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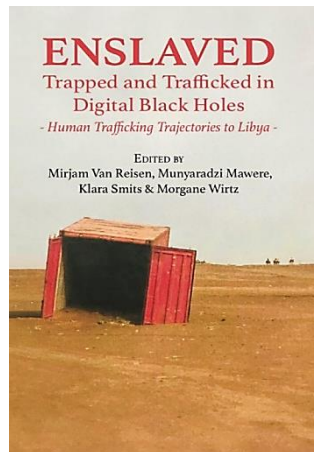
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Chapter in: Enslaved

Trapped and Trafficked in Digital Black Holes:
Human Trafficking Trajectories to Libya

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Contents

Preface by Honourable Chief Fortune Charumbira.....	vi
Acknowledgements	xix
Acronyms	xx
Glossary of Terms.....	xxii
Chapter 1.....	1
Human Trafficking for Ransom in Black Holes in the Digital Landscape: An Introduction	1
Trapped in a human trafficking cycle for ransom	1
Methodology and aim of research.....	4
Organisation of this book	5
Summary of findings.....	7
Human trafficking trajectories: A string of black holes.....	18
Number of migrants and refugees detained in Libya.....	20
Number of Eritreans and payments in Libya.....	23
Conclusion	23
Acknowledgements	25
Ethical clearance.....	25
Author contributions	25
References	26
Chapter 2.....	30
Living in a Black Hole: Explaining Human Trafficking for Ransom in Migration	30
Introduction	30
Methodology	35
The flaw in the push and pull theory of migration	37
Problem framing.....	40
Black holes in the digital infrastructure.....	45

Ethnographic monitoring of black holes in the digital landscape	48
Remoteness and cultural entropy.....	54
The human trafficking cycle: Living in a black hole in the digital landscape	55
Conclusion	57
Acknowledgements.....	60
Ethical clearance.....	60
Author contributions	60
References	60
Chapter 3.....	70
Skin in the Game: Methodology of an Ethnographic Research with Exposure to Trauma.....	70
Introduction	70
Is human trafficking for ransom researchable?.....	71
The research contributors.....	79
Research approach	80
The research Social Dynamics of Digital Innovation	83
Locations and materials for SDDI research.....	91
Fieldwork preparation and conduct	94
Data analysis.....	100
Management of potentially traumatising experiences of the research team	103
Conclusion	110
Acknowledgements.....	112
Ethical clearance.....	112
Contribution by authors.....	112
Author contributions	112
References	113

Documentaries and videos.....	118
Chapter 4.....	121
Human Trafficking for Ransom: A Literature-Review.....	121
Introduction	121
Methodology	123
Description of human trafficking for ransom	125
Practices	126
Human trafficking networks.....	133
Trauma of victims	136
Prosecution and delivery of justice.....	139
Unintended effects of ICTs	141
Documentation of human trafficking for ransom beyond the Sinai	145
Conclusion	145
Acknowledgements	147
Ethical clearance.....	148
Author contributions	148
References	148
Chapter 5.....	154
The Past is not Past: The History and Context of Human Trafficking for Ransom in Libya.....	154
Introduction: Crossing the desert is not just a job.....	154
Methodology	157
A fertile ground: Historic context.....	160
Migrants and refugees in Libya today: Findings from the interviews	174
Discussion	184
Conclusion	185
Acknowledgements	187

Ethical clearance.....	187
Author contributions	187
References	187
Chapter 6.....	195
Enslaved by their Own Government: Indefinite National Service in Eritrea	195
Introduction	195
Methodology	200
The definition of slavery: Ownership vs control.....	203
Forced labour, but not slavery?.....	214
Forced labour for the purpose of economic development	221
Control over Eritrean national service conscripts	226
Conclusion	238
Acknowledgements	240
Ethical clearance.....	240
Author contributions	240
References	240
Chapter 7.....	255
Escaping Eritrea: The Vulnerability of Eritreans to Human Trafficking	255
Introduction	255
Methodology	257
Literature review: Exodus from the ‘black hole’ of Eritrea	260
Reasons for fleeing Eritrea	268
Leaving Eritrea	274
Situation in neighbouring countries.....	280
Conclusion	287
Acknowledgements	289

Ethical clearance.....	289
Author contributions	290
References	290
Chapter 8.....	296
TRUST Works: Delivering Trauma Recovery Understanding Self-Help Therapy (TRUST) to Refugees from Eritrea.....	296
Introduction	296
The need for mental health support for Eritrean refugees	297
Research question.....	305
Research design	307
Results	315
Discussion and conclusion	320
Acknowledgements	323
Ethical clearance.....	324
Author contributions	324
References	324
Chapter 9.....	332
Deceived and Exploited: Classifying the Practice as Human Trafficking	332
Introduction: From the Sinai to Libya	332
Documentation of human trafficking routes	333
Methodology	339
The start of the journey.....	341
The routes to Libya.....	355
Conditions on route across the desert	361
Payments for the journey	368
The organisation of trafficking to Libya	376
Discussion	379

Conclusion	383
Acknowledgements	386
Ethical clearance.....	386
Author contributions	386
References	387
Chapter 10	392
Straight Lines in the Sahara: Mapping the Human Trafficking Routes and Hubs through Libya.....	392
Introduction	392
Holding camps, official detention centres and departure points	394
Methodology	397
Southern route (from Niger)	400
South-eastern route (from Sudan)	405
Western route (from Algeria)	410
North-western route (from Tunisia)	412
North-eastern road (from Egypt)	414
North Libya – Departure point for the Mediterranean Sea	422
Discussion	443
Conclusion	445
Acknowledgements	446
Ethical clearance.....	446
Author contributions	447
References	447
Chapter 11	451
“You are the Ball – They are the Players”: The Human Traffickers of Eritreans in Libya	451
Introduction	451
Methodology	455

The relationship between refugees and traffickers.....	459
Key human traffickers and where they work.....	461
Libya as a ‘black site’ for Eritrean government’s nefarious activities	503
Cloaking of human traffickers.....	505
Synthesis: Tracing the trafficking network.....	506
Discussion.....	511
Conclusion.....	514
Acknowledgements.....	515
Ethical clearance.....	515
Author contributions.....	516
References.....	516
Chapter 12.....	521
Living Skeletons: The Spread of Human Trafficking for Ransom to Libya	521
Introduction: Living skeletons.....	521
Human trafficking for ransom in the Sinai and Libya.....	522
Methodology: Exploring the perspective of survivors.....	525
Experiences of detainees in holding camps.....	528
Extortion of ransoms.....	538
Discussion.....	560
Conclusion.....	564
Acknowledgements.....	566
Ethical clearance.....	566
Author contributions.....	566
References.....	566
Chapter 13.....	570
Hell on Earth: Conditions of Eritrean Refugees in Official Detention Centres in Libya	570

Introduction	570
Methodology	578
Arrests by Libyan Coast Guard.....	581
Conditions in official detention centres.....	583
Relationship between refugees and humanitarian organisations, UN agencies, journalists and authorities.....	603
Discussion	613
Conclusion	618
Acknowledgements	619
Ethical clearance.....	620
Author contributions	620
References	620
Chapter 14.....	627
“Dead-dead”: Trapped in the Human Trafficking Cycle in Libya	627
Introduction	627
Methodology	631
Escape from detention – what’s next?	634
Travel within Libya	637
Urban areas	641
Facilities provided by humanitarian organisations	643
Slavery in Libya.....	644
The sea.....	648
Escaping by land to Tunisia.....	652
Evacuation to Niger.....	655
Discussion	659
Conclusion	662
Acknowledgements	663

Ethical clearance.....	663
Author contributions	663
References	663
Chapter 15	669
“We had no Choice; it’s Part of the Journey”: A Culture of Sexual Violence in Libya	669
Introduction: Many did that...rape	669
Methodology	672
Literature review: The culture of sexual violence in Libya	675
Theoretical considerations: Three categories of sexual violence	683
Sexual violence as a tool of subjugation	685
Sexual exploitation	691
Sexual violence as an opportunistic crime.....	697
Impact of rape: Trauma and secondary trauma.....	703
Discussion	706
Conclusion	709
Acknowledgement.....	710
Ethical clearance.....	710
Author contributions	710
References	710
Chapter 16.....	715
“Gate Closed”: The Situation in Libya during COVID-19	715
Introduction	715
Methodology	719
Push and pull theory of migration during COVID lockdowns.	723
Findings of the interviews.....	725
Findings of the desk review	740

Conclusion: Moving on, despite the restrictions, whatever the risks	747
Acknowledgements	748
Ethical clearance.....	749
Author contributions	749
References	749
Chapter 17	759
Active Agency, Access and Power: Social Media and Eritrean Refugees in Libya	759
Introduction	759
Digital connectivity in exile: Power and agency.....	762
The Eritrean online public sphere	765
Methodology	767
Findings	770
Discussion	778
Conclusion	779
Acknowledgements	780
Author contributions	780
References	781
About the Authors	786

Chapter 10

Straight Lines in the Sahara: Mapping the Human Trafficking Routes and Hubs through Libya¹

Morgane Wirtz

Introduction

Open Google Maps in satellite mode and type ‘Libya’ in the search bar – you will see a gigantic country, the fourth largest in Africa in size, 90% covered by desert. In the middle of the Sahara, its 4,383 kilometre border, drawn in straight lines, separates Libya from its six neighbours: Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan and Egypt. To the north, a 1,770 kilometre coastline opens onto the Mediterranean Sea – and to Europe. Zuwarah, in western Libya, is only 300 kilometres from Lampedusa in Italy. This geography is one of the reasons why Libya is so attractive to people on the move, as well as to human traffickers seeking to prey on them.

Of the five migration routes through Libya, most Eritreans use the south-eastern route. Their journeys are facilitated by smugglers and human traffickers, who keep them in holding camps, warehouses and stores along the way. Grave human rights violations are occurring in these places – but also in the official detention centres funded by the DCIM. Migrants and refugees are beaten, tortured, raped and killed. Few make it to the coast, where they wait in departure points for their chance to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. If caught by the Libya Coast Guard, they are sent back to official detention centres, where the cycle starts again.

¹ The research for this chapter was undertaken as part of the author’s PhD thesis and will be reused fully or in part for this purpose.

Despite the current boom in the construction of walls to control access to certain parts of Libya (Carayol & Gagnol, 2021), there are many routes through the country. Migrants and refugees² enter from Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan and Egypt. They are from West, East, Central and North Africa. Some come from Asia and the Middle East, including Syrians and Bangladeshis. All routes converge in the north-west of Libya – in Tripoli or coastal cities – where there are departure points for the Mediterranean Sea. These routes have been used for the smuggling and trafficking of goods, drugs, arms and people since time immemorial.

However, research on the trafficking routes across Libya is scarce. Micallef (2017) presents a map of the routes and hubs. He shows that illicit trade is organised across the whole country and in coordination with neighbouring countries. He states that, since the fragmentation of Libya after the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, the exploitation of migrants and refugees is increasingly becoming a source of income for armed groups operating in the country. Other authors, such as Kuschminder and Triandafyllidou (2019), also reflect on human smuggling and extortion in Libya, and on how they are connected. They state that the experience of Eritrean refugees in Libya depends on which territory they enter from and which tribe controls that area.

The places where migrants and refugees are kept along the human smuggling and trafficking routes are many. These are called ‘holding camps’, ‘prisons’, ‘warehouses’, ‘houses’, ‘hangars’, ‘stores’, ‘farms’, and ‘credit houses’.³ There are also official detention centres. Malakooti (2019) identified, located and compared the main official detention centres in Libya in 2019. She also indicates the location of other places where migrants and refugees are held and the departure points for the Mediterranean Sea.

² In this chapter the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’ are used interchangeably in a non-legal way to refer to people on the move, without drawing any conclusions about their legal status (see Glossary of Terms).

³ See Glossary of Terms.

Despite this research, little is known about the human trafficking routes through Libya. To understand the practices, its drivers and origins, there is an urgent need to investigate the routes used and the places where people are kept along the way. To fill this gap, the research question addressed in this chapter is: *What are the trafficking routes through Libya, including the places from which people depart, the transit hubs and the places used to hold migrants and refugees?*

After this introduction, the methodology used for this research is set out, which is followed by the findings of the interviews, grouped under the five migration routes – the southern route (from Niger), the south-eastern route (from Sudan), the western route (from Algeria), the north-western route (from Tunisia), and the north-eastern route (from Egypt). Evidence from the interviews is also presented on the north of Libya, where the roads converge. This is followed by a brief discussion and conclusion.

