activities such as screening and debriefing interviews. The Office continued to work closely with the Agency on projects aimed at contributing to the uniform implementation of screening rules under the Screening Regulation, and on the effective implementation of screening and debriefing rules at operational level.

The Office was also consulted on the pilot analytical activity on fraudulently obtained visas and contributed to the inclusion of fundamental rights clauses in the mechanism for the collection of actionable statistical data.

Moreover, under the cooperation framework of the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community Risk Analysis Cells,³⁵ the Office continued cooperating with Frontex entities on possible fundamental rights risks and implications in the project.

4.4 The Fundamental Rights Action Plan

In accordance with the EBCG Regulation and the obligation to guarantee the protection of fundamental rights in the performance of its tasks, in 2021 the Agency adopted a fundamental rights strategy³⁶ and the corresponding action plan for the implementation of the strategy.³⁷ Hence, as required by the action plan, the Fundamental Rights Officer's annual report includes an assessment of the progress made on the implementation of the action plan across the year 2024.

The Fundamental Rights Action Plan's first component covers overarching practices applicable to the entire European border and coast guard community, consisting of 10 objectives and 27 recommended activities to enhance compliance with fundamental rights by integrating best practices into Member States' national integrated border management strategies. Since 2024, the Office has aimed at strengthening the synergies between this overarching component of the Fundamental Rights Action Plan and the implementation plan of the Technical and Operational Strategy for European Integrated Border Management (see Section 4.5 *The Technical and Operational Strategy for European Integrated Border Management*).

The Fundamental Rights Action Plan's second component focuses on integrating and aligning all Frontex entities with fundamental rights: since 2021, 17 objectives and 87 corresponding activities have guaranteed results-based planning and assessment of concrete activities, with qualitative and/or quantitative indicators and outcomes and suggested means of verification. Progress on the implementation of the Agency-specific component is reported to the Management Board twice a year, in alignment with the timeline of the Agency's multiannual programming cycle.

The Agency ensures monitoring of the implementation of the Agency's components of the action plan. During the fifth cycle of the roadmap for the implementation for 2024 (concluded in October 2024), the Agency found that most of the 87 activities included in the action plan were either implemented (14) or implemented and on-going (61) with actions already planned/foreseen for the following year; four activities were partially implemented and eight delayed. The delays were due to technical difficulties, project amendments or lengthy consultation procedures. In some instances, data protection rules to a certain extent prevented full implementation of some activities.

Some examples of actions implemented and good practices registered throughout 2024:

- Consultation of Agency entities with the Fundamental Rights Office prior to the launch of activities and publication of reports, including the *Annual Risk Analysis 2023/2024* and the design of the pre-warning mechanism.
- The *Trafficking in human beings* focus group convened in April 2024, with the participation of the Consultative Forum. Sub-working groups have been established focusing on thematic areas, including the update of the VEGA children handbooks, VEGA awareness sessions and the update of the risk profiles. A concept on *Cross-border crimes action days against trafficking* was drafted and then launched in Cyprus, with the participation of the International Organisation for Migration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Europol and EU Member States.

³⁵ The eight countries in which risk analysis cells are located are the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania (Islamic Republic of), Republic of Niger (until 2023), Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo.

³⁶ Management Board Decision 12/2021 of 14 February 2021 adopting the Fundamental Rights Strategy.

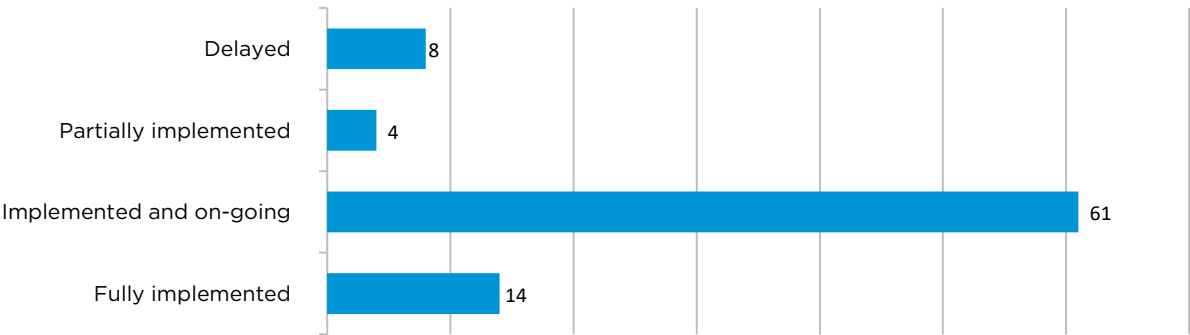
³⁷ Management Board Decision 61/2021 of 9 November 2021 adopting the Fundamental Rights Action Plan for the implementation of the Fundamental Rights Strategy.

