

Mixed migration routes and dynamics in Libya

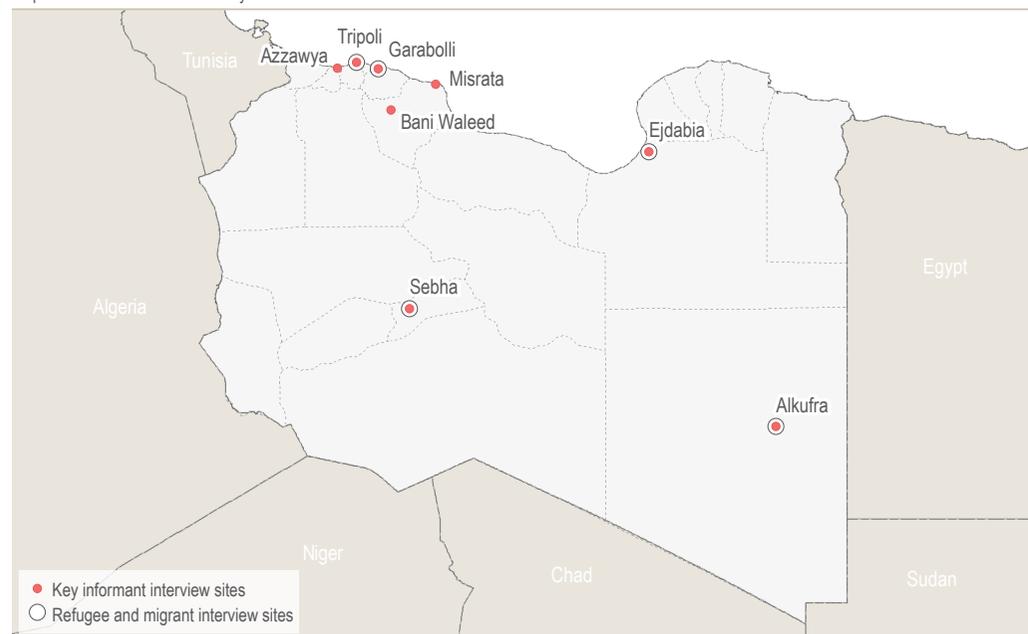
The impact of EU migration measures on mixed migration in Libya

April 2018

CONTEXT

While migration to Libya gained prominence with the rise of refugee and migrant¹ sea arrivals in Italy since 2011 and, more significantly, since 2014, migration to the country is nothing new. Libya has been an attractive destination for refugees and migrants from North and West Africa since the 1970s and 2000s respectively with many coming to work in construction or agriculture. At the same time, before the outbreak of the civil wars in 2011 and 2014, Libya was also a destination for refugees and migrants in the region, a relatively safe and economically stable hub close to the Middle East. While refugees' and migrants' situation in the country had been precarious already before, the political instability that ensued the fall of Ghaddafi and the two civil wars exacerbated the difficult situation for refugees and migrants in the country.² While Libya is a signatory to the 1969 OAU (Organisation of African Unity) Convention, it has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and only individuals of seven designated refugee-producing countries can register as persons of concern with UNHCR in parts of Libya.³ The majority of refugees and migrants do not have access to residence permits,⁴ putting them at acute risk of detention for irregular stay.

Map 1: Data collection sites in Libya



Both groups suffer from grave protection concerns in detention and in urban areas, including arbitrary detention,⁵ systematic exploitation and kidnapping by militia groups.⁶

In this context, and in the backdrop of a rise in arrivals from Libya through the Central Mediterranean sea route to Italy since 2014 and again in 2016,⁷ the European Union (EU) and EU member states have put in place a number of measures with the United Nations (UN) backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya, as well as in neighbouring Niger, in order to stem the flow of refugees and migrants towards Italy. Most notably, these measures have included a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between Italy and Libya's GNA to improve border security along the western coast and southern borders in February 2017, EU-supported border management capacity building activities for Libyan security and coast guards, as well as an increase in return operations for refugees and migrants from Libya to their areas of origin and safe third countries.⁸

Following the implementation of these measures in early 2017, the numbers of refugees and migrants reaching Italy from Libya have reduced drastically since mid-2017. While in August 2016 more than 20,000 refugees and migrants reached Italy's shores from Libya, the same month in 2017 saw less than 4,000 arriving in the country, a fivefold decrease.⁹ However, while overall numbers of individuals reaching Italy have decreased, it has not previously been clear how these measures impacted refugees' and migrants' lives in Libya and their mobility within the country.