Before the methodology is presented, the next section provides a general description of the terminology used to describe the places where people on the move are held, including holding camps, official detention centres and departure points.

Holding camps, official detention centres and departure points

There are many places where people on the move are held, mostly against their will, while in Libya. These places, official or not, change their location regularly. In this chapter, the places mentioned by the interviewees are presented. Some of them may have closed their doors by the time of reading. The aim is to present the routes, hubs, and human rights abuses reported by migrants and refugees while in detention centres. In this chapter, we generally refer to these as ‘holding camps’, ‘official detention centres’ and ‘departure points’.

A ‘holding camp’ is a generic term used to describe any place where migrants and refugees are held until they pay the ransom for their release (and for their onward journey north from where they can attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea). These places vary in size. In the smallest holding camp reported in the interviews, the detainee was

alone. The largest hold about 1,000 detainees at a time. This is why the names to refer to the camps vary; they are called ‘prisons’, ‘warehouses’, ‘houses’, ‘hangars’, ‘stores’, ‘farms’, and ‘credit houses’.⁴ Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies have no access to these places, hence, all kinds of abuse takes place there. Ex-detainees have reported starvation, lack of hygiene, disease, torture, punishment, sexual violence and forced labour (ECCHR, FIDH & LFJL, 2021). Captivity in these places can last from a few days up to years (Malakooti, 2019).

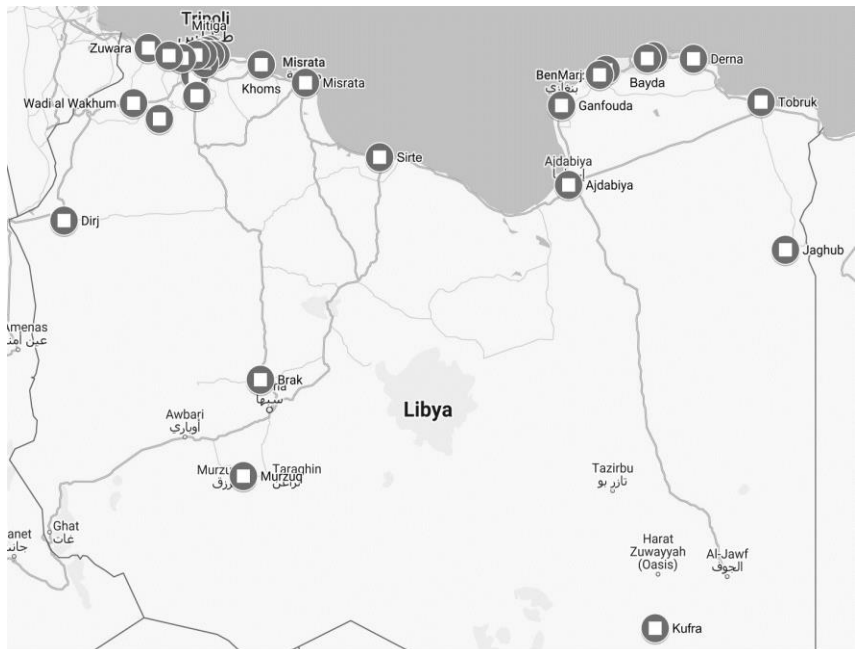


Figure 10.1 Official detention centres listed by UNHCR in 2021 and mentioned by the interviewees

(Source: Based on primary and secondary data and created from Map data ©2022 Google)

‘Official detention centres’ are prisons where migrants and refugees are detained, run by the Department for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM) under the Ministry of Interior or by forces affiliated with the

⁴ See Glossary of Terms.

Government of National Unity in Libya (previously the Government of National Accord), often through the DCIM. The locations, types of facility, reason(s) and lengths of detention are multiple. In October 2021, there were 24 official detention centres listed by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Libya (UNHCR, 2021). Even for the United Nations, it is very difficult to know how many official detention centres are active as they close and reopen frequently.

While most of the official detention centres in Libya receive funding from the government, in many places, power still lies with social connections between armed groups and communities, rather than state institutions (Eaton, Alageli, Badi, Eljarh & Stocker, 2020). As a result, the Ministry of Interior has little to no control over the security forces running the operation, other than providing finances (Malakooti, 2019). In some instances, non-state armed groups have opened detention centres that have later been recognised as official by the DCIM (Malakooti, 2019).

Migrants and refugees are held in official detention centres arbitrarily and indefinitely for illegal migration without charge or trial (Amnesty International, 2020). International aid organisations and UN agencies have limited access to those places. Such access is a process of constant negotiation (see Chapter 13: *Hell on Earth: Conditions in Official Detention Centres in Libya*). This has resulted in a lack of transparency, making it difficult to monitor the situation and living conditions of the detainees. Human rights abuses are common in these facilities (OHCHR & UNSMIL, 2016, 2018a).

Official detention centres sometimes close after reports of gross human rights violations, but can reopen shortly after (Malakooti, 2019). This leads to difficulties in establishing an accurate overview of what happens in these facilities on a day-to-day basis. Sometimes it is unclear if a place is an official detention centre or a holding camp – as both can be run by traffickers or armed groups. It is also possible that camps switch hands, although this is not confirmed. Chapter 13 gives a full description of the conditions in these places.

Finally, the term ‘departure point’ is used in this chapter to describe the places where migrants and refugees are hidden before crossing the Mediterranean Sea. These points are often close to the coast. Migrants and refugees wait there until conditions are met to attempt a crossing. They are often locked in departure points and kept silent to avoid being spotted by the security forces. Human rights abuses are common in departure points, however, seem to be less regular and systematic than in official detention centres and holding camps.

Methodology

The methodology detailed here describes the collaborative efforts of the research team Social Dynamics of Digital Innovation in Remote non-Western communities (SDDI). This team worked under the leadership of Van Reisen, who acted as principal investigator. The full methodology of the research underpinning this book can be found in Chapter 3: *Skin in the Game: Methodology of an Ethnographic Research with Exposure to Trauma*.

The main material obtained for the ethnographic research was collected through participatory fieldwork. Observations and other material collected in various locations, both in-person and through digital communication, informed the background of this chapter. This material included reports, videos, social media posts, photographs and other information, collected and sent to us by resource persons in social media spaces and in personal communications, using participatory ethnographic research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016) and netnography (Kozinets, 2017).

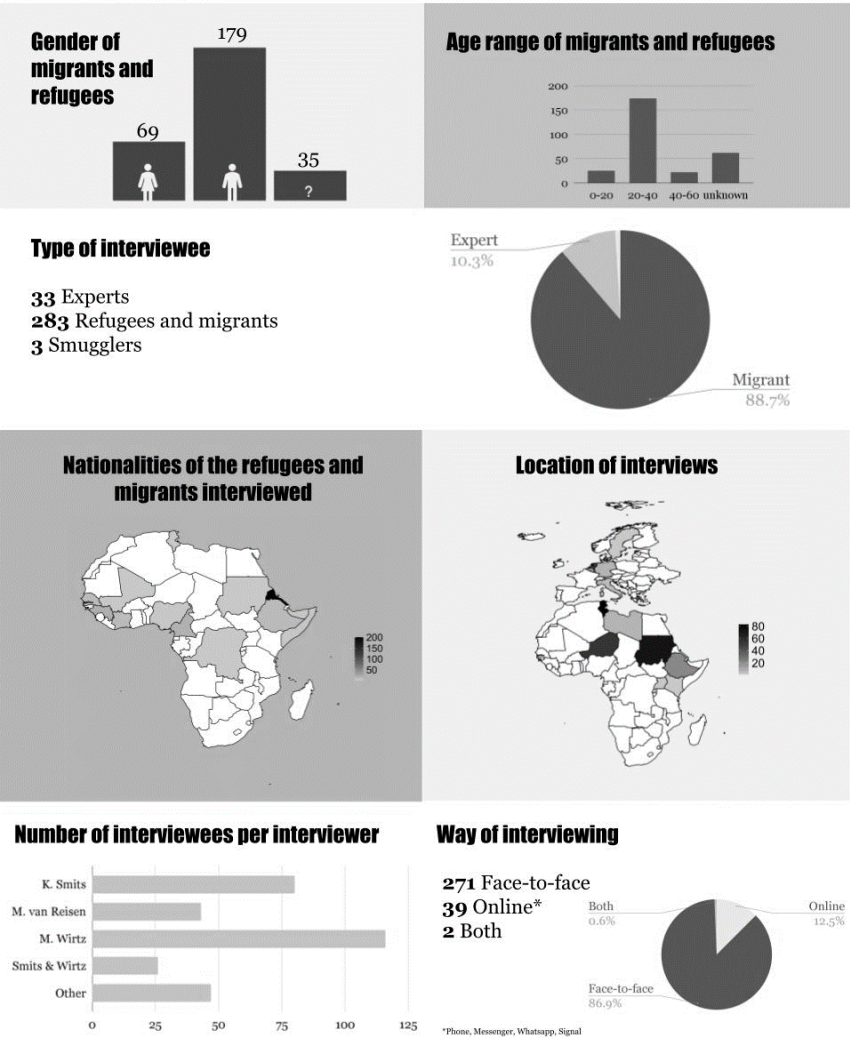
The large majority of the interviews analysed in this chapter were carried out between March 2019 and December 2021 by Morgane Wirtz, Klara Smits and Adoum Moussa. Interviews by Mirjam Van Reisen were conducted in small focus groups, and several interviews from her previous research have been re-used. The SDDI research includes 312 participants in interviews. A total of 213 interviews were conducted and 12 reports based on interviews were analysed. Some

of the interviews were held with more than one person at a time. This included 11 focus group interviews. Two-thirds of the interviewees were male. Of the respondents interviewed, 33 were experts/resource persons; 3 were smugglers; and 283 were refugees/migrants (89%). Of the refugees/migrants, 128 had been trafficked in Libya. Two-thirds of the refugees and migrants interviewed were aged between 20 and 40 years. The majority of the interviewees (n=203) were Eritrean. Other interviewees were from: Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia. The interviews were held in Belgium, Italy, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, the Netherlands, Niger, Sudan, Tunisia, and online. The majority of interviewees were in Tunisia (n=83), Sudan (n=73), Niger (n=54) and the Netherlands (n=48).

After analysing all interviews, the interviews with migrants and refugees who had been trafficked in Libya (n=128) were used for closer analysis. These were coded and labelled according to the Libyan cities they had travelled through and the money they paid to reach the next destination. A second coding and labelling was conducted in parallel on detention facilities. All detention facilities described by the interviewees have been indexed and coded using the labels: city; type of detention facility (official, unofficial, departure point); name of the place; who worked there; who the detainees were; the number of interviewees who mentioned the place; the nationality of interviewee; date of detention; the mention of killings, torture, forced labour, sexual violence, starvation, disease, or connections with human trafficking networks (for official detention centres); the impact of the war in Libya on the interviewee; complaints about NGOs and UN agencies (yes/no); and other. This coding and labelling allowed the author to compare across testimonies and highlight the places where different interviewees met in different places and identify if they were imprisoned together, among other things.

Figure 10.2. Overview of interview statistics⁵

312 Interviewees



⁵ Some interviewees are noted as both expert and refugee/migrant, but only counted once towards the interviewee total.

The following sections present the five main routes used by the victims of human trafficking to enter and leave Libya. The southern route, along the border with Niger and Chad, is mainly used by migrants and refugees from West Africa. The second route is in the south-east of the country near Libya's border with Sudan and Chad. It is the main road taken by migrants and refugees from East Africa, including Eritrean refugees. The third route travels along the west of Libya, along the border with Algeria and attracts migrants and refugees primarily from West African countries. The fourth route is in north-west Libya, at the border with Tunisia and is used by Tunisians and Libyans, as well as migrants and refugees from East and West Africa. The fifth route is on the east coast of Libya and follows the Egyptian border, with migrants and refugees typically arriving from Egypt. Asian and East African migrants and refugees also take this path. In the north-west of Libya, all routes converge. Departure points are located in several coastal cities for journey across the Mediterranean Sea. The majority of official detention centres are also situated in that part of the country.

