LIBYA

Pre-crisis humanitarian situation in Al Jabal Al Akhdar district

KEY MESSAGES

- Based on initial assessments, the flash floods caused by Storm Daniel have most affected Shahat and Al-Bayda, two of the largest cities in Al Jabal Al Akhdar district, following Derna city (UNICEF 14/09/2023).

- Despite the National Meteorological Centre in Tripoli declaring a state of emergency and issuing warnings about severe storms 72 hours before Storm Daniel made landfall, the floods still affected 30,000 people in Al-Bayda as at 14 September (Nature 15/09/2023; REACH 15/09/2023).

- Several factors aggravate the impact of Storm Daniel. These include the civil war and consequent fractured governance system in Libya, as well as increasing environmental hazards resulting from climate change and the geographical location of the country. Al-Bayda city (the capital of the district) is the fourth-largest city in Libya. Despite this, there is limited baseline information available on some humanitarian needs, such as education, and the wider political and socioeconomic context in both Al-Bayda and Al Jabal Al Akhdar district.

- There were approximately 2,500 migrants and 100 refugees in the district as at January 2023 and 2,420 IDPs as at August.

- The buildings in Al-Bayda were not built to withstand floods, landslides, or damage from environmental hazards. Previous floods had already damaged many buildings. Before the current floods, 11% of the respondents of the 2022 REACH Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) reported that rain leaked into their shelters, causing flooding and damage to walls (REACH 15/09/2023).

- Health risks, such as waterborne diseases, are likely to increase, but the capacity of hospitals and primary healthcare (PHC) facilities in Al Jabal Al Akhdar was already reduced pre-flooding. Before the storm, 15 of the 51 PHC facilities in Al-Bayda and Shahat cities were already non-functional. Al-Bayda city was also facing water shortages, with 47% of households having unmet WASH-related needs. Water contamination after the floods will likely increase the demand for bottled water and other items, such as emergency shelter construction materials, which might cause price hikes if the demand outpaces the supply (REACH 15/09/2023).

- Prior to the storm, residents in Al Jabal Al Akhdar were already experiencing regular power outages.

Map 1. Al Jabal Akhdar district, Libya

Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA 13/11/2018

About this report

Aim: this report provides the current situation in Al Jabal Al Akhdar related to the impact of Storm Daniel district, as well as baseline, background, and contextual information to help inform the humanitarian response.

Methodology: this report is based on a review of secondary data, including reports from international organisations, scientific publications, and news articles.

Limitations: because of years of conflict and political instability, there is limited baseline information available on Al Jabal Al Akhdar district, especially at a granular level, making it difficult to compare pre-crisis information on the affected areas, such as Al-Bayda, Shahat, and Sousa cities. Despite protracted conflicts, displacement, and instability in the district, there is also a lack of information on pre-crisis humanitarian needs, such as education. Spellings of locations in Libya vary across different sources, presenting challenges in triangulating information for the same location.

CURRENT SITUATION

As at 18 September 2023, Al-Bayda (the capital city of Al Jabal Al Akhdar district) had received over 1,200 flood-affected people from Derna district (OCHA 18/09/2022). An estimated 3,000 people were also displaced within Al-Bayda itself (IOM 14/09/2023; REACH 15/09/2023). Some of the displaced people are sheltering in public buildings, such as schools. Road damage has also impeded access to significantly flooded areas, such as Sousa city in the same district, which could explain the lack of information on the current situation in the city (WHO 12/09/2023).

As at 12 September, three of the six hospitals in Al Jabal Al Akhdar district (Al-Bayda Medical Centre, Sousa Rural Hospital, and Al-Bayda Rural Hospital) were entirely non-functional because of flooding, although Al-Bayda Medical Centre was reported to be 80% operational by 20 September (WHO 12/09/2023). The main health challenge reported was a lack of medical supplies, medicine, and staff, which was already a problem prior to the floods. The emergency and ambulance department of Al-Bayda also reported a partial collapse of their headquarters and the loss of two ambulances (OCHA 15/09/2023). Besides road damage and flooding, fuel shortages are also challenging movement and transportation in Al-Bayda (IOM 14/09/2023).