REACH conducted this study in the framework of a partnership with UNHCR with the aim to increase understanding of the impact of migration measures implemented in Libya since early 2017 on mixed migration dynamics in the country. The assessment focused on (1) migration routes to and within Libya, smuggling hubs, and changes thereto since early 2017; (2) refugees' and migrants' experience of migration policy changes in their everyday lives and (3) the extent

Key finding

The assessment finds that migration routes to and within Libya have diversified since early 2017. It finds an increase in arrivals from Algeria and Chad and a multiplication of smuggling hubs along the eastern coast of the country. In the face of increased coastguard controls along the Libyan coast, the numbers of refugees and migrants held for long periods of time with limited freedom of movement in warehouses and unsafe accommodations along the coast have increased. In the rest of the country, refugees and migrants continue to suffer from the difficult living situation in Libya. At the same time, knowledge about the security situation and migration measures implemented since 2017 in Libya did not reportedly impact refugees' and migrants' decision to go to or stay in Libya or migrate further north.

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to which information about migration measures implemented in Libya since early 2017 shaped refugees' and migrants' decision making on staying or leaving Libya.

It is based on 75 in-depth semi structured individual interviews with refugees and migrants outside detention centres across the country and 32 key informant interviews with smugglers, law enforcement officials and civil society activists. Refugees and migrants were asked to reflect about their living situation and mobility in the country and how it changed since early 2017. Further longitudinal analysis on changes in routes, entry and exit points since early 2017 was conducted on the basis of comparable information REACH had collected in the framework of a partnership between IMPACT, Altai Consulting and UNHCR in late 2016 and early 2017.¹⁰

ROUTES TO LIBYA

Key informants reported three main entry points to Libya: first, via Algeria with refugees and migrants, mostly of West African origin, entering the country either on the north-eastern or south-eastern border with Libya. Second, via Niger or Chad with refugees and migrants reaching the main migrant hub of Sebha in the South of Libya and, third, via the eastern route with people from mainly Central and Eastern Africa reaching the region of Alkufra transiting through both Chad and Sudan. Secondary routes include entering Libya via Egypt along the coastal town of Emsaed.

While the main entry points into Libya reportedly did not change since early 2017, respondents reported an increase in arrivals from crossing points in Algeria and Chad.¹¹ This was also recorded by DRC/4MI data collected in January and February 2018,¹² indicating that refugees' and migrants' routes into the country may be diversifying as a result of the tightened security apparatus in the Agadez region of Niger in particular.¹³

The majority of key informants reported that they had not witnessed a decrease in arrivals of refugees and migrants from the southern borders since early to mid-2017. However, given the difficulty to systematically monitor and quantify entries at official and unofficial entry points along Libya's southern borders, this information needs to be further investigated.

ROUTES WITHIN LIBYA

Key informants reported that routes within Libya towards the coast have diversified since early 2017 with an increase in small routes along the eastern coast and a corresponding emergence of smuggling hubs in the northeast of the country. While a study conducted by IMPACT in early 2017 suggested that the vast majority of refugees and migrants traveling from both the southwest and southeast of the country tended to concentrate along the western coast,¹⁴

routes reportedly used in April 2018 indicate that refugees and migrants travel all along the coast, from both the southeast and the southwest of the country. The means of transport had reportedly not changed since 2017, with individuals moving with the help of smugglers in either big trucks, 4x4 cars or taxis, depending on refugees' and migrants' resources.