Southern route (from Niger)

Originating from Senegal, Nigeria, Mali, Guinea, Gambia and other places in West Africa, people on the move meet in the area of Agadez, a city in the north of Niger. From the interviews, it becomes clear that the city of Agadez is a gateway to the Sahara and an important crossroad. It is here that the tarred road ends and migrants and refugees say that they call a 'smuggler' to organise the rest of their journey to Libya. These smugglers are often Tuaregs⁶ or Toubou,⁷ as

⁶ The Tuareg are a traditionally nomadic ethnic group that live in the Sahara in Libya, Algeria, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuareg_people).

⁷ The Toubou (also spelled Tubu) are a traditionally nomadic ethnic group that live in the Sahara, mainly in Chad, Libya, Niger and Sudan (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toubou_people).

they know the Sahara well. But there are also many West Africans in Niger who organise the journey of their compatriots to Libya.

Since 2016, smuggling has been illegal in Niger and is actively policed. As a result, departures have decreased drastically. Those that do take place are organised at night or with the support of the security forces who control the checkpoints to the city. Agadez is also sometimes bypassed and departures are organised from other towns, such as Zinder (Wirtz, 2019).

To leave Agadez, migrants and refugees are generally loaded on to 4×4 Toyota Hilux vehicles, with 28 passengers per vehicle. To reach Sabha, in the south of Libya, it takes five days of travel from Agadez. These journeys are exhausting and many accidents have been reported (see Chapter 9: *Deceived and Exploited: Classifying the Practice as Human Trafficking*). A smuggler interviewed in Agadez said “The Sahara has become a cemetery ordeal” (Interviewee 1001, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, 2018).⁸

In 2022, Libya started expelling migrants, which has driven up the amounts charged by smugglers in Agadez. Adoum Moussa, journalist and researcher in Agadez explained the following:

By the start of 2022, Libya has started to expel migrants of all nationalities along this road. They are brought in Libyan trucks directly to Agadez. This resulted in an increase in the prices of smugglers. In 2022, migrants/refugees paid around West African franc 750,000 [EUR 1,150] to go from Agadez to Sabha. (Interviewee 2001, interview with Wirtz, WhatsApp messages, March 2022)

The prices were lower in 2019:

In 2019, the price for Sabha was CFA 250,000 [EUR 380], CFA 200,000 [EUR 305] for Qatrun and CFA 400,000 [EUR 610] for Tripoli. (Interviewee 1080, interview with Moussa, face-to-face, October 2020)

The main cities in southern Libya mentioned by the interviewees are Qatrun, Sabha and Brak Al Shati. These cities are also destinations

⁸ This interview was also published in the documentary Teghadez Agadez (Wirtz, 2019).

for migrants and refugees from Chad. This route is mainly used by West African and Sudanese migrants and refugees and passes through the gold mines in the north of the country (Interviewee 1104, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022).

Although the number of migrants using the southern route is impossible to calculate, in a survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) over a year in 2020, a total of 40,886 outgoing migrants, going mainly to Libya, were registered in Niger, while a total of 9,756 migrants going to Libya were registered in Chad (IOM, 2021b).

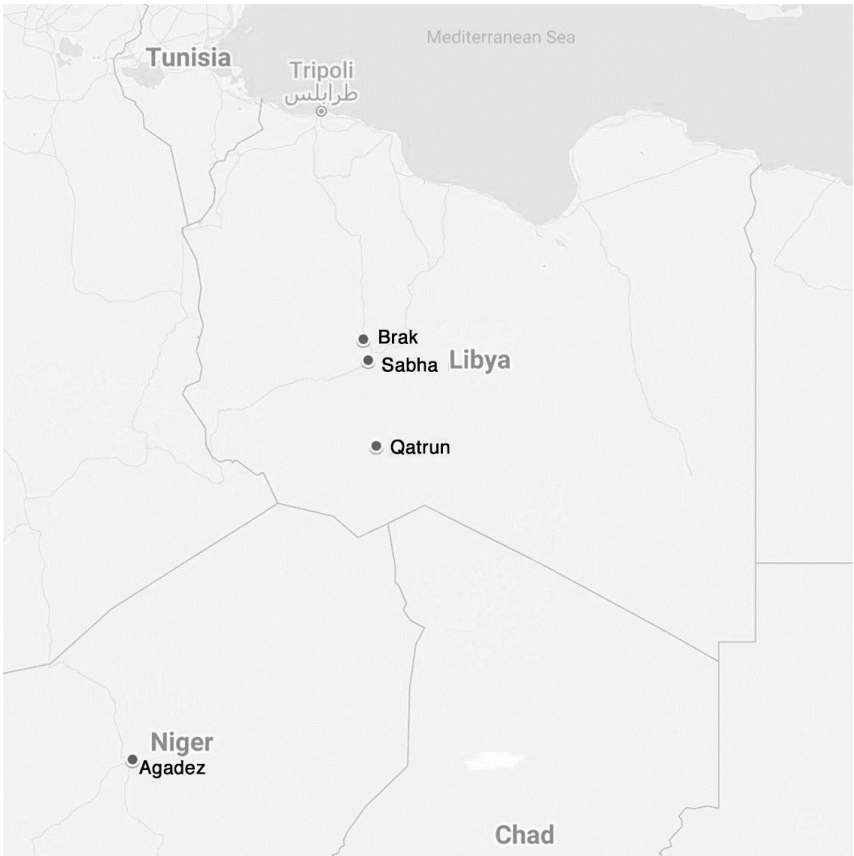


Figure 10.3. Migration hubs along the southern route

(Source: Based on primary data and created from Map data ©2022 Google)

Qatrun

Qatrun is one of the first oases in Libya after crossing the border from Niger or Chad. It is a small city in the middle of the Sahara, on the road to Sabha. It is not a main stopping point, so the area serves mostly as a transient space (Interviewee 1043, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020). Migrants may decide to stop in Qatrun to work for a while and collect money to continue their journey. A Gambian migrant shared his experience in Qatrun:

In Qatrun, fortunately, they don't have mentality job. They have ... like if they are building houses, sometimes you help them, do a smear for the house, scrape it, or sometimes they don't carry loads. If they have loads, you help them drop them. Sometimes you go to offload shops [warehouses], big shops used to bring rice, or macaroni [...]. Sometimes they give you a shop to sit down there for months offloading loads and bringing loads inside. They pay you. (Interviewee 1043, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020)

From Qatrun, transit is possible to Niger, Chad or north, towards Sabha and Tripoli. The Gambian interviewee stated that girls were raped and many people died during transit at Qatrun (Interviewee 1043, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020).

Sabha

Sabha is a town in a Saharan oasis. It is the capital of the Fezzan region and is situated in south-western Libya, approximately 640 kilometres south of Tripoli. The city is an important migration hub. It is the main stopover for migrants and refugees who enter Libya through Niger and Chad. It is also a destination for migrants and refugees who enter the country from Algeria. Many migrants and refugees who we interviewed for the purpose of this chapter explained that they worked for a while in Sabha before continuing their journey northward or back to Niger. Testimonies of forced work in the city and the gardens around were also collected:

[We stayed three days in the Sahara, without food or water. He saw us, he said he doesn't want to create problems. We will stay in his garden, we will work to do everything there. Then he will help us go to Tripoli. When we arrived at his house, we started working, he took us as prisoners. [...]] We work for him for free for up

to a month like that. When he left, we also continued to work. He closed the door, and gave us milk and tea. We broke down the door. We went straight to the centre of Sabha. In Sabha we found black people working there who sleep with their bosses, they don't pay the money. They pay up to a year, they say: we will send you to Europe. We saw that those people don't speak logically [make sense]. (Interviewee 1045, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020)

There are many places in Sabha where migrants and refugees hide before being transferred to their next destination.

There was one DCIM run detention centre in Sabha, the Sabha Tariq al-Matar detention centre, which is listed by the UNHCR as closed as of October 2021 (UNHCR, 2021). Since 2022, migrants have been gathered in another detention place in Sabha (which is run by Libyan authorities, but it is not clear if this is an official detention centre), before being expelled to Niger (Interviewee 2001, interview with Wirtz, WhatsApp messages, March 2022). The interviewees mentioned four other places where they were detained – these were not official detention centres and it is not clear who they were operated by. Twelve detainees, from various African countries, were locked up in the smallest one, 105 in the largest one. Two interviewees reported being beaten and three experienced sexual violence in these centres. A Senegalese interviewee was shot as he tried to escape one such place and left without receiving medical care (Interviewee 1046, interview with Moussa, face-to-face, June 2020).

Sabha is also a stopover on the prostitution network that goes from Nigeria and the sub-region to Europe (Chapter 15: *“We had no Choice; it's Part of the Journey”: A Culture of Sexual Violence in Libya*). Since the 1990s, women have been trafficked on this road (Kuschminder, 2020). After being promised a trip to Europe and a job, they find themselves in Niger, Libya or Europe, having to pay off huge debts through prostitution (Wirtz, 2021).

After their stay in Sabha migrants and refugees go to Niger, Chad, Algeria or travel towards Tripoli and the north of Libya.

Brak

Brak, or Brak al Shati, is a small town in the desert surrounded by many agricultural gardens. The city is located 80 kilometres north of Sabha, on the road to Shwayrif and the coast. Forced labour and human trafficking for ransom have been reported in Brak. Networks of human trafficking of refugees from East Africa have a branch in Brak. Eight interviewees (seven Eritreans and one Somali) stated that they had been detained in Brak and faced severe human right violations. Five of them had been held in the warehouse of Aziz,⁹ a notorious Sudanese human trafficker (see Chapter 11: “*You are the Ball – They are the Players*”: *The Human Traffickers of Eritreans in Libya*) and reported seeing him there. One interviewee stated that 190 women, children and men were locked up in Aziz’s warehouse. Another one talked about 900 detainees. Shooting (to death), electric shock, beating, burns, hanging upside down or with hands and legs together, and sexual violence have all been reported by interviewees as occurring there.

After their stay in Brak, some interviewees reported being transferred to Bani Walid or Shwayrif. Others continued their journey to Tripoli or Sabratha.

South-eastern route (from Sudan)

Khartoum, a large, modern city, crossed by the Nile was the departure point for the large majority of the people interviewed for this chapter. This route, which links Sudan to Libya, is described in detail in Chapter 9: *Deceived and Exploited: Classifying the Practice as Human Trafficking*. The migrants and refugees who take it are mainly Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somalis and Sudanese. It is often in Khartoum

⁹ Note, this name was given in the interviews and is of an alleged trafficker. The author makes no comment on whether or not he is in fact a human trafficker, but is merely presenting what was said in the interviews.

that they come in contact with a ‘connection man’¹⁰ who organises their journey to Libya. The connection men were identified by the interviewees as Sudanese, Eritreans or Ethiopians. The interviewees reported making a deal for the journey. In 2016, the price was around USD 1,600 for crossing the Sahara, plus another USD 1,600 for crossing the Mediterranean Sea. However, most of the time, the price actually paid by the refugees is way higher than this, as they are sold, kidnapped and arrested several times on their journey through Libya.

Departures can be organised from different places in Sudan, but were mainly reported in Khartoum or in its opposite city on the west bank of the River Nile – Omdurman. Passengers hide for a while and, when they reach a sufficient number, are loaded into big Lorries and carried north. At a certain point in the desert, the passengers are transferred from the Lorries to 4×4 pick-ups.

The trip from Khartoum to Libya takes one month on average. The interviewees mentioned several stops where they were handed from one driver to another. A young Eritrean explained:

[We spent] one month, alone in the Sahara. One week without food, without water. Many people were killed there, also children. We went by car and walking. A bit by car, and also walking. But it took a really long time. [We were transferred between drivers] from Sudan to Chad ... from Chad to Libya ... from Libya to Libya ... almost three times. Four times! (Interviewee 0002, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019)

As this excerpt shows, the road from Sudan to Libya is dangerous. Most of the interviewees mentioned lack of food and water. Sexual violence was also reported. Many witnessed the death of other passengers who fell from the car, were abandoned or killed by the drivers.

A portion of the road between Sudan and Libya might be through Chad. Many interviewees mentioned fighting between their Libyan

¹⁰ The term ‘connection man’ was widely used by the migrants and refugees interviewed to refer to both those at the top of the trafficking network, as well as the facilitators/smugglers (see Glossary of Terms).

drivers and Chadian armed groups. Some were kidnapped by Chadian armed groups and sold to human traffickers. The destinations mentioned by the interviewees who took this route were Kufra, Ajdabiya, Bani Walid, Shwayrif, Brak, Ishlavia and Umm al Aranib.



