



**CROSSING BORDERS,
BUILDING LIVELIHOODS**

The insecure economic lives of migrants in Libya

July 2024

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THE INSECURE
ECONOMIC LIVES OF
MIGRANTS IN LIBYA

JULY 2024

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ABOUT MMC

MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based mixed migration responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

For more information visit:

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ABOUT FES

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany with a rich tradition in social democracy dating back to its foundation in 1925. The foundation owes its formation and its mission to the political legacy of its namesake Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected German President.

The work of FES focuses on the core ideas and values of social democracy – freedom, justice and solidarity. This connects FES to social democracy and free trade unions. As a non-profit institution, FES organises its work autonomously and independently.

FES started to work on Libya in 2012 and committed to defend human rights and support social and gender Justice. FES Libya aims at promoting the principles of democracy, dialogue and reconciliation.

For more information visit:

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KEY FINDINGS

Key findings are based on surveys carried out in 2023 with 317 migrants who had previously spent at least 3 months in Libya. The research enhances the current body of knowledge on migration in Libya by examining the economic situation of migrants in Libya.

55%

of respondents stopped in Libya to find work and finance their onward journey

Economic factors play a crucial role in decision-making for migrants, influencing their initial decision to migrate and/or their decision to stop in or transit through Libya.

The primary reason given by respondents for leaving their country of origin was economic factors (77%), but they interplayed with other factors such as violence, insecurity and conflict (41%), and a prevailing culture of migration (39%). Therefore, 78% of all respondents stated that they selected their intended destination (mainly Europe or North America) because they anticipated finding better economic opportunities and/or generally experiencing a higher standard of living (65%) there. More than half of respondents decided to stop in Libya for work to finance their onward journey.

63%

of respondents left Libya because of security reasons

Security concerns in Libya are influential drivers to move onward from Libya.

While many respondents chose to travel to Libya for economic reasons, most migrants interviewed decided to leave Libya in search of safety; two-thirds of respondents (63%) left Libya because of security reasons, while only 35% left to seek better working conditions and 22% because they were seeking to earn more money.

92%

of respondents who earned money did not have a formal employment contract

The majority of jobs available to migrants in Libya are in the informal sector.

Most respondents who earned money in Libya did not have a formal employment contract (92%) and were primarily making money through casual or occasional work (76%). They thus had an unpredictable and irregular source of income while being also vulnerable to exploitation and financial instability.

64%

of respondents who earned money received assistance from other migrants to find a job

Migrants in Libya mostly lean on personal networks with fellow migrants, co-nationals, and community leaders for access to job opportunities.

Three-quarters of respondents (77%) made money while in Libya, and 61% of this group were able to find a job within one month of arriving in the country. Two-thirds secured employment with the assistance of co-national networks or other migrants. The majority had received information about job opportunities in the Libyan labour market prior to their departure, mostly from relatives or friends currently (39%) or previously (41%) in Libya.

1 in 5

respondents who did not earn money did not feel safe to start looking for a job

Safety concerns, challenges in searching for jobs and limited access to information about the labour market constitute significant barriers to livelihoods.

Of the respondents who did not make money in Libya, 14/74 did not feel safe to start looking for a job because of the risk of being arrested, while 15/74 actually looked for employment but faced difficulties, such as the lack of available jobs or language barrier. Limited access to information about the labour market may also be an underlying factor, as 44/74 of those who did not make money said they had not heard about economic opportunities in Libya before arriving.

37%

of respondents who earned money said that their level of education was higher than what was required in the job they had

The skills required for the jobs available to migrants were generally at the same level or lower than their educational qualifications.

A third of all respondents (30%) had a level of education below secondary school. Despite having a generally low level of education, this did not appear to be a barrier to accessing the Libyan labour market as most respondents who were making money in Libya worked in lower skilled sectors. Indeed, most men respondents who made money in Libya worked in the construction sector (44%) and/or in a café/restaurant (43%), while women worked predominantly in a café/restaurant (31/53) and/or did domestic work (e.g. as a cleaner) (35/53).

76%

of respondents who earned money were casual workers

Job opportunities available for migrants in Libya have precarious working conditions, lacking formality, stability, security and social protections.

66% of respondents reported wage theft or not being paid on time, and 39% reported that they did not receive payment at all. Therefore, only 20% of respondents were able to cover their needs while in Libya, and only 15% were able to save money. A greater part of the interviewed migrant workers (47%) relied on remittances from people in their country of origin, whereby only 31% (23/74) of respondents who did not have an income in Libya received money from their relatives in their country of origin.

83%

of respondents who earned money estimated that they had been taken advantage of, exploited and/or abused while at work

Migrants who made money in Libya faced high levels of additional risks in the workplace, and casual/occasional workers were more vulnerable.

In addition to wage theft, the most frequently reported incidents that migrants experienced in the workplace in Libya were verbal abuse (60%), lack of job security (49%) and physical abuse (42%). The absence of legal rights for migrants in Libya exacerbates their vulnerability and exposes them to heightened

protection risks. Casual and occasional workers in informal public gathering places were frequently at a higher risk of abuses and human rights violations, including forced labour, human trafficking, arbitrary arrest, and detention.

Gender has an influence on both the type of job the migrants get and the types of risks they are exposed to.

1 in 3

women respondents who earned money reported experiencing sexual exploitation or abuse in the workplace

There is less diversity in sectors available to women migrant job seekers, and the most common sectors of employment for women respondents were domestic work (39/58) and work in a café/restaurant (34/58). Women, whose level of education was generally higher than men, more often reported taking a job with a lower education requirement than what they possessed (48% (28/58) compared to 33% for men). As women migrant workers tend to work in less visible sectors, which increases risks, they are also more affected by protection incidents such as gender-based violence.



Introduction

Libya as a key migration hub, despite humanitarian concerns

Libya is at a pivotal location along the Central Mediterranean Route, one of the most unsafe migration corridors in the world. At the peak of the European migration surge in 2015–2016, over 300,000 individuals left Libya and arrived in Italy by sea.¹ Conservative estimates suggest that 7,491 people lost their lives or went missing in the Mediterranean along this route during the same period.² More recently, in the year 2023 alone, 52,034 individuals set sail from Libya and reached Italy, with an estimated 1,897 people losing their lives or going missing in the Mediterranean.³

Amid a protracted political, security and economic crisis in Libya, the outlook for the conditions of migrants appears bleak. The general security situation in the country has remained unstable since the 2020 ceasefire, with intermittent clashes between armed groups and fragmented national security forces. In the absence of a cohesive governing authority, the timeline for parliamentary and presidential elections is still unclear. In this context, an estimated 823,000 people, including both Libyans and non-Libyans, require humanitarian assistance.⁴ Moreover, political disunity and a volatile security situation provide an opportune environment for human trafficking while human rights violations remain widespread, adding to situations of vulnerability for migrants.

Despite persistent concerns regarding the conditions of migrants in Libya, the available protection space continues to shrink. The Global Protection Cluster has highlighted the ongoing protection risks faced by migrants in Libya as well as Libyan nationals.⁵ Most pressing humanitarian assistance needs for migrants are related to health services, accommodation, non-food items, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene.⁶ However, access to people in need, particularly to migrants in detention centres, has increasingly been challenging as humanitarian agencies have to adapt to a more constrained operational environment. Concurrently, international actors are shifting foreign assistance towards development and reconstruction, moving away from humanitarian aid.

1 UNHCR (2017)

2 UNHCR (consulted 2024/31/1) [Operational Data Portal. Mediterranean Situation/Italy](#)

3 UNHCR (2023)

4 UNOCHA (consulted 2024/31/1) [Libya](#)

5 Global Protection Cluster, 2022. <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/publications/322/reports/protection-analysis-update/libya-protection-analysis-update>

6 IOM (2023) [IOM Libya. Migrant report. Round 49. July-September 2023](#)

Migrants' core contribution to Libya's economy and informal sectors

Libya serves not only as a departure and transit point, but also as a destination country for migrants, primarily in search of economic opportunities.⁷ Labour migration in Libya manifests diversely, influenced by a range of motivations. This includes migrants who settle in the long-term, remitting funds to their families in their countries of origin, seasonal migration from neighbouring countries, and transit migrants who pause in Libya to earn income for their onward journey. Whether migrants consider Libya a transit or destination country for labour migration, the country's labour market dynamics, characterized by readily accessible job opportunities offering attractive wages, play a significant role in influencing its central position in the flow of money along migration routes. Migrant workers play a crucial role in the Libyan economy by filling gaps in sectors typically overlooked by the local workforce, including construction and domestic services. However, the economic inclusion of migrants in Libya is hindered by persistent challenges related to their vulnerable status as the majority of available employment opportunities for them are informal, adding to their irregular situation.

With the support of international partners,⁸ national actors in Libya's migration governance are gradually moving towards acknowledging the contribution of migrants to the country's economy. Recent reports⁹ indicate that the Government of National Unity is negotiating bilateral agreements with countries of origin to facilitate labour migration procedures, but provisions for access to social security and the prevention of exploitation still remain insufficient. Libya now has a 2023–2025 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which includes a Collective Outcome on migration management promoting the improvement of migrants' living conditions.¹⁰ This will undoubtedly impact national policies on migration management and eventually the outlook of migrants within the national economy and labour market.

Research objectives

This study aims to investigate the multifaceted economic realities of migrants in Libya. It aims to present findings regarding (i) the economic and financial conditions of migrants in Libya, (ii) the opportunities and risks migrants face in the Libyan labour market, (iii) the economic significance of Libya for migrants in migration journey, and (iv) the relationship between economic aspirations and their migration decisions involving travel to and from Libya. The research findings will provide evidence for recommendations aiming to improve the protection and general economic conditions of migrants in Libya.

7 de Haas (2006) [Trans-Saharan Migration to North Africa and the EU: Historical Roots and Current Trends](#)

8 ICMPTD (consulted 2024/31/1) [Strategic and institutional management of migration in Libya](#)

9 Nova news (2023), [Libya: everything is ready in Tripoli for the first conference on legal migration in the Sahel](#)

10 United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 2022. <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework>



1. Methodology

MMC used a mixed methods approach in this study, based in a quantitative component that is triangulated and contextualized by qualitative interviews and a literature review.

1.1 Qualitative data and literature review

Empirical findings are grounded in an extensive analytical review. The main objectives of the literature review were to provide background information on mixed migration trends to and onwards from Libya, as well as on the contribution of migrants to the Libyan economy, including through an understanding of the Libyan labour market dynamics, as well as its legal and policy framework.

Qualitative data collection consisted of four interviews and aimed to complement the literature review with background and contextual information. In-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted in January 2024 with two academics, a representative of an international NGO based in Libya, and a UN analyst. They were selected for their expertise (either academic or programmatic) on mixed migration trends in Libya and/or their knowledge of the Libyan labour market.

1.2 Sampling criteria

This report is primarily based on 317 quantitative interviews carried out with migrants who had previously stayed in Libya. Data was collected through 4Mi, which is MMC's flagship primary data collection system (see text box). Sampling was purposive, targeting migrants who had previously stayed in Libya for more than three months; 9% of all respondents had left Libya in 2021, 43% in 2022, and 48% in 2023. Data collection was not possible in Libya at the time of the study due to operational constraints, therefore the sample comprises respondents interviewed outside of Libya who spent a minimum of 3 months in Libya. The study does not differentiate between people who had considered themselves settled in Libya¹¹ and those who considered themselves in transit.

¹¹ Although sampling did not include a final destination criterion, the study did not include migrants whose ultimate destination was Libya, despite comprising a substantial proportion of migrants who gained access to work in the country.

What is 4Mi ?

Regional teams in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America collect and analyse data on mixed migration dynamics. Launched in 2014, 4Mi today consists of a network of around 120 enumerators in some 15 countries. Stationed in known gathering points for migrants on commonly used routes, 4Mi enumerators use questionnaires to conduct in-depth structured surveys of people on the move on a continuous basis. These surveys provide indicative insights into the profiles, drivers, aspirations, decision-making, and experiences of migrants along mixed migration routes, including protection risks, the smuggler economy, and needs for information and assistance. More on 4Mi and its methodology can be found on the [MMC website](#).¹²

1.3 Respondent demographic profiles

Surveyed migrants were generally young, and men comprised the majority of the sample. The median age was 28, with 22% of respondents aged between 18-24, 66% between 25-34 and 12% between 35-55. The sample criteria aimed to reflect the gender balance in the general population of migrants in Libya. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s estimates, adult men constitute 79% of the total population of migrants in Libya.¹³ The gender breakdown in the sample mirrors this estimate as 77% (n=245) of respondents were men and 23% (n=72) were women. Given that the sub-sample of women respondents is small, gender-disaggregated analysis should be interpreted with caution.

