



MIGRANTS REFUGEES

Migration Profile

LIBYA

A. Executive Summary

Libya has experienced a period of intense and protracted crisis since 2011. Before this explosion of violence, the country was a major destination for labour migrants and typically hosted from 1.35 to 2.5 million migrant workers. Most migrant labourers worked in the construction and health sectors, with some in agricultural and manufacturing sectors. In 2011, more than 796,000 migrants left the country, but Libya remains an attractive destination for low to medium-skilled migrants, who seek to enter the country due to its competitive salaries and continuous need for migrant labour.

Internal displacement has increased dramatically in recent years as the sustained use of artillery shelling and air strikes close to inhabited areas continue to destroy local livelihoods. The number of IDPs has more than doubled from 179,400 in early 2018 to over 401,830 in 2020. Currently, most IDPs are being hosted in various municipalities of Tripoli. Although most internally displaced persons are aged between 18 and 59, there is an identifiable trend of increasing numbers of displaced children between the ages 6 and 17 who are rapidly becoming the largest segment of Libya's displaced population.

Crucially, Libya is a major transit country along the Central Mediterranean Route to Europe. In fact, Libya operates as the gatekeeper for the migration crisis in the region as Europe continues to pursue joint policies with the country to limit the arrival of migrants on European shores. In 2020, Libya counted at least 625,638 migrants in its territory, almost all of them (93%) arrived from sub-Saharan and North Africa. Among these, there were at least 348,000 children reported to be in dire need of help, with more than 315,000 of them being especially hard to reach due to COVID-19. Attention to the condition of migrant children in Libya is crucial, because 93% of those who were interviewed in Italy reported facing detention and abuse in Libya. Children are especially isolated from external support.

The steady growth of human trafficking to and through Libya adds an additional layer to the vulnerability of migrants in Libya, with a corresponding increase in the extent of smuggling and the rising prices charged by smugglers.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

In 2021, Libya's estimated population was 7,017,224. In 2017, international migrants accounted for more than 12% per cent of the population, declining to about 9% in 2020. The country has the Mediterranean Sea to the north and is bordered by five neighbouring countries: Niger, Sudan, Egypt, Tunisia and Chad. Libya's main ethnic group is Arab and Berber (97%) and the remaining 3% includes Egyptian, Greek, Indian, Italian, Maltese, Pakistani, Tunisian and Turkish people. Regarding religions, most of the population (96.6%) are Muslim (predominantly Sunni Muslim), with 2.7 % who are Christian, 0.3% who are Buddhist and the balance (each less than 0.2%) are Jewish, Hindu, folk religion, other or unaffiliated. Libya has an oil-based economy and since 2014 has experienced challenges with instability on the social, political and security levels, disruptions in oil production, and a decline in global oil prices.

II. International and Internal Migrants

The profile of those who migrate to and through Libya varies, but primarily this includes young single men with low levels of education and who report migrating to or through Libya for economic reasons. In 2016, this was especially true for those migrating from neighbouring countries (such as Niger, Sudan, Egypt, Tunisia and Chad), who often reported moving for economic reasons and indicated temporary employment as a core driver for their migration. Most of these migrants moved back and forth several times from their countries of origin. Similarly, also in 2016, West and Central African nationals from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Cameroon and Senegal, reported leaving for economic reasons. East African nationals from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan, on the other hand, said they mainly left their country of origin because of political persecution, conflict and economic distress, and most used Libya as a point of transit in their intended migration towards Europe. This was also the case for those originating from non-neighbouring Arab countries (Syria, Palestine, Iraq), who were often fleeing conflict, were skilled and educated refugees and who were prone to travel as family units.

Levels of human trafficking for sexual exploitation have been progressively increasing since 2015, and Nigerian and Cameroonian women are frequently targeted.

Whether migrants drawn to Libya by job opportunities intend to stay permanently or temporarily, the high levels of instability, insecurity, exploitation and abuse very often induce migrants to attempt to eventually reach Europe.

Reportedly, internal migrants in Libya mainly migrate due to ongoing violence, which is especially present in Tripoli and in the Western part of the country. Air strikes and artillery shelling in proximity to civilian areas put the safety of local inhabitants at significant risk. Since 2019, more than 140,000 people have been displaced solely from the area of Tripoli.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Libya has a long history of being a key destination for labour migration in North Africa. In fact, an estimated 1.35 to 2.5 million migrant workers were living in Libya prior to the revolution in 2011. Most of them were employed in the construction and health sectors. Libya represented a desirable destination for labour migration due to its competitive wages and its growing private sector. In 2011, more than 796,000 migrants left the country, yet Libya's migrant population remains significantly high with an estimated 625,000 migrants in the country in 2020. Libya still represents an attractive destination for migrants from neighbouring countries due to its higher salaries and continuous need for migrant labour. In 2019, the Flow Monitoring Surveys conducted by IOM revealed that 84% of the surveyed migrants cited economic reasons for migration. Economic opportunities and employment were also central to the prolonged stay of migrants in the country.