For the second consecutive year, the Agency organised a regional search and rescue workshop, for the promotion of regional cooperation in the Adriatic/Ionian area of interest for Italy, Greece, Albania, Montenegro and Frontex.

In 2024, the Fundamental Rights Office continued to support, through tailored training and awareness-raising

sessions, the network of Frontex focal points of the different business units within the Agency. It also ensured the monitoring of the Agency’s commitments under the Fundamental Rights Action Plan by reporting twice a year to the Management Board.

CHART 13. Status of implementation of the Fundamental Rights Action Plan
(January-October 2024)



4.5 The Technical and Operational Strategy for European Integrated Border Management

The Technical and Operational Strategy for European Integrated Border Management, adopted in 2023 – stemming from Article 8 of the EBCG Regulation and a need to guarantee the implementation of the European Commission’s multiannual strategic policy for EIBM – sets up a strategy and corresponding implementation plan for the integrated border management strategies adopted at national level by Member States and Schengen associated countries, as well as for the European border and coast guard community as a whole. The strategy is composed of 15 components. Among them, fundamental rights, education and training, and research and innovation are overarching components. This means that due consideration must be given to them not just by themselves, but also with regard to the implementation of each of the other twelve components (such as border control or returns, for instance).

To guarantee implementation and compliance with fundamental rights, the Fundamental Rights Office

provides annual advice on the status of implementation and the progress made. In parallel, within this framework the Office continued to provide advice and assistance on fundamental rights compliance in the implementation of the national integrated fundamental rights strategies, supporting national experts with tailored training.

In 2024, the Fundamental Rights Office focused on enhancing synergies between the Strategy’s implementation plan, the Fundamental Rights Action Plan and the parallel obligations to the Agency deriving from the evolving legal framework of the European border and coast guard community.

The table below presents the actions in the area of fundamental rights envisaged by the implementation plan for the Technical and Operational Strategy for European integrated border management, as amended by the Management Board in November 2024,³⁸ with timeline and status of milestones.

³⁸ Management Board Decision 43/2024 of 21 November 2024 amending Management Board Decision 30/2023 adopting the Technical and Operational Strategy for European Integrated Border Management 2023-2027.

Action	Timeline	Milestones
(13.1) Develop and implement relevant national-level fundamental rights strategies and action plans taking into account and implementing as relevant, the EBCG fundamental rights strategy and fundamental rights action plan, involving all operational concerned actors, including the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, as well as key human rights bodies, in particular Ombudspersons, National Human Rights Institutions and National Preventive Mechanisms, as relevant. Ensure to continuously act upon recommendations related to border management coming from national, EU, and international monitoring mechanisms, including the relevant United Nations bodies and the Council of Europe.	End of 2025	Development and adoption of fundamental rights strategies and action plans
(13.2) Develop and implement a framework for regular and independent evaluations of the fundamental rights compliance of the operational activities and feed findings into improvements (e.g.: regular revisions of 'operational plans', implementing safeguards).	Continuous, 2027	Establishment of national monitoring mechanisms building on EU Agency for Fundamental Rights' guidance
(13.3) Ensure that the 'do's' and 'don'ts' guidance, based on the patterns emerging from serious incidents category 1 (fundamental rights-related incidents) is followed by the operational stakeholders.	Continuous	Development of guidelines
(13.4) Actively involve fundamental rights monitoring in all activities of Frontex, in accordance with national law, granting the same access to operational areas in line with Article 110(3) of the Regulation.	Continuous	Operational instructions by national authorities (Host Member States)
(13.5) Ensure adoption and transparency of operational guidelines on cooperation with investigations into fundamental rights concerns that prioritise proactive cooperation between investigative bodies and national authorities, guaranteeing the necessary access to information and documentation, and transparency and accountability.	End of 2026	Operational guidelines developed and adopted
(13.6) Encourage the development and maintenance of an EBCG-wide network of focal points for the exchange of promising practices and to take stock of progress and/or seek advice where needed from the Fundamental Rights Offices of the relevant EU agencies (Frontex, Europol, EU Agency for Asylum and EU Agency for Fundamental Rights).	Continuous	Log of lessons learned and best practices; Network established; Development and agreements on Terms of reference

Scenarios of fundamental rights violations at the borders – Guidance for border guards on Dos and Don'ts

In March 2024, the *Scenarios of fundamental rights violations at the borders – Guidance for border guards on Dos and Don'ts*³⁹ were published. They include a set of scenarios based on the experience gathered by the Office in the context of monitoring and advisory activities, as well as serious incident reporting. The Scenarios provide practical guidance on common cases of non-compliance with fundamental rights obligations, making clear what is lawful and what is not. The publication constitutes the first output of the implementation of action 3.13.3 of the Technical and operational strategy for European integrated border management.