Almost all respondents (98%) were from sub-Saharan African countries. They had started their journey from 27 different countries, the most frequently cited being Sudan (14%) and Ethiopia (12%). The top five countries of origin collectively constitute 54% of the entire sample (see Table 1), yet no single nationality overwhelmingly dominates.

¹² See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi/

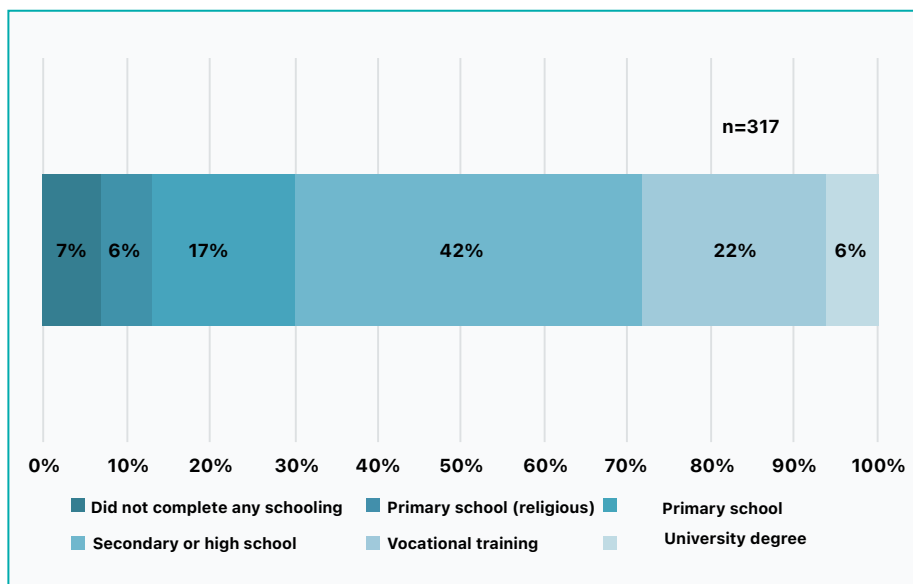
¹³ IOM (2023) [Op. cit.](#)

Table 1. Top 5 respondent nationalities¹⁴

Nationalities	Respondents	Percentages (n=317)
Sudan	45	14%
Ethiopia	39	12%
Cameroon	34	11%
Eritrea	30	9%
Guinea	26	8%

Almost a third (30%) of all respondents had a level of education below secondary school. 42% had completed secondary school while more than a quarter (28%) had completed either a vocational education (22%) or tertiary education (6%). Overall, women had a higher level of education than men, with 18/72 (25%) of female respondents who completed their primary education or did not complete any schooling, compared to 32% for male respondents.

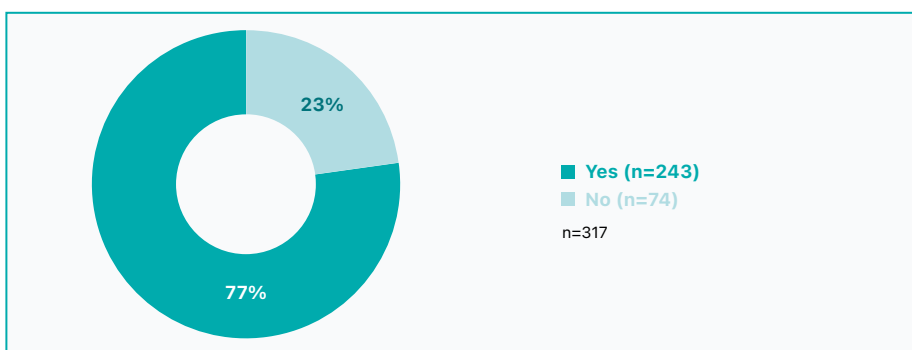
Figure 1. Respondent education level



¹⁴ Other nationalities included Ivory Coast (6%), Chad (5%), Nigeria (5%), Burkina Faso (3%), Mali (3%), Niger (3%), South Sudan (3%), Benin (2%), Senegal (2%), Democratic Republic of Congo (2%), Central African Republic (2%), Somalia (2%), Gabon (1%), Sierra Leone (1%), Togo (1%), Republic of the Congo (1%), Syria (1%), Yemen (1%), as well as Ghana, Liberia, Mauritania and Zambia with one respondent for each of the latest cited nationality.

The majority of respondents had a source of income¹⁵ when they were in Libya. Three-quarters of all respondents (77%) thus worked or sold assets to make money during their stay in Libya, while 23% did not earn money (see Figure 2). Notably, the gender breakdown of the sub-sample of respondents who made money in Libya (n=243) does not show any differences between men and women, as 76% were men and 24% were women (same gender proportion as the overall sample). Paid labour is a key indicator of the livelihoods and economic conditions of migrants in Libya which the report analyses in depth, including in relation to other demographic variables (e.g. level of education, financial responsibility for others, etc.).

Figure 2. Did you make money in Libya?



1.4 Validity and limitations

The 4Mi sampling approach involves several measures to mitigate bias but remains purposive. It means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population.

4Mi data is self-reported, and therefore there is a risk relating to internal validity.

Overall, the research analyses the economic conditions of a very specific and relatively small population, i.e. migrants who had stayed in Libya but were outside of Libya at the time of the interviews. Migrants who were still in Libya (either in transit or who settled there), or who returned to their country of origin were also not covered.

¹⁵ Throughout the study, the first subgroup of respondents is referred to as «migrant respondents who made money in Libya,» while the second subgroup is referred to as «migrant respondents who did not earn money in Libya.» The vast majority of respondents who made money in Libya were migrant workers, as only 2 out of 243 were selling assets only. However, the study avoids using the term «migrant workers» to closely reflect how questions were asked.

This study aims to explore conditions for migrants in general, and as such primarily presents findings for the full sample of migrants. Caution should be taken with the disaggregation by gender and whether making money, due to small sample sizes for some groups. Further disaggregation by nationality or language group is not possible, and would require a larger-scale or more targeted study.



2. Mixed migration and the Libyan economy

2.1 Key trends in mixed migration to and onward from Libya

Migration trends in North Africa are rooted in trans-Saharan mobility dynamics dating back to before colonial presence across the continent, while Libya has long been considered a major migration corridor in the region. North Africa has been an attractive destination and transit region for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, particularly for economic reasons. Estimates indicated that in 2006 between 65,000 and 120,000 sub-Saharan Africans were entering the Maghreb (Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania) each year, of which 70 to 80% were believed to have migrated through Libya.¹⁶ However, in the last decade, many changes have affected the nature and extent of migration dynamics through and into Libya.

Libya has long been a popular destination for many migrants seeking economic opportunities and attracted by competitive wages, particularly in the oil industry.¹⁷ Before the 2011 Revolution, as many as 2.5 million migrants, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, were working in Libya in the services industry, oil, and construction sectors. In the 1990s, Gaddafi's pan-African policies had shifted the country's position away from a focus on collaboration with mainly Arab countries towards a welcoming of sub-Saharan African migrants to work in Libya.¹⁸ This transformed Libya into a destination country for migrants from a wide array of African countries seeking improved economic opportunities and, in some cases, fleeing conflict.¹⁹ Despite the outbreak of conflict in 2011, migrants continue to journey to Libya in pursuit of job opportunities, but with increasing concerns for their safety.

Beyond its status as a destination country, Libya has also become, in recent years, an important transit and departure point for migrants in the North African region and along the Central Mediterranean Route. The most remarkable increase in sea arrivals in Italy occurred between 2014 and 2016, escalating from 42,925 in 2013 to 181,436 in 2016. Of migrants who reached Italy in 2016, 90% departed from Libya.²⁰ There was a notable decline in sea arrivals in Italy after Italy and Libya signed a bilateral agreement on migration management in 2017 (see Sub-section 2.1.2) and during the COVID-19 pandemic, with only 34,154 sea arrivals in Italy in 2020, including 13,012 (38%) who departed from Libya.²¹ Departures from Libya resumed in 2022 and comprised 51% (53,310) of the 105,131 sea arrivals recorded in Italy that year, including 19,354 Egyptians and 14,971 Bangladeshi who departed from

16 de Haas (2006) [Op. cit.](#)

17 IOM (2020) "[Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean: Trends, risks, development and governance](#)"

18 De Haas (2006) [Op. cit.](#)

19 [Ibid.](#)

20 UNHCR [Op. cit.](#)

21 UNHCR (2020), [Italy Sea arrivals dashboard December 2020](#)

Libya and arrived in Italy.²² In 2023, Libya ranked as the second-largest departure point for migrants arriving in Italy by sea after Tunisia, with 52,034 individuals departing from Libya.²³

2.2 The situation of migrants in Libya

2.2.1 Migrants in Libya

Libya is estimated to be home to the largest population of migrants in North Africa. As of September 2023, the IOM reported that there were 697,532 migrants residing in the country, indicating a slight decline from the figure in January 2023 (706,472).²⁴ Likewise, by the end of 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) documented 54,256 individuals officially registered as refugees or asylum seekers. Despite a decrease in the number of registered refugees and asylum seekers during Covid-19, the 2023 numbers closely align with the count in November 2018 (57,664) and represent a 26% rise compared to November 2022 (43,000).²⁵

The majority of migrants live in Western Libya; according to IOM over half (56%) live in this region, followed by 31% in Eastern Libya and 13% in Southern Libya. The predominant migrant demographic in Southern and Western Libya is composed of individuals from Sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for approximately 85% and 57% respectively, whereas in Eastern Libya, the majority of migrants originally come from North Africa (including Sudan and Egypt), constituting 66% of the migrant population there.²⁶ Key informants underscored two factors contributing to this geographical distribution: the proximity of Western Libya to Italy, featuring numerous departure points, and the attractive job opportunities with higher wages in Tripoli.²⁷ However, in a context where access to Italy is becoming more complicated, eastern Libya, and Tobruk in particular, has become an emerging departure point for new migratory routes to Crete.²⁸

Three quarters (77%) of migrants in Libya are from neighbouring countries, according to IOM data.²⁹ Nigerien migrants constitute 26% of the total migrant population in Libya, making it the most represented migrant nationality in the country followed by Egypt (22%), Sudan (18%), and Chad (11%). Nigeria (5%), Syria (4%), and Bangladesh (3%), follow in the ranking of migrant nationalities in Libya. Overall, migrants from 45 different countries are represented in the IOM data.

22 UNHCR (2022), [Italy Sea arrivals dashboard December 2022](#)

23 [UNHCR Op. cit.](#)

24 IOM (2023) [Op. cit.](#)

25 [UNHCR Op. cit.](#)

26 Geographical areas refer to the three historical regions in Libya: Tripolitania (Western Libya), Fezzan (Southern Libya) and Cyrenaica (Eastern Libya).

