



KEY FIGURES

+590,000MIGRANTS IN LIBYA
(OCHA 13/09/2021)**+10,000**MIGRANTS DETAINED
(AP 10/10/2021)**+26,000**MIGRANTS INTERCEPTED
BY THE LIBYAN COAST
GUARD BETWEEN
JANUARY–OCTOBER 2021
(THE NEW HUMANITARIAN
15/10/2021)

OVERVIEW

Libya is the main entry point for migrants attempting the journey to Europe via the Central Mediterranean route (UNHCR 03/07/2017). Increased cooperation between the EU and Libya's migration management authorities has led to an increase in the number of migrants intercepted and sent to detention centres. Between January–October 2021, the Libyan Coast Guard has intercepted over 26,000 migrants trying to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea (The New Humanitarian 15/10/2021); most of them have been taken to detention centres (UNHCR 02/07/2021).

On 1 October 2021, a raid by Libyan security authorities in the Hai Andalus municipality of Tripoli led to the detention of over 5,000 migrants. One migrant died, at least 15 others were injured, and several became homeless after makeshift shelters and unfinished buildings got destroyed (UNHCR 08/10/2021). At least 511 women and children were transferred to the already overcrowded Al-Mabani detention centre; 355 were transferred to the Shara Zawiya detention centre, while 570 were taken to the Abusliem detention centre (DTM 03/10/2021). After the raid, the Libyan Coast Guard intercepted and detained an additional 645 migrants (Amnesty International 08/10/2021). On 9 October, guards at the Ghot Shaal detention centre shot and killed six migrants (Reuters 09/10/2021). Prior to any official figures on migrant deaths in detention, reports say that at least 60 died between 2019–2021 (IOM 09/10/2021; MSF 09/04/2021; UNSMIL 02/07/2019).

About this report

Aim: This report provides an overview of the humanitarian needs of migrants in Libyan detention centres.

Method: The analysis is based on a review of secondary sources produced by NGOs, international organisations, scholars, and the media.

Limitations: Figures provided are estimates as access to several detention centres is restricted, meaning no comprehensive needs assessments can be carried out in those areas.

KEY FINDINGS

- **The humanitarian situation in detention facilities has deteriorated**, with more than 5,000 migrants arrested and transferred to detention centres over the last three weeks of October 2021. Following a raid by Libyan authorities, 751 women (including at least 30 pregnant women) and 255 children have been detained (UNICEF 04/10/2021).
- **Detention centres are overcrowded**, and detainees lack food, water, medical care, hygiene, and NFIs.
- **Detained migrants face severe protection issues** and are subject to torture, sexual and gender-based violence, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and extrajudicial execution.
- **Humanitarian organisations have limited and intermittent access** to the centres, making it difficult to assess the situation and provide assistance.



BACKGROUND SITUATION

Context

The political situation in Libya has been volatile since the collapse of Gaddafi's regime in 2011. Since 2014, Libya has been divided into competing political and military factions: the internationally recognised Government based in Tripoli and the Libyan National Army, which controls much of eastern and southern Libya. The Islamic State group also retains a presence in the desert interior. The lack of a unified political structure means that migration laws and regulations are not applied (Human Rights Pulse 02/03/2021). In 2010, Libya enacted Law No. 19 of 2010 on Combating Irregular Migration. The law determines that any person irregularly staying in Libya can be fined and detained without specifying the duration and conditions of the penalties (Global Detention Project 02/2015; HRW 21/01/2019).

EU migration policies and collaboration with Libya have reduced the number of migrants arriving from Libya to Europe, most of the time via Italy. Such policies have also increased the number of people intercepted at sea and sent to detention centres by the Libyan Coast Guard (Amnesty International 15/07/2021). From 2017–2021, the EU funded a EUR 91.3 million “integrated border and migration management in Libya” programme to build the capacity of the Libyan Coast Guard (HRW 21/01/2019; Amnesty International 15/07/2021).

