

# IOM takes control of Niger's borders

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 integrated, efficient and effective border management". While ECOWAS advocates for a "borderless region" (ECOWAS Vision 2020), its activities in support of the AU Border Program, adopted in 2007, reflect more 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 (PAF) - organises the training of Nigerian "border policemen", provides some of their equipment/supplies 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 irregular 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 information on travelers (biographical and biometric data). According to IOM, it helps states "to control more effectively those entering and leaving their territories" and provides a statistical basis on which to "develop their migration poli-

cies". In this regard, IOM can also rely on its "Flux Monitoring Point", a team tasked with managing data on, and monitoring, population flux. Based on a Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), this team develops maps and statistics on migratory routes and how they may be circumvented. On the ground, these data are rarely used to understand and meet the protection needs of migrant populations: they are rather mobilised to produce knowledge about "migratory flows". Moreover, in the longer term, the possibility of connecting MIDAS to other databases is contemplated both by the Nigerian authorities 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 5,697 kilometre-long Nigerian 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 authority 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](http://www.migreurop.org) in the section Publications / Notes.  
<http://www.migreurop.org/rubrique447.html>



MIGREUROP is a network of associations, activists and researchers, with a presence in around twenty countries across Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The network strives to raise awareness of and to oppose policies that marginalise and exclude migrants, notably, detention in camps, various forms of displacement and the closure of borders, as well as the externalisation of migration controls by the European Union and its Member States. In this way, the network contributes to defending migrants' fundamental rights (including the right 'to leave any country, including their own') and to promoting freedom of movement and settlement.

[www.migreurop.org](http://www.migreurop.org)

Follow migreurop on and @migreurop

MIGREUROP - CICP - 21ter rue Voltaire 75011 Paris

Photography: Pascaline Chappart - Graphic design: La société  
Dir. of publication : Emmanuel Blanchard

WITH THE SUPPORT OF:



This project was supported by the European Program for Integration and Migration (EPIM), a collaborative initiative of the Network of European Foundations (NEF)

MIGREUROP  
BRIEF  
FIRST EDITION  
N° 9

May 2019

On 4 April 2019, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) expressed its concern about migrants detained in Libya. This communiqué served as "clarification", following the position expressed by António Guterres, secretary-general of the UN. Indeed, during a visit to Libya, he had declared himself "shocked" by the fate of the migrants and had launched 'an appeal to the international community to respect of international refugee law and to deal with the problem of migration in a manner compatible [...] with human rights'.

In its clarification, IOM is nevertheless careful not to incriminate any state, not even that 'international community' that was clearly pointed out by António Guterres. For IOM, the detention of people at 'points of arrival' is 'arbitrary', yet the organisation does not go further than pleading for 'alternative solutions' to the detentions carried out by the Libyan government. The support given to the Libyan government by European states eager to find partners willing to execute their policy of externalisation is not even mentioned. IOM is in fact an important component of the range of deterrents and barriers to migration, as advocated by its main donors. Acting without qualms has actually allowed the agency to occupy an ever larger space in the UN system, in which other agencies and bodies have rather shown more regard for human rights.

On 5 April, the secretary-general of the UN declared he was particularly concerned with the 'safety of migrants in detention at a time of escalation in military action'. The return of military confrontations in the Tripoli region made the fiction of Libya as a 'safe country' less and less tenable. But it is out of question not to 'defend' the frontiers of countries to the north of the Mediterranean: hundreds of people under the 'protection' of the OIM are now displaced or sent back to Niger and Nigeria.

PHOTOGRAPHY: IOM FRESK BY THE SUCHIAPTE RIVER TO PROMOTE ITS APPLICATION MIGAPP (MEXICO, CHIAPAS)

Con la inclusión y protección de las personas migrantes ganamos todos.

THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION WORKING FOR (CLOSED) BORDERS

*migreurop*

## What is the role of the International Organisation for Migration?

Recent developments have put the IOM under the spotlight. In June 2018, António Vitorino, a former Portuguese minister and former European commissioner, was at its head. One of the first tasks of the new director was to defend the Global Compact on Migration (Marakesh Treaty) adopted in December 2018. Today, the IOM is at the heart of debate on migration policies, a position which it has not always held.

ARTICLE CONTINUES OVERLEAF

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 'on site'. 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 forward to the designation of 'irregular migration' as a 'problem', at the top of

governments' agendas and political controversy. If a mild form of world governance is at work in the domain of asylum and refugees, on the basis of norms contained within the Geneva Convention and the activity of the UNHCR, no such thing exists for migration policies, which remain strictly in the domain of nation states. The IOM presents itself as a go-between for states, at the same time responding to their desire to remain in charge of their migration policies.

In 2016, when the IOM became a sister organisation of the UN, it adopted the facade of an international organisation whilst maintaining its autonomy. Thus, the 'charter' of the IOM makes no reference to migrants' human or fundamental rights, which allows it to offer 'à la carte' services to states, unimpeded by the norms that frame the activities of UN agencies.

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 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 'dialogue' 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 AND THE MIGRANT CARAVANS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

'We're not afraid. Here and there, Hondurans will cross!'. In autumn 2018, thousands of Hondurans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans organised their departure together bound for the United States. A radical challenge to the Mexican-American strategy of obstructing migratory flows, the migrant caravans defied frontiers and declared against the state of clandestinity imposed by restrictive migration policies. To 'defend' their frontier, the United States deployed the army, reduced access to the right of asylum, but also called on the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to contain what President Trump called an 'invasion'.

In consequence, the IOM organised monitoring of these population movements and networking between frontiers affected. Notably, it set up a presence at border crossing places and at staging-points on the marchers' journey. Distribution of food and clothing was used to serve the IOM's purpose of dissuading the migrants from proceeding. The option of 'voluntary return'

was even offered at the exits from Honduras and El Salvador to Guatemala, all of which are members of the Central American agreement on free movement.

Judging these borders to be 'oversubscribed' (*sobreque-ridas*), the IOM declared that it was concerned by 'the level of stress suffered by migrants, and by the demands placed by the caravan on the humanitarian community and on asylum systems'. The IOM called 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 attention given to the vulnerability of people exhausted by the march came with a warning to those exposed to trafficking, extortion, to disappearances ... But the only alternative offered by the IOM was to seek asylum in Mexico or returned to the country of origin. The IOM's propositions thus took it for granted that entry to the United States was impossible, in effect an operation to totally undermine a political movement founded on the claim for collective asylum.

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

