

Migrants and Migration in the eastern region of Libya.

A research report for Borderline Europe

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Table of Contents

Introduction to the research report.

Risks and Limitations.

Chapter 1: The detention centers in the eastern region of Libya.

Chapter 2: The health situation and human rights violations.

Chapter 3: Humanitarian workers in Libya and the host communities perception on migrants.

Sources

Introduction

Libya has become one of the main routes for migration towards Europe. Since the outbreak of the revolution in Libya in 2011, Libya has witnessed unstable conditions that have threatened the lives of many migrants who have been directly affected by wars and ongoing conflicts in the country. In addition, the deterioration and instability of the political system led to detaining large numbers of migrants by the authorities, in addition to their presence in large numbers in uninhabitable buildings and places. Moreover, the militias also exploited the uncontrolled security situation, where migrants are facing the most heinous crimes of murder, rape and extortion. And in the absence of security oversight, little is known about arrest and detention patterns.

This research presents a situational analysis to describe the environment faced by migrants arriving in the eastern region. The research focuses on three main aspects, firstly a descriptive report of official and unofficial detention centres in the Eastern Region. Secondly, the efforts of activists working in the fields of human rights in the eastern region and the documentation of cases of violence and torture migrants were exposed to during the three-month research period. Information published on social media pages, was followed up, the activities and responses of officials in the local authorities documented and analysed. Finally, the research looks at the perception of migrants in the eyes of civil society in the eastern region.

Risks and Limitations

In this research, we used weekly social media reporting tools in order to evaluate the official facebook pages of the detention centres and the DCIMs (Department for Combating Illegal Migration) in the eastern region, where 22 Facebook pages were followed up which are officially affiliated with or

related to detention centres. Facebook pages were analysed by dates of the last posts, nature of posts published, the time between posts, and the rate of activity and interaction were followed up.

The research also focused on following up and documenting the inhuman abuse that migrants received in the Eastern Region, which were spread through social media and are on pages and popular facebook groups in eastern cities.

This report is based on the stories of humanitarian workers, collected during two meetings to learn more about the situation on the ground.

Risks related to the research report:

1. The research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has restricted the movement on the ground.
2. The duration of the research internship is limited, in addition to the lack of access to public sources of electricity and the Internet due to the current state of the country, which led to a delay in performing the tasks assigned to it on time within three months.
3. Limited access to accurate on-ground data due to insecurity complications.

Chapter 1:

The detention centres in the eastern region of Libya



Photo: Official Facebook page of DCIM in Alkufra showing a Sudanese migrant deported for being diagnosed with STD.

Introduction to the political situation in Libya

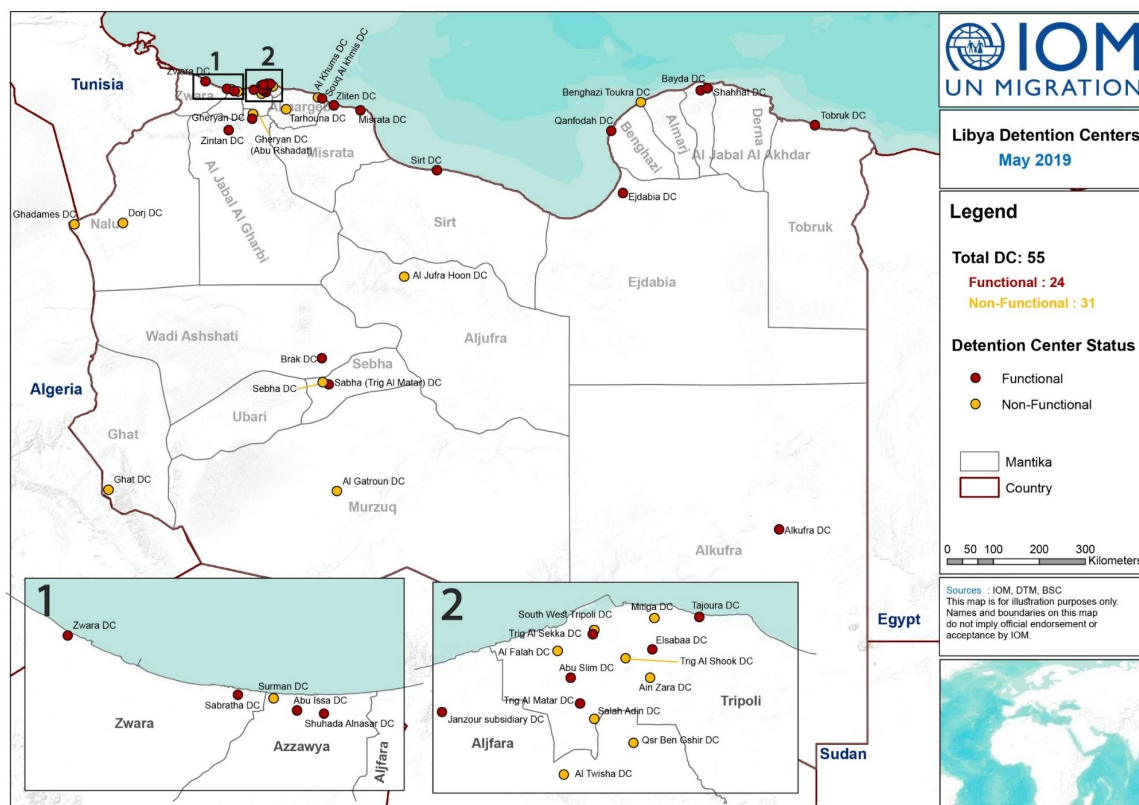
The political situation in Libya is one of the most complex. After the revolution that toppled Muammar Gaddafi, the country plunged into a series of civil wars and internal divisions. Now, seven years after the February Revolution, the country is governed by two entities, the Government of National Accord that controls most of the western region (Tripoli), and the

