

‘ON THIS JOURNEY, NO ONE CARES IF YOU LIVE OR DIE’

Abuse, protection, and justice along routes between East and West Africa and Africa’s Mediterranean coast



FOREWORD

By Charlotte Slente, Secretary-General of the Danish Refugee Council, and
Bram Frouws, Head of the Mixed Migration Centre

Refugees and migrants face unacceptable and extreme forms of violence on mixed migration routes from East and West Africa to and through North Africa. This report provides clear and strong findings based on almost 16,000 interviews with refugees and migrants all along the migration routes. It provides clear data on the extent to which refugees and migrants face various violations of their rights, and identifies who are generally reported to be responsible and should thus be held accountable.

The evidence provided in this report underlines that Libya is not a safe place to return people to. It shows that abandoning people to the fate of smugglers, criminal gangs, and detention camps is not acceptable. It shows that the careless treatment of refugees and migrants is unacceptable. And it highlights steps that need to be taken to curtail the crimes that are committed against refugees and migrants, bring perpetrators to account, and strengthen the support and safety mechanisms available to victims.

Reliable and compelling evidence on the scale and nature of these violations and the types of perpetrators is the first step towards action. Data and evidence are needed to be able to hold the perpetrators accountable. It is needed to make an unequivocal call for greater cooperation between States to increase protection.

The Danish Refugee Council is therefore pleased that its Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) partnered with UNHCR to provide data and evidence and develop this joint report. Through MMC's global data collection programme 4Mi, more than 10,000 refugees and migrants are interviewed every year on mixed migration routes across the world to gain first-hand information directly from people on the move about their experiences, their needs, their intentions and aspirations and the risks they face. This gives unique insight to the human reality behind migration. The 4Mi data collected by MMC along the routes from sub-Saharan Africa to and through North Africa in 2018 and 2019 forms the body and evidence base of this report.

This cooperation between UNHCR and MMC fits with MMC's overall vision that migration policies, responses and public debate are based on credible evidence, placing human rights and protection of all people on the move at the centre and with its objective to contribute to effective evidence-based protection responses for people on the move. It also fits with MMC's role as part of the Danish Refugee Council, but as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners and the broader humanitarian sector.

DRC and MMC are committed to continue our close cooperation with UNHCR and all other partners that share the same objective of ending the violence against refugees and migrants and we are grateful to all the 4Mi monitors, who are out there collecting data every single day, listening and documenting the often harrowing, but also hopeful, stories of refugees and migrants. We are of course especially grateful to all the people on the move who have taken the time to share these stories that allow us to advocate for their rights, and contribute to better policies and responses.

This is not the first report outlining the violations refugees and migrants face at every step of the way along these routes and in North Africa and, sadly, it may not be the last. But it adds to the mounting evidence base that can no longer be ignored.

FOREWORD

By Filippo Grandi, High Commissioner of UNHCR

This report tells a chilling story – one with many strands, originating in towns, cities and villages across the African continent, but which converge in Libya, where the abuses against refugees and migrants travelling along what has become known as the Central Mediterranean Route have blighted tens of thousands of lives over the last decade.

For many, their experiences in Libya are part of a continuum that extends far beyond that country's borders – a staging post at the intersection of countless desperate journeys – driven by war, persecution and the inexorable erosion of hope, and characterised by unspeakable brutality and inhumanity.

The Sahel region is one of the theatres where these journeys originate. More than 2.5 million people are now displaced across the region owing to harrowing violence, and the number is growing. On a visit there earlier this year, I spoke with some of those forced to flee their homes. Their testimony was chilling: night-time attacks on villages by groups of armed men; the killing of friends and neighbours; families and loved ones separated in the chaos, unable to find one another.

Like others displaced around the world, the vast majority remain within the region – in their own countries or neighbouring ones, seeking safety close to home, hoping for the day they can return and recover their lives. But some, out of despair, opt to head for Libya, Morocco or other Maghreb countries, lured by promises of work and more secure prospects, including in Europe.

They face a perilous journey across the Sahara Desert – running the gauntlet of militias, smugglers and traffickers, for whom taking a human life is nothing more than the cost of business, and human beings are a tradable commodity. The reality of the promises that propelled them on their way is often torture, extortion, forced labour, rape, kidnapping or death.

The stories I heard in the Sahel, and on earlier visits to Libya, are echoed in countless accounts told to UNHCR teams – at disembarkation points in Italy and Malta, in our Emergency Transit Mechanisms in Niger and Rwanda, and in Libya itself. Those whose journeys originated in East Africa, or elsewhere, tell similar stories.