IOM (2023) [Op. cit.](#)

27 Key informant interview, Professor of geography and migration studies, January 2024

28 Le Monde (2024), [Les autorités grecques veulent éviter une nouvelle route migratoire entre la Libye et la Crète](#)

29 IOM (2023) [Op. cit.](#)

2.2.2 Protection risks and human rights challenges

Migrants in Libya endure harsh living conditions, due to a variety of factors. In the midst of a protracted crisis marked by political instability and insecurity, humanitarian needs are high. According to IOM data, the main humanitarian needs of migrants in Libya include health services (81% of respondents interviewed), accommodation (53%), non-food items (47%), and water, sanitation, and hygiene (22%).³⁰ Financial difficulties and high costs for essential goods and services (reported by 58% of IOM respondents) emerge as the primary challenge affecting migrants' ability to meet their basic needs. According to the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), less than half of interviewed migrants (46%) have a predictable source of income from permanent employment while 69% of migrants noted difficulties in finding employment, particularly in the formal sector.³¹ Limited job opportunities is also a challenge affecting the Libyan population, as unemployment rates were estimated to reach 20% in 2020.³²

Since October 2021, the country has seen a spike in the arbitrary detention of migrants, which prompted an unprecedented mobilization of migrants calling for protection.³³ Detention centres in Libya are known to be places of human rights violations and abuses.³⁴ In a report by the UN-led independent fact-finding mission for Libya, numerous violations against migrants in Libya, which may be considered crimes against humanity, especially sexual violence, were reported.³⁵ Furthermore, the mission found that between January 2021 and December 2022, 57,109 migrants were intercepted in the Mediterranean by the Libyan coast guards and brought to detention centres where they were exposed to inhumane conditions, torture,³⁶ and other ill-treatment, as well as forced expulsions³⁷ and enforced disappearances.³⁸ Similarly, kidnapping practices are common in the broader context of human trafficking in Libya, as migrants are vulnerable to extortion practices by non-state actors (including armed groups, gangs and smugglers) for the purpose of forced labour, for example as a method of debt repayment.³⁹

The impacts of Libya's uncertain political future on its migration policy are not clear. While the date for parliamentary and presidential elections has not yet been set at the time of writing and there remains a high risk of conflict during this transition, foreign assistance is shifting towards development and reconstruction⁴⁰ and away from humanitarian aid. Assuming that this shift will produce its expected impact on development, this will have a considerable effect on the outlook for migrants in general, with more

30 [Ibid](#)

31 OCHA (2021), [Libya Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022](#)

32 United Nations Support Mission in Libya, 2022.[Op. cit.](#)

33 openDemocracy (2022), [One hundred days of refugee protest in Libya](#)

34 UN (2022), [Libya detention centers remain places of violations and abuse](#)

35 UN (2022), [Report of the independent fact-finding mission on Libya](#)

36 OHCHR (2016), ["Detained and Dehumanized". Report on human rights abuses against migrants in Libya](#)

37 OHCHR (2021), [Unsafe and Undignified. The forced expulsion of migrants from Libya](#)

38 IOM (2023) [Libya Maritime update 3 June 2023](#) ; UN (2022) [Op. cit.](#)

39 7% of all respondents left Libya because they had accumulated debt there. OHCHR (2016), [Op. cit.](#)

40 IEMed (2022), [Rebuilding Libya's Economy on New and Sustainable Grounds](#)

jobs likely available to those seeking economic opportunities but enduring restrictions on the provision of assistance to those requiring protection.

2.3 Migrants' contribution to the Libyan labour market

Despite an insecure environment, Libya remains an attractive destination for migrants pursuing job opportunities and higher wages than those available in their countries of origin. This is further fuelled by ample, albeit it mostly informal, labour opportunities, given the sustained demand for low-skilled workers in the Libyan labour market.⁴¹

2.3.1 The diverse profiles of migrants in the Libyan labour market

In Libya, migrant workers can be broadly categorized into two distinct groups depending on the means of their entry.⁴² However, this generalization should not overlook the diverse legal statuses that migrants working in Libya fall into, encompassing migrant workers in both irregular and regular situations, migrants in transit, asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants in detention.

The first group consists of migrants from countries that have established bilateral agreements with Libya, facilitating regular access to the Libyan labour market for their citizens. These individuals view Libya as their primary destination and often use intermediaries to assist them in finding a job, often in international firms.⁴³ Their expectations include higher wages as compared to their countries of origin, and while workers arrive to Libya through regular channels, they still might slip into irregular status if they do not secure a work permit upon arrival.⁴⁴ Originating from Arabic-speaking countries like Tunisia⁴⁵ and Egypt,⁴⁶ their integration into the Libyan labour market is further eased when they possess specialized skills in manual sectors that are overlooked by the Libyan population. This group's migration is often circular (seasonal), happening between March and December,⁴⁷ and shaped by formal agreements between Libya and their country of origin, which provide a certain level of protection and economic opportunity.⁴⁸

41 IOM (2020) [Op. cit.](#)

42 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

43 ILO & Impact Initiatives (2022) [Labour Markets access for Migrants in Libya and the impact of Covid-19](#)

44 Only 13% of long-term migrant workers in Libya held a work permit in 2019

IOM (2019) [Living and Working in the midst of Conflict: The Status of Long-term Migrants in Libya](#)

45 AfDB and IOM (2012) [Migration of Tunisians to Libya. Dynamics, Challenges and Prospects](#)

46 IOM (2022) [Egyptian Migrant Workers in Libya. General Overview and Opportunities for the Future](#)

47 According to IOM data, Egyptians, Nigeriens and Tunisians are over-represented among seasonal migrant workers as compared to the general migrant population in Libya. Most seasonal workers arrive in Libya between March and April, and then leave during the months of October and December.

IOM (2020) [Circular Migration to Libya](#)

48 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

The second group of migrant workers typically enter Libya in an irregular manner, often with the aid of smuggling networks or their family and friends. They originate from sub-Saharan countries, Asia, and the Middle East.⁴⁹ Their motivations for leaving their home countries tend to be rooted in economic considerations, and/or related to escaping insecurity and conflict. For some, Libya is seen as a destination where they plan to work, save money, and send remittances to their relatives,⁵⁰ with the potential intention of settling in Libya or returning home after a period of time. Others in this group consider Libya a transit point, and an opportunity to earn money to finance their onward journey to destinations including Europe.⁵¹ Among migrant workers who arrived irregularly, both those who intend to stay in or transit through Libya face harsh living conditions and are highly exposed to various risks, prominently including the threat of human trafficking, forced labour and exploitation.⁵²

2.3.2 Current legal situation

Libya's relatively loose labour regulations for migrant workers started to be tightened after a domestic surge in anti-immigrant sentiments in 2000.⁵³ An ILO study on the Libyan labour market from 2021 finds that the labour market is more and more shaped by unemployment for nationals on the one hand, and the presence of large numbers of migrant workers on the other hand.⁵⁴ This paradox can be explained by a combination of skills mismatches, an overly inflated public sector, and a refusal to engage in manual labour, such as in the construction or domestic sectors, among Libyans.⁵⁵ However, Libyan labour law takes a protectionist position toward the labour market. It requires employers to hire foreigners only if they cannot find Libyans to fill a position.⁵⁶ Similarly, Libyan law requires at least 20% of workers in foreign companies to be Libyan nationals.⁵⁷ However, migrant workers with a regular employment contract and work permit have access to similar benefits and social security services as the Libyan population.⁵⁸

Furthermore, starting in 2010, Libya's migration policy shifted from one seeking to attract foreign labour to one criminalizing migration. This change followed negotiations between Gaddafi's regime and the European Union to strengthen migration containment measures.⁵⁹ According to Libya's 2010 Law No. 19, any foreign national who crosses the border into Libya irregularly will be placed in detention for an undefined period of time and subject to forced labour or a fine of LYD 1,000 (USD 208), after which they

49 IOM (2023) [Libya – Migrant Profiles](#)

50 IOM (2021) [Labour Migration to Libya. Remittances amidst Conflict and Pandemic](#)

51 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

52 UN (2022) [Op. cit.](#)

53 de Haas (2006) [Op. cit.](#)

54 ILO & Impact Initiatives (2022) [Op. cit.](#)

55 [Ibid.](#)

56 ETF (2014) [Op. cit.](#)

57 [Ibid.](#)

58 ICMPD (2020) [The Legal Guide for Foreigners in Libya](#)

59 The Guardian (2010), [EU keen to strike deal with Muammar Gaddafi on immigration](#)

will be expelled from Libyan territory.⁶⁰

For migrants, applying for a work permit appears to be a solution to obtaining legal status in Libya, but barriers to accessing the necessary documentation for the application process remain high. Both migrant workers who arrived regularly (either with a residency or a transit visa)⁶¹ and irregularly to Libya are currently allowed to obtain work permits if they have a valid employment contract in Libya.⁶² However, since obtaining the required documentation is difficult for many migrants, many migrants working in Libya do so without a legal permit. Key informants underscored the limited connections between migrants in irregular situations and their embassies, highlighting infrequent access to consular services. In addition to the above-mentioned difficulties to obtain an employment contract, this impediment hinders their ability to obtain essential legal documents from their home country necessary for seeking a Libyan work permit.⁶³

While Libyan authorities increasingly acknowledge the contribution of migrants in addressing gaps within the labour market, this recognition has not manifested in substantial changes to the existing legal framework. Although life prospects are unstable and laws have been tightened in Libya, migrant labour continues to be crucial for the revival of the Libyan economy and is still in high demand.⁶⁴ There have been recent signs of a shifting approach on migration governance, but it is still nascent. In November 2023, the Government of National Unity, based in Tripoli, organized a conference with representatives from 20 Arab and African countries.⁶⁵ The conference aimed to explore solutions for integrating migrants into the Libyan economy, following the example of a recent Memorandum of Understanding signed with Bangladesh.⁶⁶ However, there hasn't yet been an effective shift in the Libyan authorities' migration policy, largely attributable to overarching political instability impeding national reforms.⁶⁷ In this context, the Libyan authorities' tolerance toward migrant workers in irregular situations is primarily implicit.

The link between informal work and insecure working conditions is not straightforward. A key informant noted that even informal customary agreements, prevalent in the Libyan labour market and possessing significant moral obligations, can offer benefits and safeguards. However, these alternative means of protection seem to have diminished following the erosion of social cohesion and decline of customary practices since 2011.⁶⁸

60 DCAF (2010) [Law No. \(19\) of 2010 on combatting illegal immigration](#)

61 ICMPD (2020) [Op. cit.](#)

62 EurAsylum & IOM (2015) [Assessment of Priorities for the Development of Libya's Migration Policy: A Strategic Vision](#)

63 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

64 El Kamouni-Janssen, F. Nancy Ezzeddine & Harchaoui, J. (2019) [From abuse to cohabitation: A way forward for positive migration governance in Libya](#)

65 Libya Security Monitor (2023) [GNU hosts conference on legal migration and employment](#)

66 Libya News Agency (2023) [Libya and Bangladesh sign a memorandum of understanding to facilitate procedures for expatriate workers](#)

67 Key informant interview, Analyst at a UN agency Libyan country office, January 2024

68 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

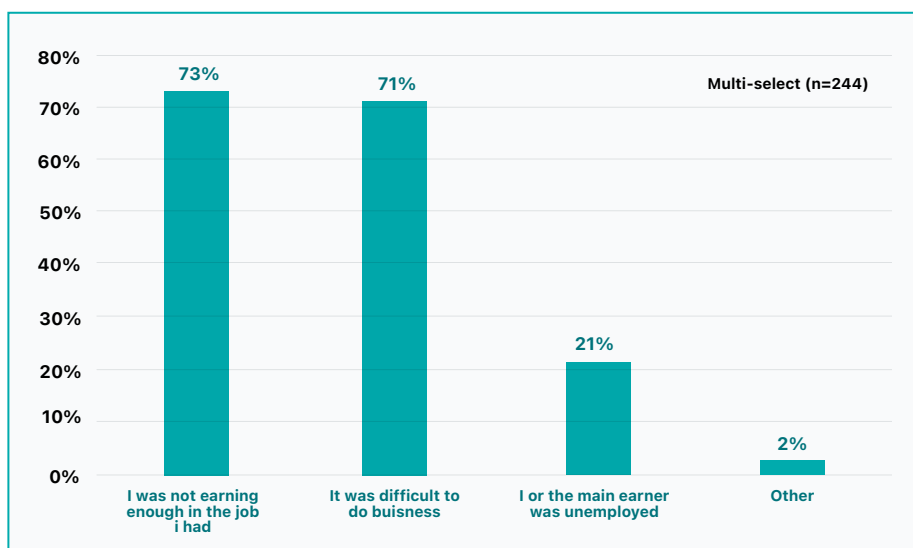
2.4 Migrants' perspectives: economic drivers of migration to and onward from Libya

This section focuses on quantitative data collected with migrants to explore the drivers of migration to and onward from Libya.

2.4.1 The role of economic factors in migration decision-making

Overall, the primary reasons given by respondents for leaving their country of origin were economic factors (77%), violence, insecurity and conflict (41%), and a prevailing culture of migration (39%).⁶⁹ Among those who left due to economic reasons (n=244), almost three-quarters reported that they were not earning enough money in their job (73%) and/or that it was difficult to do business in their country of origin (71%) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. What kind of economic reasons were a motive for you to leave? (among respondents who cited economic reasons to explain why they left their country of origin)



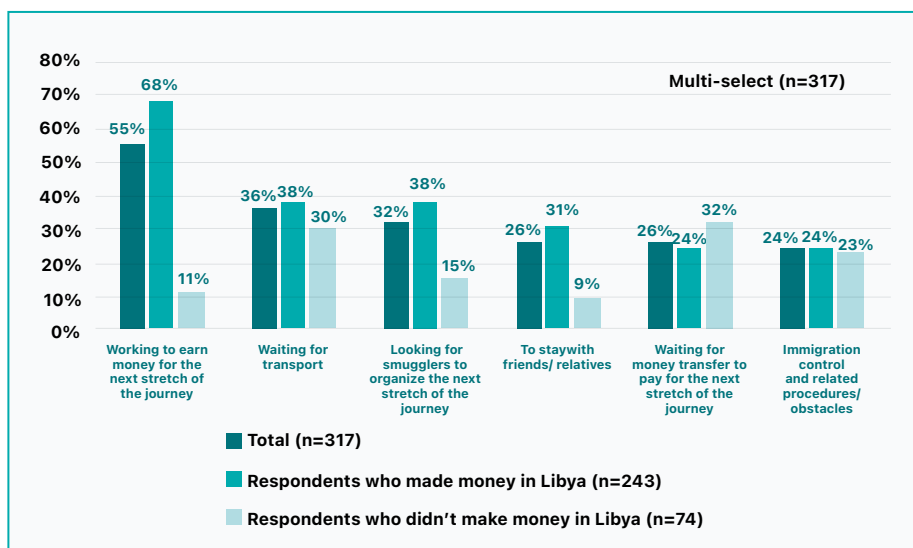
⁶⁹ Other reasons included deprivation of rights and freedoms (26%), barriers to access to services and corruption risks (24%), personal or family reasons (21%), and environmental stressors (2%).