Today, the profile of labour migrants in Libya is complex and heterogenous, and is composed of people from various backgrounds and skill levels. Overlapping migrant categories and statuses makes it even more difficult to produce accurate data on skilled migration in Libya. The coexistence of factors such as increasing inflation, local dependency on migrant labour and migrants' need to find the money to finance their travels, has a mostly positive impact on the employment status of migrants in Libya. In fact, 76% of the migrants interviewed by the IOM in 2019 were employed, whereas only 52% reported being employed prior to their arrival in Libya. Migrants are employed primarily in construction, water supply, gas and electricity sectors, with some working in agriculture, pastoralism and manual crafts. Limited job availability and insufficient or mismatched skills for the jobs available were reported as core reasons for migrant unemployment. Hence, labour migration towards Libya currently attracts lower and middle skilled workers, as migrants are generally hired for the jobs that Libyans are unwilling to do. Of the 670,000 migrants and refugees in Libya today, it is not clear what proportion is in the country solely for employment.

Most of the country's informal labour is provided by sub-Saharan nationals, whereas Eastern European engineers, Filipino nurses, Indian and Iraqi teachers, and Syrian and Ukrainian doctors are also present. While some migrants are able to access regular employment, the majority face exploitation and the challenge of living on extremely low wages. Data concerning the outflow of Libyan skilled nationals, on the other hand, is extremely limited as emigration generally is complex and untracked. The structural limitations on Libya's educational system, together with infrastructural deterioration, lack of opportunities and ongoing conflict, all feed into the de-skilling of the nation's population. Notwithstanding the lack of accurate data, the number of Libyan labour migrants in neighbouring countries such as Egypt and Tunisia is thought to be in the thousands.

IV. Forced Migration (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees)

By April 2020, Libya reported a significant increase in the number of IDPs, which more than doubled from 187,423 in late 2018 to 401,836. This paralleled steadily with the number of returns to Libya (\approx 457,324). This growth in internal displacement links closely to the protraction of

armed conflict, especially in the Western part of the country where approximately 78,878 families were displaced by the sustained use of artillery shelling and air strikes in inhabited areas. Due to ongoing violence, the municipalities of Tripoli are currently hosting at least 108,000 IDPs. At the same time, the surge of COVID-19 has led to new restrictive measures that prevent people from leaving at-risk areas. As a result, the Tripoli municipalities of Tajoura (33,578 IDPs), Hai Alandalus (13,993 IDPs), and Suq Aljuma (29,825 IDPs) host most of the total IDP population (71%) in the Tripoli region. The majority of the IDPs appear to be aged between 18 and 59 and are equally divided by gender, yet there appears to be a significant upsurge in the number of displaced children between the ages of 6 and 17.

Besides the growing insecurity due to protracted armed violence, another main driver of internal displacement is Libya's deteriorating economic situation, nourished in part by inflation, and resulting in a major increase in the cost of accommodation, the lowering of wages and buying capacity, and also the loss of IDP household's financial capacity during this protracted crisis. Displacement is also closely interlinked to the general lack of basic services and access to them and a lack of livelihood opportunities and humanitarian assistance.

Libya can be seen as the main gatekeeper for the migration crisis in the region, since most forced migrants seeking to reach Europe must undertake one of the deadliest journeys in the world: the Central Mediterranean Route, which passes through Libya. In 2020, there were an estimated 625,638 migrants in Libya, almost all of whom (93%) arrived from the sub-Saharan and North Africa region. (There has been a shift recently to the Eastern Mediterranean Route towards Europe on the part of Syrians.) Due to ongoing armed conflict in the Northern part of Libya, almost half of the forced migrants (46%) are located in Western Libya, and along the coast. Almost all of the forced migrants in Libya are adults (93%), and approximately 11% of them are females. By the end of June 2020, an estimated 5,475 migrants were intercepted or rescued at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard and returned to Libya. In 2020, at least 98 migrants died during their journey across the Mediterranean and 149 remain missing.

In December 2018, children represented an estimated 9% of the 663,000 migrants and refugees estimated to have arrived in the country. Among these, a third (19,691) were unaccompanied or separated from their families. In 2020, a reported 348,000 children were thought to be in dire need of help, with more than 315,000 of them being especially hard to reach due to COVID-19, protracted armed conflict and the economic crisis. A study conducted by UNICEF identified the extreme vulnerability of children in Libya who face even greater hardships than their adult counterparts, despite having child-specific rights. In fact, children are even more vulnerable to labour exploitation and discriminatory access to healthcare. According to the study, almost all the children (93%) interviewed in Italy reported being held in captivity in Libya. In order to survive in the country, children attempt to go unnoticed and to minimise the time they spent outside their home or workplace. This exacerbates their vulnerabilities by limiting their access to external support, thus deepening their isolation. Child trauma and isolation are even more concerning now as UNHCR has been forced to put its psychosocial programme for children in Tripoli on hold due to ongoing conflict.