Having endured such atrocities, many still take to the sea on untrustworthy vessels, embarking on one of the deadliest crossings in the world. More than fourteen thousand people have lost their lives attempting the journey from North Africa to Europe since 2015. At the time of writing, in June 2020, at least 60 refugees and migrants have just lost their lives, having been shipwrecked on a voyage from Tunisia. These were men, women and children who dreamed of reaching safety; mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters who had dreams of a better future.

Some make it to Europe, but often face an uncertain future; others are intercepted and returned to Libya, sometimes delivered back in to the hands of the smugglers and traffickers they had hoped to escape.

Last month, I repeated my call to the United Nations Security Council for strong leadership and concerted action to stop these cruelties, and to press for solutions to the conflict in Libya, which has become host to widespread internal displacement, complex mixed flows, and horrendous abuses against refugees and migrants. For too long, the perpetrators of abuses and organisers of these journeys have been able to act with impunity. Pockets of progress have been achieved in the last few years, with some now listed for sanctions, and a few important arrests.

The number of refugees and migrants in detention in Libya has also dropped in recent months. This is positive, and must be sustained, but there is still a long way to go. Solutions must still be found for refugees and migrants stranded there – solutions that require the support and engagement of States, including countries of origin, and evacuation, resettlement or other arrangements for those unable to return home.

Such measures must go hand in hand with greater, coordinated efforts to address the root causes that drive these dangerous journeys. We need a much more strategic application of development aid that tackles the factors generating conflict, violence and impoverishment, including issues related to governance, inequality, and the environment. We must spare no effort to broker peace if we are to prevent people being forced to flee their homes, and to allow greater numbers currently in exile to return home. Strengthening security is an important aspect, but steps are also needed to help States rebuild social cohesion, to ensure the impact is sustained.

I commend the Mixed Migration Centre team at the Danish Refugee Council, our partners in the preparation of this report, for their vital work in shining a light on these journeys to and through Libya. The data they have provided adds to a growing body of work that cannot be ignored.

Greater coordination, trust and cooperation are needed if this situation is to be brought to an end – including in the areas of security and justice. More must be done to strengthen protection of the victims along the routes, and to provide people with credible alternatives to these dangerous land and sea journeys. These measures must be accompanied by an unequivocal commitment to ensuring that no-one rescued at sea on the Mediterranean is returned to danger in Libya.

I hope that this report will help motivate and inform concrete action to end the suffering associated with these desperate journeys. They represent a stain on our collective conscience that we cannot afford to ignore.

Written by Duncan Breen, with special thanks to MMC and UNHCR colleagues as well as *Telling the Real Story*.

Layout and design by Ecorys UK

Title based on testimony provided by Somali refugee evacuated from Libya to Niger about his journey with smugglers.

The data presented in this report has been collected by MMC through the 4Mi programme, which is supported by the following donors in West Africa, North Africa, East Africa and Geneva: the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the EU Trust Fund, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), GIZ, UNHCR and DANIDA. The information, data and views set out in this report do not necessarily reflect the official position of any of these donors supporting the work of MMC. Responsibility for the content of this report lies entirely with the MMC and UNHCR.

Cover photo: "When we arrived [at Bani Walid] armed men forced us into an underground cell, with 500 other prisoners and beat us all day and all night. We were told to call our families and they demanded 10,000 Dinars (US\$7,000) for each of us." A Sudanese asylum-seeker evacuated to Niger recounts his experiences in Bani Walid, Libya, in May 2019. © UNHCR/John Wendle

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The route from Sudan to Libya is full of extreme difficulties and challenges, to the extent you would think that you will not make it. You would travel three days in the Sahara and lose your direction. There are no trees or anything, you can see nothing except the sky and endless sandy landscape. There is thirst. We travelled for three days in the Sahara to get to Libya.

They would give us a little water only once in the morning. They would beat us to rush us, saying there are thieves and bandits on the way. Our brothers would fall and die of thirst. You just leave them there. There are times when you don't even bury them properly. This is a fact, because we dumped many of our brothers and sisters on the way. The Sahara is difficult.

You would lose a brother because of thirst, nothing you can do for him when he is asking for water. Even when you tell them someone is dying because of thirst, they don't listen. They only care about getting you to the place where they should deliver you to. Even when you arrive, they only give you food either in the morning or night.

There is also thirst and filth. I spent two dreadful years in Libya. Those two years have been the same every day, day and night. Macaroni for breakfast or dinner. You wouldn't wish such a life for your brothers and sisters.