Detention facilities

Official detention centres in Libya are under the Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM), which is attached to the Government of National Unity, Ministry of Interior. Local militias often control these centres (Global Initiative 10/04/2019). As at 4 July 2021, there were 29 official detention centres in Libya (UNHCR 04/07/2021).

There are also informal detention centres used as holding locations by smugglers and unofficial detention centres run by militias that are not under the direction of the DCIM. Little information and data are available on those centres, and humanitarian actors do not have access to them (OCHA 03/02/2021). The situation for migrants is likely worse in those centres (Global Initiative 10/04/2019). In late 2020, several informal places of captivity for migrants have been transferred to the DCIM for better control and have been rebranded as detention centres (Amnesty International 15/07/2021), although there is little change in the way those facilities are run.

Concerns

The closure of detention facilities caused the transfer of migrants to other centres with worse conditions. In August 2019, the DCIM announced the closure of three of its biggest detention centres – in Khoms, Misrata, and Tajoura (BBC 02/08/2019). The migrants coming from these were moved to other centres, exposing them to worse conditions and leading to

overcrowding (MSF 17/10/2019). Five additional centres have closed since September 2020: Dhar el-Jebel in the city of Zintan and four others in Khoms, Shara Zawiya, Sabratha, and Zuwara, although numerous others have opened in 2021 (The New Humanitarian 24/06/2021).

There is a link between smuggling and detentions. Slave markets are present along migrant routes used by sub-Saharan migrants (Lucas Mafu 06/02/2019; IOM 11/04/2017; TV5Monde 16/11/2017). Militias control smuggling routes; migrant route, nationality, and the associated smuggling ring determine the type of centre in which they are detained (Global Initiative 10/04/2019). There is an economy around migrants in detention centres, who are sold for USD 200–400 (NPR 21/03/2018; Global Initiative 10/04/2019).

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Humanitarian needs in detention centres are extremely high, as most of the centres are overcrowded, with as little as 0.41 square meters per person in cells. The Shara Zawiya detention centre, meant to accommodate 200–250 people, currently accommodates 550 people – mainly women and children. At the Al-Mabani detention centre, migrants are forced to remain standing because of overcrowding (MSF 06/10/2021).

Child detention

Following the raid by Libyan authorities on 1 October, 255 migrant children were detained (UNICEF 05/10/2021) – at least five of them unaccompanied (UNICEF 12/10/2021). These children are forced to share cells with adults. Suicide attempts, aggressive behaviour, sleep disorders, and bedwetting have been reported among the children (UNHCR 28/01/2020). At least two girls have attempted suicide following beatings and rape in the Shara Zawiya detention centre (AP News 21/06/2021).

Protection concerns

The detainees have high protection needs as they have no legal status and often face severe abuses, including rape, torture, extortion, forced labour, slavery, dire living conditions, and extrajudicial executions (Global Detention Project 05/2020). They are also sometimes caught in crossfires. In 2019, an airstrike in the Tajoura detention centre killed 53 migrants and injured 130 (BBC 06/11/2019).

Among the migrant population, certain categories are more at risk of violence. Those from sub-Saharan Africa have reported more frequent abuse and ill-treatment than those from North Africa (Refugees International 15/04/2018; Global Detention Project 05/2020). There are also reports that people were targeted on the basis of their race during the raid by security forces (Amnesty International 08/10/2021).



Sexual and gender-based violence

There are reports of guards subjecting detainees to rape and other forms of sexual violence, sometimes in exchange for food or freedom. These patterns of sexual violence have been reported in at least seven detention centres (Amnesty International 15/07/2021). For example, there are reports of sexual violence against women and minors by the guards in the Shara Zawiya detention centre (AP News 21/06/2021; Amnesty International 08/10/2021). Female migrants in detention centres are also trafficked for sexual exploitation (Global Initiative 10/04/2019). Psychological services are necessary for survivors of sexual violence (UNSMIL 20/12/2018).

Mental health

Poor conditions in the detention centres affect the mental health of migrants, especially since most of them had already suffered through traumatic journeys before being detained. Suicide attempts, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and sleeping disorders, have been reported among migrants detained over a long period of time. There is a strong need for psychosocial treatment as a limited number of organisations operate in this sector (UNSMIL 20/12/2018).