Figure 10.4. Migration hubs along the south-eastern route

(Source: Based on primary data created from Map data ©2022 Google)

Kufra

Kufra is an oasis town in the south of Cyrenaica region in Libya. It is isolated in the Sahara desert. The city is surrounded by gardens dedicated to agriculture. There are two official detention centres in Kufra: one managed by the DCIM and one established and maintained by the municipal government (Malakooti, 2019).

Kufra is an important migration hub. It is the first stopover for migrants and refugees who enter Libya from Sudan, sometimes via Chad. Most of these migrants and refugees are Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali, Sudanese, and Chadian, but other nationalities are also present. When, asked about the nationality of migrants and refugees in Libya, a representative of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) answered:

I think there are all nationalities there. There are even North Koreans. North Koreans I think the only places in the world where you can find them are Venezuela and Libya. I am not joking! In Kufra, there are North Koreans by the way!
(Interviewee 1105, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)

The majority of the Eritreans interviewed for the purpose of this chapter transited through Kufra. In or around the city, there are many places (sheds, farms and warehouses) where people on the move are received and divided according to their traffickers. One interviewee shared the following:

We reached Kufra. They brought us to a warehouse outside of the city, in farmland. I stayed there one night. They separated us; the people from the truck, to different places. Everybody has a different smuggler. I followed the way of my smuggler with other migrants. (Interviewee 1021, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

In most cases, the interviewees explained that they spent a few days in Kufra and were then transferred to other cities, where they became victims of human trafficking for ransom.

However, people are also held in holding camps and warehouses in the city, which are not in any way run by the government. Eight different places were mentioned by the interviewees. Holding between 70 and 750 detainees, these are places where human trafficking for ransom is practised. The conditions in those places (also called warehouses by the interviewees) were reported to be

deplorable. Disease, lack of hygiene and starvation are common. An interviewee, who was asked to pay USD 8,225 in Kufra remembers:

Every morning, there was a dead body. People were dying every morning. Ten people. They throw them outside. It is because of the hunger. (Interviewee 1028, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

The young man quoted above was shot in the leg as he tried to escape from the warehouse. Interviewees who were detained in such places reported being beaten with plastic tubes and sticks, shot, having water thrown at them, their hands and legs tied together, and experiencing sexual violence.

The deportation of migrants and refugees to Sudan or Chad is organised in Kufra (Creta, 2020). All of the interviewees met for this chapter continued moving north after their transit in Kufra. Most of them were sent to Shwayrif or Bani Walid.

Shwayrif

Shwayrif is a small city in the Sahara desert in the north of Libya. It is a migration hub for East African migrants and refugees on their way to the northwest of Libya. Many come through Kufra. It is also a place where people who have been kidnapped on their journey are brought. Human trafficking for ransom is practised in Shwayrif.

Five interviewees described places (e.g., holding camps, warehouses) where they had been detained in Shwayrif. Three of them had been imprisoned in a detention centre belonging to Abdusalam,¹¹ a well-known Eritrean human trafficker (see Chapter 11: *“You are the Ball – They are the Players”: The Human Traffickers of Eritreans in Libya*). They were detained with between 1,000 and 2,000 other Eritrean, Somali and Sudanese refugees and reported having arrived there after being kidnapped on the way to the Mediterranean Sea.

¹¹ Note, this name was given in the interviews and is of an alleged trafficker. The author makes no comment on whether or not he is in fact a human trafficker, but is merely presenting what was said in the interviews.

Interviewees who fell into the hands of human traffickers in Shwayrif mentioned starvation, lack of hygiene, disease, beating, and sexual violence. One mentioned that several detainees died of hunger (Interviewee 0016, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019).

After their transit in Shwayrif, the interviewees were brought to Sabratha, Bani Walid or Tripoli.

Western route (from Algeria)

Algeria is a working destination for many West African migrants and refugees. They save money there, before returning home or continuing their journey to Libya or Morocco. From the north of Algeria, the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea to Spain or Italy is also organised. The interviewees who had passed through Algeria described a difficult situation, in which they are constantly chased by the police who arrest illegal migrants and deport them to the border with Niger in the desert.

There are two important crossing points between Algeria and Libya. The first is at Ghat, in the south-west of Libya, which is used by people travelling towards Sabha. The second is at Gadamis, in western Libya, and is used by people who wish to continue their journey to Tripoli or coastal cities in Libya.

As this research was conducted in Niger, Sudan and Tunisia, this is not one of the routes studied. However, in the course of the research, five people were interviewed, originally from West Africa, who had crossed the border between Algeria and Libya through Gadamis. According to them, the smugglers who work on this border are from Algeria, Libya and various West African countries. They collaborate and are organised in networks. The price of the trip is negotiated in Algeria before departure. In 2018 and 2019, it varied between EUR 120 and 600, depending on the destination.

The crossing of the border often starts at Debdeb, in Algeria. Two interviewees, a couple from Guinea, explained the conditions under which they made the journey:

They crammed us in the back of 4x4s, like cans of sardines. [...] Sometimes they packed us in. We were tied up with tarpaulins. The air couldn't get in. There were many people who suffocated. We tried to lift the tarpaulin to breathe fresh air. [...] After Zintan, a car came to get us. They put us in the trunk. You can't even see where you are going. (Interviewee 1039, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020)

The crossing of the Libyan-Algerian border was particularly hard for this couple. They witnessed the death of passengers, including a pregnant woman. They were also beaten by drivers and the woman was raped by Libyan smugglers (Chapter 15: “*We had no Choice; it's Part of the Journey*”: *A Culture of Sexual Violence in Libya*). Another Gambian interviewee crossed the border on foot, accompanied by an Algerian guide. He described his journey as follows:

I took the car from Algeria, I came to Debdeb. After Debdeb, we walked between Debdeb and Libya, almost 25 km – on foot. There were women, children. There was also an Algerian. He was the one who took us across the border. When we arrived in Libya, he was going to return [to Algeria]. Now there were Libyans [who took responsibility for us]. It's a network that does business among themselves. (Interviewee 1043, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020)

This interviewee's original destination was Tripoli, but he was kidnapped on the road and forced into slavery in Sabha. Several interviewees mentioned bandits working along this border.

The destinations mentioned by the interviewees who took the road from Algeria to Libya are Gadamis, Sabha, Zintan and Tripoli. Like the other roads, the road between Debdeb and Gadamis is also taken to leave Libya.



Figure 10.5. Migration hubs along the western route

(Source: Based on primary data created from Map data ©2022 Google)

North-western route (from Tunisia)

Zarzis and Medinine are two cities in the south of Tunisia. The first is oriented towards the Mediterranean Sea and offers its inhabitants and tourists wide white sandy beaches, adorned with palm trees. The second is inland, planted with olive trees and has a drier climate. Both cities receive migrants and refugees from all over Africa, who have arrived directly in Tunisia by plane or fled Libya by land. The main crossing point along this border is Ra's Ajdir.

For people who do not have Libyan or Tunisian nationality, the border crossing between the two countries is more likely to be from Libya to Tunisia than vice versa.

However, in recent years, there has been a return to Libya of migrants and refugees who had originally fled Libya due to gross human rights violations. Their objective is usually to cross the Mediterranean Sea from Libya. They know that by taking this route they risk their lives, but, as one interviewee explained: “Instead of living for nothing, you have to die for something” (Interviewee 1059, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020). Tunisia often does not meet the migrants and refugees’ expectations in terms of protection, job opportunities and wages (Chapter 16: “*Gate Closed*”: *The Situation in Libya during COVID-19*).

To cross the border between Tunisia and Libya, there is no need for a smuggler. Attending a meeting in an apartment, a young refugee in Medinine, in Tunisia, wearing gloves, a simple shirt and a pair of jeans said a casual: “Goodbye, guys!” (Interviewee 1029, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020). There was no hugging, no bag, nothing at all. It was as if he was just going to the shop next door. But he was going to Libya. One of his friends explained:

Of course he doesn't take a bag with him. Otherwise, he could be identified. He is going to take a car to Ben Gardane and then he will cross the border on foot, hiding in the bushes. If the police catch him, they will bring him back. There is a guy here today: the police arrested him yesterday and brought him back. He will leave again tomorrow. (Interviewee 1027, informal conversation with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020)

The young refugee added:

After I reach the border with Libya, I will again use my own feet. (Interviewee 1029, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020)

The destinations mentioned by the interviewees who took the road from Tunisia to Libya are Zuwarah, Zawiyah and Tripoli, from where they try to take a boat across the Mediterranean Sea.



Figure 10.6. Migration hubs on the north-western route
 (Source: Based on primary data created from Map data ©2022 Google)

North-eastern road (from Egypt)

During our research, we met one man, a 27-year-old Eritrean, who had entered Libya from Egypt. Being aware of the fact that migration in the east of Libya is often underreported, we interviewed a few experts on the topic to gain an initial understanding of it. This section contains the results of those interviews. A representative from the Libyan branch of the OMCT shared the following:

It is mainly Egyptians who take the road from Egypt to Libya. People from Syria, Bangladesh, Iran or other Asian countries, and a few Somali and Eritreans, also use this migration path. They are mainly registered at the UNHCR in Egypt and,

because they have waited for a long time, then they decided to cross. (Interviewee 1105, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)

It is often through intermediaries that refugees in Egypt contact a facilitator (someone who arranges the journey) to take them to Libya. An activist for the human rights of Eritrean refugees explained:

The Egyptian mafias cannot deal with refugees, because they don't know their language. They don't know how to communicate with them. So there are some [people] working in the middle. Some of them are Eritrean, Sudanese, also Nigerians and Somalis, like that. They send them refugees. The [smugglers] motivate them by money, or they motivate them saying: "If you bring 50 or 60 refugees, finally we will take you with your family without any money to Italy". (Interviewee 1100, interview with Wirtz, WhatsApp call, March 2022)

The representative from OMCT stated that the facilitators working on this border are mainly Egyptians and Libyans from the Ouled Ali tribe:

The people who are doing business at the border, the families, they don't consider themselves as Egyptians or Libyans. [...] In the east, there are specialised families who are doing business with special or specific items. For instance, you have families who are controlling only drugs. Anyone can't jump into this business. And there is a kind of family monopoly. [Something like:] "This is our business and no one jumps in". [...] And you have another family doing only food. And another family doing only human trafficking. They don't call it trafficking actually, they call it just smuggling, because it is just the transport. Bringing people from one point to another point. (Interviewee 1105, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)

The facilitators can also be from other countries:

From Cairo, I started the way to Libya. An Eritrean connection man took me in charge. I agreed with him from Egypt to Italy: USD 3,000. I took a pick-up to travel. At the border between Egypt and Libya, we crossed on foot. After that, we took back the car. (Interviewee 1008, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

According to the experts interviewed, the price paid by migrants and refugees to cross the border to the west of Libya varies from around

USD 2,000 to 3,000. It is possible to pay less, if the destination agreed on is in the east, closer to the border. Some Egyptians pay less, around USD 1,500, and have the opportunity to pay in Egyptian currency.

Departures to Libya are organised in small coastal Egyptian cities, like Marsa Matruh. Then, as explained by interviewee 1008, portions of this journey can be done on foot and other parts in pick-ups, Land Rovers and Land Cruisers.

The journey between Egypt and Libya can be really dangerous; two interviewees mentioned organ trafficking on this road:

The Egyptian government found many people in the desert or at the border, they already had many operations on their body, like that. This also happens there. Also there are people who say: "We were together but five of us got lost. When we got up in the morning, we didn't find five of our friends. We don't know who took them". When they ask the mafia, they say: "Oh they escaped from us. What do you want us to do? They escaped from us". And in fact, the mafia always choose two, three or four of the hundred refugees. One, two, three, four, or five and they bring them to those doctors and they start to do operations, because they need their organs. This is happening all the time.