Labour market challenges in migrants' country of origin further explains the prevalence of these economic drivers of migration. Although more than two-thirds of all respondents (72%, n=227) indicated that they were making money in the 12 months prior to leaving their country of origin, 50% of this group had a job they considered "casual" or "occasional."

2.4.2 The economic reasons to stop in Libya

The predominant explanation provided by survey participants for stopping in Libya was economic, with 55% of all respondents seeking job opportunities to finance their onward journey (see Figure 5). The economic factors for staying in Libya differ between those who made money while in Libya (n=243) and those who didn't (n=74). Respondents who were making money during their stay in Libya much more often specified income-generating activities to finance their onward journey (68% vs 11% (8/74) of those not making money). At the same time, waiting for money transfers to finance the next phase of their journey emerged as the most commonly reported explanation from respondents who were not earning money while staying in Libya. A higher proportion of respondents who did not earn an income in Libya said they were waiting for a money transfer to finance their onward journey (32%, 24/74) as compared to those who did earn an income in Libya (24%) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Top 6 reasons for stopping in Libya⁷⁰



⁷⁰ Other reasons included detention (18%), resting (15%), because smugglers stopped to recruit clients (9%), asylum application (8%), waiting for friends/relatives to catch up (8%), abandoned by smugglers (8%) and sickness/injury (3%).

Financial needs were not the only reasons for stopping in Libya; logistical reasons also factored in. Such factors were the second and third most often cited reason to stop in Libya, with 36% of respondents waiting for a transport solution and 32% looking for a smuggler to organize the next stretch of the journey (see Figure 5). Such considerations are inherent to the irregular nature of migration to/from Libya as the country is a major departure point along the Central Mediterranean Route where migrants need to stop to organize the next stretch of their journey.⁷¹ In turn, the logistical preparations increase the financial costs of migration for migrants⁷² and the likelihood that they will need to work to cover these costs,⁷³ further underlining the central role of Libya in the circulation of money on migration journeys.

Migration control measures further compound the financial constraints and costs associated with logistical factors. A quarter of all respondents said they had stayed in Libya because of obstacles related to immigration control (24%) (see Figure 4). According to a key informant, such deterrent measures also increase the likelihood and the financial costs of using a smuggler/facilitator along the route to ensure safe passage on controlled and securitized routes. Therefore, having to make several attempts to cross the sea but failing to reach the next stage of the journey because of interceptions and pullbacks is an additional reason why migrants would decide to work in order to earn money and pay for another attempt.⁷⁴ Indeed, for a quarter of all respondents, deterrent measures increase the cost of their journey as they were not able to move on but still needed to find resources to cover their needs, and also finance subsequent attempts to cross the Mediterranean into Europe.

2.4.3 Mobility expectations and economic aspirations after stopping in Libya

Economic factors played a less important role in respondents' decision to leave Libya as their immediate need is to seek safety. Indeed, 63% of respondents said they left Libya for security reasons. Economic reasons were not as prominently expressed, with only 35% of respondents seeking better working conditions outside Libya and 22% seeking to earn more money.⁷⁵ Respondents who had made money in Libya more often indicated economic reasons for leaving, with 41% seeking better working conditions (compared with 18% (13/74) of respondents who had not earned money in Libya).⁷⁶ At times security concerns intersect with economic considerations; key informants also emphasized how the impact of political instability on

71 Among all respondents, Libya was never cited as their intended final destination.

72 IOM (2023) [IOM Libya Migrant Report Round 48. May-June 2023](#)

73 Respondents who made money in Libya were over-represented among those who reported facing practical barriers to migration, accounting for 89% of those who reported seeking smugglers (n=103) and 81% of those who reported waiting for a transport solution (n=114) (compared to their 77% share in the overall sample).

74 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

75 Other reasons included factors: Libya not being the intended destination (68%) and the desire to reunite with friends and family (20%); and other factors: loss of job (17%), access to services (15%), accumulation of debt in Libya (7%), inability to find a job (4%), especially one that matched their skills (5%).

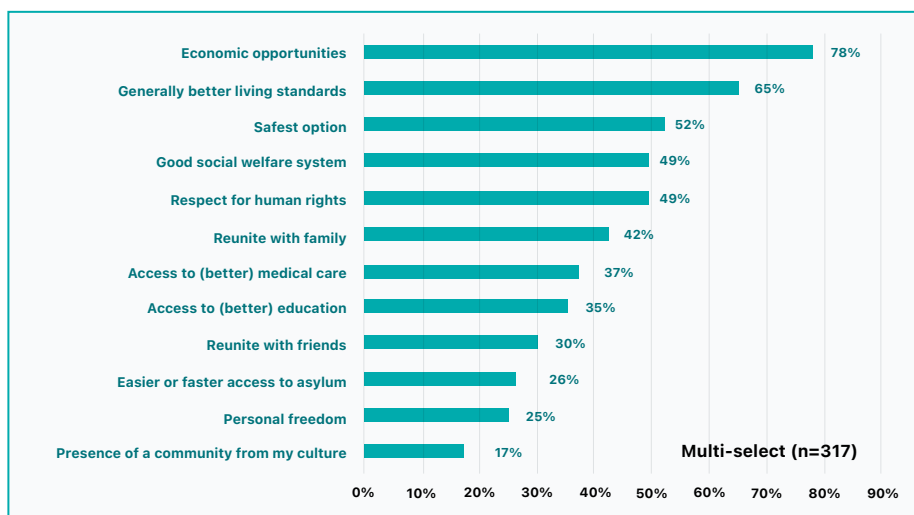
76 Other economic reasons followed the same trend, with 25% of the respondents who made money in Libya that were seeking better wages (vs 12%, 9/74, for respondents who did not make money in Libya), 23% having lost their job in Libya and 9% having accumulated debts there (vs 3%, 2/74).

livelihoods and labour market conditions can drive migrants to a relatively safer country.⁷⁷

A European or North American country was the preferred destination for 95% of all respondents. Canada was the most frequently selected preferred destination (cited by 18% of respondents), but European countries were preferred by 68% of all respondents, with France (10%), the United Kingdom (9%) and Germany (9%) being the most popular choices (see Table 2), followed by Belgium (8%), Switzerland (4%) and Italy (4%). For those who did not mention Europe or North America, the intended destinations were Australia (3%) and Gulf countries (1%).

Economic aspirations are a primary reason for selecting a preferred destination (see Figure 5). Over three-quarters of respondents (78%) said they chose an intended destination because they expected to find better economic opportunities and/or generally enjoy a better standard of living (65%) there. Access to basic services was also a key reason for choosing an intended destination (49%), including access to better medical care (for 37% of respondents) and/or education (35%).⁷⁸ The desired economic benefits of migrating to a particular destination country reflect the primary role of the economic drivers that led respondents to migrate in the first place (see Section 2.3.1).

Figure 5. Reasons for selecting the intended destination⁷⁹



77 Key informant interview, Analyst at a UN agency Libyan country office, January 2024 ; Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024 ; Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024 ; Key informant interview, Professor of geography and migration studies, January 2024

78 Other reasons included safety that comes from this choice (52%), perception of respect of human rights (49%) and chance to enjoy personal freedom (25%) in the intended destination, reunite with family (42%) and/or friends (29%) and/or the community from their culture (17%), perceived easier or faster access to asylum (26%), and/or nearness to their country of departure (1%).

79 Other response options included close to country of departure (1%) and other (1%).



3. The economic situation of migrants while in Libya

Access to job opportunities and attractive wages in Libya are key factors influencing migrants' decision to come to and/or transit through Libya. However, beyond the prospect of economic benefits, the reality of harsh working and living conditions and an unstable labour market tend to disappoint their expectations.

3.1 Access and barriers to the labour market

Employment plays a central role in the livelihood of migrants in Libya, but finding decent work can prove to be challenging.

3.1.1 Enablers of labour market access

Libya offers relatively quick access to the informal labour market for migrants seeking job opportunities. Of the respondents who earned money while in Libya (n=243), 61% were able to find a job within one month of arriving in the country and only 16% had to wait more than two months. This finding is consistent with the labour market needs for both qualified and manual workers and the relative ease of both entry into Libya and access to its labour market with quick and informal (see Sub-section 3.1.3) recruitment processes.⁸⁰

Migrant community leaders, fellow nationals and other migrants played a key role in accessing stable job opportunities. For those respondents who were earning money, the most cited means of finding a job was through word of mouth on the part of their fellow nationals or other migrants (64%) (see Figure 6). In a context of highly informal and unregulated labour intermediation,⁸¹ key informants emphasized the role of migrant community leaders in facilitating contact between jobseekers and employers.⁸² Migrant jobseekers are thus directed to these community leaders to help them find a job, but also for support with things like finding accommodation, even before departing for Libya. More structured and organized traditional intermediaries play a less influential role in providing access to the labour market. Only 32% of the respondents who made money in Libya reported using a recruitment intermediary to find a job and 9% reported using a smuggler to facilitate access to job opportunities (see Figure 6). However, more structured and formal intermediation agencies often work with migrant community leaders to help them find candidates when they receive a specific request from an employer.⁸³

80 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

81 ILO & Impact Initiatives (2022) [Op. cit](#)

82 Community leaders could be described as former migrants who have settled in Libya and lived there for a long time, established a sustainable livelihood, learnt Arabic, and built a two-fold network with the host communities (e.g. Libyan recruiters and employers) and people from their own country of origin.

Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

83 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

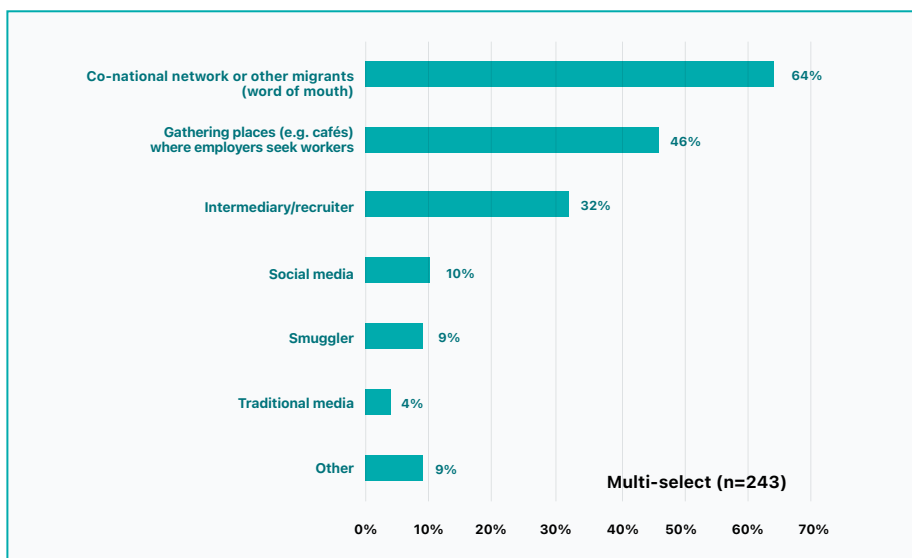
Furthermore, migrants' own networks (either co-nationals, friends, relatives or simply between fellow migrants) provide access to information and job opportunities and serve as an informal form of labour intermediation. Those who were making money in Libya more often said they stopped in Libya because they wanted to stay with friends and/or relatives there (31%) than those who did not earn money in Libya (9%, 7/74), suggesting that those making money also had stronger social support networks, which may have assisted them in finding work. Key informants emphasized the importance of being well-connected to other migrants in order to access information about job opportunities, which is supported by the quantitative findings, as "word of mouth" between migrants was the main method used and reported by respondents to find a job (64%). The prevalence of support networks between migrant workers in the labour market also has the potential to enhance migrant workers' ability to address other economic aspects of their migration journey, such as collectively overcoming financial constraints, such as sharing accommodation, sharing food expenditures, helping to pay for treatment in the event of a medical problem, etc.⁸⁴