Emerging smuggling hubs

The most prominent smuggling hubs recorded in early 2017, namely Tripoli and Bani Waleed, were reported to be still functioning in April 2018. However, in addition to those, respondents reported an increase in smuggling hubs in the east of the country, mostly around the areas of Ejdabia, Sirte and Tobruk. This was reportedly due to two main reasons. First, respondents reported that the rise in coast guard controls along the western coast, coupled with an increased crackdown on refugees and migrants in the cities of Tripoli and Bani Waleed, had led to a diversification of transit and exit points along the coast. Second, the stabilisation of the region around Sirt after the defeat of armed groups in 2017 reportedly made the eastern region more accessible and the coastal road through Sirt useable for smugglers.

Along the eastern coast, in the area between Tobruk, Ejdabia and Sirt, respondents reported several places where refugees and migrants were held in locations outside urban centres, waiting to be transferred to warehouses and locations closer to the coast. Refugees and migrants were reportedly held in abandoned farms, warehouses and locations which did not have phone reception, to minimise the risk of being found by police. Ejdabia in particular was reported to be a re-emerging smuggling hub, after having decreased in importance in 2016.

Along the western coast, respondents reported that after the armed clashes in Sabratha in September 2017¹⁵ there had been an increase in smuggling in neighbouring coastal towns, notably in Alkhums, Garaboli and Zliten. This was also found in two other studies on smuggling in the region, published in December 2017 and March 2018¹⁶ respectively.

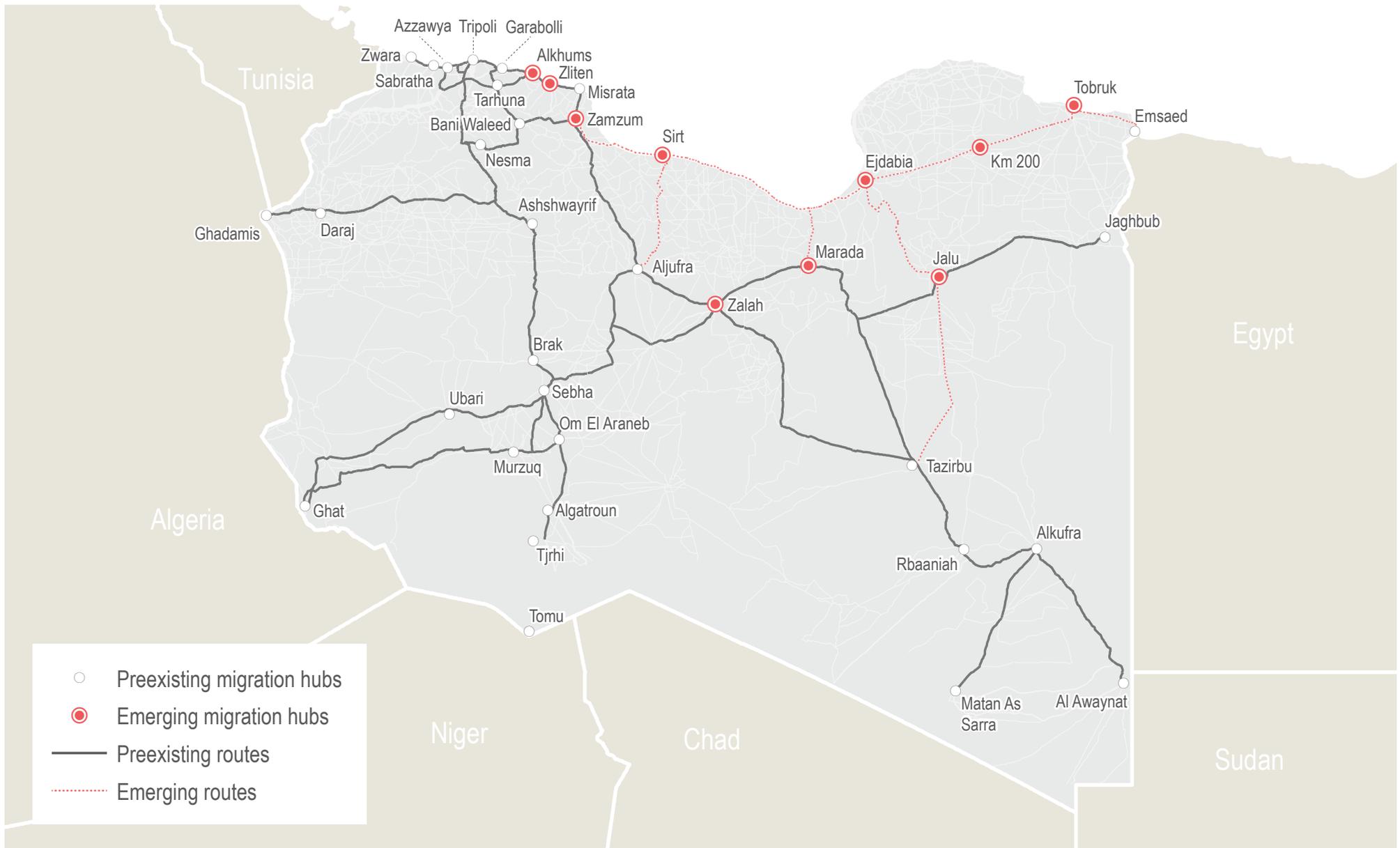
Decreased departures, smuggling hubs still functioning

