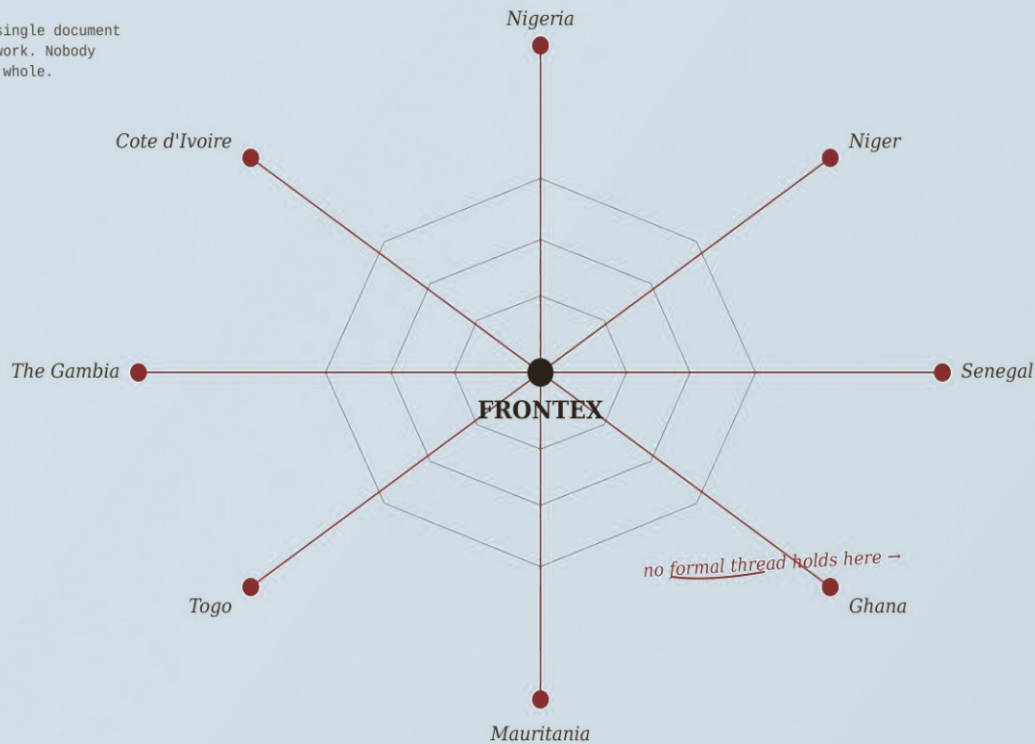


SUBJECT, Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community, informal cooperation network, est. 2010. No treaty basis identified. Structure, one shared platform, [REDACTED] roughly 30 partner authorities, eight active Risk Analysis Cells. [REDACTED]

Legal instrument naming the network as a whole, NONE FOUND.



CASE NOTE, no single document names this network. Nobody signed it as a whole.



BUILDING BORDERS FROM AFAR

The Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community, and the web nobody signed

BUILDING BORDERS FROM AFAR

The Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community and the machinery of externalisation

borderline-europe research briefing, August 2026

Long before a person reaches the Mediterranean, a version of their journey may already exist somewhere else, in a risk analysis report, a shared database entry, a training template written in Warsaw and applied at a border post in Niamey or Dakar. That distance is the point. The European Union's approach to migration has moved for years toward managing arrivals as far from its own territory as possible, and one of the least visible instruments doing that work is a network most people have never heard of, the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community, known as AFIC.

AFIC does not patrol a border or fly a drone. It does something quieter and, in some ways, more durable. It builds the intelligence architecture that other, more visible forms of externalisation rely on. Understanding it means understanding how the EU's border has learned to project itself outward without ever formally crossing a line on a map.

Launched	2010, following a launch conference in Madrid
Legal form	Informal cooperation network, not a treaty or status agreement
Reach	Around 30 to 32 African states, the figure varies by year and source
On the ground	Eight Risk Analysis Cells, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo
Funding	A dedicated strengthening project received roughly 4 million euros in EU funding between 2017 and 2023

What AFIC actually is

Frontex launched AFIC in 2010, following a conference in Madrid, as a framework for regular exchange of knowledge, intelligence and risk analysis with African border authorities. It was modelled on Frontex's own internal risk analysis network, extended outward. Frontex's own 2015 Joint Report describes the goal plainly, improve information sharing, develop common risk analysis, and build the analytical capacity of partner authorities.

