

Forum: Advisory Panel

Topic: Addressing the Effect of the Human Trafficking and Migration Crisis Between Libya and Europe

President/ Chair

## Introduction

The current fugitive and migrant crisis in Libya continues to escalate, making Libya one of the most dangerous countries for refugees and migrants in Africa. The situation continues to deteriorate, increasing the number of individuals and children stuck in a string of never-ending violence.

Many people fleeing countries plagued with conflicts, violence, or poverty use Libya as a main point of departure in hopes of reaching countries in Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. However, most individuals never reach Europe. To get to Libya, a smuggling network must be used, and the smugglers usually take advantage of these vulnerable groups by trafficking them. Additionally, the Mediterranean Sea is one of the deadliest seas with more than 1,200 deaths recorded within the first half of 2024. Furthermore, the boats are overcrowded, made of rubber and are unseaworthy. These boats drift for days with no direction, there also isn't enough food or water for the migrants which unfortunately lead to death. Moreover, Libyan authorities would frequently deny rescues leaving migrants to die at sea. While some people do get rescued or intercepted, they are usually sent back to Libya where they will get sent to overcrowded detention centers.

This happened due to the political instability in Libya, the lack of political leadership and governance has led to a lack of action on organized crimes. Both the Government of National Stability (GNS) and the Government of National Unity (GNU) haven't been able to enforce laws leading to a rise in crime and forcing people out of their homes.

As of 2024, Libya has more than 250,000 individuals seeking refuge, with around 143,000 internally displaced persons (IDP) many of whom are living in unsafe conditions. These asylum seekers must stay in overcrowded detention centers where they must face starvation, physical abuse, and in some cases forced labor or sexual violence.

The journey from Libya to Europe has and will continue to become more hazardous increasing numbers of violence and crimes. More than 900,000 migrants and refugees who remain in Libya as of 2024, many of whom are stuck and unable to move safely. Finally, urgent action is needed to address this crisis.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Human Trafficking:

Illegally transporting or coercing individuals so that they can profit from their work or service, usually in the form of forced labor or sexual exploitation.

### Internally Displaced Persons (IDP):

A person required to leave their previous place of residence but remains within the country's borders.

### Smuggling Networks:

A criminal group who illegally transport people, goods, or services across borders.

### Detention Centers:

A location where individuals are held against their will, usually by a government, for a variety of reasons such as deportation, criminal charges, immigration, etc.

## Illicit Economy:

Illegal economic activities, often involving the production, distribution, or sale of goods and services.

## Asylum Seekers:

An individual who fled from their country of origin as a political refugee and is looking for safety in another country.

## General Overview

### Subtopic 1: Addressing the Economic Effect of the Human Trafficking and Migration Crisis Between Libya and Europe

Due to the absence of a centralized government control over Libya, there has been an increase in illegal operations that can generate funds without entering the formal economic and banking system. (Africa Organized Crime Index, 2023) These operations include, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, arms trafficking, drug trafficking, oil, petrol, and diesel smuggling, as well as money laundering. (UNICRI, 2021) Migrant smuggling and human trafficking alone created around \$978 million in revenue within Libya in 2016. This challenges and completely undermines efforts to build a stable economy. (Africa Organized Crime Index, 2023)

This all leads to illicit financial flows (IFFs), which are very abundant in Libya. IFFs take many resources that could be used to fund important and much needed public services such as, security, education, and health care. In addition to that, IFFs weaken financial systems which allows individuals to hide stolen assets, evade taxes, and avoid the negative effects of currency devaluation. (UNICRI, 2021)

Over the past years the country's ability to control and monitor its economic activities has been very limited, additionally any reforms of the state-dominated economy will remain hindered by the ongoing instability, security threats, military conflicts, capital flight, and corrupt oil production. Businesses can't operate properly because there are no contracts, and there is a critical lack of transparency and accountability. (Africa Organized Crime Index, 2023)