Health

There are reports of fractures, blunt trauma, abrasions, eye injuries, gunshot wounds, and limb weakness among migrants in various detention centres (MSF 09/04/2021). Migrants who sustain injuries following physical abuses by guards also need healthcare assistance. For example, several men were found unconscious and in need of urgent medical attention in the Al-Mabani detention centre (MSF 06/10/2021). Disease outbreaks are also regular; for one, the lack of access to sanitation facilities accelerates the spread of diseases such as scabies and tuberculosis. For example, a tuberculosis outbreak in 2019 killed at least 22 migrants (AP News 1/07/2019; MSF 21/06/2019). Respiratory tract infections, acute diarrhoea, skin diseases, and urinary tract infections are among regularly treated illnesses (MSF 13/12/2016). The overcrowding of detention centres, combined with poor hygiene and a lack of sanitation facilities, is also likely to facilitate the spread of COVID-19. There are plans for a microvaccination campaign in detention centres, but only targeting approximately 800 migrants in Tripoli and nearby cities (WHO 20/09/2021; Global Times 07/10/2021).

WASH

There is inconsistent access to clean water and hygiene facilities (MSF 22/06/2021), and most detention centres are poorly equipped with sanitation facilities. In the Shara Zawiya detention centre, 120 people share one latrine (MSF 06/10/2021; Amnesty International 15/07/2021). These

factors result in high rates of skin infections, scabies, and fleas (MSF 14/12/2016). Migrants also have limited access to drinking water, with less than one litre allocated per person per day, which leads to dehydration (MSF 14/12/2016).

Food security

The food security situation in detention centres is dire; some detainees have reported having only one meal in several days, and newly arrived migrants have had to wait four days before receiving food (Global Initiative 10/04/2019). In another instance, hundreds of migrants fled the Abu Salim detention centre in 2019 out of hunger after being denied food for weeks (AP News 31/10/2019). Migrants are also sometimes charged for food in detention centres (Global Initiative 10/04/2019). There are cases of adult malnutrition because of the poor quality of the food and the small amounts provided, averaging only 600–800 calories per day (MSF 03/02/2017). In 2019, a quarter of the migrants detained in the Sabaa detention centre in Tripoli were malnourished or underweight (MSF 20/03/2019).

Assistance for return or for durable solutions

Over 1,000 migrants in the Al-Mabani detention centre have requested Voluntary Humanitarian Return Assistance from the IOM. Humanitarian flights have resumed as of 22 October 2021 after being suspended for months by the DCIM for unspecified reasons (IOM 22/10/2021).

The Emergency Transit Mechanism was established in 2017 to facilitate the evacuation of refugees and asylum seekers in Libya to a safe environment while durable solutions are identified for them (UNHCR 21/06/2021). The programme is facilitated through an agreement between UNHCR and the Governments of Niger and Rwanda (Global Initiative 10/04/2019). There is a gap between the number of resettlement places offered by the countries and the high amount of migrants in need of evacuation (HRW 21/01/2019). Between 2017–2020, 3,361 migrants were sent to Niger and 385 to Rwanda (EUTF 26/03/2021).