PRE-CRISIS CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Al Jabal Al Akhdar district (in Cyrenaica region) is located in northeastern Libya. The capital of the district is Al-Bayda city, which is the fourth-largest city in Libya (after Benghazi, Misrata, and Tripoli). Al Jabal Al Akhdar district also comprises the cities of Shahat and Sousa, which have also been affected by the September 2023 floods (REACH 15/09/2023).

	AL JABAL AL AKHDAR DISTRICT	AL-BAYDA	SHAHAT	SOUSA
Population	209,978–250,000	67,120–250,000	43,376	8,000
Population living in poverty in 2022	3.9%			
Population vulnerable to poverty in 2022	13.2%			
Number of public hospitals	4–6			
Number of PHC facilities		25	26	

Sources: Britannica (accessed 19/09/2023); World Population Review (accessed 20/09/2023); DBpedia (accessed 19/09/2023); WHO (12/09/2023); OPHI (10/2022); The Libya Observer (06/03/2021); Knoema (accessed 20/09/2023)

The population of Al-Bayda city varies between 67,120–250,00 across different sources. It is important to note that the overall population of Al Jabal Al Akhdar district is at least 209,978, meaning the figures for the city and district might often be conflated (Britannica accessed 19/09/2023; DBpedia accessed 19/09/2023; Knoema accessed 20/09/2023; WHO 12/09/2023).

Al Jabal Al Akhdar experienced higher levels of economic growth than other districts in Cyrenaica region from the start of the conflict in 2011 to 2018. Regardless, 3.9% of people still lived in poverty in the district, and a further 13.2% were vulnerable to poverty (ERF 02/2021). Further information on the economic situation of Al Jabal Al Akhdar, particularly Al-Bayda, Shahat, and Sousa cities, is scarce.

Political instability

Since 2014, power in Libya has been intermittently divided between the east and west of the country. Between 2014 to 2020, Abdullah Al-Thani was the Prime minister leading an eastern government based in Al-Bayda and Tobruk, challenging the authority of the western Government of National Accord.

As the seat of the eastern government, Al-Bayda and surrounding cities in Al Jabal Al Akhdar have seen frequent demonstrations against this government's performance, including in 2016 and September 2020. The 2020 protests in Al-Bayda and other eastern cities prompted the Al-Thani government to resign.

Ossama Hamad leads the current eastern government, based in Tobruk, with the support of armed forces aligned with General Khalifa Haftar, considered the real power broker in the east (ACAPS 19/09/2023; CFR 19/09/2023; The Libya Observer 08/02/2016; ECFR 19/05/2016; ISPI 02/02/2017; DW 14/09/2020).

For further information on politics and governance in the region, please see the ACAPS report on the pre-crisis humanitarian situation in Derna.

Armed conflicts

In 2011, anti-Gaddafi groups were scattered in and around Al Jabal Al Akhdar. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, formally allied with al-Qaeda, drew many of its members from the district at the beginning of the conflict (BBC 16/02/2011).

Since the outbreak of the Libyan civil war in 2011, Al Jabal Al Akhdar has been under the control of the eastern forces aligned with General Haftar (EASO 07/12/2020). Specifically, as at May 2021, the district was under the control of Brigade 73 of Haftar's armed forces, led by General Ali al-Qataani (Chatham House 02/06/2021).

In 2019, General Haftar's war to take Tripoli led to insecurity in the district as an overstretched Libyan National Army began to recruit local police (DW 20/07/2021). From January 2019 to September 2020, most security incidents in the district were related to demonstrations against living and working conditions, arbitrary arrests and abductions, and Türkiye's support for the eastern forces (EASO 07/12/2020). There is minimal information on security incidents in the district between the end of 2020 and September 2023.

A member of the agricultural police in Al Jabal Al Akhdar reported that arms were widespread in the region as at 2021 (DW 20/07/2021).

Climate and environmental hazards

Al Jabal Al Akhdar is prone to floods, receiving Libya's highest annual rainfall levels (15–20in or 375–500mm annually) and high humidity. The rainy season occurs from October–April and peaks between December–January (Hamad 03/2012). Al-Bayda received 414.1mm of rain within 24 hours of Storm Daniel; the average for September is only 6mm, while the average during the peak of the rainy season is 121mm monthly (Nature 15/09/2023; Weather Atlas accessed 20/09/2023). Further rainfall can be expected until the end of the year, aggravating the impact of the current flooding.

