

# Humanitarian Management of Borders in Crisis Situations: Objectives, Procedures, and Methods

## الإدارة الإنسانية للحدود في حالات الأزمات : الأهداف والإجراءات والأساليب

### Key Outcomes

1. Enhanced Protection and Standards: HBM improves the protection of vulnerable migrants (refugees, trafficking victims, unaccompanied minors) by implementing standardized screening procedures, referral mechanisms, and gender-sensitive processes. This streamlined humanitarian assistance and reduced victimization, ensuring compliance with international human rights standards and fostering trust between migrants and border authorities.
2. Technological Integration and Efficiency: Technological advancements, notably IOM's MIDAS tool, support border security and operational efficiency. Automated risk assessment and mobile response units enable faster identification of high-risk individuals and effective resource allocation, enhancing both security interests and humanitarian outcomes.
3. Collaboration, Capacity Building, and Future Investment: Effective HBM relies on cross-border and interagency cooperation (regional



agreements, data sharing) and frameworks like HBMM for coordinated responses to migration surges and public health risks. Continuous investment in technology, capacity-building (cultural mediation training), and expanding systems (biometrics) is crucial to ensure humane, adaptive, and sustainable border management.

### Abstract

Humanitarian Border Management (HBM) is a comprehensive approach aimed at effectively balancing the requirements of national security, migration governance, and humanitarian protection. While migration flows are increasing in complexity, border

### المستخلص

تُعد إدارة الحدود الإنسانية (HBM) نهج شامل يهدف إلى تحقيق توازن فعال بين متطلبات الأمن الوطني، وحوكمة الهجرة، والحماية الإنسانية. في ظل تزايد تعقيد تدفقات الهجرة، يتعين على مسؤولي

officials must adopt strategies that address the needs of vulnerable populations while ensuring effective and human border control. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) plays a key role in the development of frameworks that facilitate safe, orderly, and regular migration. This policy brief will outline the core aims and methods of HBM, whilst highlighting their practical applications in border management operations. By comparatively analyzing successful implementations throughout different regions, this brief provides actionable insights for improving HBM structures in various border contexts.

الحدود اعتماد استراتيجيات تلي احتياجات الفئات السكانية الضعيفة، مع ضمان مراقبة فعالة وإنسانية للحدود. وتلعب المنظمة الدولية للهجرة (IOM) دورًا محوريًا في تطوير أطر تُسهّل الهجرة الآمنة والمنظمة والنظامية. يُحدد هذا الموجز السياساتي الأهداف والأساليب الأساسية لإدارة الحدود الإنسانية، مع تسليط الضوء على تطبيقاتها العملية في عمليات إدارة الحدود. ومن خلال تحليل مقارن للتطبيقات الناجحة في مختلف المناطق، يُقدم هذا الموجز رؤى عملية لتحسين هياكل إدارة الحدود الإنسانية في سياقات حدودية متنوعة.

## Objectives of Humanitarian Border Management

### Ensuring the Protection of Migrants and Refugees

The primary objective of HBM is to maintain an adequate balance between the imperatives of maintaining security protocols at the border vis-à-vis upholding the rights of migrants and refugees. Border officials must adhere to international human rights and refugee law obligations by ensuring that vulnerable groups such as asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, and victims of trafficking, receive appropriate protection and support. A prominent example of this was the response undertaken during the 2015 Mediterranean migration crisis where border officials assisted in the commissioning of emergency reception centers for the provision of immediate humanitarian assistance and screening for protection needs. In the Silk Routes Region, HBM practices in have further demonstrated the

need for robust referral mechanisms to assist displaced populations professionally [(1)]. In Armenia, the integration of humanitarian assistance alongside appropriate national security measures by border officials led to the identification and referral of at-risk individuals through efficient streamlined processes [(2)].

Of significance as well are how screening techniques for Refugees have been significantly enhanced by making procedures gender-sensitive and trauma-informed. This has ensured that vulnerable women and children receive appropriate protections and are not subjected to repeated exposure during screening processes. Meanwhile, border areas with marked levels of trafficking have established specialized units competent in victim-

1. IOM. Humanitarian Border Management in the Silk Routes region - Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, 2014.
2. IOM. Humanitarian Border Management - The Republic of Armenia: Needs and Gaps Assessment Report, 2016.



centered approaches. This has resulted in improved detection of trafficking victims and their provision with support services.