Migrant jobseekers also turn to more uncertain and less secure methods of finding work. Going to gathering places to meet employers was mentioned by almost half of respondents who were making money (46%) as their successful strategy for finding a job (see Figure 6). These gathering places were described by key informants as public and informal spaces where migrant jobseekers would stand and wait, sometimes for several hours, for a recruiter to come and hire them. While waiting, they would carry their own equipment in a visible manner so that recruiters in their sector of activity could easily identify them (e.g. screwdrivers or brushes). However, the jobs available to migrant jobseekers in these gathering places are mostly casual work opportunities, thus unstable and often very insecure. Indeed, migrant jobseekers may not receive information about the identity of their employer, the nature, pay and duration, and/or location of the job until they arrive at the workplace, i.e. after they have committed to work (see Section 3.3.2 for analysis on the risks that migrant jobseekers face in these public gathering places).⁸⁵

84 Key informant interview, Professor of geography and migration studies, January 2024

85 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

Figure 6. How did you find a job in Libya?
(among respondents who made money in Libya)



In addition to receiving information about job opportunities from fellow nationals and other migrants when in Libya, access to labour market information at the pre-departure stage is also a key means of finding a job⁸⁶ once in Libya. Indeed, the majority of respondents who made money in Libya (59%) had received information about job opportunities prior to their departure: from relatives or friends currently (39%) or previously (41%) in Libya; from a smuggler (18%); from social media (9%); and/or directly from an employer in Libya (6%). This again underscores the important enabling role of migrants' own networks of compatriots and community leaders through which information about job opportunities can circulate. Yet, more than a third (35%) of respondents who made money in Libya had not heard that Libya offered economic opportunities before arriving there. This information-related factor represents a potential delay or obstacle to their economic integration in Libya, and indeed a slightly higher proportion of this group took longer to find work there.⁸⁷

3.1.2 Barriers to accessing the labour market

Over a third (27/74) of respondents who did not earn money in Libya were not planning on staying in the country and thus did not look for employment (see Figure 7). Indeed, 86% (64/74) of those not making money explained that they left Libya because it was not their intended destination, compared

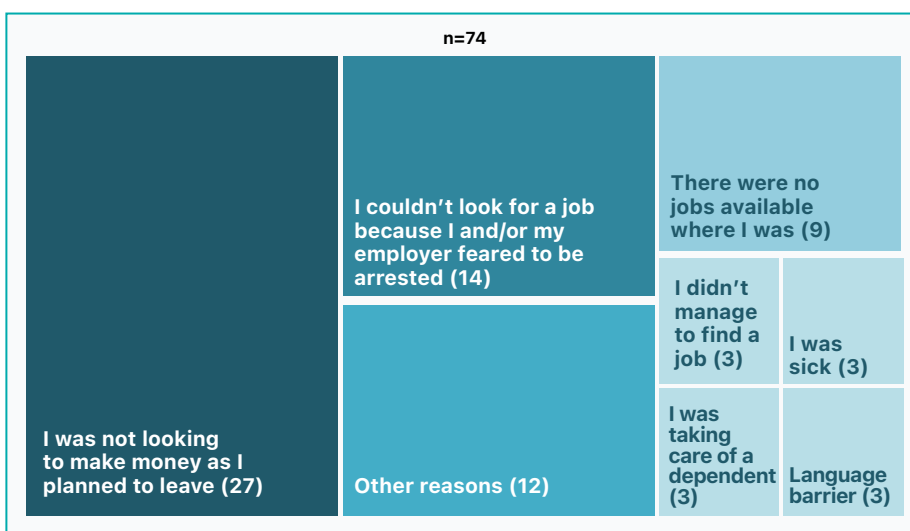
⁸⁶ IOM (2015) [Improving Access to Labour Market Information for Migrants and Employers](#)

⁸⁷ 16/86 (19%) of the respondents who had not heard about any economic opportunities before arriving in Libya found a job there after 3 months, compared to 10% of the broader subsample of migrants who made money in Libya.

with only 62% of the respondents who earned money in Libya. Likewise, they stayed in Libya for a relatively shorter period of time compared to the respondents who earned money in Libya.⁸⁸ As highlighted by key informants, the chances of reaching Europe (i.e. Italy in most cases) when attempting to cross the sea are low, forcing migrants to try several times and/or to choose another transit country where the risks of crossing the sea are perceived to be lower and the chances of success higher.⁸⁹

However, it remains unclear to what extent individuals not earning money were actively seeking job opportunities. The variety of reasons given by 57/74 respondents for not earning money in Libya indicate that a large number of them would have worked if they could find opportunities (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Why didn't you make money during your stay in Libya?
(among respondents who did not make money in Libya)



A variety of different job search challenges (lack of available jobs, language barrier, etc.) were mentioned by respondents who did not make money in Libya (see Figure 7 above). Key informants stressed the role of language in finding a job, especially in some sectors that require contact with Libyan customers (e.g. in restaurants and cafés). Migrants from non-Arabic speaking countries would thus face greater challenges in finding a job.⁹⁰ Another potential barrier to finding work is a dynamic of mistrust between employers and migrant jobseekers highlighted by one key informant. Often recruiters

88 43% (32/74) spent only 3-4 months in Libya (compared with 26% of those who earned money there), and 40% (30/74) stayed more than 6 months in Libya (compared with 55% of those who made money in Libya).

89 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

90 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

prefer to hire long-term workers and may hesitate to hire migrants for fear they will move on.⁹¹

Safety concerns were also mentioned by 14/74 of the respondents who did not make money in Libya. Specifically, they feared arrest, which demonstrates the negative impact of the criminalization of migrants highlighted in chapter 2. The specific risks that migrants face when seeking job opportunities and/or in the workplace thus can act as a disincentive, discouraging them from finding income-generating activities, especially if they have to look for work in public and informal gathering places (e.g. cafés) that are known to be unsafe (see a more detailed analysis of the risks faced by job-seekers and workers in sub-chapter 3.3).

Limited access to labour market information may also explain why some respondents did not earn money in Libya. Indeed, respondents who did not make money in Libya more often reported not having heard about economic opportunities before arriving.⁹² They also had limited knowledge of the characteristics of the Libyan labour market, such as discerning whether the jobs available matched their level of education and skills.⁹³ This may be related to a lack of social supports due to weaker social capital and integration into migrant networks (see Section 3.1.1).

3.1.3 Unstable livelihood opportunities

In addition to the above-mentioned barriers to accessing the Libyan labour market, opportunities for decent⁹⁴ stable work are limited.

Of the respondents who made money in Libya, three-quarters (76%) were casual or occasional workers.⁹⁵ Women were slightly over-represented among casual / occasional workers, while they were slightly under-represented among respondents who held a regular paid job.⁹⁶ Even within the sub-group of respondents with the more stable status of regular paid employment (28%, n=68), 19 out of 68 individuals had also engaged in casual or occasional work during their time in Libya. The limited number of independent businesspeople among respondents earning money in Libya, inclu-

91 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

92 60%, 44/74, compared with only 35% of those who made money in Libya.

93 66%, 49/74, compared with only 12% of those who earned money in Libya.

94 Accord to the International Labour Organization, decent work refers to “*work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.*”

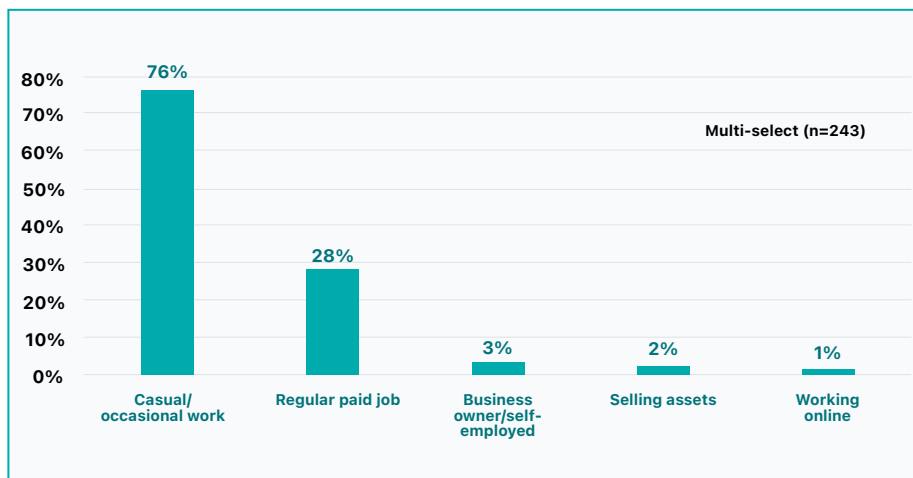
ILO, [Decent work](#)

95 Casual or occasional work refers to employment that is sporadic or not on a fixed schedule. It could include tasks or jobs that are performed on an as-needed basis, without a long-term commitment from either the employer or the worker.

96 Though subsamples are small and results should be interpreted carefully, women represented 24% of the respondents who earned money in Libya, 26% of casual/occasional workers (over-representation) and 11/68 (16%) of respondents who had a regular paid job (under-representation).

ding 3% who were self-employed, 2% selling assets, and 1% working online (see Figure 8), aligns with the challenges presented by an underdeveloped private sector in the country.⁹⁷ Additionally, it reflects the obstacles faced by migrants in obtaining a legal status that influences their capacity to formally register a company.

Figure 8. How did you make money in Libya?
(among respondents who earned money in Libya)



The majority of interviewed migrants who made money in Libya (n=243) did not have a formal employment contract, meaning that their livelihoods were insecure and uncertain. More than three-quarters of those making money (77%) held a verbal employment agreement while only 8% had a written contract.⁹⁸ The informal and sporadic nature of migrant workers' livelihoods reflected here is a consequence of legal and policy frameworks that limit access to the formal labour market for migrants, leaving the majority in a precarious employment situation. This in turn can impede their ability to save and plan financially, and also to access insurance and social services usually provided through a formal employment contract.⁹⁹

Overall, the sectors in which respondents reported working during their stay in Libya are predominantly manual, and considered unattractive by Libyans (see Chapter 2). Working in a café or restaurant (47%), construction (34%) and domestic work (31%) were the most frequently reported sectors of work while in Libya (see Figure 9). Given the above-mentioned sporadic nature of their job opportunities, a large proportion of those making money (42%) had done so in more than one sector. While migrant workers are filling

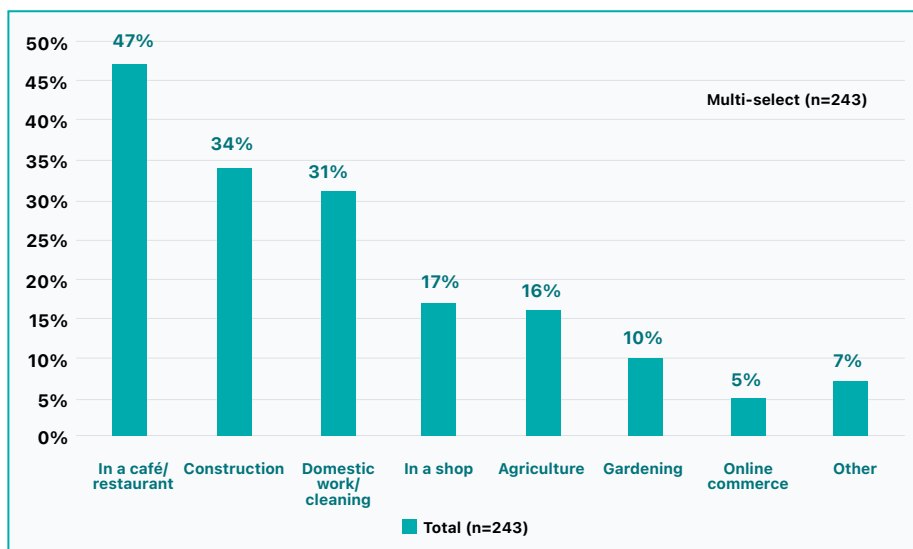
97 ETF (2014) [Labour Market and Employment Policy in Libya](#)

98 14% didn't have any agreement as they were self-employed and 1% had another type of employment agreement.