Between 2005–2019, Al Jabal Al Akhdar lost around 14,000 hectares of forest, especially post-2011, when unregulated logging and construction increased as a result of political instability and the need to make money by selling wood. This deforestation has worsened flooding in the area, preventing land where trees have been cut from absorbing sufficient water, which flows into residential areas. Deforestation also amplifies the effects of increasing temperatures in the district (DW 20/07/2021).

In 2019, flash floods in Al-Bayda destroyed 85 houses and damaged hundreds more (DW 20/07/2021). On 6 November 2020, the district experienced flooding after heavy rainfall, specifically in Al-Bayda city (where an estimated 2,100 people were affected) but also in Alqubba, Labriq, and Shahat (Crisis24 08/11/2020; OCHA accessed 20/09/2023). The main humanitarian needs following this flooding were NFIs, food, hygiene kits, and health items (OCHA accessed 20/09/2023). After the 2020 floods, infrastructure reconstruction in Al-Bayda took a long time, and flooding patterns in Libya have consistently contributed to its problems of economic decline, poor infrastructure, and poverty (The Borgen Project 30/11/2020).

Periodic drought also occurs in Al Jabal Al Akhdar. Rainfall is predicted to become erratic and eventually diminish as a result of climate change (Britannica accessed 19/09/2023; ABC 12/09/2023; REACH/WFP 09/05/2023).

According to a 2023 REACH-WFP assessment of the vulnerability of livelihoods to climate change in Libya, livelihoods in Al Jabal Al Akhdar were ranked a 3 (Moderately Climate-Sensitive) on a scale of 1–4 (Extremely Climate-Sensitive to Not Climate-Sensitive).

PRE-CRISIS HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AL JABAL AL AKHDAR

People in need

Libya's 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), published in December 2022, rated the severity of humanitarian needs in Al Jabal Al Akhdar district a 4 (Severe) on a severity scale of 1–5 (Minimal to Catastrophic), putting it among the three districts with the most severe need levels in Libya. Among the 300,000 people in need in Libya, an estimated 37% of those in Al Jabal Al Akhdar were women, and 63% were men. 29% were children, 5% were the elderly, and 15% had disabilities. The HNO estimated 2,500 migrants and 100 refugees in the district (OCHA 26/01/2023).

People on the move

Libya is both a destination and transit country to Europe for asylum seekers and migrants. A February 2023 IOM assessment identified almost 705,700 migrants living across the country, of whom 19,600 were scattered across Al Jabal Al Akhdar district. This represented an increase from around 694,390 reported in December 2022, with migrants coming to Al Jabal Al Akhdar in search of job opportunities, particularly in the agricultural sector (IOM 12/2022). The pressing needs of people on the move were access to WASH, shelter, and health services. Out of people on the move assessed by IOM, 61% were Egyptian, and 16% were Sudanese. As at April 2023, 13% of the migrants and refugees in Al-Bayda city reported having been evicted or threatened with eviction, mostly because of their inability to pay for rent and utilities (IOM 08/08/2023).

Al-Bayda city has been hosting IDPs from conflict-affected areas over the last decade, such as from Benghazi, Derna, and Tawergha town in Misrata district (UNHCR 14/11/2014). As at August 2023, Al Jabal Al Akhdar was hosting 2,420 IDPs (IOM 24/08/2023). Further information on the situation of IDPs in the district is unavailable.

Shelter

The buildings in Al-Bayda were not built to withstand floods, landslides, or damage from environmental hazards (IOM 08/08/2023). Pre-crisis MSNAs found that around half of IDP respondents and one-third of non-displaced respondents in Al-Bayda lived in inadequate shelters that lacked insulation from the heat and cold, had mould and moisture issues, and were prone to flooding and damage caused by leaking rain (REACH 15/09/2023).