Despite the insecurity and armed conflict, Libya remains both a transit and destination country for forced migrants. In 2020, of the 625,638 migrants who arrived in Libya, 21% arrived from Niger, 16% from Egypt, 16% from Chad, 13% from Sudan and 8% from Nigeria. Most of the migrants are subject to assisted return to their country of origin under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative. This program required €357 million in funding and assisted the return of 81,000 African migrants (50,000 of them from Libya). They received no support from the IOM upon their return, however, and they are often reintegrated into previous cycles of abuse and exploitation. There are several reported cases of women being trafficked in Libya and forced into prostitution.

The growth in the flow of migration resulted in higher fees charged by smugglers, rising more than a reported 30% in recent years. Other pressures are the deterioration of Libya's internal security, the high inflation and foreign currency crises in the country, and the presence of more and more smuggling intermediaries over the years. Crucially, between 2016 and 2018 the Libyan Dinar lost more than half (55%) its value, and this not only caused a spike in the cost of smuggling, but also forced migrants to work for much longer periods within Libya in order to earn the money to pay for their onward sea travel to Europe. Moreover, smuggling fees can reflect the migrant's country of origin and perceived economic status, the levels of service necessary for the journey, and the prices attached to the smuggling network itself. Most migrants and refugees transiting through Libya are informed by close friends and relatives about the smuggling routes and the risks involved. Still, they often ignore the more problematic details of the journey, including these fluctuating prices and the risk of detention in Libya and the perilous sea journey to Europe.

Migrants' journeys follow two patterns: organised travel and step-by-step travel. The former is like a complete travel package deal from country of origin to country of destination. Behind this is a transnational, structured smuggling network that organizes the journey and provides food and accommodation. The costs of this type of travel are very high (US\$5,000) and migrants directed towards Libya must pay for the entire trip prior to departure. In contrast, step-by-step journeys utilise different smugglers for each section of the journey, paid separately prior to each departure. Between each stop, migrants usually seek informal employment, which is often exploitative, in order to fund the next leg of their journey. This indicates the existence of a fragmented, un-structured, non-hierarchical smuggling network.

The main entry points into Libya are located along the Sudanese border, south-east of Kufra, and along the border with Niger to the south of Sebha. The former mainly sees the transit of refugees and migrants from East Africa, whereas the latter is utilised mainly by people arriving from West and Central Africa. Ras Jedir (on the Tunisian border), Salloum (on the Egyptian border) and Ghat (on the Algerian border) are secondary entry points. Due to ongoing conflict in Libya and high instability, smugglers avoid the north-eastern part of the country; instead, most of them direct their trafficked migrants through one of the entrances just listed. Bani Walid is increasingly emerging as a point of transit towards Tripoli, which is where most people take temporary employment and plan the next part of the journey, or suffer detention.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking in Libya has been significantly increasing over the past decade, from 15,151 in 2012 to 181,436 in 2016.

Whether or not they are trafficked, people travelling to and through Libya are exposed to very harsh environmental conditions, unsafe means of transportation, minimal access to food, water and medical support, and abuse. In fact, victims of human trafficking are usually transported in pick-up trucks and rubber boats that are highly unsafe. This makes them extremely vulnerable to extortion and ill-treatment, including robbery, detention, forced labour, sexual violence and exploitation. Victims of human trafficking are especially vulnerable in Libya due to armed violence, racism and discrimination against people of sub-Saharan origin. IOM has documented the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation that has been increasing in recent years with an estimated 4 out of 5 girls and women (approximately 80%) who arrive in Europe from Nigeria by sea were likely victims of sexual abuse. Many of them arrived on the shores of Italy pregnant after being raped during their stay in Libya. Most women report being trafficked by people they knew who made false promises of paid employment and better opportunities.

Women and girls are also often forced to undergo abortions in unsanitary conditions, without access to anaesthetic, pain medication or antibiotics. In addition, they are trapped into indebtedness by their traffickers.

