

Borders What's Up With That?

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Borders what's up with that? In her song, M.I.A repeatedly asks us this question and sheds light on the points where international migration starts or fails to start. “Borders”, released in 2015 by Sri Lankan singer M.I.A., is a criticism of the modern migration crisis and the borders we set for each other as individuals and nations.

Borders are the points where international migration stories begin. The definitions of both refugees and migrants include expressions such as [“outside the country of his nationality”](#) or [“whether within a country or across an international border”](#). Borders, as the starting point of international migration, create both opportunities and obstacles for refugees and migrants.



From the music video of “Borders” by M.I.A.

This question also evokes a criticism of current border control mechanisms. Especially in Europe, the border policies and mechanisms implemented to manage the current migration crisis, not only physical borders, but also legal, political and humanitarian borders, have enormous impacts on refugees and migrants. So, how do Europe's border control policies and mechanisms shape the lives of refugees? How do Europe's current border control policies shape these stories? In this article, we will discuss the current border control mechanisms in Europe and analyse the consequences of these mechanisms on refugees in the light of the questioning in M.I.A’s song.

Question: To what extent can border management mechanisms simultaneously guarantee effective border control and respect for the human rights of refugees?

We need to start by recognizing that irregular migration is a security problem, especially for bordering states, but the question we focus on is: to what extent is the tendency to approach border management from a high security perspective legitimate, acceptable and humanitarian? This is because this tendency jeopardizes respect for the most basic human rights of refugees in situations we often encounter. [It is a fact that there is a disparity between the concepts of border management and human rights.](#)

In its policy note “**Effective Management of External Borders**” the EU priorities external control for the Schengen area, which has no internal border controls. One of the points it tries to ensure is: [“to improve internal security in the EU by detecting and preventing threats at external borders”](#). Some of the components of **European Integrated Border Management (EIBM)** are listed as follows: [“border control, a common EU system for extraditions, cooperation with third countries, use of state-of-the-art technology including large-scale information systems, respect for fundamental rights, protection and promotion.”](#) The mechanisms used to ensure EIBM are organizations such as **FRONTEX, EUROSUR, SIS, Smart Borders**, or indeed physical barriers, maritime operations, border camps.

The objectives of this policy are precursors of the concrete situations we will encounter in the implementation mechanisms, but it is still necessary to briefly mention the mechanisms. **FRONTEX**, whose area of operation and competence has been considerably expanded, is responsible for protecting the EU's external borders, [“promoting, coordinating and improving border management.”](#) However, some criticisms of **FRONTEX** suggest that its border management practices conflict with human rights and contrary to the EU principle of respect for human rights. **FRONTEX**'s failure to fulfill the requirements of international law and conventions, its lack of a strong strategy, its [over-focus on risk analysis and monitoring activities, and its detention and return activities against unwanted migrants make it unable to strike a balance between border control and human rights.](#)

“FRONTEX is based on “a migratory policy mechanism that places more emphasis on security rather than on freedom and justice, which subsequently contributes to establishing an expulsion agency”

EUROSUR similarly provides a common operational and technical framework that assists Schengen countries in combating [cross-border crime, preventing unauthorized border crossings and reducing the tragic death toll of migrants at sea.](#)

Smart Borders and Entry-Exit System (EES) directives aim to [“strike a balance between facilitation for migrants and internal security”](#) for migrants arriving in the EU from third countries. It records biometric data of individuals to increase the efficiency of border crossing.

Similarly, the **Schengen Information System (SIS)** shares data for border control to fight crime and ensure security inside and outside the Schengen Area. It contains alerts on persons and objects falling into one of the following alert categories: [“return, refusal of entry or stay, persons wanted for arrest, missing persons, criminals or witnesses, vulnerable persons at risk.”](#) SIS is an important tool for border control officers, police and immigration authorities.

There are also more traditional methods such as physical barriers (border fences), surveillance systems (drones, thermal cameras, movement systems), migrant and refugee camps and hotspots.

Understanding the purpose of border control mechanisms was important to understand why we criticize these mechanisms. Because the reflection of the results of the activities implemented by these

mechanisms on refugees is an invoice of how the emphasis on human rights is put aside and the focus on security is put aside. In particular, it is the bill of the “Boat People” crisis, which M.I.A. also includes in its song. Boat People represent the tragedies in the Mediterranean and the



From the music video of “Borders” by M.I.A.

refugees' struggle for survival. [“The more border control mechanisms go beyond what is humanly acceptable, the more refugees change their routes to illegal and dangerous routes.”](#) Unfortunately, more than 25,000 migrants and refugees have drowned or disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea since 2011. The same applies to overcrowding and poor living conditions in refugee camps or hotspots (especially in Greece and Italy). The conditions in the camps are described in terms of [‘bare life’](#). In addition, the technological surveillance systems used in tracking mechanisms also significantly violate personal data.

With increasing structural discrimination, nationalism and populism in Europe, refugees are marginalized and criminalized. For these reasons, EU border control mechanisms are far from a fair, lawful and transparent interpretation process. It creates a legal and humanitarian crisis while being the [“world's deadliest border regime.”](#) The EU's migration policies are shaped by security and deterrence rather than addressing the causes of the problems (economic inequality,

conflicts and poverty). In this vicious circle, as refugees try to reach the EU through routes that carry a higher risk of death, the EU's border policies are further tightened.

As a result, the EU's border control mechanisms and policies call into question its moral responsibility. So, is it possible to manage borders in a more balanced way to find a solution to the refugee crisis? By prioritizing human rights, shifting the focus from security, strengthening cooperation and considering different actors such as NGOs, the focus can be on long-term.

Quotes from M.I.A

“We’re solid and we don’t need to kick them”: Here M.I.A. refers to the situation on 7 September 2015 when a Hungarian journalist was caught kicking a refugee on camera – she lost her job following the viral attention it garnered.

“This is North, South, East and Western”: This line distinguishes the West from its counterparts. “North, South, East” are listed as nouns (identifiable) whereas “Western” is an adjective: Originating from the West (in particular Europe or the United States). M.I.A. is highlighting that there are serious issues across the globe, simultaneously suggesting that these issues go in all directions (social, political, economic).

“We representing peeps, they don't play us on the FM / We talkin' in our sleep, they still listen on a system”: Most of the refugees coming to Europe are traumatized by what they experienced in their home country, so they talk in their sleep because their brain can't cope with the situation. Also, she refers to the previous line: They have so much to say that they even talk while sleeping, but the media doesn't show their message.



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