Health

Before the storm, there were three fully functioning and three partially functioning public hospitals and 36 PHC facilities in Al Jabal Al Akhdar district. Prior to the flooding, 7 of the 25 PHC facilities in Al-Bayda and 8 of the 26 in Shahat were non-functional by September 2023. The partial functioning of public hospitals was attributed to a shortage of medical supplies and funding (WHO 12/09/2023). As at August 2021, WHO was providing support to three hospitals and three PHCs in the district (Health Cluster 13/09/2021).

WASH

Prior to the storm, Al-Bayda city faced water shortages, with 47% of households having unmet WASH-related needs. This made Al-Bayda one of the three areas with the highest percentage of households facing these challenges. One in five households did not have enough drinking water. This problem was partially a result of inadequate infrastructure, as most households relied on the public water network even with two-thirds only having access for one to three days per week (REACH 15/09/2023).

An aquifer in Al Jabal Al Akhdar, one of the five major aquifers in Libya, serves as one of Libya's main renewable water sources (REACH/WFP 09/05/2023; AF 10/2017). In 2016, seawater intrusion and waste disposal contaminated this aquifer (Journal of Natural Sciences Research 2016). The state of the aquifer prior to the flooding is unclear.

Livelihoods

The 2022 MSNA rated livelihood diversity in Al Jabal Al Akhdar a 4 (Very High Livelihood Diversity) on a scale of 1 (No Livelihood Diversity) –4 (Very High Livelihood Diversity). MSNA respondents reported public sector jobs as the most important livelihood activity, followed by agriculture and commerce (REACH/WFP 09/05/2023). Al-Bayda is a destination city for people on the move because of employment opportunities in the city (IOM 08/08/2023).

Al Jabal Al Akhdar is one of Libya's main agricultural regions, producing grains, fruits, and vegetables (FreshPlaza 13/09/2023). As at May 2023, this district and the area of Jabal Nafusah (known as Nafusah/Green Mountain) provided more than 80% of the country's agricultural production. Between July–August 2018, 41–50% of households in the district were engaged in agriculture, 31% in livestock production, and 16–20% in crop production. Increasing desertification and scarce water for agriculture in Al Jabal Al Akhdar have recently damaged grape, olive, and other crops, increasing their prices and putting pressure on local livelihoods (REACH/WFP 09/05/2023). Poor agricultural land use in the district has also led to the decline of most soil quality indicators, which may lead to land degradation and soil productivity decline in the future (Sustainability 01/2022). The livestock sector relies on animals such as sheep, goats, cows, and camels; some people also rely on beekeeping and bird breeding (REACH/WFP 09/05/2023; FAO 04/04/2019). Conflict in Libya has indirectly resulted in increased animal feed costs and a lack of medicine and vaccines for disease control among livestock. Livestock farmers in Al Jabal Al Akhdar district have also reported insecurity and the risk of smuggling hindering the livestock trade and affecting their ability to generate income. There is also a need to repair roads connecting livestock farmers to veterinary services in the district and build new ones to connect rural livestock areas to safer urban centres less exposed to security risks. Some of the biggest challenges to cropping and livestock in Al Jabal Al Akhdar are high agricultural input and labour costs, the remoteness of grazing land, low access to water, and a lack of overall security (FAO 08/2017).

Food security

Although Al Jabal Al Akhdar being one of the three districts with the most severe humanitarian needs in Libya according to the 2023 HNO, the 2020 and 2021 MSNAs classified its coastal areas as 'most secure' (WFP 08/2022). At the same time, only 0–5% of the respondents in the July–August 2018 MSNA reported experiencing food insecurity in the district (FAO 04/04/2019). There is a lack of more recent and granular data on food security for the district.

Protection

While there are no reports of significant protection risks in Al Jabal Al Akhdar, there are risks related to unexploded ordnance and vulnerabilities related to migrant and IDP populations (REACH 30/11/2018).

Al-Bayda sees regular protests against living conditions and the government in the east. Between May–August 2022, armed groups and militia responded to these protests using unlawful force (Amnesty International 2022). The impact of trafficking on non-Libyans in Al-Bayda is unknown. As the city is a reception point for people on the move, there is a constant

risk of trafficking. The irregular status of most people on the move increases this risk and their inability to access essential services, such as protection and assistance. They often face detention, abuse, and retrafficking. An important information gap remains regarding the number of potential trafficking victims in Libya (Protection Cluster 30/04/2022).