Libyan Interim Government that controls the eastern region of the country (Benghazi with parliament in Tobruk) with the presence of the Libyan National Army led by Khalifa Haftar. Fezzan, the Libyan Saharan South, is ogling independence.

These divisions led to a deterioration in economic and social conditions, particularly among vulnerable groups of migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons.

Detention centers in the eastern region

According to the international organisation of migration (IOM), there are 584,509 migrants in the country. 29% of the total number of migrants reside in the eastern region of the country in November 2020. For instance, Egyptian migrants constitute the top cohort in all of the eastern coastal regions of Libya, such as Al Jabal Akhdar, Derna, Almarj and Benghazi. (Source: <https://dtm.iom.int/libya>)



In Libya, the detention centres are under the responsibilities of the DCIM, a governmental migration agency that works under the authorities of the Ministry of internal affairs. There are 55 detention centres; however, only 24 of them are functional and six of them are located in the eastern province of the country.

The DCIM takes advantage of migrants to extort money from them. As migrants are arbitrarily arrested on the street without informing them why or where they are being taken, and then detained until a migrant merchant guarantees for them by paying the authorities a sum of money, and hence bailing the migrant out. Sometimes, officers of the DCIM conduct search and arrest patrols, under false allegations against working migrants, who are detained until the merchants pay more money.

Social Media Monitoring on Detention Centers

Through our follow-up on the official pages of the immigration detention centers in the Eastern Province on Facebook and Twitter, we found that most officials prefer posting on facebook rather than Twitter; however, we found more than 20 pages, all of them related to detention centers and anti-immigration agencies in the Eastern region, and only seven pages were actively posting (ranged from daily to biweekly). Most of the posts were largely news related to staff members, while detention center pages in cities like Benghazi, Tobruk, and Kufra were specifically posting updates on migrants' conditions and humanitarian aid provided to them, as well as news about deportation and migrant housing. The migrants detention center in Kufra is one of the most active official pages, as it publishes almost daily about the status of migrants in the center in terms of health as well as news of deportation and residency.

As we noted from the frequent facebook posts on migrants updates, centres near the borders, such as Tobruk, Jubboub, and Kufra tend to follow

an approach to directly deport migrants. They are deported for reasons usually attributable to a migrant's infection with a sexually transmitted disease, or an epidemic disease such as COVID-19. In such cases, the migrant may not access healthcare, instead, is deported across the border by land to neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Chad and Sudan.



جهاز مكافحة الهجرة الغير شرعية /الكفرة

July 6 · 🌐

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بتاريخ اليوم الاثنين الموافق 2020/7/6 تم القبض على شخصان من الجنسية السودانية من بين الاشخاص مصاب بمرض نقص المناعة المكتسبة (الايدز) عفانا الله واياكم والشخص الثاني لا يوجد لدي اي اوراق او مستندات شخصية وعلى الفور تم احالتهم الي مركز الايواء والترحيل الكفرة لاتمام اجراءتهم لترحيلهم الي بلدهم •

حفظ الله ليبيا



Photo: DCIM Facebook's page the post documents that on July 6th, two Sudanese migrants were deported back to their country for health issue reasons as one of the deported migrants was diagnosed with AIDS.