### **Enhancing Border Management Efficiency Whilst Simultaneously Maintaining Security**

At bottom, a border management system fit for purpose must capably process migrants whilst protecting against security threats and preventing irregular migration. Integrated Border Management (IBM) strategies have been successfully employed in several regions to enable both safe and legal migration. The use of data and technology has been crucial in this respect. For instance, IOM's Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) is a digital border screening system with a proven track record of improving identity verification processes, thus ensuring that legitimate movements travel unmolested whilst unauthorized entries are flagged.<sup>[(3)]</sup>

In Africa, a notable success story for MIDAS has been demonstrated in Nigeria, where the system significantly reduced unauthorized entries by combining biometric data with simultaneous reporting<sup>[(4)]</sup>. As with Armenia, the adoption of IBM frameworks enhanced security during times of acute crisis whilst maintaining a solid humanitarian focus. This permitted border authorities to reasonably process asylum claims whilst countering trafficking risks. Other forms of digital border screening systems known as automated risk assessment risk technologies have also been either piloted or leveraged in other countries to streamline decision-

making and the identification of high-risk individuals attempting to cross borders<sup>[(5)]</sup>.

### **Fostering Interagency and International Cooperation**

An essential cornerstone of a well-functioning border system is the fostering of cooperation between border authorities, immigration services, law enforcement agencies, and humanitarian organizations. At the state level, effective bilateral and regional agreements, such as the EU-Turkey migration deal, demonstrate how concerted frameworks can both reduce irregular migration and ensure the protection needs of migrants are met. With respect to capacity building efforts, joint training programs between neighboring countries can significantly foster the harmonization of procedures, leading to a more coordinated approach to migration governance. In the Silk Routes Region, cross-border coordination mechanisms have been further developed under the framework of the Budapest Process<sup>[(6)]</sup> to improve management during abrupt migration influxes at key border points in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This has included the fostering of regional dialogues, the establishment of contingency plans, and the promotion of data-sharing agreements between neighboring countries to enhance preparedness and response capabilities during migration crises.

An extension of these efforts is the establishment of several multilateral response teams for responding to migration surges to facilitate real-time communication

3. MIDAS: A Comprehensive and Affordable Border Management Information System.

4. Ibid.

5. World Customs Organization (WCO). Coordinated Border Management: An Inclusive Approach for Connecting Stakeholders, 2015. Countries that have implemented automated risk assessment technologies include Germany, the UK, the US, India, China, Australia, Russia, Denmark, Israel, and France.

6. Budapest Process. IBM Silk Routes Total Project Factsheet.

between border agencies and improving coordination during humanitarian crises. Data-sharing agreements and biometric interoperability systems have also enhanced cross-border cooperation and the effectiveness of migration management strategies.

## Methods of Humanitarian Border Management

### Humanitarian Screening and Referral Mechanisms

Border agencies must implement standardized screening procedures to identify protection needs among migrants. Screening stations at border crossings should be staffed with professionally trained personnel, including medical professionals, child protection officers <sup>[(7)]</sup>, and legal advisors. In cases of identified vulnerabilities, wraparound referral pathways must be instituted to direct migrants towards dedicated services such as asylum processing <sup>[(8)]</sup><sup>[(9)]</sup>, medical aid, and legal assistance.

For example, should a victim of human trafficking (VoT/VoHT) be identified at the border, then it is the duty of border staff to be prepared to refer them through the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). The requisite competence for this would require familiarity by staff of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for assisting victims of trafficking as well as the available recourses, durable

solutions or services available <sup>[(10)]</sup>. IOM's experience in the Western Balkans has demonstrated the effectiveness of NRMs in coordinating between border agencies, social services, and NGOs to provide comprehensive wraparound assistance <sup>[(11)]</sup>. In Armenia, border authorities worked with IOM to develop SOPs that improved victim identification and cross-border coordination with neighboring countries. In Senegal, Ghana and other Sahelian countries <sup>[(12)]</sup>, IOM is currently assisting with efforts at revitalizing and improving local NRM's against the backdrop of ongoingly high levels of movements across the region.