³⁹ Frontex, [Scenarios of fundamental rights violations at the borders – Guidance for border guards on Dos and Don'ts](#), 2024.

4.6 Cooperation with the Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights

In accordance with Article 108 of the EBCG Regulation, the Consultative Forum was established by the Agency to assist it and provide independent advice on fundamental rights matters. The Consultative Forum comprises key European institutions and international and civil society organisations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (organisations co-chairing the Consultative Forum). The EBCG Regulation requires the Agency to confer with the Consultative Forum on the further development and implementation of the fundamental rights strategy, the functioning of the complaints mechanism, the codes of conduct and the common core curricula.

The Consultative Forum, Frontex Management Board and the Fundamental Rights Office held three Consultative Forum meetings in 2024, where the state of play

concerning fundamental rights at the external borders of the EU was discussed. The exchanges between the Fundamental Rights Officer and the Consultative Forum were continuous throughout the year, and this collaboration was strengthened during 2024, focusing on the fundamental rights dimension of Frontex activities including the risks of violations and the identification of mitigating measures. In compliance with the EBCG Regulation, the Fundamental Rights Office assists the Consultative Forum by providing its secretariat, mandated to support it both administratively and financially. Finally, in 2024 the Consultative Forum participated in field visits to joint operations, deployed experts to implement VEGA activities and contributed by providing feedback to Frontex internal documents. The activities of the Consultative Forum are presented in the Consultative Forum's annual report.⁴⁰

4.7 The ETIAS Fundamental Rights Guidance Board

The European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) is a border management tool developed to establish a new approach to European border management and security within the Schengen area. It will affect travellers from over 60 visa-free countries. The implementation of the ETIAS Regulation⁴¹ has proven challenging due to its complexity and the need to involve all responsible parties.

To guarantee fundamental rights compliance of the system, the ETIAS Regulation established in 2022 the ETIAS Fundamental Rights Guidance Board as a critical governance element (Article 10(2) of the ETIAS Regulation). Its main responsibility entails ensuring adequate protection of travellers' fundamental rights when applying for ETIAS travel authorisation. To achieve this, the Guidance Board brings together stakeholders with various kinds of expertise in fundamental rights, including the Frontex's Fundamental Rights Office, the

Frontex Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights, the European Data Protection Supervisor, the European Data Protection Board, and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. The Fundamental Rights Officer serves as deputy chair of the Guidance Board and fulfils an advisory role.

In 2024, the Guidance Board held six meetings focusing on building internal capacity and supporting the initial technical and organisational phases of ETIAS, including developing screening rules, establishing the ETIAS watchlist and procedures for the processing of applications. The Guidance Board also provided expert input on specific consultations that arose during the year and developed a guidance note on the risk of discrimination in the context of the ETIAS screening rules. The Guidance board published its first Annual Report,⁴² marking an important step in its mission to safeguard fundamental rights within the ETIAS framework.

⁴⁰ Frontex, Consultative Forum on Fundamental Rights, [Eleventh Annual Report 2023](#), July 2024, and [Twelfth Annual Report 2024](#), June 2025.

⁴¹ [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 September 2018 establishing a European Travel Information and Authorisation System \(ETIAS\) and amending Regulations \(EU\) No 1077/2011, \(EU\) No 515/2014, \(EU\) 2016/399, \(EU\) 2016/1624 and \(EU\) 2017/2226](#). Consolidated text: [Regulation \(EU\) 2018/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 September 2018 establishing a European Travel Information and Authorisation System \(ETIAS\) and amending Regulations \(EU\) No 1077/2011, \(EU\) No 515/2014, \(EU\) 2016/399, \(EU\) 2016/1624 and \(EU\) 2017/2226](#).

⁴² Frontex, [ETIAS Fundamental Rights Guidance Board Annual Report 2023](#), 2024.