Other factors are also contributing to the economic uncertainty such as disagreements of the leadership between the GNS and the GNU of fundamental national financial institutions such as

the Central Bank and Libya's sovereign wealth fund. As a result of oil blockades from the opposing governments as well as the absence of a unified budget both branches of the bank have given credit to the opposing governments. (Africa Organized Crime Index, 2023) Oil is a huge part of Libya's economy and funding, as in 2021 crude oil generated around 98% of Libya's total government revenues. Although oil blockades were lifted in 2020, the economy was still deeply affected as the political conflicts and instability caused limited capital investments in the countries oil and gas sectors. (EIA, 2022) These political and security issues make it impossible to predict economic outcomes for Libya. (Africa Organized Crime Index, 2023)

The conflict also deeply impacted foreign trade and has severely destabilized the country's economy. It had a significant impact on Libya's exports, which drastically dropped in some of its crucial products, many of which were related to oil. However, the effect on the imports has been greater than that of the exports, because of the lack of construction in addition to the reduction in spendings for both foreign workers and nationals. Moreover, the substantial number of foreign workers returning to their home countries as well as the decreasing income of Libyan citizens are major factors behind the drop in consumption. (UNESCWA, 2021)

## Subtopic 2: Addressing the Humanitarian Effect of the Human Trafficking and Migration Crisis Between Libya and Europe

As the humanitarian crisis continues to worsen, asylum seekers and migrants are getting stripped of their basic human rights. An alarming number of individuals including children are getting abused, exploited, and displaced. Countless individuals first get exploited and abused by the smugglers. Then, a significant number of those individuals are sent to overcrowded detention centers where there is little to no regard for their human rights, and several, who managed to get to the Mediterranean have to sail the deadliest sea and rarely ever make it across, whether they went missing, passed away, or got deported and sent to the detention centers. (UNHCR Canada, 2022)

Visits were conducted by the Human Rights Watch (HRW) in July of 2018, where the conditions of the detention centers were documented as inhumane. The detention centers were severely overcrowded, unsanitary, had poor quality of food and water which led to malnutrition, lack of suitable healthcare and alarming encounters of violence by guards, including beatings whippings and the use of electric shocks. Additionally, children are also subject to these inhumane conditions, they witnessed many children including infants lack sufficient nourishment, they also lack the proper healthcare, there are no schools or activities for the children either. Children also are subject to the abuse as there has been documented allegations of beatings and sexual abuse by both

smugglers and guards. (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The detention centers are extremely overcrowded, to the point where some people must sleep sitting up. They are also unhygienic, with sewage spills from overflowing septic tanks and clogged toilets. Furthermore, there is barely enough food to eat and not enough water to drink or wash with. Combined with the harsh conditions of the centers, infectious diseases such as acute watery diarrhea, scabies, and chickenpox spread quickly. Some individuals were denied lifesaving medical care and humanitarian assistance. Even essential items such as clothing, mattresses, hygiene kits, women’s sanitary products, blankets, diapers, and baby formula were irregularly distributed, and often confiscated by security guards. People would create makeshift diapers by using towels and plastic bags, and they would prolong the use of the diaper; this causes irritation on the baby’s skin. Additionally, women would use pieces of blankets or torn up t-shirts as makeshift menstrual products. (MSF, 2020) Interviews were also conducted and a woman who is 7 months pregnant said a guard hit her with a hose for trying to get water, and another individual said that they are only allowed to go and shower every 10 days or so and that there were ticks and lice stuck on their shirt. (Human Rights Watch, 2019)

