



## LIBYA

The increase in the numbers of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers traveling in mixed migratory movements constitutes a major political and humanitarian challenge. North Africa is affected by such movements as a region of origin, transit and destination.

European restrictions on inward regular migration processes has contributed to the rise of irregular migration flows.<sup>1</sup> These restrictions have forced those on the move to find other ways to reach European shores, which, has resulted in a surge in the activities of organized transnational criminal networks operating smuggling and trafficking rings across the region. Migrants continue to face abuse and exploitation at the hands of these smugglers and traffickers who promise passage across the Mediterranean Sea and national borders.



These movements are driven by those who are fleeing war and searching for security; those looking for better opportunities and future; Geographic proximity and historical ties have also contributed as drivers for North Africans to migrate to Europe (particularly those from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) and to the Gulf countries (particularly those from Egypt and Sudan).<sup>2</sup>

## BACKGROUND

Libya has been a major transit and destination country for thousands of migrants. Libya is not considered a major source for irregular movement in the region. While the number of international migrants in Libya has shown some decrease since the uprising of 2011, Libya continues to be a country of transit and destination for many.

Despite the tremendous focus placed on irregular migration through Libya to Europe, the situation is much more complicated with many migrants, refugees and asylum seekers choosing to remain in Libya while others with initial intentions to transit thru becoming stranded in the country. Research over the past few years has revealed that worsening conditions, including exploitation and abuse in Libya has led or encouraged substantial number of migrants and refugees to cross to Italy from Libya.<sup>3</sup> For many of these migrants, the initial intention was not to travel to Europe.<sup>4</sup> Others may be forced or aggressively recruited by smugglers to make the crossing to Italy.<sup>5</sup>

In comparison to estimates of migrants in Libya, the number of people making the sea crossing irregularly from Libya is relatively small. In 2017, 119,369 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers arrived to Italy via the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR) accounting for only 15% of the total migrant population in Libya.<sup>6</sup>

While Libya is not signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention, it is a signatory to the 1969 African Union Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. It is a participating state of the Khartoum Process which aims to enhance cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination on migration and mobility while addressing trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants.

## MIGRANT PROFILE

As of February 2017, IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) has managed to reach and register approximately 704,100 migrants in Libya.<sup>7 8</sup> However, it is estimated that there might be between 800,000 to 1 million migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the country.

Migrants in Libya mainly originate from Africa and to a lesser extent, the Middle East and West Asia. Out of the 650,073 individuals from Africa, 446,732 (69%) originated from Sub-Saharan countries and 183,226 individuals (31%) from North African countries. As of February 2018, migrants from Egypt and Niger constituted the majority of migrants in Libya registered by DTM representing a combined 34%

(240,000) of the total estimated migrant population.<sup>2</sup> The majority of migrants in Libya are men constituting 89% of the estimated migrant population. Minors are estimated to make up 10% of the migrant population with 41% (28,869) of them being unaccompanied.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of 2016, there were 9,301 registered refugees in Libya.<sup>11</sup>

## ROUTES TO AND FROM LIBYA

### INBOUND

The Southeastern desert in Kufra is the main entry point for migrants coming from Sudan and the Horn of Africa while and people coming via Algeria most often enter through Ghat or Ghandames.<sup>12</sup>

The majority of migrants arriving to Libya from West Africa (Mali, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria) report passing through Niger and enter Libya through its Southern and South-Western borders, often stopping at the cities of Murzuq and Sebha.<sup>13</sup>

Migrants arriving from Egypt enter Libya through the Eastern borders often passing through, or staying in the cities of Tobruk and Almagreb.<sup>14</sup>

### OUTBOUND

While some migrants decide to settle in the south of Libya, mainly in Sebha, most attempt to make the journey north toward Tripoli. Migrants who need to earn money to pay for the remainder of their journeys may stop to work in Sabha, Ghatrun and Murzuq to work and get in touch with new smugglers who can help them complete their journeys.<sup>15</sup> Smugglers who send migrants from Libya to Europe organize their operations near the coast of Libya between Gasr Garabulli and Zuwara. More than 80% of boats to Europe are boarded between Sabrahta and Az-Zawiya. 90% of migrants traveling on the Central Mediterranean Route (CMR), one of the deadliest migration routes, depart from Libya.<sup>16</sup>

However, many migrants may be intercepted before or while making the journey across the Mediterranean. At the seaside, migrants have reported being intercepted by armed men who were believed to be from the Libyan coastguard, who then beat them, rob them and take them to detention centers or houses where they are subjected to abuse and exploitation (including forced labor and sexual violence).<sup>17</sup>

### THE MEDITERRANEAN CROSSING

The Sea crossing departing from Libya commonly referred as the Central Mediterranean route continues to be the deadliest route in the world. The CMR has accounted for almost 88% of all recorded deaths along the Mediterranean since 2014 while only accounting for 25% of arrivals. The CMR has claimed an estimated 10,311 lives between 2015 and December 2017. While comparisons between the first two months of 2017 and 2018 may show that arrivals to Italy and deaths dropped from 13,446 in 2017 to 5,247 in 2018; and from 442 to 316, respectively, the rate of death along the CMR has increased. By February 2017, for every 30 people who arrived to Italy, 1 person had died; while at the same time this year, for every 16 people who arrived, 1 person had lost their lives in the Mediterranean.