Education

As at 2018, around 20% of households in Al Jabal Al Akhdar district reported unmet needs for education, with one of the main reasons that children did not regularly attend school being the lack of quality education and qualified teachers (REACH 30/11/2018). Further information on educational needs in the district or in Al-Bayda, Shahat, and Sousa cities is not publicly available.

Response capacity

During the 2020 floods, the initial response came from eastern governmental and local nongovernmental civil society organisations (REACH 26/11/2020). As at February 2022, 11 humanitarian projects were implemented in Al Jabal Al Akhdar, five of which were related to health. There were seven humanitarian stakeholders, including five UN agencies, one government institution, and one INGO (OCHA accessed 20/09/2023).

PRE-CRISIS INFRASTRUCTURE

Map 2. Al-Bayda city, Al Jabal Al Akhdar

Source: OCHA (31/05/2017)

Electricity

Prior to the Storm Daniel floods, residents in Al Jabal Al Akhdar were already experiencing regular power outages (DW 20/07/2021). The 2020 floods in the district damaged electricity networks (WMO 11/11/2020). In January 2023, former eastern Prime Minister Fathi Bashagha called on the eastern Minister of Electricity and Renewable Energy to begin the maintenance of power transmission lines in several districts, including Al Jabal Al Akhdar, following power outages in the region (LR 25/01/2023).
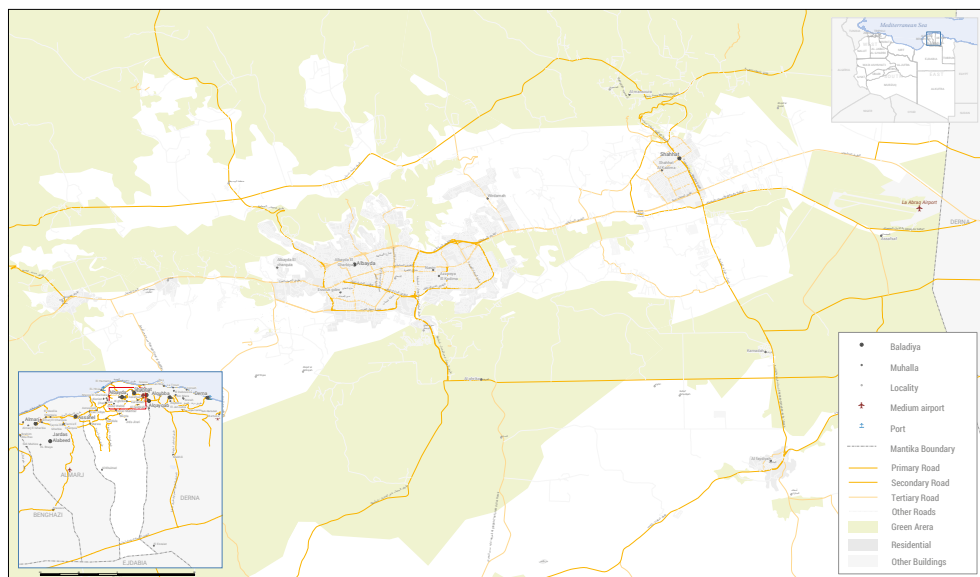
Internet and communications

The 2020 floods in Al Jabal Al Akhdar also damaged telecommunications networks (WMO 11/11/2020). No further information can be found on whether this damage has been repaired or on the general state of telecommunications in the district prior to Storm Daniel.

Road and transport infrastructure

The medium-sized Al Abraq International Airport is located in the east of the district, close to the border with Derna. There is also a port in the coastal city of Sousa. As at December 2021, Greek and US companies had proposed to redevelop the port (The Libya Observer 08/12/2021). The Libyan Coastal Highway passes through the east of Al-Bayda city and connects the west and east of the country. As at 18 September 2023, the road in southeastern Al-Bayda city connecting Al-Bayda, Massah, and Shahat was passable but narrow and affected by the floods. It was unclear whether redevelopment of the port had begun by 20 September and if the five main entrances to the city were functional (Logistics Cluster 18/09/2023).

Map 3. Al-Bayda city roads, Al Jabal Al Akhdar

Source: OCHA (31/05/2022)