If 150 people start to move from Egypt, 135 or 140 will reach [Libya]. Maybe 15 people, maybe 10 people, maybe 5 people are always lost on the way. And, of course, 3 of them, 4 of them pass away because of diseases, like heart attacks or something. But some of them are already chosen by the mafia groups to take them to those doctors and to kill them or give them some drugs or medicines and to start taking their organs. After that they kill them or sell them. This kind of story, we hear a lot about in Egypt. (Interviewee 1111, interview with Wirtz, Phone call, March 2022)

The first transit city after crossing the border from Egypt is Tobruk. From there, migrants and refugees can continue their way along the Libyan coast, or take 'the 200 road' that directly links Tobruk to Ajdabiya. Later, they can continue their journey towards Tripoli or Libyan cities on the western coast, from where they can try to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. The OMCT representative shared:

There are not many human traffickers in the east [of Libya] compared to the west. (Interviewee 1105, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)

In the east, the business practised is more smuggling of people than human trafficking for ransom. However, it also happens that migrants and refugees are sold on the north-eastern road and brought to Bani Walid or other places where migrants and refugees are detained across the country (see the section on Ajdabiya and Benghazi).

Tobruk

Tobruk is a city in the north-east of Libya on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea. It is the first important city for people who enter Libya from Egypt. There is one official detention centre in Tobruk, the Tobruk detention centre, operated by the DCIM (Malakooti, 2019).

From Tobruk, migrants and refugees can continue their way in the direction of other cities on the coast of eastern Libya or take ‘the 200’, which is a 200 kilometre road that directly links Tobruk to Ajdabiya, which, according to the OMCT representative, avoids cities and a large number of checkpoints (Interviewee 1105, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022).

According to the OMCT representative, there are also departures by boat to Europe from Tobruk. Interviewed in March 2022, the OMCT representative stated:

What we have observed since the beginning of this year is that there are some departures from the East [of Libya]. Mainly from Tobruk. The last two weeks, a boat drowned and about 20 people, Egyptians and Syrians drowned. And the bodies are still coming out from the shore to the coast. (Interviewee 1105, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)



Figure 10.7. Migration hubs on the north-eastern route

(Source: Based on primary data created from Map data ©2022 Google)

Jaghub

Jaghub is a village in the Libyan desert, located 30 kilometres west of the border with Egypt and 500 kilometres south-east of Benghazi. There is one official detention centre in Jaghub, the Jaghub detention centre, which was reportedly closed in July 2021 (UNHCR, 2021). A translator who worked for an NGO in Libya was able to visit this centre in 2018. He describes it in these terms:

[Compared to the other detention centres], it was a fairly quiet, peaceful building. People are inside. It was not full. So it was quiet. Behind bars. (Interviewee 2000, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, December 2021)

The translator added that about 2,000 sub-Saharan men, women and children were locked in this centre. He also saw several Congolese people there.

More information has to be collected to detail the crossing of the border between Egypt and Libya at this point, including how people arrive in this detention centre and the roads taken by migrants and refugees after Jaghbub.

Benghazi

Benghazi is the second most populated city in Libya. It is the main town in the east of the country. Large parts of this city were destroyed during the civil war. As the city is on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, it is one departure point for the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea to Malta or Italy, which lie 700 kilometres north-west of Benghazi. There is one active official detention centre for migrants and refugees in Benghazi, called Ganfuda detention centre, which is run by the DCIM (Global Detention Project, 2021).

During the research, we met two migrants/refugees who travelled through Benghazi during their journey. One had been arrested by soldiers in Ajdabiya and brought to the immigration service in the city (Interviewee 1021, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019). For the other one, Benghazi was a transit town on the way between Sudan and Tripoli (Interviewee 0008, interview with Smits, face-to-face, April 2019). According to a human rights defender for Eritrean refugees, there is a direct connection between Sudan and Benghazi:

The trip would go from Sudan to Benghazi. Then from Benghazi to Tripoli. [...] At the border, the drivers change to Libyans. The [passengers] don't know the drivers. Then they are divided. First divided, then they pay. Everybody knows their smuggler. Somebody in Benghazi calls with the contact person: did you receive the money? If yes, then, "OK, go". The security [forces] of Benghazi gives cars and weapons for the traffickers to transport the refugees. The driver's only duty is to keep the passengers and transport them. (Interviewee 0023, interview with Smits, face-to-face, February 2022)

The quote above suggests that there are unofficial detention centres (e.g., holding camps, warehouses) in Benghazi, but details about these places were not uncovered during the research. A warehouse dedicated to human trafficking for ransom in Al Marj, 100 kilometres east of Benghazi was, however, mentioned (Interviewee 1105, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022).

After transiting to Benghazi, migrants and refugees may attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea or take the road to Tripoli. This road is very difficult, as detailed by an interviewee from Eritrea:

[When] we are leaving from Benghazi, to Tripoli, we are going under the big truck. We are under the truck, and then they put them over us ... bricks, for building houses. Ah, to hide the people. So difficult. Yes, even two people died in that time, because we don't have any air. If you protest, they beat you. (Interviewee 0008, interview with Smits, face-to-face, April 2019)

Refugees travelling between Benghazi and Tripoli are sometimes diverted from their original destination to an unofficial detention centre (e.g., holding camp, warehouse), as the director of the Foundation Human Rights for Eritreans, Muluberhan Temelso explained:

[From Benghazi], some don't want to take them to Tripoli, but want to take them back to the desert. I received some messages from refugees who had started their journey, but still they have no idea where they are. [...] It can take about 11 hours from Benghazi to Bani Walid, maybe more. It depends on the way they use. If they pay for the checkpoints, it is shorter. But if they don't pay, they are forced to take other ways. It takes more time. (Interviewee 1101, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)

Ajdabiya

Ajdabiya is a town in east Libya, 160 kilometres south of Benghazi. The city is at the intersection of the roads from Kufra, Tobruk, Benghazi, Misrata and Tripoli. It is an important migration hub. There is one official detention centre in Ajdabiya, called the Ajdabiya detention centre, which is controlled by armed groups. Given the power of armed groups in Libya, the Minister of Interior cannot control all of the detention centres. It seems that the DCIM has no

other role than to finance these centres, which is the case for this one (Malakooti, 2019).

The experts interviewed for this chapter compared Ajdabiya to Kufra. It is one of the first transit cities for migrants and refugees who enter Libya from Sudan. The OMCT representative described it as follows:

One side of the town is full of migrants and the [smugglers] do their own business and transportation. It is a big hub. It is the same as in Kufra. One side of the city is well known as inhabited by the migrant community, and also by traffickers and smugglers, and everything is happening in that place. Drugs and prostitution. It is the same. (Interviewee 1105, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)

The OCMT representative added that migrants and refugees do not usually stay long in Ajdabiya. It is a transit city where people are sorted in big warehouses before continuing their journey. In some of those places up to a thousand people are locked up, as Muluberhan Temelso, director of the Foundation for Human Rights for Eritreans, explained:

Ajdabiya and Kufra are similar places. They receive people from Sudan. They are only different in distance. It depends on whom the migrants belong to, someone from Ajdabiya or someone going to Kufra. It depends on who the smuggler is. (Interviewee 1101, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)

The facilitators that Muluberhan Temelso refers to are of all nationalities and they collaborate with Libyans. They organise the transfer of people from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia. Temelso describes unofficial detention centres (e.g., holding camps, warehouses) where they are locked up before continuing their journey:

When you arrive in Ajdabiya, you are forced to pay the money for the desert. There are hangars there. You cannot jump through the fence of the garden. There is a big iron door. They lock you there. There is a toilet there, water there. And you only get out of that house to eat your meal once a day. So it is a big house. There are several detention centres for the refugees there. They force them to pay for the journey they have already made. (Muluberhan Temelso, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)

During the research, two Eritrean refugees were interviewed who had been imprisoned in the same unofficial detention centre in Ajdabiya. They described a very tiny place of 20 square metres hosting 80 men, women and children. One of them said:

We eat there, we sleep there and we use the toilet inside there. They were beating us. They said: "keep quiet, keep quiet. No talk. No movement". There was much sickness and disease. We had no water to clean and we were dirty and we had insects. There was a lack of blood because there was no food. There was skin infections. And also, the weather was very cold in our blankets and clothes. There was much suffering. It was planned to ask us to pay money. Then, we escaped from there. All of us. It was about morning. We tied the Libyan guard and we escaped. (Interviewee 1021, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

Ajdabiya is a two-day drive to Tripoli. When they take that way, migrants and refugees are sometimes diverted from their original destination to the desert and brought to Shwayrif or Bani Walid where they fall victim to human trafficking for ransom (Interviewee 1105, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022).

North Libya – Departure point for the Mediterranean Sea

In this section, the details about the locations in North Libya mentioned by the interviewees are presented. It starts with Tripoli and Bani Walid, then other locations are listed in alphabetical order.

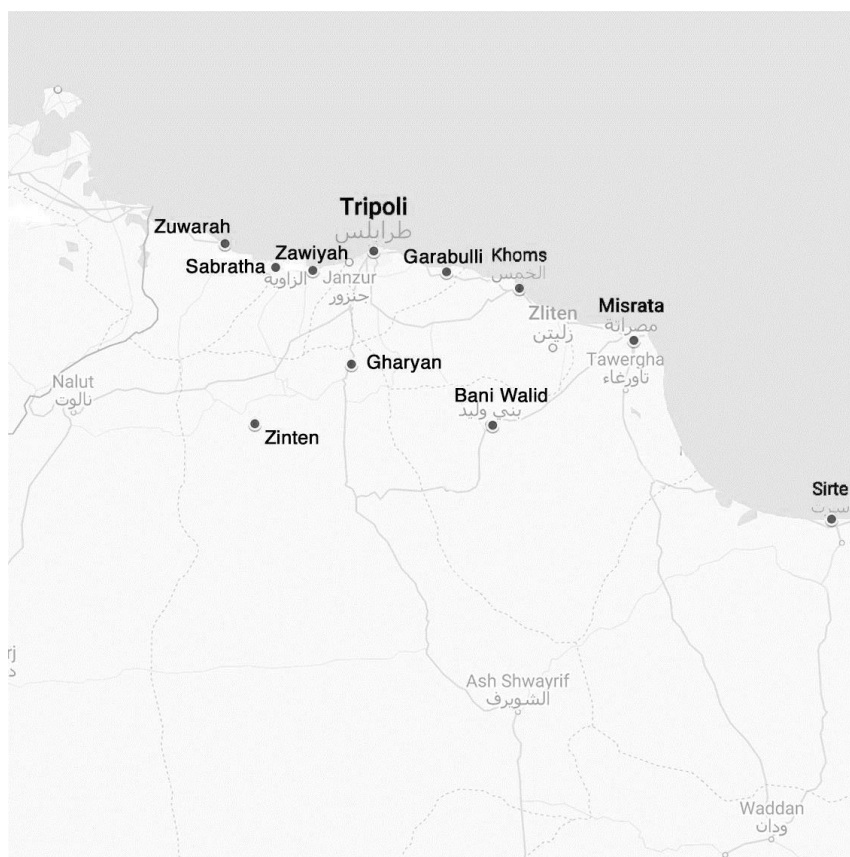


Figure 10.8. Migration hubs in north Libya

(Source: Based on primary data created from Map data ©2022 Google)

Tripoli

Tripoli is built on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, across from Malta and Sicily. It is the capital of Libya and the largest city in the country. It is the most popular region for migration movement. According to the IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), approximately 86,280 (nearly 15%) of the 575,874 migrants and refugees in Libya are in Tripoli (IOM, 2021a). Many of them live and work in the capital. They often share a house that they rent with other migrants and refugees.

Situated in the north-west of the country, Tripoli is a hotspot for migrants and refugees wishing to cross the Mediterranean Sea to

Europe. Four departure points were reported by the interviewees in Tripoli. A man explained that, in 2016, he was in a place with 3,000 other Eritreans and Ethiopians waiting for a boat, good weather and security conditions to allow them to depart to Europe (Interviewee 0006, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019).

Two interviewees reported experiencing bad treatment while at the departure point. One was forced to drink urine by a guard. The other one explained that at his departure point people were beaten by a whip if they made noise. The injunction not to talk and to remain silent is common at departure points. The smugglers/traffickers are afraid of being discovered by the security forces. In several cases, the interviewees never embarked on the sea crossing from Tripoli and were kidnapped or arrested and sent to other departure points or (unofficial or official) detention centres.