It was very difficult. Libya was difficult. Being locked inside for a year where you can't see the sun. With no water to drink or even wash yourself with. Where you get lice and skin diseases all over your body. You know how difficult it was.

And having been through all this, you saw how much fear we had of the sea. Yet, you would be so eager to touch the sea because that would mean you are getting out of that life. To the extent there were times you would wish God would take your soul.

**Kidane from Eritrea, interviewed by
Telling the Real Story, 2019**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the end of May, 30 people were murdered in the town of Mizdah, south of Tripoli, allegedly by traffickers. These were among the latest in a long series of deaths along the route from West Africa or the East and Horn of Africa to Libya. At least 68 refugees or migrants are known to have died along the route this year alone. As refugees and migrants travel along the Central Mediterranean route to Libya, many continue to be subjected to horrific violence at multiple points along the way, as the testimonies in this report show, even before any attempt to cross the sea to Europe. It remains one of the deadliest land crossings in the world.

This report draws on data collected by the Mixed Migration Centre's 4Mi monitors along the route to map the places where refugees interviewed in 2018 and 2019 most frequently reported deaths, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), physical violence, and kidnappings occurred. It illustrates how refugees and migrants using the route face a series of risks including as they cross into eastern Sudan, and when crossing the Sahara Desert, and then again in multiple places in Libya. Similarly, those traveling through West Africa reported multiple incidents of physical violence, SGBV, as well as deaths at various points. Refugees and migrants have reported being subjected to brutal violence, including being burnt with hot oil, melted plastic, or heated metal objects, being electrocuted, tied in stress positions, and experiencing and witnessing repeated sexual violence, often in the context of ransom demands. UNHCR staff and partners continue to witness the severe impact these abuses have had on the mental health of many men, women, and children.

At present, there is still no way to accurately determine the number of deaths along the route each year. Many people continue to die in the Sahara Desert and their deaths are usually not officially recorded, while many others die of sickness and vehicle accidents, as well as violence while traveling through parts of West Africa. These deaths are rarely recorded aside from in survey data, such as that collected by 4Mi monitors. While 4Mi data does not record the date a death or incident of abuse occurred, a calculation of when each respondent started their travel indicates that almost 1,400 of the over 2,200 deaths reported by respondents likely occurred in 2018 and 2019. This, together with information from other sources, suggests that at a minimum, there was an average of at least 72 deaths each month. A high proportion of those reported to

4Mi monitors appeared directly related to crime, including negligence by smugglers as well as deaths in captivity. While many deaths and abuses during the crossing of the Sahara continue to be reported, other danger spots for refugees and migrants according to the data include Sabha, Kufra, and Qatrun in southern Libya, the smuggling hub of Bani Walid, southeast of Tripoli and several places along the West African section of the route, including Bamako and Agadez. While smugglers were reported to be responsible for most incidents of SGBV along the route, security forces, police or military personnel were reported to be primarily responsible for the incidents of physical violence, mostly in West Africa.

Despite the multitude of risks refugees and migrants face, people rescued or intercepted at sea continue to be disembarked in Libya, which UNHCR and others have repeatedly stated is not a port of safety. From there, most are transferred to detention centres, where many suffer dire conditions and some are at risk of again falling prey to smugglers and traffickers. In Libya, and elsewhere along the route, there are insufficient mechanisms in place at present to identify survivors of abuses and provide them with protection. Measures such as the identification of local safety networks, including safe houses and support services for survivors of SGBV and other abuses, need to urgently be put in place in key locations along the route. In addition, more support is needed to help refugees integrate in the countries to which they have fled and greater access is needed to safe and legal pathways, including resettlement and family reunification, to reduce the need for dangerous journeys.

Despite many positive steps forward that have increased accountability for perpetrators of abuses against refugees and migrants, there is still not enough collective action by States and relevant agencies to cooperate and coordinate across borders and regions. As a result, many criminals continue to target and abuse refugees and migrants with impunity. More needs to be done to support survivors seeking justice and to ensure they feel safe disclosing information; and for States to cooperate in their efforts to identify perpetrators at different points along the route, share key information with relevant law enforcement agencies, and collectively hold perpetrators accountable, including through the use of sanctions and further prosecutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To countries along the Central Mediterranean route and donors

