Since the 2015 Euro-African Summit for “improved migration management” in Malta, Niger is commonly referred to as a “transit country” by the European Union (EU). This landlocked country is indeed an almost obligatory crossing point for West African nationals wishing to reach Libya or continue their route further north. Their journey is theoretically facilitated by the Protocol on Free Movement adopted in 1979 by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), an organisation of which Niger is a member.

Several ECOWAS initiatives promote cross-border cooperation, including the Cross-border Initiatives Programme (CIP) adopted in 2005, partly based on the European model, and the accession of ECOWAS members to the Convention of the African Union (AU) on cross-border cooperation of 2014, one of whose objectives is “to ensure a coordinated, efficient and effective border management”. While ECOWAS advocates for a “borderless region” (ECOWAS Vision 2020), its activities in support of the AU Border Programme, adopted in 2007, reflect the ambition to reaffirm inter-state boundaries by facilitating their delimitation.

The EU Trust Fund for Africa launched at the 2015 Malta Summit has enabled the IOM, already established in Niger since 2006, to intensify its activities in the country. In 2019, the organisation led 25 projects (“voluntary returns”, “assistance, “reintegration” and “stabilisation” of migrants). The component regarding “border management in Niger”, funded by several donors (Japan, Canada, United States, EU), aims at “helping the government to develop the infrastructural, material and institutional capacities of the National Police and all border security forces”, at strengthening their “inter-service cooperation”, and at fostering the integration of cross-border communities.

In practice, the IOM “border management team” partly trained by the French Border Police (PAP) organises the training of Niger’s “border policiers”, provides some of their equipment and contributes to the rehabilitation of certain buildings (border post, offices). For IOM, the objective of further reinforcing border security is to allow for smoother trade and transport of goods and people. This approach theoretically considers migratory control as secondary to economic integration issues, in line with the objectives of the AU and ECOWAS.

However, “integrated border management” also implies the increased control of mobilities in Niger, in the context of a fight against illegal immigration. European’s insistence on closing the migratory route along the border with Libya has led in particular to the adoption in 2015 of a law against migrant smuggling in Niger. Also, any foreign person is considered by IOM as a potential “illegal migrant” when they travel beyond Agadez and the “red line of Madama”.

In this perspective, IOM uses the Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS). This instrument, already operational in several African countries, aims to collect, process, store and analyse data on mobility and by other actors, in particular Interpol and Frontex. Due to the flexibility of its mandate, between “assistance to migrants” and “technical management of flows”, IOM has become of key importance in Niger today. While the organisation agrees that controlling the S.597 kilometer-long Niger borders is impossible, it still demonstrates creativity to assert its leadership in this area.

For instance, in November 2018, IOM offered a mobile border post to the Nigerian authorities for territorial surveillance. It is a truck whose container is divided into several spaces including a forensic laboratory, a space for “immigration management” and a “waiting and reception area”.

The bibliography is available on Migreurop website: www.migreurop.org in the section Publications/Notes: [http://www.migreurop.org/lostyear47.html]
The IOM was created in 1951 under the name of Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM). It was in charge of many people displaced by the Second World War. The Human Rights Commission of the UN, founded at the same time, was mandated to provide assistance and protection to refugees, and to guarantee their rights, usually in situ. But the United States and its allies mistrusted this population which was perceived a susceptible to communism. In a Europe that was still unstable, an intergovernmental organisation separate from the UN, the CIME, took charge of the transfer of nearly a million displaced people to the Americas.

Today, the IOM is still active in the logistics of the transport of migrants, for example in so-called ‘voluntary return’ programmes. But it has undertaken a vast range of additional tasks. Having obtained permanent status (and its current name) in 1988, it has played a growing role in international migration politics since the 1990s. In 1991, the IOM had just 43 member states and a budget of some $300 million. In 2018, the IOM budget was some $1.8 billion, it had 172 member states, and nearly 11,000 employees. The IOM owes this great leap for international migration politics since the 1990s. In 1991, the IOM had just 43 member states and a budget of some $300 million. In 2018, the IOM budget was some $1.8 billion, it had 172 member states, and nearly 11,000 employees.

The IOM activity is in three domains. First, there are operational services: in addition to ‘voluntary return’ programmes, the IOM in some countries runs detention centres for migrants in transit or being expelled. It is concerned with ‘trafficking’ of migrants, ‘sensitising’ migrants to potential dangers involved (through information campaigns) or ‘protecting’ its victims.

The IOM calls the attention of states and migrants to the fact that ‘effective protection of human rights depends on respect for processes recognised in international treaties and national laws.’ The IOM also acts as an advice agency for states in matters concerning migration. IOM experts cooperate with ministries and agencies of many governments. In this context, the IOM offers training in fields such as border surveillance, and new border control technology.

Finally, the IOM is an important player in the production of discourse on migration. It organises ‘dialogues’ between states, takes part in numerous conferences on the subject, and cooperates with many researchers. In this way it generates and diffuses its vision of what migration ought to be: movement of people ‘managed’ so as to make it to the benefit of all (mainly destination countries, but also countries of origin, even the migrants themselves). This pragmatism mobilises a utilitarian approach according to which migration, like trade, should be managed so as to optimise its effect on the world economy. The IOM, whose closeness to western superpowers is in its very make-up, is involved in the policies of developed countries far more than in defence of any right to free movement, a right which in any case the IOM can only imagine as strictly restricted, at least for people leaving the Global South.

The IOM sends migrants back to countries considered to be dangerous by its donors