All key informants in the centre and north of the country reported a decrease in attempted boat departures since early 2017 due to the increase in controls along the coastal area. However, smugglers in Bani Waleed reported that the increase in controls along the coast had not led to a decrease in refugees and migrants they were holding in warehouses helping to travel to Italy. Rather, smugglers reported that they had to hold refugees and migrants for longer in warehouses, waiting for green light to transfer individuals to other warehouses along the coast. Reportedly, this led to refugees and migrants spending long amounts of time in several warehouses in poor conditions and with limited freedom of movement, as the coordination

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MIGRATION ROUTES INSIDE LIBYA, PRE-EXISTING AND EMERGING SMUGGLING HUBS



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between different smugglers to send refugees and migrants on boats took longer due to the increased controls along the coast. This has increased refugees' and migrants' protection risks and vulnerability.

'In the city of Bani Waleed the numbers of refugees and migrants have not decreased and we are still sending large numbers to the cities along the coast. I think that the number of migrants coming to Europe has decreased, but their numbers in Libya have not – I have not seen it. I think there is a problem that prevents these people from leaving from the beaches to Europe and this leads to the accumulation of their numbers in Libya.'

Smuggler, Bani Waleed

IMPACT OF MIGRATION MEASURES ON REFUGEES' AND MIGRANTS' EVERYDAY LIVES

Refugees and migrants in Libya were asked to speak about their lives in the country since early 2017 to ascertain the extent to which recent migration measures in the region affected individuals in their everyday lives. The impact was found to be different between individuals who were in Libya with the aim to transit to Italy and those who were in the country with the intention to stay and work.

Refugees and migrants transiting through Libya to Italy

Refugees and migrants who were in Libya with the intention to reach Italy tended to fall into two categories. First, refugees and migrants who had planned their travel in stages, first reaching Libya to stay and work in the country for a while to earn the necessary resources to pay for their trip to Italy. Second, some refugees and migrants interviewed were reportedly only transiting through the country, having already organised and paid for a 'travel package' which included their journey until Italy. This was comparable to the profiles of refugees and migrants transiting through Libya recorded in early 2017.¹⁷ All refugees and migrants who had the intention to reach Italy reported using smugglers to move within the country.

Refugees and migrants mainly transiting through Libya were all found along the coast.¹⁸ **Most reported that their living situation was poor, as they were staying in often overcrowded shelters with no electricity, waiting to be transferred by smugglers to the beach.** However, as they only intended to stay for short time in the country, they did not intend to invest into paying for better and safer accommodation as their priority was to leave the country as quickly as possible. Having been in Libya for only a short time, respondents could not compare their living situation in the country over time.