What makes AFIC distinct, and what makes it worth scrutiny, is its legal form. It is not a treaty, and not one of the formal status agreements discussed further below. AFIC is an informal cooperation network, and Frontex itself has described it that way in a response [later published by Statewatch](#). Informality is not an accident here, it is what allows the network to grow, add partners and expand its activities without the scrutiny that a single, formal legal instrument would invite.

The Risk Analysis Cells

The practical backbone of AFIC is a set of Risk Analysis Cells, or RACs, generally embedded inside national border management authorities, according to Frontex's own account. Frontex trains local analysts, supplies analytical templates and equipment, and receives the resulting data and reporting in return. As of the most recent Frontex accounting, eight RACs operate in Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo. The Dakar cell opened in 2019, Nouakchott's followed in 2022, and Guinea's has reportedly been prepared without yet becoming fully operational.

These cells are not neutral data collection points. They sit inside national institutions with their own political pressures, and the intelligence they generate about smuggling routes, document fraud and irregular crossings feeds directly into Frontex's own risk analysis, which in turn shapes operational planning, funding priorities and diplomatic pressure on the same states hosting the cells.

Who actually holds the relationship, the Nigeria example

The picture is less uniform than the general RAC description suggests, and Nigeria is the clearest example. Frontex's own 2012 working arrangement with Nigeria was signed by the Nigerian Immigration Service, but explicitly extends to other national authorities involved in border and migration management, most notably NAPTIP, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, an anti-trafficking body rather than a classic border authority.

The Abuja cell also shows how closely these cells depend on EU money. It opened at the end of 2019 as part of an EU project called "Strengthening of AFIC as an instrument to fight serious cross-border crimes affecting Africa and the EU." The European Commission funded the project with about 4 million euros from 2017. The money paid for meetings, field visits, training, joint analysis and direct support to the cells. When the project came to an end, Frontex handed the equipment over to the trained analysts in all eight countries, including Nigeria. Little public information is available on how the cells have worked since then. This makes it hard to say how far they are truly part of national border authorities, and how far they remain EU projects placed inside them. Who actually holds the EU relationship on the ground, an immigration service, a trafficking agency, or some combination, varies by country and matters for who is accountable for what.

Where WAPIS fits in

AFIC also does not sit alone in the region's data infrastructure. The West African Police Information System, or WAPIS, is a separate biometric and criminal-data platform, run by INTERPOL rather than Frontex, financed by the EU, and rolled out across largely the same countries. AFIC and WAPIS are legally and institutionally distinct, one is a Frontex risk analysis network, the other an INTERPOL policing database, but they reinforce the same underlying shift, more biometric identification, more centralised data, more interoperability between West African and European systems, arriving through parallel channels that are rarely analysed together.

Working arrangements are informal in nature, and therefore bypass judicial, democratic, and public scrutiny.

Statewatch and the Transnational Institute, Exporting Borders, 2026

What Frontex is actually allowed to do, and where AFIC sits in that

Frontex can work outside the EU in two ways. The lighter way is a working arrangement, simple cooperation like sharing information or running training, which needs sign off from Frontex's own board and the European Commission, and since 2019, advance notice to the European Parliament. The heavier way is a status agreement, needed whenever Frontex actually deploys staff with real police powers abroad, as it does in the Western Balkans. That requires a full international treaty, negotiated with Parliament involved throughout.

AFIC's country by country deals, like the one with Nigeria, sit on the lighter track, so in theory they get that oversight. But AFIC as a whole never does. It is not one agreement anyone signed, it is a shared platform, regular meetings, and training links spread across around 30 countries and one EU funding project. No single document names AFIC itself, so no one has to report on it, notify anyone about it, or seek approval for it as a whole.