Four unofficial detention centres were reported by the interviewees in Tripoli. In these places, the interviewees mentioned lack of food and beatings, sometimes with iron sticks, which resulted in broken bones, threats with large knives, being burnt and electric shocks. In July 2021, eight official detention centres were reported to be active in Tripoli (UNHCR, 2021). The people interviewed for this research gave details on four of them: Qasr bin Ghashir, Tariq Al Matar, Tariq Al Sikka and Tajoura.

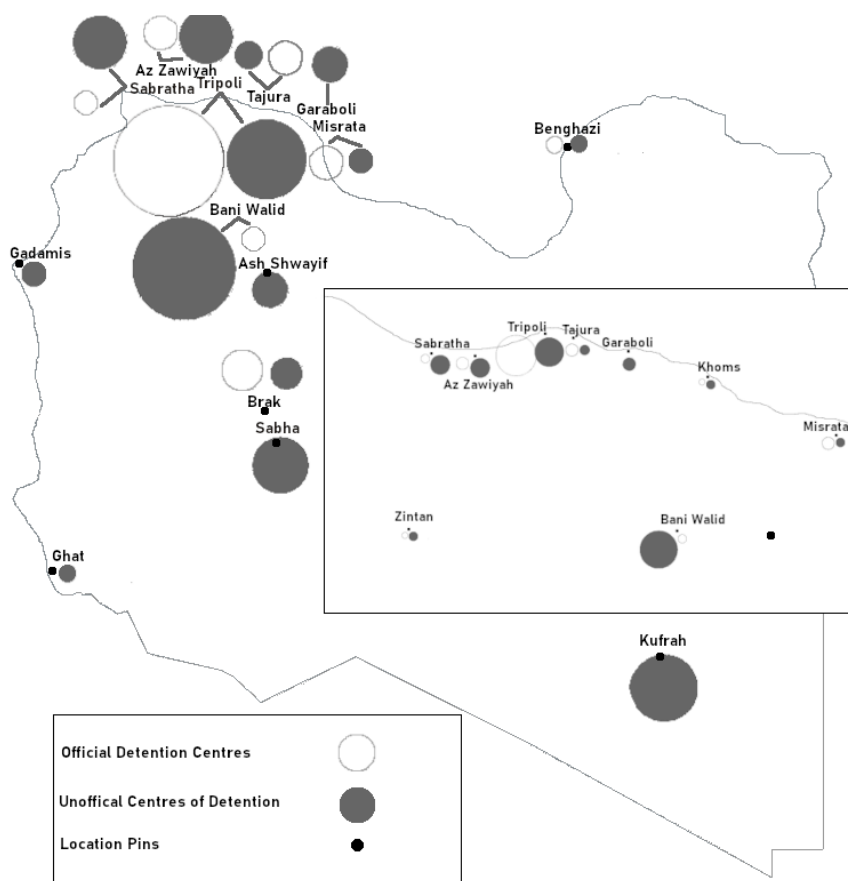


Figure 10.9. Detention centres, proportional to the number migrants and refugees detained in each centre
(Source: Based on primary data)

Qasr bin Ghashir Detention Centre

Qasr bin Ghashir is in the south of Tripoli. According to the detainees, the prison is composed of several hangars, which hold refugees and migrants, mainly Eritreans, Sudanese and Nigerians (Elumami, 2019). An Eritrean refugee contacted while he was detained in Qasr bin Ghashir in December 2018 stated that they were 300 detainees in the past and that there were now 150 women,

children and men locked up. He described Qasr bin Ghashir detention centre as follows:

We are in a big warehouse. [...] The weather is very cold. [We have] no clothes. (Interviewee 0010, interview with Smits, WhatsApp messages, December 2018)

The guards in Qasr bin Ghashir have been accused by the interviewees of working with smugglers and human traffickers:

The leader of this prison, sometimes he sends people in plastic boats [...] Some of our brothers stayed for months with this man. They paid USD 1,500 to go out of this prison. (Interviewee 0009, interview with Smits, WhatsApp message, July 2019)

The interviewees added that some refugees are forced to work in the house of the boss of the prison without receiving payment (Interviewee 0010, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019).

Interviewees also reported lack of water and food, their possessions being stolen, and beatings if they were found with forbidden items, such as mobile phones. Despite this, some were brave enough to use a phone to share information for this research.

The main danger for migrants and refugees in Qasr bin Ghashir seems to be the war. In January 2019, the detainees found themselves in the middle of the conflict. They explained later:

We are in a bad condition. [...] We are in big trouble dear [...]. Our place is a big war zone. Again, our place, our compound is the material that takes the guns from inside our compound. And everything ... the damage, the tools, they prepare in our home. They prepare the guns and everything inside the compound. (Interviewee 0010, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

On 23 April 2019, fighting erupted in the area of the detention centre and the 700 detainees – unarmed men, women and children – found themselves trapped and caught in the cross fire. There were reports of several deaths and at least 12 detainees were injured (MSF, 2019). At least 325 detainees were later evacuated to Zawiyah detention centre (Elumami, 2019).

Tajoura Detention Centre

Tajoura is a town located about 25 kilometres east of Tripoli (Malakooti, 2019). Tajoura detention centre is run by the DCIM and the al-Daman armed groups. It is infamous for an airstrike that hit the detention centre on 2 July 2019 and resulted in the death of 53 detainees and injury of 130 others (United Nations, 2019). This attack can be explained by the fact that the detention centre is actually located inside a military base. A former detainee described the centre as follows:

There are some policemen sitting in front of the door. There is a lot of hard guns and houses in Tajoura. [...] Number one is for the ladies. Number two is for Nigerian men. Number three is for Eritrean and all of those who need to be registered with the UNHCR. (Interviewee 1098, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020)

Although it is an official centre run by the DCIM, human trafficking for ransom is carried out there and the perpetrators include government officials. Interviewees reported that detainees were systematically coerced to pay government soldiers for their release (Interviewee 1048, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020). It was also reported that armed groups were “hiding Somali and Eritrean soldiers in the camp to later sell them” (Interviewee 1028, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020). An interviewee stated that kidnapping was organised by the armed groups working in the prison:

I tried to find a job inside the compound translating for the militias. [...] I was translating for them because they are kidnapping West African people from the road during the night, those who are working in cafeterias, in every place, they are kidnapping and take money from them ... they are using electric shocks inside the compound! That place! (Interviewee 1098, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020)

In Tajoura, forced labour has been reported inside and outside the detention centres. One refugee described how he was forced to work with weapons and to follow the armed group during their missions in

conflict areas (also see Chapter 13: *Hell on Earth: Conditions in Official Detention Centres in Libya*):

They told me to clean the weapons. I was cleaning the weapons with petrol and something like a machine gun, they bring it, they open it and I wash it. I did not know how to connect it and put it together. But after they taught me, I can clean it and again put it together for them. (Interviewee 1091, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, 2020)

Interviewees added that detainees were beaten if they gave information about the situation in this official detention centre, and this observation was confirmed by another researcher with knowledge of the situation (Sara Creta, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019).

Tariq al Matar Detention Centre

‘Tariq al Matar’ literally means ‘the way to the airport’ in Arabic. This detention centre is infamous among migrants and refugees and 23 of the interviewees in this research were detained there at some point in their journey. All of them describe a large hall with 1,200 to 1,500 detainees locked together. An Eritrean man shared the following:

We were sleeping on the ground. Like this size, you can't sleep on this size [...] If you try to move, you will lose your place. [...] So we did this: we stayed with friends there and half of us slept at night, half of us slept during the day. (Interviewee 1022, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

The majority of the interviewees who were in Tariq Al Matar complained about the lack of food and unsanitary conditions. Four toilets were available for the more than a thousand detainees. Refugees also mentioned tuberculosis and skin diseases. The interviewees reported people dying in this prison.

Almost all of the interviewees who had been in Tariq al Matar also complained about the attitude of the guards. They reported that they stole the belongings of detainees, including the provisions given by UNHCR. Several Eritreans said that detainees were sold to human traffickers. One day, the detainees decided to protest against the selling of other detainees and fighting started. An Eritrean man

recounted the following (similar reports were given by other interviewees):

I stayed six months in the prison and I was shot by a gun in the prison. In the stomach, you want to see? [...] The problem is that they took 20 people to sell them. After another day, they do like that. So if they take 20 people, after 20 people, after another time, they will take us. UNHCR doesn't care about us. We are registered with UNHCR, but they didn't care about us. They didn't come to check on us. That is why we were angry. Everybody was angry. We decide to fight with them, to break the door and try to go out. They shot me. You want to see a photo? This is in the hospital. They shot me and after the Air Police heard about this. Tariq al-Matar is close to the airport. Because they tried to kill us with gas. They threw a gas inside a hole, three gas canisters. The guy watching the prison tried to kill us. There is a video. Everybody shared the video. There is my photo in it. (Interviewee 1006, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Interviewees also mention beatings by the guards, as well as religious discrimination. Three ex-detainees reported that some of them were forced to work inside and outside the prison without payment.

In August 2018, the detainees found themselves in the middle of the civil war in Libya. Bullets entered the centre and the detainees escaped. An Eritrean refugee recalled the following:

The war happened and the guards left us and we escaped from that place because it was really bad and everybody moved. Everybody broke the door and went out, this 1,500 people started walking in the street. (Interviewee 1022, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

Many of the interviewees met in the Emergency Transit Mechanism camp in Niamey had been resettled by UNHCR from Tariq al Matar detention centre (see Chapter 13: *Hell on Earth: Conditions in Official Detention Centres in Libya*). This prison was reportedly closed in July 2021 (UNHCR, 2021).

Tariq al Sikka Detention Centre

Tariq al Sikka is in the centre of the Libyan capital, Tripoli. This centre is run by the DCIM and the al-Khaja armed group (Malakooti, 2019). Many of the interviewees we met who had been detained in Tariq al

Sikka stayed only a few nights before they were transferred to Tariq al Matar detention centre, as Tariq al Sikka was really too crowded:

The prison is just like ... tuna. You can't sleep", recalled an Eritrean ex-detainee.
(Interviewee 0014, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

The detainees in Tariq al Sikka are of all nationalities. An Eritrean refugee explained that the detainees are:

From Asia, Africa and Arab countries. More than 600 in one big hall.
(Interviewee 0016, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019)

The interviewees described food shortages in the prison and diseases like tuberculosis and skin conditions. One mentioned being beaten with a stick (Interviewee 1021, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019). Another one said that the soldiers came and asked if someone could work in their house, but no one answered (Interviewee 0015, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019).

The interviewees we met who weren't transferred to Tariq al Matar after their stay in Tariq al Sikka, were transferred to the Emergency Transit Mechanism camp in Niaméy, where they were interviewed for this research while waiting to be resettled in Western countries (see Chapter 13: *Hell on Earth: Conditions in Official Detention Centres in Libya*).

Bani Walid

The town of Bani Walid is located approximately 180 kilometres south of Tripoli in Libya. It is at the intersection of roads from the south and to Misrata and Tripoli. During our research, we met 33 people who said that they had been in Bani Walid. Most of them were transferred there from Sudan or Kufra. Others came from Sabha or Brak. Others arrived in Bani Walid after having been kidnapped in coastal cities of Libya.

Interviewees describe this city as perhaps the worst place for migrants and refugees in Libya. It is a hotspot for human trafficking for

ransom. This quote from a Nigerian migrant who was sold to human traffickers shows how the place is perceived by foreigners in Libya:

They wanted to take us to go and sell us to the private prison in Bani Walid, where there are the most deadly prisons in Libya! Where they pay in European and other hard currencies! Where people die like chickens! (Interviewee 1030, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020)

Seventeen different unofficial detention centres (e.g., holding camps, warehouses) were mentioned by the interviewees in Bani Walid. Some of them were mentioned by several different interviewees as where they were detained. A representative of the Libyan branch of the OMCT who was able to visit Bani Walid confirmed that human trafficking for ransom is a major practice in the city:

In Bani Walid itself, where we have what we call 'al nahr road'; the river road, you have more than 20 traffickers and they have their own farm, and they have their own network. [...] In Bani Walid, even if you pay, you will be tortured. [...] You have to be tortured. Otherwise they feel something was missing. (Interviewee 1105, Libya, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, March 2022)

When an interviewee mentioned 'Bani Walid', as researchers, we knew we are going to hear gruesome stories. There are so many dead bodies in Bani Walid that the victims of human trafficking refer to it as 'The Ghost City'.