Additionally, the voluntary return program of the IOM (VHR) returns migrants and refugees via Benghazi/ Agadez. VHR resumed its activities on 8th September 2020, according to the facebook posts of DCIM in Benghazi, and deported 169 Bangladeshi migrants back to their country.



Photo: From the official DCIM's Facebook page showing DCIM officers and IOM organising the deportation of Bangladesh migrants in September 2020.

From internal sources in Tobruk, the official detention center in the city is not the only one housing migrants. There are more than four unofficial detention centers where groups of smugglers carry out the most heinous crimes against migrants. Evidence is given by a video that was streamed on one of the city's biggest Facebook groups of more than 60k members.

That video was posted on 13th of September 2020 by an anonymous account, documenting the torture marks of 9 Egyptian immigrants who had come to the city of Tobruk in search of work and assuming the smuggler was extorting migrants to pay about 25,000 LYD and forcing their families to send money. Fortunately, this group managed to escape from this detention center and headed to the nearest police station where the video was filmed.

Migrants

showed the officers the extent of the abuse and torture they had been subjected to. A migrant in the video was showing one of his fingers damaged by pliers. No information is available nor any statement released to clarify if there is any further information of the incident.

On October 12th, the official page of the DCIM in Benghazi posted an official statement, describing the fate of the Sudanese refugees who travelled from Sudan to Libya in the beginning of October. The Sudanese refugees travelled by foot and refused any hosting offers from nearby travellers and only requested food and water until he finally reached Benghazi.



Photo: social media influencers sympathise with the Sudanese migrant. The event took place on 12th of October.

One of the Sudanese refugees reported, he fled his country to the unknown, looking for a decent place for work and proper living, only to find himself being detained in the detention center. His videos went viral and subsequently many social media influencers started posting about him, travellers who came across him also told his stories. When the DCIM in Benghazi posted his arrest, showing a picture of the officer standing in victory, that they finally arrested

the famous refugee, people started to show solidarity and to criticise how the DCIM handled the situation.

Afterwards, and for the first time this year, the DCIM decided to break the silence and defended and justified their behaviour in the case of the Sudanese refugee.

The below facebook post says **“What the policeman did is the law, and what the Sudanese did is illegal.”** and then the official goes on defending their acts **“the Sudanese migrant was transferred to the Ibn Sina clinic, to conduct some medical examinations, on the instructions of the branch chief. As the DCIM in Benghazi, we give all migrants of different nationalities the same humanitarian treatment”**



Photo: Screenshot of the DCIM's official Facebook page defending the DCIM's activities and actions on October 12th 2020.

However, O.W, a humanitarian aid worker at an international organisation working in the Detention center of Ghanfoda, Benghazi came to a different conclusion on what he had seen after the social media protest.

“He was treated in a different way from the rest of the immigrants, and he was given the attention and care of the workers, while the rest of the inmates ate only one meal for a whole day.”

General observation

According to the two cases that both were streamed in the social media, the DCIM officers do not feel observed by the public and their reaction and statements depend only on what trends on social media.

In the first case represented above, the Egyptian migrants had no access to immediate healthcare as it was urgently needed, and they had to travel to urban healthcare facilities. In addition to that, there hasn't been any official statements by none of the officers either through their social media pages or other media platforms as local radio stations that shows what was the fate of those migrants or whether there was an investigation taking place. However, their reaction was different for the second case presented above. The officials here were pressured to publish a statement clarifying the current situation of the Sudanese migrant.

Chapter 2:

The health situation and human rights violations

Access to healthcare for migrants

Access to healthcare facilities is a major risk for migrants. Migrants face multiple challenges regarding their health conditions, as they may be excluded or expelled on the road side from the travelling group in the event of a medical emergency; in addition to that, migrants are being forcefully deported outside the country when tested positive for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

“Migrants prefer to go to the local pharmacy to get painkillers than to a hospital or clinic fearing to be reported and arrested once identified as illegal migrants” O.W. told us.

As reported by a humanitarian worker, there was a migrant in need of an urgent medical procedure, and he was unable to go to hospital due to the required amount of papers that he was unable to provide, because he is an irregular migrant. He was detained for a month and then was deported back to his country of origin.