How information shapes decision making on mobility in Libya

All refugees and migrants interviewed had arrived in Libya after the outbreak of the first civil war in 2011. The vast majority of them were reportedly well informed about the difficult situation in Libya before leaving their country of origin and were not dissuaded by it. Most had extended family or friends in Libya who had told them about the difficulties they may face in the country.

As respondents were well aware of the risks they would face in Libya, only a small minority of refugees and migrants interviewed reported having changed their mind over their stay in Libya once they reached the country. Respondents reportedly knew about the low level of security in parts of the country, the discrimination they may face, as well the risk of militias and kidnapping; most reported having made a calculated decision to come to Libya. This did not change between individuals interviewed who had planned to reach Libya for work and those who intended to transit to Italy.

Similarly, while most respondents tended to know about humanitarian evacuation schemes and assisted voluntary programmes offered to refugees and migrants in the country, this knowledge did not shape their decision on whether or not to return home.²⁰ Rather, respondents reported that the decision to return was based on their personal considerations around work and family.

'I knew through relatives and friends that Libya has work opportunities and also armed conflict. I do not plan to stay here, I am here only to cross. But I expected to face accidents or be arrested.'

Eritrean woman, Ejdabia

Refugees and migrants living and working in Libya

Refugees and migrants who were in Libya for work with no reported intention to travel onward to Italy were mostly found in urban hubs or places known for agricultural production. Respondents were particularly found in cities, which have a history of being a destination for migrant workers from neighbouring countries, notably major urban hubs, such as Misrata and Tripoli, and cities closer to neighbouring countries, which have historically been popular destinations for circular labour migration.¹⁹ This includes the city of Ejdabia, a traditional destination for Sudanese and Egyptian migrant workers along the eastern coast and the southern cities of Sebha and Alkufra, particularly popular among circular migrant workers from West Africa, including Nigeriens, Chadians and Malians. The majority of them had arrived in Libya more than one year ago.

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The vast majority of refugees and migrants who were in Libya for work reported travelling as little as possible in the country, due to their lack of residence permits and ensuing fear of police, check points along the roads and militia groups. When they did travel, this was either for work, or, in a minority of cases, because the respondent had family or friends in other parts of Libya he or she wanted to join. Security as reason for further movement within Libya was only reported in Sebha, where respondents reportedly felt very unsafe as a result of the deterioration of the security situation since autumn 2017. When they did move, this was mostly to other urban centres within the country, mostly Misrata, Benghazi or Tripoli.

By staying put, respondents tried to minimise their exposure to risk by investing into their stay in their current location. This included finding work where the individual was paid regularly and building social networks which could support them. Especially among refugees and migrants from Sub-Saharan origin, staying for longer in a location reportedly allowed individuals to build better relations with Libyans living in the same area, staying in better types of shelters and finding an employer who could protect them or pay their ransom if they were kidnapped. Therefore, when asked how their situation changed since they first arrived in Libya, most reported that their situation had improved, as they had been able to build social relations and find more decent work which protected them from exploitation and abuse. The value loss of the Libyan Dinar was also reported as a major concern which led to the deterioration of refugees' and migrants' situation since they first arrived in Libya.²¹

'When I first came I worked in many occasional jobs and I was never safe. Then, a construction contractor found me, and everything changed as I started working with him and made more money than before.'

Ghanaian man, Tripoli

When respondents did move, the way of travel reportedly depended on their access to residence permits and financial resources with the vast majority of them using the services of a smuggler. Those who had residence permits were able to travel along official paved routes, using busses or taxis, deemed the safest way of travel. The vast majority, who did not have residence permits, reported engaging the services of a smuggler. This included using falsified residence permits, allowing individuals to travel along official routes, including highways; being hidden in big trucks; or being transported in small cars or 4x4 pick-ups along unofficial routes. All respondents reported that the more money an individual had, the higher their chances of having good quality transportation. Some also reported that it helped looking North African, as security and militia groups at check points were less likely to stop the car.