**Types of exploitation of victims exploited in Libya**

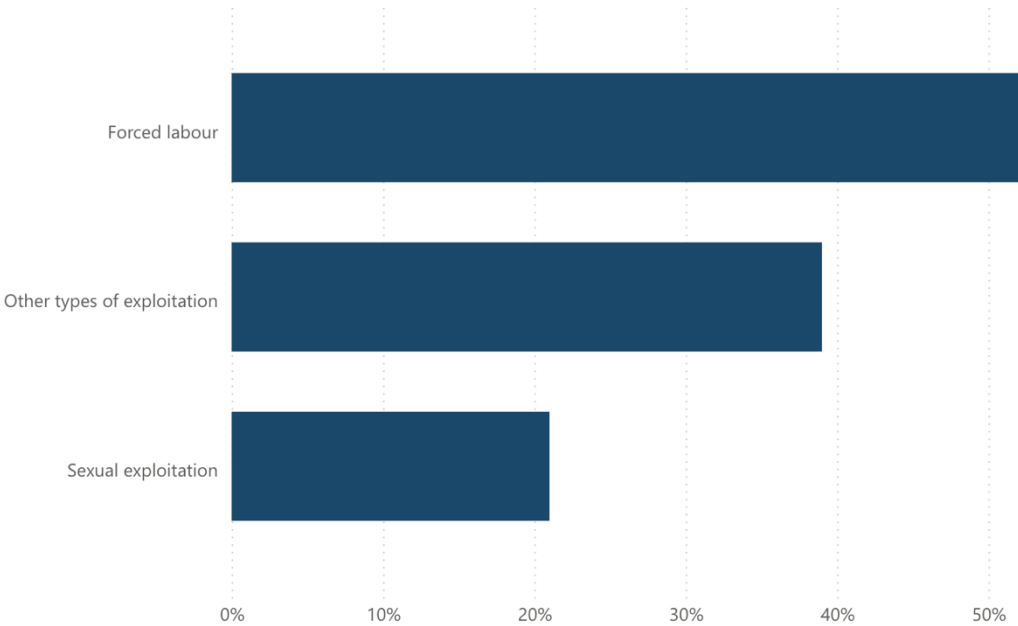


Figure 1 (CTDC, 2022)

Detention centers are not the only place where migrants and asylum seekers are suffering; it happens from when they get with the smuggling networks. Different armed groups, criminal gangs and

networks, tribal groups, smugglers, and traffickers work together, and they compete to smuggle and traffic migrants through Libya, while also engaging in severe human rights abuses and violations against migrants, this includes torture, sexual abuse and exploitation, extortion, ransom, theft, and forced labor. The most used type of exploitation is forced labor as seen above in figure 1. According to international organizations, smugglers and traffickers trade migrants and refugees with illegal networks, whilst keeping them in inhumane conditions. There are even some cases where the migrant pays the smuggling fee, however once they cross the Libyan border they get abandoned in southern cities or deserts and they are also prone to serious forms of abuse, including human trafficking. (U.S. Department of State , 2024)These networks take advantage of the desperation of the migrants, taking their dream of a better life and trapping them in a web of abuse, violence, and exploitation. (OMCT, 2024)These networks are motivated by the profit; they will take advantage of the migrant in any of the ways mentioned before just to get more money. (Utsch, 2021)