## SMUGGLING

In the years since the collapse of the Ghaddafi regime, smuggling networks in Libya have become increasingly consolidated. The militarization of smuggling has concentrated smuggling in the hands of a few powerful entities whose growth is facilitated by militias' provision of territorial access to smugglers.<sup>18</sup>

Smuggling in Libya is part of a transnational criminal network; Libyan smugglers cooperate with smugglers from across Africa to organize the transit of migrants until their arrival to Libya. In many cases, this entails coordinating with government officials, militaries and/or militias outside of and across Libya to facilitate the transport and movement of people across borders or points.<sup>19</sup> Smugglers also coordinate with militias in Libya to facilitate the transport of people.<sup>20</sup>

Migrants traveling to and through Libya with the assistance of smugglers have two options to pay for their journeys: they can either purchase an organized journey, in which they pay a single smuggler to arrange their journey from origin to destination, or a leg by leg journey, in which they pay a multitude of smugglers along the way to take them from one place to the next.<sup>21</sup>

Fees charged by smugglers have been reported to range between \$200 up to 5,000 Euros depending on nationality, country of departure, country of destination, transportation and payment arrangement agreed upon with the smuggler(s).<sup>22</sup>

# MIGRANT MOTIVATIONS

Migrants from West and Central Africa as well as neighboring countries of Niger, Chad, Sudan, Egypt and Tunisia mainly report migrating to Libya to seek better economic opportunities. While migrants from East Africa report leaving their countries of origin due to political persecution and conflict.<sup>23</sup>

The majority of people who travel to Libya from neighboring countries (Niger, Chad, Sudan, Egypt) plan to stay there and do not intend to continue to Europe. Most of these migrants travel to Libya to seek economic opportunities and may engage in circular migration patterns, traveling repeatedly to and from their countries of origin. An IOM DTM sample found that the majority of migrants from these countries intended Libya as their destination.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, upon arriving in Libya and experiencing a wide array of human rights abuses and precarious living conditions, many migrants may come to view the onward journey to Europe as their only option for survival and escape from abused and exploitation in Libya.

## THE MIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN LIBYA

### TREATMENT IN LIBYA

Migrants in Libya are made vulnerable by their irregular status, discrimination and racism.<sup>25</sup> Migrants are frequently robbed and smugglers may force them to pay more money than originally agreed upon.<sup>26</sup>

International community was shocked in November 2017, when some video footages were released showing abuse of migrants in Libya including practices similar to slavery. Various International Organizations have been active in Libya to reduce such vulnerabilities. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) which has been active in providing assisted voluntary returns to vulnerable migrants in Libya expanded upon its efforts in assisting returns of 23,302 migrants to their homes through its voluntary humanitarian return programme since January 2017.<sup>27</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for its part has evacuated 1,084 vulnerable refugees from Libya since the programme started in November 2017.<sup>28</sup>

### DETENTION

Human rights abuses are widespread in many of the migrant detention centers in Libya including torture, rape, and extortion. Detained migrants report being beaten, stolen from and abused by guards in the detention centers as well as being exposed to contagious diseases due to unhygienic conditions.<sup>29</sup> Detention centers are run by the Department for Combating Irregular Migration (DCIM). Although they formally report to the Ministry of the Interior, in actuality, many of these detention centers are run by armed groups and are beyond the purview of government control.<sup>30 31</sup> Furthermore, these centers have not received any funding from the Ministry of Interior since 2015, leaving them without resources to provide basic food and sanitation for detainees.<sup>32</sup>

Detention centers in Libya tend to be overcrowded and under-resourced. They lack formal registration processes and access to a legal process, lawyers and judicial authorities for detainees.<sup>33</sup> Migrants receive insufficient meals and on an irregular basis and are typically crowded into rooms with between 20 and 200 occupants.<sup>34</sup> Detained women and children migrants are mainly held at Al Jawiya prison in Misrata. They are typically held in conditions similar to those at other detention centers and under the watch of male guards, leaving them vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse.<sup>35</sup>

Many migrants rescued in the Mediterranean after departing from Libya said that they had been imprisoned for ransom at some point during their journeys. These imprisonments often include torture and a demand that prisoners call family members and friends within their networks to demand ransom money for their release.<sup>36</sup>

### SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

On both the Eastern and Western routes to and through Libya, experiences of gender-based violence are common, particularly for women migrants. Nearly half of the women interviewed in a UNHCR survey of women and children on the CMR reported having suffered from sexual violence or abuse along their journeys.<sup>37</sup>

When Europe-bound boats that attempt to leave Libyan shores are intercepted by the Libyan coastguard, migrants are transferred to DCIM detention centers or private houses where they are subjected to forced labor and sexual violence. Women traveling without male relatives are especially vulnerable to these risks and are, at times, forced to work as sex workers along their journeys. However, sexual abuse in Libya does not solely affect women. Migrant boys and men in Italy also reported being subjected to sexual abuse while in Libya.<sup>38</sup>

## FORCED LABOUR

Many migrants in Libya become indebted to smugglers through “pay as you go” arrangements, leaving them vulnerable to abuse and trafficking.<sup>39</sup> Children in particular may be forced into begging or theft by traffickers.<sup>40</sup> In southern Libya, many men, women and children migrants work under the control of smuggling groups, even when they are not physically detained by these groups.<sup>41</sup>

Migrants also experience indentured labor through kidnappings and arbitrary detention by traffickers and armed groups, some of whom operate official DCIM detention centers, and who force migrants to work.<sup>42</sup> They may be forced to work, in many cases without payment, on farms, in houses as domestic workers, in construction, or collecting rubbish.<sup>43</sup> Women migrants may be forced to work as sex workers.

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

Migrants in Libya have restricted access to services due to their irregular status, limited access to economic resources and widespread discriminatory practices. In terms of access to housing, prices barriers, security concerns, overcrowded shelters and scarce amenities are amongst the key challenges faced by migrants. In regards to healthcare, the lack of medical supplies and medical staff, discriminatory treatment and high healthcare costs constitute the biggest challenges facing migrants’ access.<sup>44</sup>

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International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
The UN Migration Agency

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