99 Key informant interview, Professor of geography and migration studies, January 2024

a clear gap in the Libyan labour market, employment in these sectors is also considered to be predominantly informal and irregular, with high turnover rates,¹⁰⁰ which may be positive in terms of labour market flexibility (e.g. finding work quickly), but which also leads to the precarity described above.

Figure 9. What kind of sectors did you make money in during your stay in Libya? (among respondents who made money in Libya)



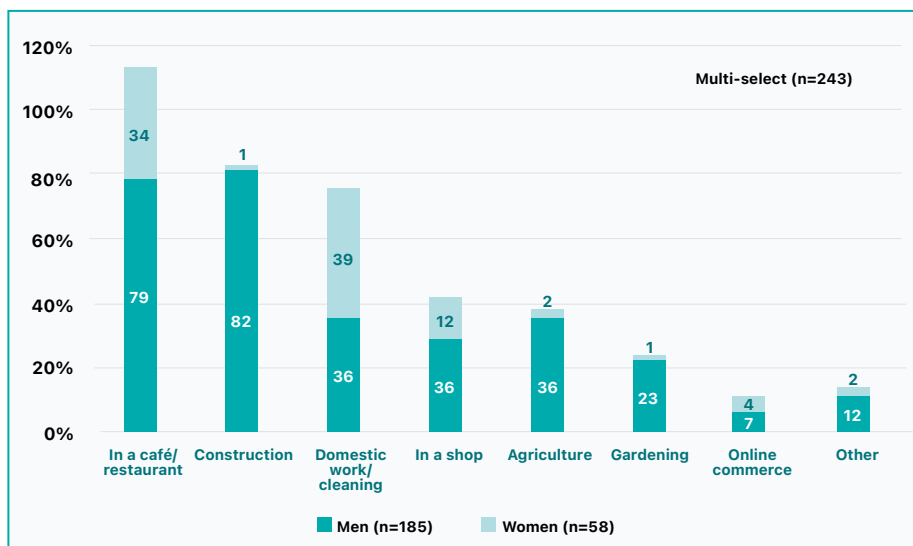
The reported sectors in which respondents earned money varied by gender. For women respondents the most common sectors of employment were domestic work (39/58) and work in a café/restaurant (34/58) while men predominantly worked in construction (44%) and cafés/restaurants (43%). Men comprised the overwhelming majority of respondents in several sectors: construction (82/83), agriculture (36/38) and the gardening sector (23/24) (see Figure 10). Meanwhile, there appeared to be less diversity in the number of sectors of employment available to women migrant workers. Key informants highlighted gender dynamics of the Libyan labour market, where women’s employment is still taboo, leading women migrant workers to work in less visible sectors.¹⁰¹ Given this gendered division of labour, women are more likely to be disadvantaged in the country’s transition to a development and post-conflict context with more regular job opportunities opened up to men.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ ETF (2014) *Op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ Such as kitchens in restaurants and cafés, or domestic work
Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

¹⁰² At the time of the interviews, the results show no particular evidence of greater restrictions on women’s access to the Libyan labour market, as the proportion of women among respondents earning money in Libya (24%) was the same as the overall representation of women in the general sample (23%).

Figure 10. What kind of sectors did you make money in during your stay in Libya (by gender)? (among respondents who made money in Libya)



Although respondents who made money in Libya had a generally low level of education,¹⁰³ it did not pose a barrier to their engagement in the Libyan labour market. Only 9% reported that their level of education was lower than what was required in the job they had. The majority of the respondents who made money in Libya (79%) said that their level of education matched the requirements of the Libyan labour market, with 30% indicating that the jobs available to them matched their level of education, 12% saying that it was at a similar level but in a different sector, and 37% saying that their level of education was higher than required. This may indicate that in the sectors of employment presented in Figures 9 and 10, the majority of the jobs available did not require formal qualifications.

Women migrants who made money in Libya more often reported being overqualified for the jobs available to them. Indeed, among all women respondents who earned money in Libya (n=58; n=185 for men), the proportion of women who had attained a level of education above secondary school (i.e. vocational training or university) (34%, 20/58) was higher than the same proportion for men (26%). The proportion of women migrants who earned money in Libya who reported having a level of education higher than the jobs offered (48%, 28/58) was also larger than the corresponding proportion for men (33%). Given that there is less diversity in sectors available to women migrant job seekers, the most common sectors of employment for female respondents (domestic work and catering) are predominantly hands-on jobs, with no formal qualifications required.

103 A third (33%) of the respondents who earned money in Libya had less than secondary education.

3.2 The precarious economic lives of migrants in Libya

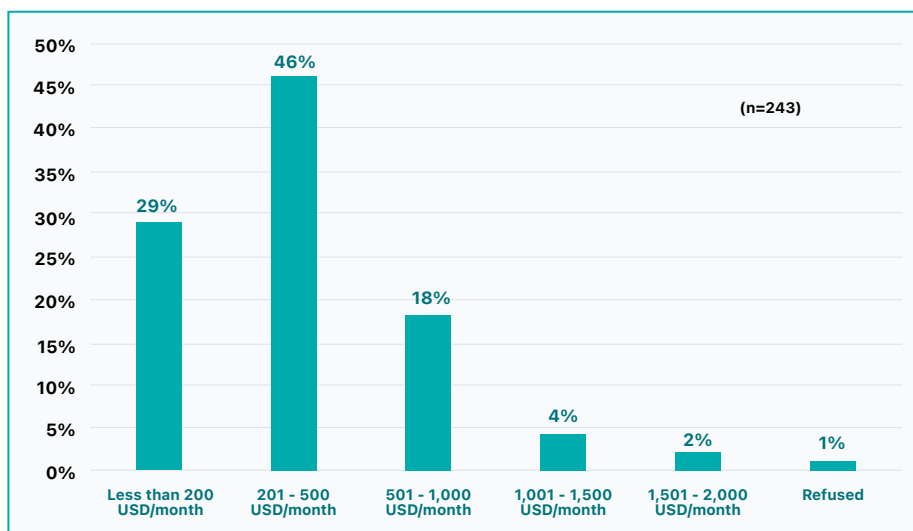
Although Libya offers relatively quick access to the informal labour market for migrants seeking job opportunities, they faced other financial constraints related to the characteristics of their employment that limited their economic inclusion.

3.2.1 Precarious sources of income

The limited viability of their livelihoods in Libya is a primary aspect of the harsh economic conditions faced by migrant respondents who earned money in Libya. The majority of these (75%) earned less than USD 500 per month (LYD 2,400), and only 24% had monthly incomes ranging from USD 500 (LYD 2,400) to USD 2,000 (LYD 9,600) (see Figure 11). As most of these respondents (71%) earned wages in the informal sector that are above the Libyan minimum monthly income of USD 208 (LYD 1,000) for full-time employment, these income levels are not different from Libyan standards.¹⁰⁴ However, migrant workers in irregular situations face additional disadvantages due to their lack of access to social benefits that are available to much of the large Libyan public-sector workforce. The majority of respondents also had an unpredictable and irregular source of income as they were primarily making money through casual or occasional work (76%) in manual and low-skilled sectors characterized by a high turnover rate (see Section 3.1.3). Therefore, respondents' income levels likely fluctuated over time, with periods when they had lower incomes and therefore faced greater financial constraints.

104 Comparison with the Libyan workers' wages and overall livelihoods is limited. Indeed, availability and quality of statistics on the Libyan labour force are very limited due to a weak Libyan labour market information system. However, it is worth noting that the majority (estimated 70%) of Libyan workers are employed in the public sector. Workers in the public sector are considered to be underpaid, but they receive benefits (e.g. food stipend, subsidies to cover household costs of living, pension) and often hold a second job in the private sector or as a businessperson.
ETF (2014) [Op. cit.](#)

Figure 11. How much did you earn per month with this job?
(among respondents who made money in Libya)



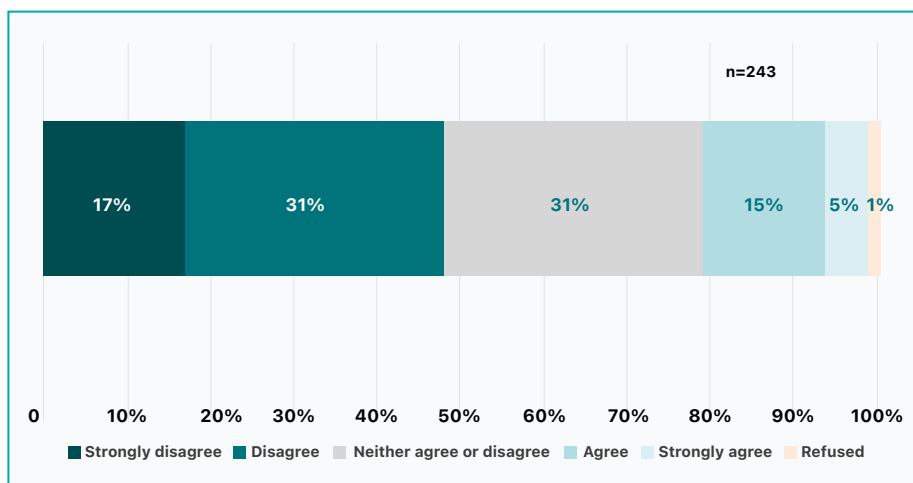
The income levels of half of interviewed migrants who earned money in Libya were insufficient to meet their basic needs. Almost half of respondents making money in Libya reported not earning enough money to cover their needs (48%), whereas only 20% indicated that they were making enough money (see Figure 12). A quarter (26%) of respondents who made money in Libya reported earning less than USD 200 (960 LYD) per month and may therefore have struggled to meet their basic needs, as the minimum expenditure basket was LYD 861.60 (USD 180) in November 2023.¹⁰⁵ The jobs available to the migrant respondents who earned money in Libya were mainly in manual sectors and provided an unpredictable, relatively low and fluctuating source of income. Therefore, their jobs did not allow them to make a sustainable living, with women more affected.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ The minimum expenditure basket is an indicator that measures the average monthly cost of essential necessities and is equivalent to a monetary poverty threshold.

WFP (2023) [Libya Market Monitoring Report \(November 2023\)](#)

¹⁰⁶ Women were under-represented among respondents who reported earning enough money to meet their needs (n=50), accounting for only 8/50 (16%) of this group, compared to their 24% share in the wider sub-sample of migrant respondents who earned money in Libya (n=243).

Figure 12. Did you make enough money to cover your needs while in Libya? (among respondents who made money in Libya)



Interviewed migrants who earned money in Libya and had to take care of the needs of their household in addition to their own needs faced greater financial constraints. Out of all respondents who made money in Libya, 63% were financially responsible for their household at the time of interview, either partly (31%) or fully (32%), and respondents who earned money in Libya and were financially responsible for their household less frequently reported earning enough money to cover their needs.¹⁰⁷

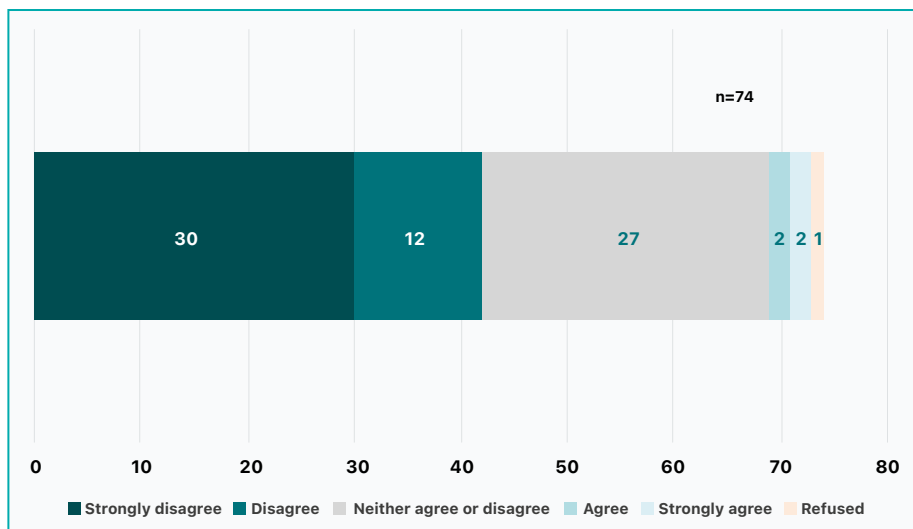
3.2.2 Lack of revenue and shrinking finances

The experience of acute financial hardship was more common among respondents who did not earn money in Libya (n=74). More than half (57%, 42/74) said they were not able to cover their needs while in Libya, with four in ten (41%, 30/74) strongly disagreeing with the statement that they could cover their needs.¹⁰⁸ Though the sub-sample is limited, this may suggest that such financial constraints have delayed the migration plans of respondents who did not earn money in Libya, and/or that they would have worked if they could. Indeed, over half of this group reported staying in Libya for more than five months (42/74), despite the fact that the majority (64/74) explained that they left the country because it was not their intended destination and 27/74 stated that they did not look for a job there because they had not planned to stay in Libya (see Section 3.1.2.).