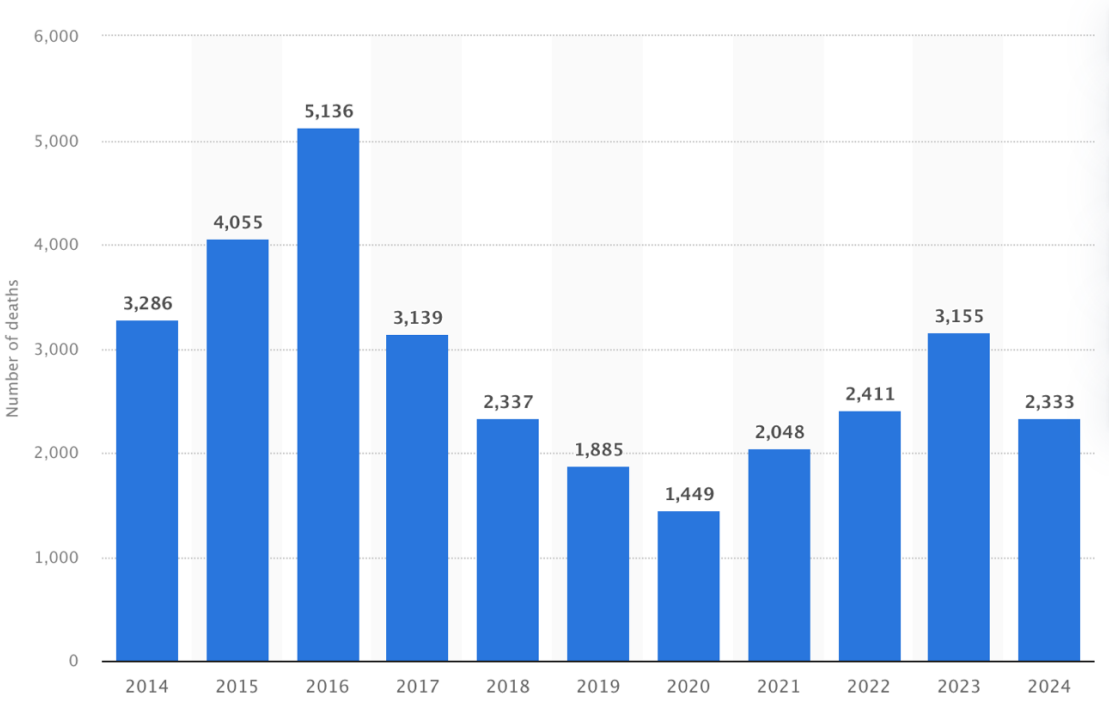


Figure 2 (Statistica, 2025)

Being known as the deadliest sea the Mediterranean Sea is also an issue. Many people hope to make it from Libya to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea; however, it is extremely dangerous, over 32,200 migrants have gone missing since 2014. (International Organization for Migration, 2025)As shown in figure 2, recorded deaths haven't gone under 1,000 since 2014. Furthermore, the boats are unsafe, and are considered unseaworthy, the boat just drifts until it finds land and that can take days, leaving people on an overcrowded boat that can sink at any moment and they're without enough food water, or medical supplies. Additionally, the boats had many

mechanical failures, many deflated and began to sink, the migrants were left with no help for days even after making many distress calls to relevant SAR authorities. The migrants were sometimes left without life jackets, a compass, or satellite communication. (OHCHR, 2021) Some people do get rescued or intercepted by authorities however they are often sent back to overcrowded detention centers where they face even more abuse. (UNHCR Canada, 2022) Moreover, the LCG rescue and intercepts migrants vessels in a reckless and violent way, they fire at or in the vicinity of migrant vessels, colliding with or ramming migrant vessels, carrying out high speed and unsafe maneuvers causing large waves and the capsizing of migrant vessels, acts of physical violence such as beating and slapping of migrants, and the use of threatening, discriminatory or racist language. (OHCHR, 2021) The head of regional unit of the Coast Guards Abd al Rahman al-Milad was sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council for being linked with violence and collaboration with smugglers and traffickers. (United Nations Security Council , 2020)

### Subtopic 3: Addressing the Social Effect of the Human Trafficking and Migration Crisis Between Libya and Europe

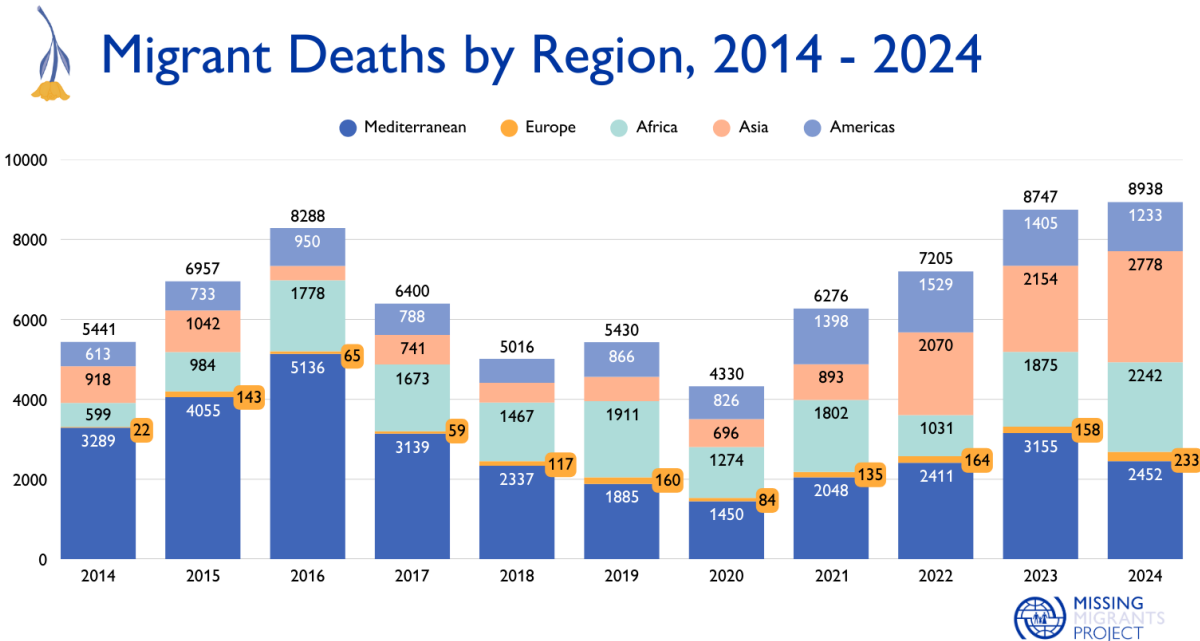
Since 2014, the migrant crisis in Libya has put hundreds of thousands of migrants specifically those from Sub-Saharan Africa in immediate danger and social deterioration. Libya which was once a destination for labor migration has become a dangerous and chaotic transit country due to the collapse of its dominant government. Migrants are arriving in hopes for seeking safety and economic opportunities, however instead they are facing violence, abuse and exploitation from the military, traffickers and sometimes even state officials. Depending on the UNHCR and IOM, as of 2023 over 650,000 migrants and refugees in Libya, with nearly half originating from countries such as Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Eritrea, and Chad.

