



PRESS RELEASE

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Does the EU border agency really take fundamental rights seriously?

The European Parliament on 13 September agreed to increase the powers of the EU's border agency Frontex and to appoint one fundamental rights officer, among other improvements. While the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) welcomes this measure towards more respect for human rights within Frontex, we are concerned that it will not seriously address the human rights breaches often committed within Frontex operations as a result of its mission to "monitor and control" Europe's external borders.

"It's difficult to see how one fundamental rights officer based at the agency's headquarters in Warsaw will be able to ensure that human rights are respected in all Frontex operations inside and outside the EU", said ENAR Chair Chibo Onyeji. "What we need is a sensitized expert team of fundamental rights officers present during each of the Frontex operations."

On numerous occasions Frontex has breached international human rights standards, whether by forcing unsafe and overcrowded boats of asylum seekers in the Mediterranean to go back to their country of origin, or by setting up detention camps in countries like Morocco or Tunisia. Inconsistencies in treatment from one member state to the next further lead to incoherencies in practices and border control and protection measures.

Due to a paradox of government interests, traversing between an aim to protect human rights and an aim to secure EU borders and entry rights, Frontex operations are encouraged politically to proceed with increased restrictions. Despite receiving increasing budget and resource capacities, effective measures have not been put into place to ensure that Frontex operations abide by international human rights standards and respect the right of an individual to seek asylum. Indeed, the fact that the EU's budget proposal for 2012-2013 foresees a budget increase of 38% for Frontex while the total fundamental rights budget should be decreased by 1% sends out a clear signal on the EU's lack of commitment to fundamental rights.

"The increased powers to Frontex are a reflection of recent trends in the EU's migration policy of seeing migration as a threat, and focusing predominantly on border control and control of 'illegal' immigration. We need to instead focus on humane treatment of asylum seekers and upholding the basic human rights of migrants entering the EU", said Chibo Onyeji.

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) is a network of more than 700 NGOs working to combat racism in all EU member states. ENAR aims to fight racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and to promote equality of treatment between EU citizens and third country nationals.

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