¹⁰⁷ The share of respondents (56%) who indicated not earning enough money to meet their needs was higher among those who were either partly or fully financially responsible for their household (n=117) than among the wider sub-sample of respondents who made money in Libya (48%).

¹⁰⁸ Those who had earned money in Libya (n=243) less often said they could not meet their needs (48%) in general and less often *strongly disagreed* that they could meet their needs (17%) as compared to those not earning money.

Figure 13. Did you make enough money to cover your needs while in Libya? (among respondents who did not make money in Libya)

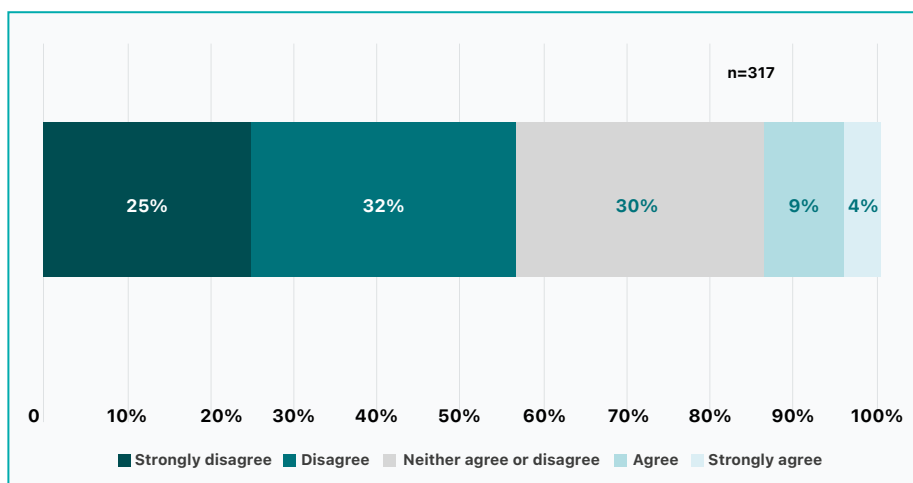


3.2.3 Financial constraints

While more than half (55%) of respondents overall stopped in Libya to work and earn money for the next stretch of their journey, only a minority (13%) were able to save money in addition to covering their needs while in Libya. This trend also reflects the limited capacities of surveyed migrants to send remittances to their relatives, as only 25% of respondents were able to send money to people in their country of origin, mostly through mobile money transfer. Only a third (33%) of the respondents who made money in Libya were able to send money to people in their country of origin, mostly using a mobile phone provider or application to do so (54/81).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Other methods for sending money home included using returning migrants (23/81), through international contacts (15/81), through a bank transfer (6/81) and other (6/81).

Figure 14. Did you make enough money to cover your needs and save while in Libya?



The job opportunities available to respondents who made money in Libya did not allow the majority to save money in order to finance, for example, their onward migration plan. Even among those who made money in Libya, only 15% said they earned enough to cover their needs and save. While two-thirds (68%) of respondents who had a source of income in Libya stopped there because they wanted to work to finance the next stretch of their journey (see Chapter 2), the relatively low and irregular wages available on the Libyan labour market alone did not allow them to cover high costs in Libya and achieve their goal. Therefore, migrant workers have to look for other sources of income, such as asking for or borrowing money from their support networks.¹¹⁰

Financial support from relatives and/or friends in their country of origin seemed to play a major role in the coping strategy of migrant respondents who did not make enough money to meet their needs. Indeed, it was common for respondents to rely on money sent by people in their country of origin to cope with their difficult economic conditions, as indicated by 43% of those surveyed. Surprisingly, 47% of respondents who were making money in Libya also received money from people in their country of origin (compared to 31%, 23/74, among respondents who did not earn money), most often through a mobile phone provider or application (58%) or a bank transfer (49%).¹¹¹

110 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

111 Other methods for receiving money from home included using returning migrants (7%), through international contacts (10%), and others (23%). n=115.

These stress factors were also reported by respondents who didn't earn money. Only 6 of 74 respondents who did not earn money while in Libya reported that they were able to save money, and none sent remittances to their relatives or friends in their country of origin. On the contrary, a third of the respondents who did not earn money while in Libya (23/74) relied on money received from their family or friends in their country of origin, either to meet their needs in Libya and/or to finance their onward journey (see Section 2.3.2.). Although the majority (64/74) had not originally planned to stay in Libya, they may not have anticipated the high economic costs¹¹² and other obstacles to continuing their migration journey onward from Libya, especially if they had to try several times to cross the sea following repeated unsuccessful attempts.¹¹³

3.3 Protection concerns¹¹⁴

Migrant respondents who made money in Libya faced risky working conditions, which add to the wider protection risks faced by the migrant community in Libya.

3.3.1 Protection risks faced in Libya

4Mi findings underscore the harsh living conditions and human rights challenges for migrants in Libya outlined in the literature review (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.2.).¹¹⁵ Of respondents overall, 75% felt that Libya was dangerous (n=239). Among them, the most frequent risks perceived was physical violence (87%). After physical violence, bribery/extortion (69%), robbery (67%), non-physical violence (65%), detention (61%) and injury or illness due to harsh conditions (58%) were the most often cited perceived risks.¹¹⁶ Perceptions of protection risks varied by gender. In general, women seemed to be at greater risk of non-physical violence, robbery and sexual violence,¹¹⁷ while men reported more vulnerability to human trafficking and death.¹¹⁸ As a result of this dangerous environment, the most frequently reason given by

112 E.g. rent and food costs are a large part of their budget

Key informant interview, Analyst at a UN agency Libyan country office, January 2024

113 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer - Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

114 The Danish Refugee Council's definition of protection encompasses all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law, i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law, and refugee law. In practice, protection interventions aim to protect people and communities from violence and/or the fear of violence, coercion, and deliberate deprivation.

115 See other MMC's publications on protection risks faced by migrants in Libya.

MMC (2022), [Refugees and migrants' assistance needs and access to services in Libya](#)

MMC (2021), [The Impact of Covid19- on the EU's Mediterranean Migration Policies: The Case of Libya](#)

MMC (2019), [What makes refugees and migrants vulnerable to detention in Libya? A microlevel study of the determinants of detention](#)

116 Other perceived risks included death (44%), kidnapping (43%), and sexual violence (43%).

117 39/51 (76%) of women respondents felt exposed to non-physical violence, 39/51 (76%) felt exposed to robbery, and 25/51 (49%) felt exposed to sexual violence, compared to 62%, 64% and 41% respectively for men.

118 65%, 47% and 46% of men felt exposed to the risk of detention, kidnapping and death respectively, compared to 47% (24/51), 29% (15/51) and 39% (20/51) respectively for women.

all respondents (n=317) for leaving Libya was security concerns (63%, see Section 2.3.3.).

The profiles of potential perpetrators are very diverse, but host communities and non-state actors were the primary threat perceived by respondents. Two-thirds (67%) of the respondents who reported being exposed to protection risks in Libya identified people from the local community as potential perpetrators. Criminal gangs (57%) and armed groups (50%) were the second and third most frequently identified potential perpetrators.¹¹⁹ In the Libyan context, these actors are recognized as the main agents involved in human trafficking, and they are thus more likely to be the perpetrators identified for kidnapping activities (as described above). Similarly, state security agencies¹²⁰ are more likely to be associated with the risks of bribery and unlawful detention,¹²¹ as are local communities in the context of blackmail and extortion practices.

While recognizing the positive role of support networks between migrants in facilitating access to the Libyan labour market and in other aspects of social life in Libya (see Section 3.1.1.), it appeared that other migrants could also be perpetrators of harmful acts. Indeed, 17% of respondents who perceived protection risks in Libya indicated that their potential perpetrator was a member of the migrant community. In that regard, key informants shared a more nuanced description of the role of migrant community leaders, going beyond the assistance they might provide to migrants (e.g. as connectors to employers) and highlighting the involvement of some of them in smuggling networks and human trafficking activities.¹²²

While access to job opportunities might provide some limited financial security, it does not improve protection from harm. Two-thirds (66%) of migrant respondents who made money in Libya (n=243) indicated that they decided to leave the country for security reasons, suggesting that they experienced and/or perceived greater protection risks while in Libya than respondents who did not earn money there (53%, 39/74).

3.3.2 Working conditions and protection risks faced in the workplace

The majority of respondents who earned money in Libya (n=243) were dissatisfied with their working conditions. Most respondents (83%) estimated that they had been taken advantage of, exploited and/or abused while working in Libya, whereas only 17% considered their working conditions to be fair and decent. These quantitative findings support the general description given by key informants of risky and exploitative working conditions for migrants in the Libyan informal labour market.

119 Other potential perpetrators included the military/police (46%), immigration officials (24%), smugglers (22%), other migrants (17%) and family members (3%).

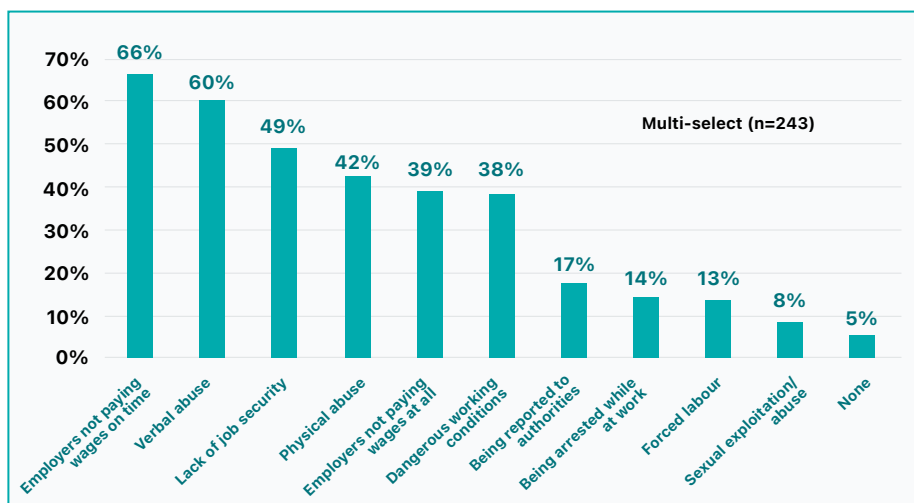
120 The military/police and immigration officials are ranked fourth and fifth respectively in the list of potential perpetrators.

121 OHCHR (2016), [Op. cit.](#)

122 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

Perceptions of unfair and inadequate working conditions were shaped by a range of incidents experienced by more than two-thirds of migrants at work. The main reported experienced incidents in the workplace included employers not paying wages on time (66%) and verbal abuse (60%). They were followed by the lack of job security (49%), physical abuse (42%), employers not paying wages at all (39%) and dangerous working conditions (38%). Women respondents who made money in Libya were more affected by incidents related to job insecurity, sexual exploitation, and verbal abuse, while men were more affected by the risk of being arrested at work.¹²³

Figure 15. What incidents did you experience while you were working in Libya? (among respondents who made money in Libya)



Almost all respondents (92%) who earned money in Libya did not have a written and formal work contract and therefore had no protection against these risks of exploitation and abuse (see Section 3.1.3). Even when migrant workers hold a written contract (8% of the sub-sample), this does not necessarily mean that they are aware of their rights and the mediation and grievance mechanisms available to them, that they trust these mechanisms and use them,¹²⁴ or that these mechanisms would have been effectively enforced if they had been used.¹²⁵ According to key informants, some embassies in Libya are proactive in assisting their nationals to obtain the necessary documents to apply for a work permit, but only a minority of migrants are

123 Of the women respondents who earned money in Libya (n=58), 60% (35/58) reported having experienced job insecurity (vs 45% for men), 29% (17/58) reported having faced sexual exploitation (vs 2%), and 74% (43/58) reported having faced verbal abuse (vs 56%). Of the male respondents who earned money in Libya (n=185), 16% reported having faced the risk of being arrested at work (vs 9%, 5/58, for women).