Sub-Saharan African Migrants are specifically most vulnerable due to the long-established racism and the idea that Black Africans are illegal or worthless. Human rights organizations and the UN reveal that these migrants daily face verbal abuse, robbery, physical attacks, and arbitrary imprisonment. Many migrants are captured by military or security forces and are placed in detention centers, where they are being exploited to overcrowding, sexual abuse, torture and deadly diseases such as, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis A and E, and skin infections such as Fungal infections. During 2022, over 24,000 migrants were caught at sea and brought back to Libya and end up in detention centers or being trafficked again.

A report by UNHCR, IOM and the Mixed Migration Center in 2017 revealed that 46% of the

surveyed migrants in Libya had been forced to work without being paid, 73% experienced at least one form of exploitation, and 53% were held against their will. The condition in these detention centers violate international human rights law. Captured migrants are denied access to legal representation, communication with family members and healthcare. Food is often insufficient, and medical care is nonexistent. Often, traffickers and guards force migrants to call family members to ask for payment under the threat of death or injury.

Women especially are in risk. Reports from the OHCHR and Amnesty International indicate the widespread conflict-related sexual violence. This was proven in a 2021 UN fact-finding mission, survivors were expressing how they have been raped continuously while they were being held in detention centers. A 20 year old Nigerian women even testified saying “I was told I would work as a cleaner, however they locked me up for weeks, and sexually abused me every night, and I was told they’d only let me leave if I paid them a ridiculous amount”. The UN has said “The treatment of migrants in Libya is a potential crime against humanity”.

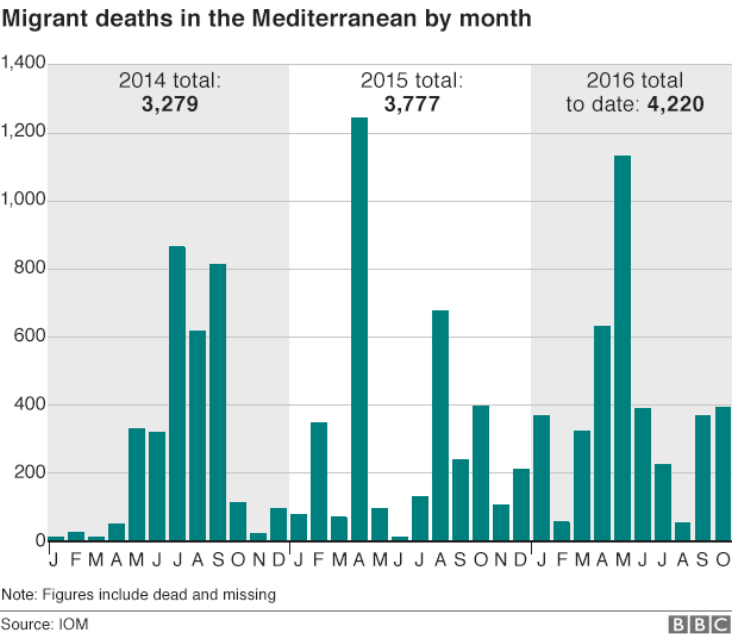


*Most recorded deaths are from the Mediterranean proving the danger of this route.*