AFIC also never appears alone. It sits alongside other tools, working arrangements, proposed treaties, funding, visa pressure, and liaison officers, part of what Statewatch calls the EU's pattern of many small deals rather than one clear framework. AFIC itself does not intercept boats or move people. It builds the shared training and vocabulary that later interception and return operations run on.

The scale gap says a lot. Frontex's own budget grew from about 143 million euros in 2015 to over 1.1 billion by 2025. AFIC's own funding, about 4 million euros between 2017 and 2023, looks small next to that. But its influence is bigger than its price tag, because it shapes how those much larger sums eventually get spent.

Official framing against the critical record

Frontex's framing	The critical research record
Improves shared situational awareness and risk analysis.	Upstream surveillance that is difficult for affected people, journalists and courts to examine.
Builds local analytical capacity and supports partner authorities.	Reshapes national border institutions around EU priorities, on unequal terms.
Targets smuggling and cross-border crime.	Folds irregular movement into a security and crime frame that can justify harsher enforcement.
Uses informal analyst networks for flexible cooperation.	Informality is what lets the network sidestep parliamentary oversight and judicial review.

The accountability gap

The real problem with AFIC is not just what it enables elsewhere, it is how it is built. Because it is informal, none of the usual rules apply to it, not the reporting duties that cover Frontex's other agreements, not Parliament's right to be told about new arrangements in advance. Frontex does have its own human rights obligations, and a Scrutiny Working Group set up after a 2021 investigation found real failures, serious enough that Parliament refused to approve the agency's 2020 budget. But those checks are built for Frontex's direct operations. AFIC's quiet, analyst to analyst cooperation falls outside them.

This is not just a technical gap, it has real consequences. A former MEP's report on a proposed agreement with Mauritania, where an AFIC cell already runs, warned that Frontex working there risked becoming complicit in serious, ongoing rights violations, since Mauritania sits outside the human rights framework that covers Frontex's other deployments. If that risk is real for a formal, written agreement, it is at least as real for an informal network with even less written down to hold anyone accountable to.

Civil society groups, including Statewatch and the Transnational Institute, have documented something else too, EU-funded surveillance tools tied to this cooperation, biometric systems, phone tracking, wiretapping, being used against journalists, activists, and opposition figures in the region. That has nothing to do with border security, which is the only thing AFIC is supposed to be for.

AFIC against ECOWAS free movement

The contrast with regional free movement is sharper than it might first appear, and it is no longer hypothetical. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger formally withdrew from ECOWAS in January 2025, forming their own Alliance of Sahel States partly in protest at what they cast as external, Western-driven interference in the region, the wider externalisation architecture AFIC belongs to among it. Togo's government has since signalled openness to joining them, making it a widely discussed fourth country in a bloc built around the ECOWAS free movement protocol, the very framework AFIC's securitising logic sits in tension with.

In 2022, a case on migrants' rights was brought before the ECOWAS Court of Justice, the regional court for West Africa. In March 2025, after Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso had left ECOWAS, the court dismissed the case as it related to those three countries. Ordinary West Africans are now caught in the middle. On one side, the regional bloc that protected their right to move freely is breaking apart. On the other, border controls funded by the EU are becoming stricter.

Where this stands now

As of mid-2026, formal status agreements with Senegal and Mauritania, under negotiation since 2022, remain unconcluded. Leaked Council discussions from late 2025 suggest member states have responded to that stalemate not by abandoning the ambition but by pushing for looser rules that would allow Frontex to expand informal deployments, of exactly the kind AFIC already represents, ahead of a planned revision of the agency's mandate later in 2026. Read against that backdrop, AFIC looks less like a supporting network around the EU's main externalisation tools and more like a preview of where those tools are heading, informal by design, precisely because informality is what has let this model expand for over a decade with the least resistance.

For an organisation monitoring how Europe's border has learned to operate at a distance, AFIC is a useful case study for exactly that reason. It shows that the most consequential parts of externalisation are not always the ones that make headlines. Often they are the quiet reporting templates and shared platforms that decide, long before anyone reaches a coastline, what kind of movement gets treated as a threat.

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