HUMANITARIAN RESPONDER ACCESS

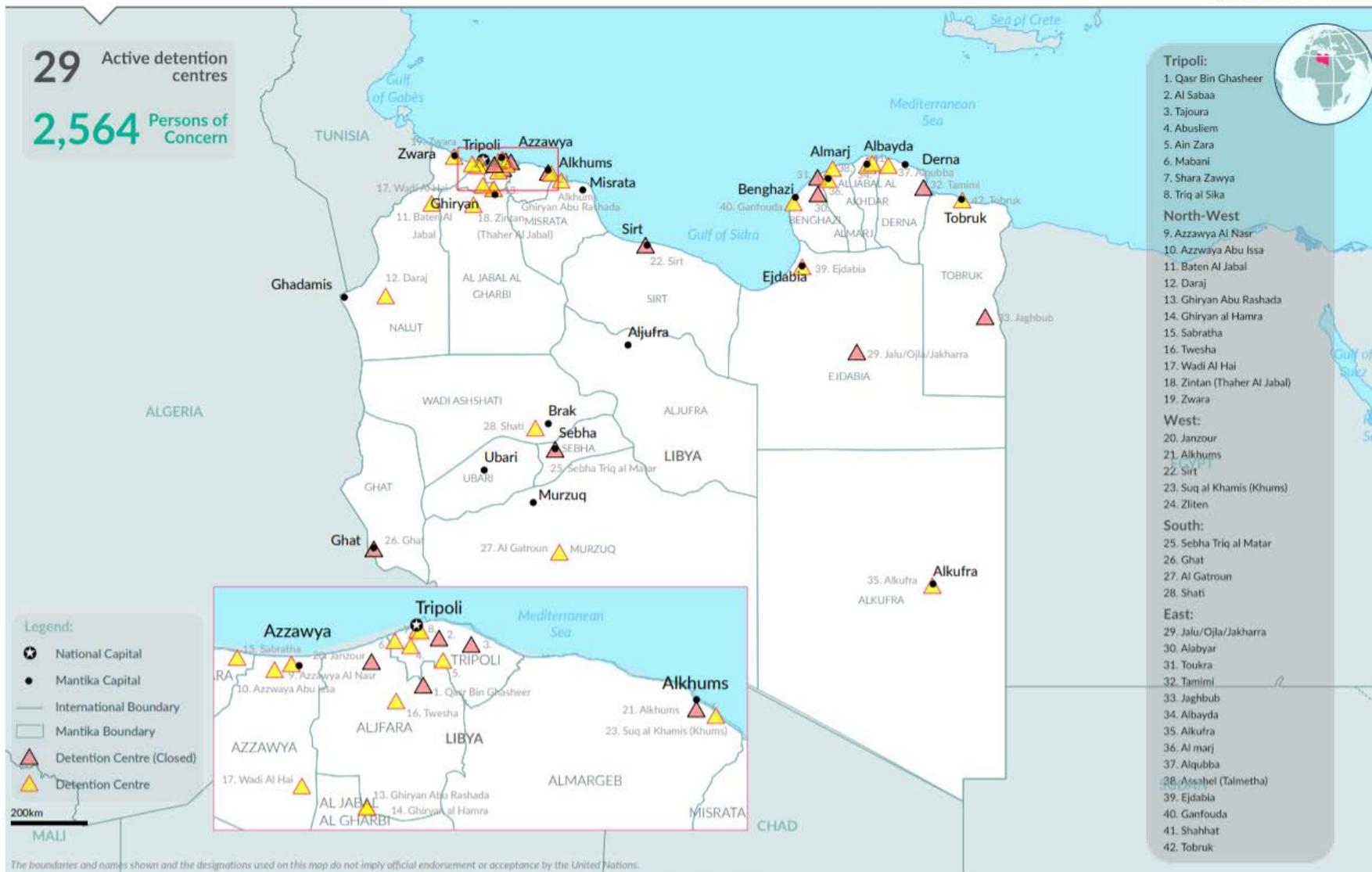
The access of humanitarian organisations to detention centres is limited and inconsistent (Amnesty International 15/07/2021), and no clear access procedure applicable to the detention centres is available. In June 2021, recurring violence against migrants in detention centres pushed Médecins Sans Frontières to suspend its activities in the Al-Mabani and Abu Salim detention centres in Tripoli to ensure the safety of their staff and protest the conditions in the detention centres (MSF 22/06/2021). Activities resumed on 15 September after negotiations with the DCIM to improve access, guarantee confidentiality, and improve the conditions of the detainees (MSF 29/09/2021).

ACTIVE DETENTION CENTRES AT 17 OCTOBER 2021



UNHCR LIBYA Reference Map - Detention Centres in Libya

Figures/ Data as of 17 Oct 2021



Source: UNHCR 17/10/2021