### Crisis Preparedness and Response at Borders

Border authorities must be equipped to handle sudden waves of migration caused by conflicts, natural disasters, or political upheaval. Core contingency plans should include the factoring of emergency response teams capable of setting up temporary shelters and processing centres. During Latin America's largest migration crisis this century, the 2019 Venezuelan migration crisis, Colombia's border authorities decided to initiate mobile response teams in order to provide emergency aid and documentation services at border crossings <sup>[(13)]</sup>. Similarly,

7. FRONTEX. VEGA Handbook: Children at land borders, 2021.
8. European Asylum Support Office (EASO). Border Procedures for Asylum Applications in EU+ Countries, 2020.
9. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights at International Borders, 2014.

10. IOM. IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance for Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse, 2019.
11. European Commission. Guidelines for Integrated Border Management in European Commission External Cooperation, November 2010.
12. DIAKHABY, Mamadou, and IOM Regional Office for West and Central Africa. «IOM Supports Governments To Strengthen National Referral Mechanisms To Enhance Migrant Protection Across Sub-Saharan Africa.» International Organization for Migration (IOM), 7 Oct. 2024.
13. IOM South America. Migrant and Refugee Venezuelan Crisis: IOM Regional Response Overview, July 2019.



IGAD's Integrated Border Management Strategy has been utilized in the face of influxes stemming from droughts in the East Africa region. Apart from the establishment of mobile teams, Cross-border coordination forums successfully aggregated data and mobilized joint preparedness plans <sup>[(14)]</sup>. Such responses have also been demonstrated to work at entire regional levels and are best exemplified by the European Union's (EU) Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) which is implemented via its Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) across 37 participating states. This has ensured effective cross-border deployments of numerous forms of assistance during crises and emergencies.

The HBM framework as implemented in the Silk Routes Region has shown the importance of preparedness in handling mass migration flows. For example, Afghanistan and Pakistan elaborated National Response Plans (NRPs) which consisted of mobile registration units and cross-border coordination teams, improving response times and resource allocation during migration surges.

Public health is also an important component of Humanitarian Border Management (HBM), particularly during health emergencies and pandemics. This was most notably demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Health, Border and Mobility Management (HBMM) Framework developed by IOM provides a structured approach to integrating health considerations into border management strategies. During COVID-19, IOM supported multisectoral coordination, strengthening

health components in Integrated Border Management (IBM) to ensure mobility and gender-sensitive responses <sup>[(15)]</sup>. This included developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for border health measures, capacity-building for frontline border staff, and enhancing disease surveillance at Points of Entry (PoEs) <sup>[(16)]</sup>. Apart from major pandemics, ongoing public health issues of smaller scale can likewise be addressed through an HBM approach. The ongoing challenge of Polio in the Chad Basin is a case in point where a multi-country border coordination plan is in place for synchronizing efforts across Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon to reduce population movements spreading polio such as through mobile vaccination and registration teams. This is a particularly suitable approach for assisting nomadic populations. <sup>[(17)]</sup>

A key element of HBM in the context of pandemics is the use of data-driven mobility mapping to track population movements and assess risk, allowing for targeted health interventions at high-risk transit points. During the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, IOM facilitated the establishment of cross-border coordination groups between Guinea and Sierra Leone <sup>[(18)]</sup>, enabling joint public health responses, including information sharing and border health surveillance. These practices were later adapted to the COVID-19 response, where

14. African Capacity Building Centre for Migration Management. Integrated Border Management Training Manual A Training Manual For Practitioners Implemented By: For The Igad Region, 2022.

15. IOM. Gender Checklist for Covid-19 Response at Points of Entry, July 2020.

16. IOM. Health, Border and Mobility Management Framework, 2021.

17. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Africa, Polio Global Eradication Initiative (GPEI). Polio eradication cross-border coordination plan 2024 – 2025: Lake Chad Basin and Sahel countries, 2024.

18. Bagonza, Dr. James. "Learning from the Ebola Outbreak to Fight COVID-19 in IOM Sierra Leone." International Organization for Migration, 8 May 2020.