4.8 Recommendations from external stakeholders

Since 2021, the Fundamental Rights Office has contributed to ensuring that the various recommendations provided to Frontex by different oversight entities at the EU level, and related to fundamental rights, are correctly addressed.

These recommendations have been addressed to the Agency by the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs Frontex Scrutiny

Working Group; the European Commission; the European Ombudsman; and the Working Group on Fundamental Rights, Legal and Operational Aspects of Operations (see status of implementation in the Annual reports 2021, 2022 and 2023). In 2024, the Office continued to monitor and provide updates on the implementation of the European Ombudsman's outstanding recommendations to the Agency related to fundamental rights.

4.9 Internal procedures and external evaluations of the Fundamental Rights Office

The year 2024 also saw the Fundamental Rights Office engaged in consultations regarding the planned revision of the standard operating procedure on the roles and responsibilities of fundamental rights monitors in Frontex operational activities, which had been jointly adopted by the Executive Director and the Fundamental Rights Officer in 2023. The document lays down the rules regarding fundamental rights monitors in the performance of their duties related to Frontex operational activities. In compliance with the EBCG Regulation, these procedural rules aim at ensuring smooth cooperation between the monitors and all participants in Frontex operational activities. A revision of the procedure is ongoing and is aimed at gathering feedback on its implementation from Member States, the Consultative Forum and Frontex entities. Furthermore, in 2024 the Fundamental Rights Office went through two autonomous evaluation processes. An external consultancy conducted an evaluation (as envisaged by the Single Programming Document 2024-2026) between January and September 2024. This evaluation aimed at assessing the role, mandate, objectives and activities performed by the Fundamental Rights Officer and the staff of the Fundamental Rights Office, encompassing the period from 2019 (adoption of the EBCG Regulation) to 2023. The main objectives of the evaluation were: a) assessing the coherence, relevance,

effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and EU-added value of the Fundamental Rights Office; and b) identifying gaps, lessons learnt and opportunities for improvement, along with recommendations.

The evaluation confirmed the key role, in terms of fundamental rights protection, played by the Fundamental Rights Office within the Agency, and its efforts to build synergies with EU institutions, sister agencies, national authorities, international organisations and civil society. The Office also received recommendations for improvement, which have been taken onboard and are guiding the Office's work. As part of follow-up to the recommendations stemming from these external evaluations, work began on a document that would guide the future work of the Office at a strategic level.

The second evaluation led to the Office being awarded the European Foundation for Quality Management certification.⁴³ This is a recognition for the Office's commitment to excellence in quality management, its focus on the creation of robust processes to inform its actions, its effective governance, and its dedication to upholding the highest standards of fundamental rights monitoring.

⁴³ [European Foundation for Quality Management](#).



CHAPTER 5.

Training and capacity building

5.1 Training development and delivery

The Fundamental Rights Office regards its capacity building activities, notably training development and delivery, as crucial to enhancing fundamental rights compliance in the long term within the Agency and beyond. Reflected in the EBCG Regulation,⁴⁴ the Agency shall ensure that all statutory staff deployed as members of the teams have received training on legal frameworks, including on fundamental rights and with a specific focus on the rights of persons in vulnerable situations. Moreover, the Agency is mandated with the task of assisting Member States and partner third countries in training national border guards, experts on return and other staff through common training standards and programmes.⁴⁵ As such, 2024 marked the Office's commitment to the provision of fundamental rights trainings and a significant increase of its overall contribution to capacity building.

To assist in achieving this commitment, the Office strengthened the team tasked with implementing its capacity building obligations under the EBCG Regulation, resulting in fruitful cooperation with the Agency's Academy. This was notably exemplified by the performance of 496 on-site training days and 193 hours of online trainings by staff of the Office, and a 100 percent fulfilment of trainer requests from the Academy. Trainings, courses, workshops and awareness sessions on fundamental rights were developed and delivered to Frontex and national personnel by the Office's fundamental rights monitors and other staff.

Examples of engagement in capacity building included training sessions for European border and coast guard standing corps in the context of all modules of the programme, including Specialised Profiles, due to the interlink of the topic of fundamental rights with all Frontex activities. Frontex standing corps leaders received the Frontex Operational Leadership and Operational

Management Trainings that also involved fundamental rights components, developed and delivered by the Office. Prior to their deployment, standing corps officers also received training on fundamental rights in operational briefings, while national border guards were given awareness sessions and workshops.