Unofficial detention centres (e.g., holding camps, warehouses) mentioned in Bani Walid hold between 50 and 1,600 detainees. The interviewees reported that detainees are of various African nationalities, as well as Bangladeshis.

Besides starvation, disease, and lack of hygiene associated with being locked in crowded, tiny and sometimes underground places, the interviewees described particularly cruel treatment in Bani Walid. They reported being beaten with sticks, electric wire, iron bars and rifles, sometimes resulting in broken bones. They were tortured with cold water, boiling water and fire; they were tied upside down, their hands and feet bound behind them, or with chains. Several experienced electric shocks. The interviewees also mentioned the removal of limbs. Many witnessed killings and several were locked up

with the dead bodies of their co-detainees. Particularly traumatising sexual violence against women and men was also reported in Bani Walid (see Chapter 15: “*We had no Choice; it’s Part of the Journey*”: *A Culture of Sexual Violence in Libya*). Such violence was often combined with humiliating and degrading acts.

Migrants and refugees who are not able to pay the requested ransom are killed or forced to work as translators or torturers for human traffickers. Others waited, often months, before being transferred to coastal cities. From there, some attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Others, were sold again or kidnapped and had to pay a ransom again.

Garabulli

Garabulli, also called Castelverde, is a town on the edge of white sand beaches on the Mediterranean Sea. It is located approximately 60 kilometres east of Tripoli. Due to its geographical position, Garabulli is a departure point for migrants and refugees wishing to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. During our research, we met eight migrants and refugees who had been through this city. Most of them had been transferred there after they had paid their ransom in Bani Walid.

Two unofficial detention centres (e.g., holding camps, warehouses) in Garabulli were mentioned by the interviewees. One of them is under the control of the famous Sudanese human trafficker Aziz.¹² Women and men from various nationalities were reported to be locked up there. The quote below, from a man, allowed us to understand the treatment of detainees in the second unofficial detention centre:

They open water and fill our body to the top. They become drunk outside, they drink alcohol, and smoke weed. And after they become drunk, they are just using us, as if they were playing football. They are playing with us. We become a toy. They are playing with us as if we are something that is not very important. You know, when

¹² Note, this name was given in the interviews and is of an alleged trafficker. The author makes no comment on whether or not he is in fact a human trafficker, but is merely presenting what was said in the interviews.

the footballers are playing football, the ball is not feeling well when they kick it or, for example... They don't think that we are human beings. (Interviewee 1026, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, January 2020)

After their stay in Garabulli, most of the interviewees continued their journey by attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

Gharyan

Gharyan is a city in the mountains situated approximately 100 kilometres south of Tripoli. Two official detention centres for migrants and refugees are located in Gharyan. The first one, Abu Rashada detention centre, is infamous for an explosion that occurred on 20 July 2021 caused by ammunition stored nearby. There were no reports of detainees injured in the incident. Hundreds of migrants and refugees escaped the centre on that day (Creta, 2021). None of the interviewees in this research had been detained in this prison.

The second detention centre for migrants and refugees in Gharyan is Al-Hamra detention centre. During the research, 12 of the interviewees had been detained there. All of them described their experience in this official prison as particularly traumatising. They stated that this detention centre is made up of 20 containers, each of them holding 100 to 110 people. Women and men are in separate containers. Detainees are from various nationalities. An Eritrean man described the following:

The containers are very dangerous. Inside the containers there is no air, no food, no water, no light. It is one container for 100 to 110 persons. There is no medical. When you are locked inside a container, there is a small window. If you knock at the door, they open and beat us. (Interviewee 1003, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Several interviewees reported beatings and sexual violence in this prison. Many also mentioned lack of food. The conditions caused diseases to spread, leading to many deaths, one participant saw five people die due to illness (Interviewee 1023, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019).

Several interviewees reported that one day, in spring 2018, bandits came and tried to kidnap detainees from the prison. Many escaped and more than 450 people found themselves on the street. They were later transferred to Tariq al Matar detention centre.

Khoms

Khoms is on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, approximately 120 kilometres east of Tripoli, famous for its well-preserved ancient ruins. There is one official detention centre in Khoms, operated by the DCIM (Malakooti, 2019). Journalist Sara Creta, who visited the prison, reported that a separate cell was reserved for ‘troublemakers’. She also pointed out that some detainees were used to build a wall in the prison and that smugglers came to the centre to gather people for the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea: “I have tasted the food, it’s not even food. It’s like plastic, it’s not even cooked. There is no sauce, no salt, nothing” (Interviewee 9002, interview with Smits, face-to-face, April 2019).

Due to its geographical position on the coast, Khoms is an important departure point for migrants and refugees who wish to cross the Mediterranean Sea. However, in this research only one interviewee had attempted the crossing from Khoms. He was arrested in the water by the Libyan Coast Guard and brought back to Khoms.

Misrata

Misrata is the third largest town in Libya, after Tripoli and Benghazi. It is situated on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, about 185 kilometres to the east of Tripoli. At 400 kilometres from Malta and Lampedusa, Misrata is, like many coastal cities in Libya, a departure point for migrants and refugees who wish to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

Until October 2019, there was one official detention centre in Misrata, called the al-Krareem detention centre, which is run by the DICM (MSF, 2019). Women, men and children are detained there. A

former volunteer translator with an NGO who visited this prison described it as follows:

In Misrata, there were tents. It was like an old prison. So there were some roofs, surrounded by barbed wire. (Interviewee 2000, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, December 2021).

According to this volunteer, in this official detention centre torture was a ritual:

I saw marks of punches on faces and arms. But when I talked to the doctors about it, they told me there were lots of lashes. (Interviewee 2000, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, December 2021)

The volunteer added that sexual violence was applied in al-Krareem detention centre against men, women and children (Interviewee 2000, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, December 2021).

Two unofficial detention centres (e.g., holding camps, warehouses) were also mentioned by the interviewees. One of them explained that, in 2017, bandit groups kidnapped 160 refugees who were then captured by the police, held in the police station and sold to trafficker Abduselam¹³ (Interviewee 1003, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019) (see Chapter 11: “*You are the Ball – They are the Players*”: *The Human Traffickers of Eritreans in Libya*).

One of the interviewees explained he had been transferred from al-Krareem detention centre to Niger, where he waited for resettlement in a Western country. The other people we met and who had travelled to Misrata later continued their journey towards other cities in Libya. This may be a coincidence. Many migrants and refugees go to Misrata and then cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

¹³ Note, this name was given in the interviews and is of an alleged trafficker. The author makes no comment on whether or not he is in fact a human trafficker, but is merely presenting what was said in the interviews.

Sabratha

Sabratha is a city on the Mediterranean Coast, located approximately 70 km west of Tripoli. It was one of the ‘three cities’ in Roman Tripoli, and the city is famous for its archaeological sites. For migrants and refugees, Sabratha is one of the departure points for the Mediterranean Sea. Many of the 16 people interviewed who went through Sabratha had been sent there by their human trafficker, after having paid a ransom in Kufra, Bani Walid or Shwayrif.

There is one official detention centre in Sabratha – Tawila detention centre – which is run by the DCIM, as well as the Sabratha Operational Room (Malakooti, 2019). We met one Guinean woman who had been detained in this prison. She described small cells, detainees sleeping on the ground without blankets, lack of water and the beating of men (Interviewee 1039, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020).

Situated less than 300 kilometres away from Lampedusa and 380 kilometres away from Malta, Sabratha is a departure point for crossing the Mediterranean Sea. It is the city where the infamous human trafficker Ahmad Oumar Al-Dabbashi, nicknamed El Amu,¹⁴ operated (see Chapter 11: “*You are the Ball – They are the Players*”: *The Human Traffickers of Eritreans in Libya*). Six of the people interviewed for this research were sheltered in El Amu’s stores in Sabratha. They described many stores, or large stores, and a lot of weapons. Women, pregnant women, children and men were reported to be held in places that hold 160 people to 1,000 people. The detainees are made up of all African nationalities and were waiting to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Only one interviewee mentioned beatings. Rape, however, seems to be more common in the places under the control of El Amu. In autumn 2017, there was a fight between El Amu and other brigades

¹⁴ Note, this name was given in the interviews and is of an alleged trafficker. The author makes no comment on whether or not he is in fact a human trafficker, but is merely presenting what was said in the interviews.

or smugglers in Sabratha. Two interviewees explained that El Amu gave weapons to migrants and refugees to fight on his side:

El Amu told us he would bring us to the sea. But he fought with the Libyans. With Haftar or with someone. And then, we fought. El Amu is a soldier. They told me: "You, you, you" from the camp. "You go to bring the shooting guns from the underground! More shooting guns! Lots of shooting guns!" They asked us to fight. I think in this camp, there was big stress. I worked with small shooting guns. I saw everything – the bombs, the Kalashnikov... I saw it. I was fighting by force! El Amu was defeat. The other group caught me. The soldiers of Libya, the soldiers of Haftar, or something. They caught me. A lot of people. (Interviewee 1023, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

After this fight, the former detainees we interviewed were sent to different official detention centres in Libya. Many ended up in Gharyan.

Other departure points and unofficial detention centres were also mentioned by the interviewees in Sabratha. One of them held up to 950 people. Women, children and men of various nationalities were reportedly held in these places. Gross human rights violations were described in those unofficial detention centres: beatings, broken legs, hangings, the selling of people as slaves, and killings (Interviewee 1043, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020).

After Sabratha, the interviewees reported being transferred to other cities or detention centres in the north of Libya.

Sirte

Located on the edge of the Mediterranean Sea, approximately 460 kilometres from Tripoli and 560 kilometres from Benghazi, Sirte has played an important role in the Libyan civil war. It is where Muammar Gaddafi was born and died. It was the last stronghold of forces loyal to him and Sirte was the theatre of the final and decisive battle of the first civil war.

From March 2015 until December 2016, the city was in the hands of Islamic State (ISIS). It is the Government of National Accord, backed by the UN that recaptured the town. In 2020, control of the city was

disputed by the Government of National Accord and the Libyan National Army.

Located approximately 560 kilometres from Malta and 600 kilometres from Lampedusa, Sirte is not the best departure point for migrants and refugees who wish to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. In Libya, Sirte is the connection point between the eastern and the western part of Libya.

There was one official detention centre in Sirte, which has since been closed (UNHCR, 2021). The conditions in that prison were reported to be particularly harsh, as a former translator for an NGO reported:

In Sirte, it was in the city centre. [...] Surrounded. A bunch of security. The least you can say is that you can find 500 people in the space of 20 square metres. Sometimes they push the dying backwards, to get some air. In turns. [...] And the faces were so pale that it was the same aspect that repeated itself over and over again.
(Interviewee 2000, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, December 2021)

The same interviewee added that the detainees were locked in containers, and faced forced labour and torture:

They even told me about cases of castration. Doing surgery without morphine, just to hurt them. (Interview 2000, with Wirtz, face-to-face, December 2021)

He described the treatment of the bodies of detainees who had died:

When there are a lot of bodies, they are put in big garbage bags. That's what the immigrants did. Afterwards, they made a big hole somewhere else, with the security, and that was it. Sometimes they would give them to the dogs as food. I've already seen a human, totally bitten. You could only see the bones. (Interviewee 2000, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, December 2021)

The NGO translator also talked about sexual exploitation in Sirte detention centre. He described a room where the 'prettiest' girls were brought and exploited by the chiefs of the prison (see Chapter 15: *We had no Choice; it's Part of the Journey*": *A Culture of Sexual Violence in Libya*).

Except for this NGO worker, none of the interviewees reported going to Sirte during this research.

Zawiyah

Zawiyah is a city on the Mediterranean Sea, situated about 50 kilometres west of Tripoli. The interviewees who went to Zawiyah reached the city in order to attempt a crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, or disembarked there after having been arrested at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard.

There are two official detention centres in Zawiyah, the Al-Nasr Centre and the Abu-Issa Centre (both run by the DCIM), and one privately owned detention centre, the Al-Nasr Brigade (run by a non-state armed group) (Global Detention Project, 2021). Four interviewees mentioned that they had been detained in those prisons. The number of detainees reported there varied from 370 to 700, depending on the interviewee and when they were detained. The interviewees reported starvation, disease and human rights violations. On 18 April 2018, the DCIM ordered the closure of Al-Nasr Detention Centre following the report of human right abuses. However, the Al-Nasr Brigade did not follow this order and the centre remains operational (OHCHR and UNSMIL, 2018a).