Outside these detention centers social condition remain just as bad, as migrants live in abandoned buildings or camps with little to no access to healthcare, clean water, sanitation, jobs or education. There are a few migrants who have access to jobs, however those who manage to find work often do in exploitative situations, with no labor rights or legal protections. A 2024 UNHCR report states that **“migrants face systemic racism from employers, landlords, and the general public, often**

**being paid less than Libyans or denied wages altogether.”**

There are a few migrants who survive the horrors of Libya and eventually do reach to Europe, however they encounter new struggles. For instance, the migrants must travel through the Mediterranean route which is the world’s deadliest migration route. During 2023, over 2,500 migrants have went missing or died while attempting to cross through drowning or their boats crashing. The few migrants who reach Europe, Italy safely they face many problems such as language barriers, housing discrimination, unemployment and xenophobia. Due to these problems most migrants are placed in refugee camps and remain in them for years worsening their already bad situations.



### Major Parties Involved

## Government of National Unity (GNU):

The GNU is the internationally recognized government for Libya; it was also appointed as interim of authority through a UN- led process. The government operates in Tripoli and in parts of western Libya but doesn't have much control over other parts of Libya. The government has been accused of corruption and misuse of funds, however there is limited evidence that they are involved in any smuggling or trafficking.

## Government of National Stability (GNS):

The GNS was created by the House of Representatives (HoR) in eastern Libya, and its backed up by Libyan National Army (LNA). The LNA has been accused of multiple of raising funds in unethical ways such as extortion, smuggling operations, and illegal seizures of public and private property in eastern Libya.

## Stabilization Support Apparatus (SAA)

The SAA is an armed group established by the GNU in 2021 with the aim of securing government buildings and officials, participating in combat operations, capturing those suspected of national security crimes, cooperating with other security bodies. They run some detention centers and have been accused of human rights violations against migrants. The GNU no longer oversight of the SAA.

## Tunisia:

Many African Migrants who went to Tunisia have been removed from the country and put in a buffer zone between Libya and Tunisia. The migrants can no longer enter Tunisia and are left stranded right between. They left them with little food or water and no medical assistance. They also abused the migrants and were extremely violent during arrests.

## United Kingdom (UK):

The UK is against illegal migration, and will likely deport illegal migrants, however the UK is trying to solve the main issue of migration; by tackling conflict and trying to reduce forced displacement, the UK also supports local integration in situations of long term displacement, as well as providing humanitarian support and protection to refugees and internally displaced persons, they also want to counter smuggling and trafficking of people. The UK wants to reduce the amount of people migrating.

## European Union (EU):

The EU is against migrant smuggling and trafficking. They fund LCG to improve security around the coast. They are also improving border security to limit the number of overall migrants. The EU wants to provide humanitarian aid, improve border security, as well as improve the capacity of the Libyan authorities, in hopes of limiting number of migrants.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Event
<b>February-October 2011</b>	- Civil war in Libya begins as protests against Muammar Gaddafi lead to a violent civil disobedience. The middle of October (October 20) marks the fall of his regime as Muammar Gaddafi was finally found and killed in Sirte by rebel groups. Gaddafi's fall led to political instability as various militaries were fighting for power, as well as smuggling routes open due to the now weak border controls.
<b>2012</b>	- Due to the political instability, increased migration through Libya as sub-Saharan Africa uses Libya as a route to Europe. Throughout this year Europe responds as Italy launches Operation Mare Nostrum (in progress at that time) in order to rescue migrants at sea after numerous numbers of people have suffered from deadly shipwrecks.
<b>October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013</b>	- Lampedusa tragedy, a boat carrying 500+ migrants sinks around the Italian coast near Lampedusa. Due to this tragedy over 360 people have lost their lives, sparking European outrage and urgent cry out for help such as rescue operations.
<b>May-July 2014</b>	- Political instability and tension sparks violence between the internationally recognized government and rival factions encouraging traffickers to take advantage