Additionally, the Office developed and delivered tailored trainings in Albania and Montenegro on fundamental rights safeguards, including the identification and referral of persons in vulnerable situations, and planned further workshops for 2025 in Spain, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The Office also increased its capacity building outreach through cooperation with the Agency's International Cooperation Unit and developed and piloted the Human Rights and Border Management Course for Lebanon and Jordan, to be repeated in 2025 for West African countries.

The Office supported the Frontex Academy in the delivery and development of trainings such as the Course for Fundamental Rights Multipliers, the Course on European Travel Information and Authorisation System, the Course on Proactive Threat Detection of Serious Border Crime, the Course on Integrated Border Management, the Course on anti-trafficking, and Operational Leadership Training.

Last, the Office also organised trainings to improve its own potential and expertise. Together with the Frontex Academy, in-person and physical refresher trainings for fundamental rights monitors were organised in Romania, further iterations of refresher trainings were planned, the return monitoring capacities of eight monitors from Member States and three monitors from the Office were strengthened and staff knowledge on artificial intelligence was expanded.

5.2 Training in the area of return

In 2024, the Office continued its engagement in training development and delivery in the area of return, notably through courses on communication with children in return, and trainings for forced-return escort and support officers (including pre-deployment briefings), forced-return escort leaders and forced-return monitors (both Frontex monitors and the pool of forced-return monitor),⁴⁶ and return and reintegration counselling for Member States. Furthermore, the Office started to develop a

training module for return operations by land, taking into account the implications of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Particular attention was given to trainings on families and children in return, including national workshops, the Frontex-led workshop on the toolbox for children in return,⁴⁷ and an online course on returning families with children.

⁴⁴ Article 62 (2) of the EBCG Regulation.

⁴⁵ Article 10 (1) (w) of the EBCG Regulation.

⁴⁶ Article 51 of the EBCG Regulation.

⁴⁷ Frontex, [Toolboxes for vulnerable groups in return](#), 2024.

5.3 Training on the use of force

Trainings on the use of force, including adequate fundamental rights safeguards, were crucial to guarantee compliance with fundamental rights for participants in Frontex activities.⁴⁸ This was supported by the Fundamental Rights Officer's mandate to verify and provide feedback on the content of use of force trainings to ensure that preventive techniques are included.⁴⁹

In 2024, the Fundamental Rights Officer issued an Opinion on fundamental rights in the Agency's capacity building in the area of use of force. This Opinion set out the concerns regarding fundamental rights components

of the content of the annual training on the use of force, and aimed to ensure inclusion of fundamental rights safeguards in use of force related capacity building programmes and revision of the Trainer's Manual on the Use of Force (*Good Practices in the training of use of force, firearms and tactical procedures*). Moreover, the Office supported five iterations of the annual training on the use of force with fundamental rights trainers, and delivered sessions to recently recruited contingent commanders and deputies on fundamental rights-compliant use of force and reporting within the Operational Training Programme.

⁴⁸ Article 4 Annex V (Section 4, under the heading Training) of the EBCG Regulation.

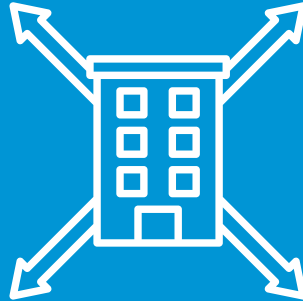
⁴⁹ Article 4 Annex V (Section 4, under the heading Role of the fundamental rights officer) of the EBCG Regulation. See also Articles 66, 109 (2) (c) and 110 (1).

PRIORITIES FOR 2025



Restructuring

- Follow-up to external evaluations conducted in 2024.
- Renewed Office structure, more efficient and matching the new contingents and reinforced chain-of-command of the Agency.
- Enhanced monitoring, evidence-based, more focus on risk and impact assessments, further integrating field and desk monitoring.
- Agile monitoring, focus on impact and compliance.



Future-proof

- Expanding the Office for an expanding Agency: increased staff, more efficient working processes and tools, clear vision on future challenges and opportunities.
- Support to the Agency and the European border and coast guard community, for the fundamental rights-compliant implementation of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.
- Reinforced interaction with EU institutions.
- Advice on cooperation and engagement of the Agency with third countries, in the context of the wider EU legal and policy framework.



Compliance

- Fundamental rights compliance as indicator under the Single Programming Document.
- Focus on strategic compliance: monitoring of the implementation of fundamental rights actions of the Agency's and European Border and Coast Guard's action plans.
- Continued support to the establishment and development of the national independent monitoring mechanisms for fundamental rights compliance.

FRONTEX



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