CONCLUSION

The assessment finds that migration measures implemented in Libya since early 2017 have led to a multiplication of smuggling routes to and within the country. Entry points into Libya along the southern borders of Libya have diversified with refugees and migrants increasingly arriving in Libya from Algeria and Chad. At the same time, departure points along the coastal area have multiplied with a particular increase in smuggling hubs along the eastern coast, notably in Tobruk, Ejdabia, Jalu, Marada and Sirt. This mirrors increased investments into anti-smuggling operations in the West since early 2017.

As a result of increased coast guard controls, refugees and migrants who aim to transit to Italy reportedly stay for longer periods of time in warehouses and hidden accommodation sites along the coast with very limited freedom of movement. As they wait to be transferred to the beaches for the boat trip to Italy, individuals reportedly live in very poor conditions, as they do not invest into their stay by finding stable employment, community relations and shelter which may protect them and are exposed to various protection concerns.

According to respondents, the situation for refugees and migrants outside detention in the country, which includes risk of kidnapping, extortion by militia groups and limited freedom of movement, has remained unchanged since early 2017. Refugees and migrants who are in the country primarily to work tend to stay put and move as little as possible to build on their social and economic networks to minimise their exposure to risk.

Knowledge of the situation in Libya and migration measures implemented in the country reportedly did not influence refugees' and migrants' decision on whether to stay in Libya or not. All refugees and migrants interviewed reported being well informed about the situation in Libya before arriving in the country. Further, most were aware of the return operations put in place for refugees and migrants wishing to return to their area of origin or a safe third country. Only few reported that this knowledge influenced their decision to stay or leave Libya.

Notably, key informants did not report an overall decrease in arrivals of refugees and migrants along the southern borders or in the main transit hubs along the coast. In view of the drastic reduction of arrivals in Italy and a decreasing number of refugees and migrants held in official detention centres along the coast,²² the question arises where these population groups are. There are reports of an increase in refugees and migrants held in unofficial detention centres, however, this was outside the scope of the present assessment.

METHODOLOGY

- This situation overview presents findings from an assessment on mixed migration routes and dynamics to and inside Libya, and the ways in which migration measures since early 2017 in the country impacted these, conducted in eight locations across the country between 21 March and 2nd April 2018. Locations assessed were sampled on the basis of their relevance to migration within Libya ascertained on the basis of IOM DTM²³ and other secondary data as either (1) important entry points in the South, such as Sebha and Alkufra; (2) transit cities, including Misrata, Ejdabia, Tripoli and Bani Waleed and (3) exit points to Europe along the coast, including Garabolli and Azzawya.
- In each location three to five in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants were administered. Key informants were selected on the basis of their expertise on migration and included law enforcement officials, mukhtars, civil society representatives and activists, smugglers and humanitarian aid workers. In addition to a total of 32 key informant interviews, 75 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with refugees and migrants who were selected in five locations selected on the basis of accessibility, namely in the cities of Sebha, Alkufra, Misrata, Tripoli and Bani Waleed. Refugees and migrants were asked to speak about their everyday lives since early 2017 over time, their knowledge of migration measures in the country and decision making over migration.
- Data collection was carried out by field teams; all received tailored training on qualitative data collection and interview skills, as well as on ethical considerations around data collection with vulnerable groups. Longitudinal analysis was carried out on the basis of comparable information on routes and mobility collected through IMPACT (of which REACH is an initiative) with Altai Consulting in late 2016 and early 2017 in Libya.²⁴ All information was triangulated with existing secondary data.
- As this assessment employed qualitative research methods, results are indicative only and cannot be generalized for the entire population of refugees and migrants in Libya. Particularly nationalities who are more likely to transit through Libya in organized smuggling networks and cannot be found in urban areas, such as Eritrean, Ethiopian and Somali nationals, are likely to be underrepresented in the present study. Similarly, the views of women are underrepresented as only few women could be found for interview at time of data collection.²⁵ The present study only interviewed individuals in urban areas, hence no information on the situation for refugees and migrants in detention centres in particular was collected.²⁶