	of the situation. Rapid increase in migrants death, making the Mediterranean route the deadliest migration route in the world. Operation Mare Nostrum is officially launched by Italy.
<b>April 2015</b>	- One of the deadliest shipwrecks in the Mediterranean kills around 800 migrants.
<b>May 2015</b>	- In response to the crash, the European Union launches Operation Sophia aiming to disrupting migrant smuggling groups and training the Libyan coast guard to ensure stronger security.
<b>2016</b>	- NGO's and the UN raise awareness about the inhumane conditions which include overcrowding, torture and trafficking. Migrant death toll rises up to 5,000 in the Mediterranean by the end of the year.
<b>November 2017</b>	- CNN report shows African migrants being sold at slave auctions in Libya, sparking people demanding UN investigations.
<b>2018</b>	- Re-occurring clashes between Libyan militaries disrupting any progress for better humanitarian conditions and governance access. Over 20,000 migrants intercepted and returned to Libya despite the worsening conditions.
<b>April 4<sup>th</sup> 2019</b>	- General Khalifa Haftar who was the leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA), launches a military offensive to seize Tripoli from the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA)
<b>April-June 2019</b>	- Ongoing clashes between the LNA AND GNA displaces thousands in Tripoli leading to over 50 migrants getting killed and injuring over 100 due to an airstrike hitting the Tajoura migrant detention center. This attacks received international attention.
<b>March 2020</b>	- Covid-19 worsens the crisis. Borders closures and lockdowns reduce rescue efforts in addition to overcrowded detention centers becoming high risk zones for outbreaks.
<b>October 23 2020</b>	- A UN-brokered ceasefire is signed, although temporary it raised hopes for improved humanitarian situations.
<b>December 2022</b>	- Elections for a new government have been postponed leading to increased political instability. NGOs face increased restriction, for example in Libyan waters rescue ships have been blocked from operating. Over 24,000 migrants are intercepted by the Libyan coast guard and have returned to Libya.

<b>April-June 2023</b>	- Conflict breaks in Sudan leading to a major refugee crisis. Over 240,000 Sudanese refugees flee toward Libya in order to reach to Europe. Libya becomes overwhelmed and is unprepared to handle this.
<b>June-October 2023</b>	- Conditions in Libya continue to worsen as camps overflow, reports of human trafficking increase as well as mistreatment and sexual harassment.
<b>November 2023</b>	- The UNHCR issue urgent appeals for humanitarian support in Libya.
<b>January 2024</b>	- Over 250,000 refugees and asylum seekers are in Libya, who are mostly living in slums and detention centers.
<b>May 2024</b>	- The European Union admits financial pressure from ongoing rescue operations, medical care, housing for migrants arriving from Libya.
<b>June 2024</b>	- Anti-migrant idea spreads across Europe, sparking political divisions and debate over migration policy.
<b>Present</b>	- The European Union and the United Nation are increasing pressure on Libyan authorities to allow humanitarian access as well as to close abusive Libyan detention centers. Talks on bringing back elections in Libya in order to stabilize governance and reduce illegal activities such as smuggling, however there are a few delays due to political instability.

## Attempts to solve the issue

### Libya, 10 September 2015(S/RES/2238)

Resolution 2238 highlights the great danger of the Mediterranean Route, specifically off of the coast of Libya, while also clearly recognizes the rapid increase in migrant smuggling and human trafficking within Libyan territory. This resolution emphasizes Libya's responsibility to defend human rights, especially those of African migrants and foreign nationals, as well as condemns the abuse and torture of migrants in detention centers. Resolution 2238, emphasizes the immediate need for more stronger and coordinated responses in order to protect migrants while addressing the main cause of this ongoing crisis by guiding The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), to keep track of human rights violations and promote humanitarian efforts. This resolution is in hopes to establish a crucial foundation for international cooperation.