Women are particularly vulnerable. Many are raped or forced into prostitution, which increases the risks of worsening their health conditions as access to health care for migrants is scarce.

Healthcare access during the pandemic

As of November 23rd 2020, Libya recorded 78,473 confirmed cases of Covid 19 since January 3rd according to the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC). Case numbers started to rise up in the Eastern region particularly in larger cities like Benghazi and Ajdabiya. This pandemic crisis is only an addition to the security and economic complexities that the country is already facing.

Reports from Eastern Region about migrants with health problems being deported come from Detention Centres (DC) in Alkofra and Al-Baida (at the border with Egypt) and Tobruk as the regional capital.

The DCIM deportation activities to borders decreased, which led to the overcrowding of migrants inside the detention centres with absolutely unsanitary conditions. As reported by O.W at Alkofra detention center, a migrant tested positive for Covid-19 and he was placed in a room with 150 migrants, all of whom were quarantined for two days and then the whole group was deported to their home country.

Additionally, Alkofra DC, along with all official border detention centers, tend to follow the same rules for deporting migrants with health problems whether it is an airborne illness or an STD. However, these deportation procedures are not voluntary.

For example, AlBayda detention center reports about two Egyptian migrants been repatriated after been tested positive for hepatitis. The detention center in Tobruk deports between 20 to 30 migrants infected with diseases per month, and they are usually Egyptian citizens.

There have been no covid-19 tests conducted among the migrant population having arrived during the epidemic period, though it is threatening the health status of Libyans and migrants alike. In addition to that, the shortage of detection and testing equipment has led to a decrease in the number of tests, which are limited to Libyans only.

Chapter 3:

Human rights activists in Libya and host communities' perception on migrants.

Statistical reports in Libya indicated that more than 60% of migrant workers in Libya work illegally, this prevents them from enjoying their labor rights stipulated in Libyan legislation.

Migrants in Libya are workers without rights. Irregular migrants do not have a license to work in Libya, so they cannot resort to the security authorities, afraid of being arrested on charges of illegal immigration and then deported.

With the increasing number of migrants coming to Libya and the failure of the authorities to manage the situation, migrants had to find less dangerous alternative options for their daily life and work.

This led to the emergence of clear divisions and ghettos in residential places and neighborhoods within cities, where we find immigrants, especially from the poor working classes, residing in unsanitary buildings with ten or more people sharing a bathroom and one sleeping room only in addition to the danger of living in these unsafe neighborhoods. These clear residential divisions have led to divergent views of the Libyan community towards the migrants.

On the other hand, human rights activists in Libya find it difficult to do their work and advocate for migrant issues. These difficulties are due to the many complex factors imposed by the country, including the social, economic and security difficulties.

Social Media has also a role in consolidating thought and negative discourse and directing public opinion towards issues related to the migrants as it helped install negative images by publishing news of smuggling or dangerous diseases in campaigns which magnify rare cases that resonate and cause overall street anger.

O.W. reported about one case confirming this pattern. In the city of Ajdabiya last year there was a Detention Center in a residential neighbourhood. The residents attacked workers and migrants under the pretext that they would have entered the country illegally and as criminals who pose a threat to their lives and do not have the right to live among them.

Many posts were discussing the event as social media played a major role in amplifying hate speech towards those migrants, which threatened their lives and the lives of the center's workers.

There are challenges facing activists and humanitarian workers and advocates for human rights in Libya, according to the interviews we conducted, humanitarian workers think there were attempts to implement situation.

This is also due to the legal aspect, as society sees them as criminals and the state also sees him as a criminal, and so activists are perceived by the society as having no right to defend them. Rather, advocacy campaigns for migrants, but they did not succeed, because “society rejected the presence of the migrants and considered them a criminal and a danger to the community.” Therefore, the work of activists in Libya is very difficult and faces many obstacles due to the complexity of the advocating to migrants issues may lead to the activists being subjected to threats that may amount to death.

Sources

Facebook Pages:

- Facebook page of the DCIM in Alkufra:

<https://www.facebook.com/%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A9-102499707815277/>

- Facebook page of the DCIM in Benghazi

<https://www.facebook.com/%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%89-2259394174314795/>

- Facebook page of the DCIM in Tobruk:

<https://www.facebook.com/%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%BA%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%82-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AF-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%BA%D8%A8%D9%88%D8%A8-102408754449804/>