Endnotes

1. For the purposes of this assessment the expression 'refugees and migrants' refers to all people on the move along the routes studied, including migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and other populations (such as victims of trafficking or unaccompanied and separated children), unless a distinction is otherwise made.
2. Global Initiative, [The Human Conveyor Belt: trends in human trafficking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya](#), March 2017.
3. IMPACT/Altai Consulting, [Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges](#), July 2017. Organisation of the African Union, [Organisation of African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa](#), 1969.
4. The laws Law No. 2/2004 and Law No. 19/2010 criminalised all irregular entries, notwithstanding the individual's status as refugee or asylum seeker; previous regular entries were irregularised, subjecting individuals to penalties of fines and prison sentences; individuals who were in the country in 2017 with regular papers reported difficulties in renewing these (see [IMPACT/Altai Consulting](#)).
5. UN OHCHR, [Abuse behind bars: arbitrary and unlawful detention in Libya](#), April 2018.
6. For an overview please consult: ICMPTD, [What are the protection concerns for migrants and refugees in Libya?](#), November 2017.
7. UNHCR, [Mediterranean Situation Dashboard](#), accessed 20 April 2018.
8. ASGI, [Italy-Libya agreement: The Memorandum text](#), February 2017; [EU External Action, Factsheet on the relations between Libya and the European Union](#), January 2018; Return operations herein mentioned include the EU-supported [Voluntary Humanitarian Return programme](#) of IOM, the [humanitarian evacuations and resettlement programme](#) by UNHCR.
9. UNHCR, [Mediterranean Situation Dashboard](#), accessed 20 April 2018.
10. Report available [here](#); Mixed migration trends dashboard available [here](#).
11. For an overview of main routes into Libya used in 2016 see IMPACT, [Mixed Migration in Libya in 2016 interactive dashboard](#) [here](#); for 2013 see [Altai Consulting, Mixed Migration: Libya at the crossroads](#), November 2013.
12. 4Mi, [Trend Report: Niger Route](#), January 2018.
13. O Saley, [Niger's migrant smuggling hub empties after EU crackdown](#), Reuters, 31 January 2017.
14. IMPACT/Altai Consulting, [Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges](#), July 2017.
15. For an overview see Micallef, Reitano, [The anti-human smuggling business and Libya's political end game](#), December 2017.
16. Al-Arabi, [Local specificities of migration in Libya: challenges and solutions](#), March 2018.
17. IMPACT/Altai Consulting, [Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges](#), July 2017.
18. This is likely to be because these groups, having organised an entire travel package through the country, were easiest found by data collection teams along the coast.
19. See also REACH, [Refugees and migrants' access to resources, housing and healthcare in Libya](#), December 2017.
20. UN News, [UN agency evacuates more than 1,000 refugees from Libya over past three months](#), 15 February 2018; The Jordan Times, [13,000 migrants repatriated from Libya — AU chief](#), 30 January 2018.
21. Ibid.; Humanitarian Cash Working Group Libya, Briefing note: Economic factors of importance for humanitarian cash-based interventions in Libya, internal document, 2017.
22. In May 2017 27,000 refugees and migrants were reportedly held in official detention centres in Libya. As of April 2018, only 5,200 were held in official detention centres, as reported by the head of the Immigration Control Agency. [Alwasat](#), 17 April 2018.
23. IOM DTM, [DTM Libya's Migrant Report Round 17](#), February 2018.
24. IMPACT/Altai Consulting, [Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges](#), July 2017.
25. For an overview of refugee and migrant women's everyday lives in Libya please consult 4Mi, [Living on the edge: the everyday life of migrant women in Libya](#), December 2017.
26. For information on the conditions for refugees and migrants in detention centres please consult OHCHR, [Detained and dehumanised: report on human rights abuses against migrants in Libya](#), December 2016.

ABOUT REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). For more information, please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter [@REACH_info](https://twitter.com/REACH_info).