VI. National Legal Framework

In 2010, Libya introduced Law no. 19 on Combating Illegal Migration, which aimed at imposing harsher punishments for smuggling, yet grouped all forms of entries in the country identified as “illegal” under the umbrella term of illegal migration, thus capturing all those who are victims of trafficking as well as those who are seeking international protection. This law punishes irregular entry in the country with a fine of 1,000 Libyan dinars or a prison sentence of up to three years. It also dictates the deportation of irregular migrants once their sentence is complete. This 2010 law was built on its antecedent, introduced in 1987: Law no. 6 on Organising the Exit, Entry and Residence of Foreign Nationals in Libya. This law determines the forceful deportation of any migrant found on Libyan territory in possession of an expired visa (or without one) and provides for their imprisonment for up to three years. It criminalises both the irregular migrant and those who have facilitated or assisted their entry and stay in the country. This is closely linked to Libya’s lack of asylum laws and procedures despite Article 10 of Libya’s Constitutional Declaration of 2011, which defines the right to asylum. Libya has also refused to sign the 1951 Convention in relation to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol for the formalisation of UNHCR’s presence in the country while it is party to the 1969 Organisation of African Unity Convention Governing and Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa.

VII. Main Actors

The State

Libya governs migration through various government departments: the Ministry for the Interior including the General Administration for Coastal Security (GACS), the Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration, the Ministry of Defence including the Libyan Navy which includes the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Libya currently has two coast guard services: the GACS and the LCG, which together are often referred to as Libya's Coast Guard. For the past two decades, EU institutions and states have been pursuing policies that sought to limit the number of arrivals of refugees and migrants on European coasts.

International organizations

Multiple international organisations including UN agencies (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF) are currently involved in migration matters in Libya. UNHCR engages with the Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration to push for the release of refugees and asylum-seekers from detention centres, and with the Libyan Coast Guard to ensure the delivery of uninterrupted life-saving assistance to people rescued at sea and people of concern at disembarkation points. The EU-IOM Joint Initiative organises return charters to countries of origin, which assisted the return of 81,000 African migrants to their country of origin and returned 50,000 Libyan migrants to Libya. Between March and July 2020, charters were interrupted due to COVID-19 and were resumed in August, when 118 Ghanaian migrants, who had been stranded in Libya, were repatriated after medical screening and psychosocial assistance from IOM prior to their departure.

By contrast, in 2020, UNICEF's emergency response reached 23,590 people who were displaced from Tarhouna and Sirte due to protracted violence. In addition, UNICEF provided access to clean drinking water for 8,131 IDPs, reached 29,000 people with mine/explosive weapons risk education, and delivered primary health care to 323,795 children and women. Nevertheless, UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children in Libya is severely underfunded. The funding gaps amount to almost 75% of the US\$19.8 million that is needed in order to reach 268,000 displaced children across the country.

The Catholic Church

In light of the ongoing violence in the country, Pope Francis has appealed frequently to the international community to address the situation of migrants and internally displaced people in Libya. His calls upon the international community to help those stuck in war-torn Libya highlight the vulnerability of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers who are subjected to abuse and to exploitation. "There is cruelty," he said. "We all have responsibility, no one can feel exempt." These were the Pope's words in June 2020, as violence continued to rage across the country and no fewer than 492,000 IDPs and migrants were in need of humanitarian assistance.

Several Catholic organisations responded to the Pope's call for action. The FCEI (Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia/Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy) together with Tavola Valdese and the Sant'Egidio Community promoted the development of humanitarian

corridors for assisting the legal and safe journey of migrants towards Europe. The aim of the project is to establish safer routes for migrants and to prevent the surge of deaths in the Mediterranean. Humanitarian corridors are superior to smugglers' services by providing safer routes for migrants, by allowing vulnerable people to enter Europe legally, and by managing their immigration process. The project is subject to state security checks and is in line with Libya's legal framework. This is an ecumenical collaboration between Catholic and Protestant organisations who have united for the humanitarian protection of vulnerable refugees and migrants. Originally developed in Italy, it is now also present in France and Belgium. Once in European territory, migrants are provided accommodation and are assisted through the process of legal, economic, educational and sanitary integration in the national fabric. The project has been successful for more than 1,000 migrants from Syria.

Within the Catholic Church, assistance to the most vulnerable in Libya and the pastoral care of migrants and refugees is carried out by Caritas Libya. Caritas Libya provides migrants with liturgical services as well as medical services, basic education about hygiene, food (delivered once a week), and limited financial help for those migrants working on church premises. With Danish Refugee Council, International Organization for Migration and UNHCR, Caritas Libya assists the many migrants and refugees who are without documents and who live in detention centres while they wait to be repatriated through the Voluntary Repatriation Program sponsored by the European Union. Voluntary repatriation, family reunification and resettlement are among the durable solutions sought by Caritas Libya and UNHCR. In 2019, the total number of people assisted included 313 men, 216 women, 193 children and 26 single mothers.

Historically, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) and the Sisters of Charity were also involved before they were forced to leave the country due to security concerns.

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