124 ILO & Impact Initiatives (2022) [Op. cit.](#)

125 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

able to benefit from such assistance.¹²⁶ Moreover, the link between informal work and protection risks is not straightforward. Indeed, a key informant recalled that even unwritten customary agreements, which are a common feature of the Libyan informal labour market and hold a strong moral binding character, can provide guarantees and protection. Yet, these alternative sources of protection appear to have eroded since the erosion of social cohesion and the decline of customary practices after 2011.¹²⁷

Job insecurity and wage theft are the most common types of workplace incidents reported by respondents.¹²⁸ Job insecurity is consistent with the most frequently reported type of employment (casual and occasional) and the lack of a written contract reported by the vast majority of respondents (see Section 3.1.3).¹²⁹ Vulnerability to wage theft and arbitrary dismissal is a function of the informal context of the Libyan labour market and the absence of codified rules that employers would be obliged to follow. It is also a function of the irregular status that migrant workers find themselves in, as they are also vulnerable to blackmail by their employer, who may threaten to report them to the authorities if, for example, they make wage claims.¹³⁰

Verbal and physical abuse is a relatively common protection risk faced by migrants in the workplace in Libya. Key informants noted that verbal abuse and harassment pertaining to race are more likely to affect sub-Saharan migrants. This may be a legacy of the historical background of relations between Libyans and sub-Saharan nationals,¹³¹ as well as related to their status if they entered Libya irregularly.¹³² They may also interact with social factors, as racial abuse appears to often be linked to Libyans' negative perceptions of the low skilled/manual jobs often performed by migrant workers.

Nearly a third of women who made money in Libya (17/58) reported experiencing sexual exploitation or abuse in the workplace. The hidden nature of domestic work, a sector in which women respondents more frequently worked, makes them more vulnerable¹³³ to sexual exploitation.¹³⁴ This risk

126 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

127 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

128 Three response options that relate to job and income insecurity are among the top five responses given by migrant respondents who made money in Libya.

129 For example, migrants who had a casual and occasional work were over-represented among respondents who experienced employers not paying them at all (accounting for 90%, 83/92) compared to their proportion (76%) in the subsample of migrants who earned money in Libya (n=243).

130 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

131 The prejudice against sub-Saharan Africans in Libyan society has deep roots in a long history of slavery. Despite being officially abolished in 1853, it persisted throughout the twentieth century and can still be linked to nowadays forced labour practices in detention centres.

UN News Centre (2017), [African migrants reportedly being sold in 'slave markets' in Libya, UN agency warns](#)

132 Key informant interview, Economist and geographer – Migration governance advisor for Libya, January 2024

133 OHCHR (2015), [Behind closed doors. Protecting and promoting the human rights of migrant domestic workers in an irregular situation](#)

134 Though the subset is small and should be interpreted carefully, migrants who did a domestic work were over-represented among respondents who experienced sexual exploitation in the workplace (accounting for 80%, 16/20, of them) compared to their proportion in the subsample of migrants who earned money in Libya (31%; n=243).

is exacerbated by the fact that domestic work takes place in the private sphere, with workers often staying in the employer's home, while such situations often happen in isolation.

Dangerous working conditions vary greatly between sectors, but construction workers appeared to be more affected by occupational accidents.¹³⁵ A key informant emphasized that the safety of migrant construction workers is a function of how much responsibility their employer decides to take to ensure a decent working environment and provide necessary safeguards. Most choose not to take these measures. Some employers are more concerned about the safety of their workers and pay for regular medical visits, provide safety equipment, and may even help in finding accommodation and contribute to food costs. Nevertheless, these measures are often motivated by employers' economic interests in retaining a specialized workforce, and many migrants do not have such specialized skills.¹³⁶

Experienced by 14% of the respondents who made money in Libya, key informants highlighted that being arrested while at work is one of the most extreme and feared risks. While the authorities implicitly recognise and tolerate the contribution of migrant workers to the Libyan economy and labour market, arbitrary arrests and detentions are sporadic and unpredictable. One of the places they occur is in the public and informal gathering places where casual migrant jobseekers openly wait for a recruiter to hire them.¹³⁷ Because of the risks of arrest¹³⁸ and detention, migrant jobseekers tend to avoid these public places of recruitment if they can, but poorly connected workers who are not specialized in a specific sector have very few alternatives, while more qualified workers would use this option as a last resort, for instance if they lost their previous job.¹³⁹ As more than three-quarters (76%) of respondents who earned money in Libya found a job in a public and informal gathering place, this suggests that they had very few alternatives to seek job opportunities through safer channels.

Combined with the risk of arrest and detention, potential extortion by employers and non-state actors may lead to greater vulnerability to human trafficking. A key informant described practices of human trafficking and forced labour in which employers confiscated migrant workers' passports and threatened to report them to the authorities, and then forced them to work.¹⁴⁰ Again, migrant jobseekers in public recruitment spaces may be

135 Migrants who worked in the construction sector were over-represented among respondents who experienced physical harm in the workplace (accounting for 49%, 45/92, of them) compared to their proportion in the subsample of migrants who earned money in Libya (34%).

136 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

137 Though the subset is small and should be interpreted carefully, migrants who found a job in gathering places were over-represented among respondents who were arrested while at work (accounting for 56%, 19/34) compared to their proportion in the subsample of migrants who earned money in Libya (46%).

138 Under the law, employers are also exposed to the risk of prosecution if they employ migrants without providing an employment contract.

139 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

140 Key informant interview, Country director of an international NGO in Libya, January 2024

more likely to be affected by this risk. The impersonal and uncertain nature of the recruitment process in these public gathering spaces described in Section 3.1.1. exacerbates this risk. As a preventive measure, migrants would thus keep a low profile and avoid going to public places where the risk of being arrested or kidnapped is higher, or they would organize themselves with other migrants to appoint a person responsible for going to the shops, for example, on behalf of the whole community.¹⁴¹

141 Key informant interview, Professor of geography and migration studies, January 2024



Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

Understanding the economic factors influencing migration decisions is crucial. Many individuals embark on migratory journeys due to economic hardships in their home countries, and, for many, Libya is a major corridor on their way to their preferred destination (mostly in Europe). For many, Libya is an important place to stop and earn money for journeys onward, as it is known to provide economic opportunities. However, despite many migrants being able to access the labour market, few appear to make the money they need to meet their immediate needs or save. Furthermore, the majority are often met with harsh realities including insecurity and exploitation.

Access to informal job opportunities in the labour market is a fundamental aspect that shapes the economic conditions for migrants in Libya. A large portion of jobs are informal, with the majority of respondents engaging in work without written agreements. Casual and daily job opportunities were the norm for respondents earning money, underscoring the temporary and unstable nature of employment for many migrants. Gender plays a pivotal role in determining job sectors, with men more represented in construction, and women more frequently engaged in domestic work. Factors enabling access to the labour market include access to information, providing migrants with insights into job opportunities and requirements. The support network comprising co-nationals, community leaders, and fellow migrants plays a vital role in assisting newcomers to understand and integrate into the labour market. However, the inherent insecurity of the Libyan labour market is a critical impediment, creating an unpredictable environment for job seekers. Furthermore, barriers extend beyond market dynamics to encompass (for a minority of respondents) language barriers and skills mismatches with available jobs, posing additional obstacles for those seeking to participate in the Libyan workforce.

Migrants in Libya grapple with precarious livelihoods shaped by unstable and insecure jobs available to them and financial constraints. In terms of financial constraints, half of the respondents who made money in Libya struggled to meet their basic needs, which reflects the precariousness of the jobs available to them. Notably, a substantial number of respondents who made money in Libya relied on financial support from relatives in their home countries, with a smaller proportion able to send remittances back home.

There are substantial protection concerns for migrants in Libya, and those who find employment face supplementary risks in the workplace. Workplace challenges compound their precarious situation, with income insecurity prevailing as employers often fail to pay wages on time or, in some

cases, not at all. Job insecurity adds another layer of risk, as individuals face the constant threat of losing their employment. Verbal and physical abuse, including instances of sexual exploitation, further highlight the vulnerability of migrant workers, especially those in casual employment seeking opportunities in public and informal gathering places. The overall insecurity faced by migrants in Libya is a challenge that drives some to ultimately leave the country in search of safer and more stable environments.

Recommendations

The findings of the study inform policy and programmatic responses aiming at enhancing the economic prospects and protection for migrants in Libya.

Libyan migration governance actors (Libyan authorities, civil society and private sector):

While there is growing recognition of the contribution of migrant workers to the Libyan economy, the general criminalization of their situation is unlikely to change given the overall unstable security and political context. However, the following actions can contribute to improve the livelihood of migrants.

- ▶ Facilitate an inclusive dialogue on amending the existing legislation that criminalizes migration.
- ▶ Improve coordination between socio-economic ministries and security actors to reach a common understanding of the contribution of labour migrants to the Libyan economy and the negative impact of their criminalization.
- ▶ Explore options to improve the regulation and security of public and informal gathering places where employers recruit casual migrant workers.
- ▶ Increase ongoing efforts leading to the adoption of bilateral agreements between Libya and the countries of origin of migrants that facilitate their regular employment in the local labour market, and include provisions for access to social security and the prevention of exploitation.
- ▶ Improve access to information on job opportunities in multiple languages (English, French and Arabic) through different channels (online, but also through human networks).
- ▶ Include migrants, as well as their community leaders, in both migration governance dialogues and national employment reform processes.
- ▶ Involve the private sector in migration governance platforms to highlight

their economic benefits and their responsibility to provide a safe environment and work permits for labour migrants.

- ▶ Engage Libyan trade unions and civil society organisations in migration governance and shaping regulations related to migrants to ensure fair wages and basic protection for labour migrants in Libya.
- ▶ Conduct further research on customary protection measures in the Libyan labour market, and explore ways to promote their adoption by employers for the benefit of refugee and migrant workers.

Although underdeveloped in the broader Libyan informal economy and labour market, the role and responsibility of the private sector in addressing the working conditions of migrants aligns with its economic interest in retaining a dynamic workforce that fill the gap of manual jobseekers.

- ▶ Assist migrant workers in obtaining the legal documentation needed to apply for a work permit.
- ▶ Provide a safe environment for migrant workers, especially in the construction sector (e.g. safety equipment).
- ▶ Organize regular medical visits, including through mobile units, for refugee and migrant workers and facilitate their access to health care.

Foreign donors and global governance stakeholders

As international actors shift foreign assistance towards development and reconstruction, the assistance needs of migrants should not be left behind in Libya's post-conflict context.

- ▶ Continue to provide funding for humanitarian and protection responses to the needs of migrants, alongside wider development and reconstruction assistance to Libya.
- ▶ Increase funding that address migrants' protection needs, as well as their share in the general migration governance funding.
- ▶ Incentivise the regular integration of migrants into the Libyan labour market by including them as a target population in broader socio-economic development funding initiatives and by adding legal aid and services programs to such funding.
- ▶ Increase advocacy efforts with the Libyan authorities on access to migrants in vulnerable situations, particularly those in detention centres.

Humanitarian and protection actors

Given the multiple constraints on humanitarian access in Libya, the population of migrant workers, who face specific protection risks that often go unnoticed, is at risk of being left behind.

- ▶ Integrate Mental Health and Psychological Support (MHPSS) interventions with other protection responses targeting migrants in order to assist victims of human trafficking and other forms of verbal and physical abuse.
- ▶ Work with migrant community leaders to identify channels of access to vulnerable refugee and migrant workers, particularly women working in the domestic sector.
- ▶ Develop mobile units and other solutions that enable practitioners to overcome access constraints for the provision of assistance to vulnerable casual refugee and migrant workers in public and informal gathering places.
- ▶ Provide information to migrants on application processes for work permits and facilitate contact with their embassies to help them obtain missing documents usually issued by their country of origin.
- ▶ Engage in dialogue with employers to raise awareness of the economic benefits (e.g. workers retention) of providing a safe working environment and work permits for labour migrants.

Foreign embassies in Libya

Weak relationships between migrants in irregular situations and the embassies of their country of origin prevent them from taking advantage of opportunities in their efforts to obtain a work and residence permit.

- ▶ Strengthen cooperation with the Libyan authorities with a view to adopting bilateral agreements facilitating safe employment procedures for their nationals.
- ▶ Engage in dialogue with nationals living in Libya (regardless of their legal status in Libya) to understand their needs for safe access to the Libyan labour market and provide information on the requirements for applying for work permits.
- ▶ Improve support, through flexible and digital solutions, to their nationals seeking a legal document from their country of origin when applying for a Libyan work permit.

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