IOM collaborated with health authorities to support Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), Infection Prevention Control (IPC), and vaccination campaigns at key transit hubs.<sup>[(19)]</sup>

### Capacity-Building for Border Officials

Training and capacity-building programs are essential to equipping border officials with the skills needed to manage migration effectively. Insights from specialized trainings on human rights principles, protection-sensitive border procedures, and crisis management, alongside ongoing analyses of border contexts must be integrated into standard operating procedures. A pedagogical approach emphasizing both theory and practice such as through tactical simulations and cross-border training exercises can improve preparedness and response capabilities. In North Africa, IOM conducted cross-border preparedness training for officials from Algeria, Libya, Niger, and Tunisia, equipping them with skills to address health security risks, migrant screening, and data management in migration crises.<sup>[(20)]</sup>

Across numerous states such as the Asean Region<sup>[(21)]</sup>, Armenia<sup>[(22)]</sup>, North

Macedonia<sup>[(23)]</sup>, Vietnam<sup>[(24)]</sup> and Egypt<sup>[(25)]</sup> border officials have participated in capacity-building initiatives focused on gender-sensitive border management and the protection of vulnerable populations, improving their ability to recognize and respond to trafficking cases and humanitarian needs. Expansion of digital training modules has further ensured that border officials remain up-to-date with evolving best practices.<sup>[(26)]</sup>

An often overlooked aspect of capacity-building is cultural mediation and intercultural awareness. The transnational nature of migration governance signifies that training programs should incorporate modules geared towards enhancing cultural competency to in turn ameliorate communication between border officers and migrants. A concrete example of a relevant training program is IOM Serbia's Cultural Mediation Competencies Curriculum which highlights the positive results which stem from protection-sensitive border management, such as from building trust, reducing tensions. The fostering of culturally competent border personnel and agencies can greatly simplify the demanding nature of this work and improve the overall effectiveness of humanitarian responses<sup>[(27)]</sup>.

19. IOM. Health, Border and Mobility Management Framework, 2021
20. Ibid.
21. Kim Eunice Jun. IOM ROK Conducts Training on Humane and Gender-Inclusive Immigration and Border Management for ASEAN Countries, 19 October 2023.
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26. International Organization for Migration (IOM). Training Curriculum for Border Officials on COVID-19 Response at Points of Entry, 2020.
27. SlovakAid, UNHCR & CRPC. Student's Handbook on Cultural Mediation, 2023.



## Recommendations

### Strengthen Interagency Coordination

Border authorities should establish integrated task forces that facilitate cooperation among immigration, security, and humanitarian actors. The EU's Frontex operations, which coordinate border security efforts across multiple countries, serve as a model for regional collaboration. Additionally, the Balkan Border Management Initiative has streamlined cross-border efforts, improving migrant screening and protection

procedures.<sup>[(28)]</sup>

### Invest in Infrastructure and Technological Innovation

Countries should expand the use of biometric systems and border management information systems like MIDAS to improve identity verification and border security. Jordan's successful implementation of biometric registration systems has proven effective in reducing identity fraud and expediting migration processes <sup>[(29)]</sup><sup>[(30)]</sup>. The adoption of mobile border monitoring units has further improved remote border management capabilities <sup>[(31)]</sup>.

### Enhance Training and Capacity-Building

Institutionalizing recurring training

programs on protection-sensitive border management is crucial. When developed in collaboration with international agencies, the combined expertise can significantly enhance the capacity of officials to detect trafficking victims and handle migration challenges. Expanding multilingual border training programs would also ensure that personnel stationed at international border points are equipped to communicate with diverse migrant populations.

## Conclusion

Humanitarian Border Management is an essential framework that enables border officials to balance safe, reasonable and sovereign migration governance with the protection needs of vulnerable populations. Through the rolling out of strong screening mechanisms, crisis preparedness strategies, and interagency collaboration, HBM ensures that migration flows can be managed effectively and humanely. Crucially, in our current age of information, strengthening HBM systems through technological innovation, international cooperation, and consistent capacity building will further improve border management effectiveness in the years ahead.

28. Reliefweb. EU strengthens cooperation on migration and border management with Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11 June 2025.

29. IOM. Humanitarian Border Management in the Silk Routes region - Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, 2014.

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