### Libya, 27 March 2015(S/RES/2214)

Resolution 2214 revolves around the discussion of terrorism, which is one of the main factors causing displacement which is leading to the migration and human trafficking crisis between Libya

and Europe. This resolution recognizes that terrorist groups such as, ISIL and Ansar al-sharia have played a huge role in the political instability in Libya, and does not condemn their existence and illegal activities. Due to these groups and this instability, weak, poor migrants and refugees have been attempting to escape this conflict using the Mediterranean route where they are being exploited to human trafficking and other dangers. Resolution 2214, encourages the long-term goal of re-establishing security in tackling the causes of forced migration within the Mediterranean route, which will be done by advocating for greater international cooperation, strengthening capacity for Libya's government, and lastly strengthened efforts to combat terrorism.

## Libya, 14 September 2017, (S/RES/2376)

Resolution 2376, acknowledges the formation of the Government of National Accord (GNA), in addition to the implementation of the Libyan political agreement, confirming the UN's commitment to a Libyan-led political process. The resolution also places emphasis on the need for humanitarian emergency aid, peacemaking and reform of the security sector, as well as the fight against migrant smuggling and human trafficking. Additionally, the resolution stresses the worsening humanitarian situation and urges the open political discussion, and demand assistance for stability in regions that were formerly ruled by a terrorist group (Da'esh). All things taken into account, Resolution 2376 supports the UN's crucial role in building institutions, peace, and ensure security in Libya, which has an immediate impact on the rights and safety of migrants travelling across the Mediterranean to Europe specifically off of the coast of Libya.

## Possible Solutions

### Close detention centers and end detention

Migrants and Asylum seekers are subjected to inhuman conditions in Libya, where they are being exploited to cruel treatment such as sexual assault, malnutrition, forced labor and physical abuse. These facilities are often controlled by criminal networks who make money through abduction and abuse, that function with small-scale oversight. Global players such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) have to apply pressure on Libyan authorities in order to put an end to these detention facilities and instead replace them with safe, temporary shelters which will be run by UNHCR and IOM to ensure humanitarian crisis is being addressed and not ignored. In one notable case, refugees escaping Libya have found security at the UNHCR-run transportation center in Niger. So, closing these horrible detention centers would indicate a commitment to protecting human rights and possibly end a huge part in the never ending abuse cycle.

### Create Humanitarian Corridors

Due to the lack of legal means of applying for Asylum in Europe, many migrants seek the dangerous Mediterranean Route. As a result of this, they are forced to travel within this hazardous route and are exploited by human smugglers. To address this issue, Humanitarian Corridors- safe and legal routes for vulnerable individuals to apply for asylum without having to put their lives at risk- should be set up across Europe in order to stop this huge risk. This could involve expanding relocation programs for the most disadvantaged and processing asylum claims at external centers in neighboring nations such as Tunisia, Egypt, or even Niger. This solution has already been proven effective in other conflicts such as the Syrian refugee crisis. By opening more legal corridors, the EU can lessen pressure on border nations while reducing the need for illegal migration by offering lawful, safer alternatives.

### Support Political Stabilization in Libya

The root cause of the migration crisis in Libya is the ongoing political instability. The country is unable to secure its boarder due to conflicting governments and a disorganized economy. In order to ensure a long-term solution, strong global support for political unification of Libya is crucial, this includes support for programs such as the UN-led Berlin Process which brought

together both international and Libyan leaders in order to negotiate peace.

## Guiding Questions

- 1- What political problems is Libya facing right now?
- 2- What is the migrant crisis in Libya?
- 3- How did the migrant crisis affect the humanitarian life in Libya?
- 4- How did the migrant crisis affect the humanitarian life in Europe?
- 5- What were migrants going through while travelling within the Mediterranean route?
- 6- How does human trafficking and smuggling financially affect terrorist groups in Libya?
- 7- How are the conditions in detention centers in Libya?
- 8- What are the push and pull factors of this migration?
- 9- What is the effect of the Libyan coast guard?
- 10- What agreements has the European Union made with Libya and neighboring countries.

## Appendix

- <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/02/how-conflict-libya-facilitated-transnational-expansion-migrant-smuggling-and-trafficking>
- <https://ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/migrant-smuggling-across-the-mediterranean-sea#:~:text=The%20smugglers%20are%20highly%20motivated,situations%2C%20often%20resulting%20in%20death.>
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