Abu-Issa Detention Centre was also closed in 2018 following allegations of sexual abuse, but was reopened by an armed security force less than 24 hours later under a new name (Malakooti, 2019). The conditions in this last centre were reported to be particularly hard, by a refugee who contacted us right after he escaped:

I was caught from the sea. I went to a prison that is worse than all the others I have been to so far. It is more dangerous than Guantanamo Bay. People are so hungry there that they eat Colgate [toothpaste]. (Interviewee 1027, interview with Wirtz, Facebook Messenger phone call, August 2020)

This refugee detailed sexual violence in Abu Issa prison:

They beat us there. They beat us naked! They remove all your clothes, then they ask you to walk like frogs, and then they laugh at you – at your genital parts. And they are gay! They are also raping men there! Not only women, men also. (Interviewee 1027, interview with Wirtz, Facebook Messenger phone call, August 2020)

Interviewees also reported collaboration between the ‘prison owners’ and the smugglers, who send the detainees to unofficial detention centres (e.g., warehouses or stores) or to departure points for the Mediterranean Sea. An Eritrean refugee explained that in Al-Nasr Detention Centre, the detainees were asked to pay to be sent to sea (Interviewee 0016, interview with Smits, face-to-face, July 2019).

Situated approximately 300 kilometres right from Lampedusa and 375 kilometres from Malta, Zawiyah is a departure point for crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Migrants and refugees of all African nationalities, but also from Syria, Bangladesh and other countries, gather in Zawiyah and hide while they wait to embark in boats. The bosses of those departure points are also of different nationalities. The main challenge mentioned by the interviewees who stayed in the departure points in Zawiyah was the order to remain silent and the excessive cost of basic necessities during their stay. A Sudanese refugee mentioned sexual exploitation:

They use the girls. They are fucking them. Some came without paying. (Interviewee 1018, interview with Wirtz, WhatsApp, March 2020)

There are also unofficial detention centres (e.g., warehouses and stores) in Zawiyah, where migrants and refugees are beaten and asked to pay ransom for their release. The smaller hold 37 people and the larger between 300 and 400 people. An interviewee mentioned that they had been sold to those places by their ‘connection men’ or by the Libyan Coast Guard (Interviewee 1063, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, June 2020).

Interviewees mentioned being locked up in cramped spaces and receiving insufficient food in unofficial detention centres in Zawiyah. They also reported being tortured and beaten with water pipes and guns. Two interviewees said that they were sold to ISIS or kidnapped by them in Zawiyah. Kidane,¹⁵ a frequently mentioned human

¹⁵ Note, this name was given in the interviews and is of an alleged trafficker. The author makes no comment on whether or not he is in fact a human trafficker, but is merely presenting what was said in the interviews.

trafficker, paid for their release (see Chapter 11: *“You are the Ball – They are the Players”*: *The Human Traffickers of Eritreans in Libya*). Whether the kidnappers really belonged to ISIS or were other bandits collaborating with the human traffickers to make the refugees pay more is unclear. An Eritrean man describes what he went through while in the hands of who he believe were members of ISIS:

They tortured us without asking for money. Just because we are Jewish. We faced a lot of violence with them. They distributed packets of cigarettes among us and forced us to smoke. They burned our skins with the cigarettes. (Interviewee 1014, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

After their stay in Zawiyah, the migrants and refugees we met during this research attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea or were transferred to other cities or detention centres in the north of Libya.

Zintan

Zintan is a town situated in the mountains, approximately 175 kilometres south-west of Tripoli. There is one official detention centre there, the Zintan Detention Centre, run by the DCIM (Malakooti, 2019). The people detained in this prison reported being unhappy with their geographical location, as Zintan is far from Tripoli and the assistance of NGOs and UN agencies. They felt forgotten. An Eritrean refugee described the prison as follows:

It was like a store of tanks in the middle of the bush. We were in a bunker. [...]. We were around 800 to 900 Eritrean and Somalis in that place. Beating was better there. But, as it is in the bush, there were snakes and scorpions coming inside. It was also cold. I don't remember how long I stayed there. Maybe two months and three weeks. (Interviewee 1014, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, April 2019)

Zintan detention centre is infamous for its harsh conditions, as its detainees launched a campaign on social networks to protest against the conditions in the centre and appeal to the United Nations for help (see Chapter 17: *Active Agency, Access and Power: Social Media and Eritrean Refugees in Libya*). Journalist Sara Creta reported that smugglers were coming to Zintan detention centre to send migrants and refugees to departure points for the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea (Interviewee 9002, interview with Smits, face-to-face, March 2019).

Zintan is also a transit city for the migrants and refugees who entered Libya from Algeria in Gadamis and who are on their way to Tripoli.

Zuwarah

Zuwarah is a city on the Mediterranean coast. It is situated about 100 kilometres west of Tripoli and 60 kilometres from the Tunisian border. Among the eight interviewees who went to Zuwarah, the majority had come from Tunisia or Tripoli, where they had worked to save money to cross the Mediterranean Sea,

There is one official detention centre in Zuwarah, called the Zuwarah detention centre, which is run by the DCIM and the General Criminal Investigation Department of the Ministry of Interior (Malakooti, 2019). A Nigerian woman who stayed more than a year in this prison reported that women were given a red tea that caused drowsiness, weakness and resulted in miscarriages (Interviewee 1042, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020). Men in the prison were given less food and beaten severely resulting in swollen faces and red eyes (Interviewees 1042 and 1046, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020)

Several departure points were reported to be located in Zuwarah, where up to 300 people waited to cross the Mediterranean Sea. They were often described as ‘good places’, where migrants and refugees from all over the African continent waited for the conditions to be right to cross. A Guinean migrant described his departure point in Zuwarah as follows:

It is a good place, a house. They put us TV, high volume so that we watch the film and make no noise. We stayed for three days and then they pushed us out to sea.
(Interviewee 1048, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, May 2020)

Unofficial detention centres (e.g., houses) also exist in Zuwarah. But the places where the people we met were detained seemed to be less organised and connected than in other Libyan cities. A young Eritrean man explained:

A Libyan took me to work in his car. And... I knew it before because he took me on a long journey. And I asked him: “Where are you taking me?” and he said: “I

am taking you to work, then I will take you back to your home after you finish the work". Then I waited. Then we passed many checkpoints, then he took me to Zuwarah. In Zuwarah he locked me in and he asked me for money. I met two people who were locked in. They were Sudanese. I asked them. They said he did the same to them as he did to me. He didn't tell me how much money he wanted because he locked me and he left. And after one night, we broke the door and we escaped from that place and we started a journey to the west. (Interviewee 1022, interview with Wirtz, face-to-face, November 2019)

After their stay in Zuwarah, most of the migrants and refugees we met continued their journey up north and attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea or escaped Libya to Tunisia.

Discussion

This chapter explores the human trafficking routes and hubs in Libya. The interviews found that migrants and refugees are not only transported from one destination to another, but held by traffickers in camps, warehouses and stores all over the country. This finding is in line with the findings of Reitano, McCormack, Micallef and Shaw (2018), who state that the border between migrant smuggling and human trafficking becomes blurred in Libya. They draw attention to the fact that lumping smuggling and trafficking groups together under one heading can have negative effects on policy decisions. They point out that, due to this, action is taken to criminalise smuggling and migration, instead of prioritising the protection of migrants and refugees human rights (Reitano *et al.*, 2018).

Malakooti found that an economy of migrant detention is developing in Libya (2019). She shows how detention centres are located along the migratory trail and points out that migrants and refugees are a source of income for armed groups, which at the same time create the illusion of counter-smuggling and facilitate the activities of selected human traffickers (Malakooti, 2019). This can also be deduced from the evidence presented in this chapter, from which a picture of roads and places of detention emerges. Departure points are close to (official) detention centres, and detention centres are not far from human traffickers houses.

Grave human rights violations are reported in this chapter. They take place in official detention centres as well as the places used by human traffickers. This is in line with the finding of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNSMIL & OHCHR, 2016; 2018a; 2018b). The crimes reported in this chapter have also been denounced by the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and Lawyers for Justice in Libya (LFJL), which call for the opening of an investigation by the International Criminal Court as to whether or not the treatment of migrants and refugees in Libya meets the threshold for crimes against humanity (ECCHR, FIDH & LFJL, 2021).

The human rights violations seen in Libya are the continuation of human trafficking for ransom in Sinai, which was first identified in 2009 (Van Reisen, Estefanos & Rijken, 2012). The modus operandi applied by human traffickers in Sinai and what has been reported in this chapter correlate. Similar torture routines are reported in the human traffickers' houses in Libya, as were reported in relation to Sinai trafficking (Van Reisen, Kidane & Reim, 2017). This is further developed in Chapter 12: *Living Skeletons: The Spread of Human Trafficking for Ransom to Libya*.

Important findings are presented in this research that allows us to understand human trafficking trajectories and to locate detention centres and human traffickers' houses where grave human rights violations are committed every day. However, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of this research. The author wrote this chapter on the basis of descriptions provided by interviewees and found in the literature. Hours were spent on Google Earth, spotting the locations. Pictures of detention centres were collected and are considered very valuable data.

The findings of this chapter also reflect the focus of the interviewee. This is why more information on human trafficking for ransom and on the locations of human traffickers' houses has been collected than on official detention centres and departure points. This is also why

information is scarce on east Libya and on towns like Khoms and Garabulli. During this research, few people who had travelled through those places were met. This does not mean those places – and others – are not important places for human trafficking. More research needs to be done to determine their role in human trafficking for ransom in Libya.

Conclusion

This chapter looked at the trafficking routes through Libya, including the transit hubs, the places used to hold migrants and refugees, and the places from which people depart to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Five routes through Libya were investigated, on which migrants and refugees travel or are transported. The first one is the southern route from Niger and Chad. This route is taken by West African migrants and refugees. The main migration hubs on this route mentioned by the interviewees met for this chapter are Qatrun, Sabha and Brak.

The second route is the main road taken by Eritrean refugees. It goes from Sudan to the east of Libya, passing through Kufra, Shwayrif, Ajdabiya and Benghazi as transit cities. The east African migrants and refugees who take this route often fall into the hands of human traffickers.

The third route is between Algeria and the west of Libya. There are two entry points on this border: Ghat and Gadamis. The West and North African migrants and refugees who take this route often later continue to move towards Sabha or towards Zuwarah and Tripoli, in the north of Libya.

The fourth route is the road between Tunisia and Libya. The main crossing point of this border is Ra's Ajdir. This road is mainly taken by Libyans and Tunisians. But West, East, Central and North African migrants and refugees also use it to escape or enter Libya.

The fifth route lies between Egypt and Libya, in the north-east of the country. Egyptians, but also Asian and East African, migrants and refugees take this path. The migration hubs mentioned by migrants and refugees in the east of Libya are Tobruk, Benghazi and Ajdabiya.

All those routes converge in the north-west of Libya, where there are more job opportunities for migrants and refugees, and where it is easier to cross the Mediterranean Sea, as the coast is close to Europe. It is in this part of the country that one can also find the largest number of official detention centres where migrants and refugees are kept if they are arrested by the Libyan Coast Guard. The main hubs and locations mentioned by the interviewees in the north-west of Libya are Bani Walid, Garabulli, Gharyan, Khoms, Misrata, Sabratha, Sirte, Tripoli, Zawiyah, Zintan and Zuwarah. In these places, migrants and refugees are held in official detention centres, holding camps, warehouses, trafficker's houses, transit points and departure points, in which grave human right violations are taking place. Bani Walid is one of the biggest human trafficker's hubs in Libya, located approximately 180 kilometres south Tripoli at the intersection between different routes.

Of course, other routes and migration hubs exist in Libya. But they were not mentioned by the people interviewed for this research. Routes are constantly changing. As can be seen from this research, there are many routes used by migrants and refugees and many people who are willing to facilitate these journeys, profit from them, and take advantage of those using them. Despite the efforts of those seeking to shut down the routes and stem the movement of people to Europe, every time a path closes, another seems to emerge. As a smuggler in Agadez said: "No one can prevent migration" (Wirtz, 2019).

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Ethical clearance

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Author contributions

Morgane Wirtz is the author of this chapter. Lucy Murray contributed to an earlier version of this chapter.

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