1. Strengthen efforts to identify and provide protection to refugee and migrant survivors of abuses, such as trafficking, exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence, and kidnapping, including in the context of COVID-19. Such efforts should include identification and mapping of existing safety networks and measures as well as the establishment of more secure safe houses and spaces with the provision of basic assistance and SGBV response services in locations where a need is identified;
2. Increase access to legal aid and map its availability for victims along the route, including for victims seeking access to justice, as well as for those who may have grounds for refugee status on the basis of their experience or fear of trafficking as per UNHCR's International Guidelines No 7,¹ or on account of gender-related persecution² or persecution based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity,³ as well as those at risk of statelessness;
3. Support national justice systems to provide protection to survivors of trafficking and other abuses such as SGBV, including through witness or victim protection programmes, and by providing training for relevant authorities on safe interview techniques for people with potential mental health conditions stemming from abuses;
4. Continue to strengthen efforts by law enforcement actors, including national counter-trafficking agencies, as well as protection and community actors to coordinate and cooperate across borders as a means of tackling international networks or actors responsible for trafficking, kidnap for ransom and other abuses;
5. Together with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, support the work of national human rights institutions to investigate allegations of abuses by State officials, including against refugees and migrants on the move, and hold perpetrators accountable, together with other relevant State institutions;
6. Urge regional economic communities particularly the Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in West Africa and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in East and Horn of Africa to work with countries of origin to address root causes, facilitate solutions and promote capacity of Member States;
7. Work to enhance the capacity of all relevant State

authorities engaging in any capacity with refugees and migrants and increase the awareness of officials regarding the rights of refugees and migrants;

8. Further enhance efforts to provide protection in the region (with support from the African Union, humanitarian partners, and donors), including through meaningful access to employment opportunities and education, with due consideration to the specific needs and diverse profiles of people with different ages, genders, and characteristics, as a means of providing viable alternatives to dangerous journeys;
9. In countries where refugees are required to remain in camps, allow greater flexibility in the issuing of movement permits from camps to avoid the need for people to travel with smugglers for temporary journeys such as to major cities;
10. In Libya, amend Law 19 of 2010, which foresees hard labour as a sentence in response to irregular entry and can have the effect of fostering the exploitation of refugees and migrants;
11. In Libya, put in place a national registration system for refugees and migrants, including at disembarkation points, in detention centres, and in urban areas to avoid people going missing; and
12. Strengthen coordinated efforts aimed at search and rescue in desert regions.

To countries of destination

1. Enhance opportunities for safe and legal travel beyond the region covered in this report, including through removing obstacles to family reunification, increasing resettlement commitments, and introducing more complementary pathways including temporary labour schemes and education visas;
2. Provide refugees and migrants who have reached countries of destination, including through resettlement, with clear, voluntary, and confidential opportunities for access to justice, including by providing trusted and accessible channels for those wishing to provide information on abuses experienced along the route, counselling them on the implications of their possible participation in criminal proceedings, providing access to a status commensurate with their international protection needs where applicable, or, for those not in need of international protection, legal stay for the duration of criminal proceedings, and providing support with access to legal aid;
3. Continue to strengthen efforts by law enforcement actors to share key information on perpetrators of abuses with those able to take action, including

with law enforcement agencies outside of Europe, ensuring that all cooperation is undertaken in a manner consistent with international human rights and refugee law;

4. Further enhance measures to identify victims of trafficking and other abuses, including through capacity building of immigration/asylum officials, law enforcement officials, and through establishing or strengthening coordination between those actors, NGOs, and other key stakeholders. Provide safe shelter for victims when needed, make information accessible on how victims of trafficking can seek help, and provide assistance for SGBV survivors to support their full recovery;

To humanitarian agencies

1. Enhance efforts to identify, in a collaborative manner, survivors of abuses along the Central Mediterranean route, including through increased outreach at key transport or transit hubs, and strengthening collaboration among service providers and community organizations as well as working with local refugee and migrant communities to identify ways in which support for survivors can be increased, barriers to accessing help can be addressed, and to increase referrals to assistance, including SGBV response services;
2. Work with national authorities to improve safe disclosure and reporting of incidents by survivors of abuses who are seeking access to justice, monitoring the response, and evaluating what further steps may be needed to strengthen protection;
3. Work with national counterparts to help ensure non-discrimination in support for survivors, including for male survivors of SGBV, as well as others, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people;
4. Continue to strengthen two-way communication with communities from which people migrate towards Libya and other countries in North Africa to provide reliable information to challenge false expectations, warn of the multiple dangers along the journey, and see whether safer alternatives to dangerous journeys can be found where people are. Expand to other key transit countries and countries of first asylum awareness programmes among youth and children, such as *Telling the Real Story*;¹
5. Work collaboratively to establish an interagency mechanism accessible to family members to register those missing on the route, increase outreach to family members of people missing along the route, and strengthen family tracing and reunification through a coordinated approach across countries and regions; and

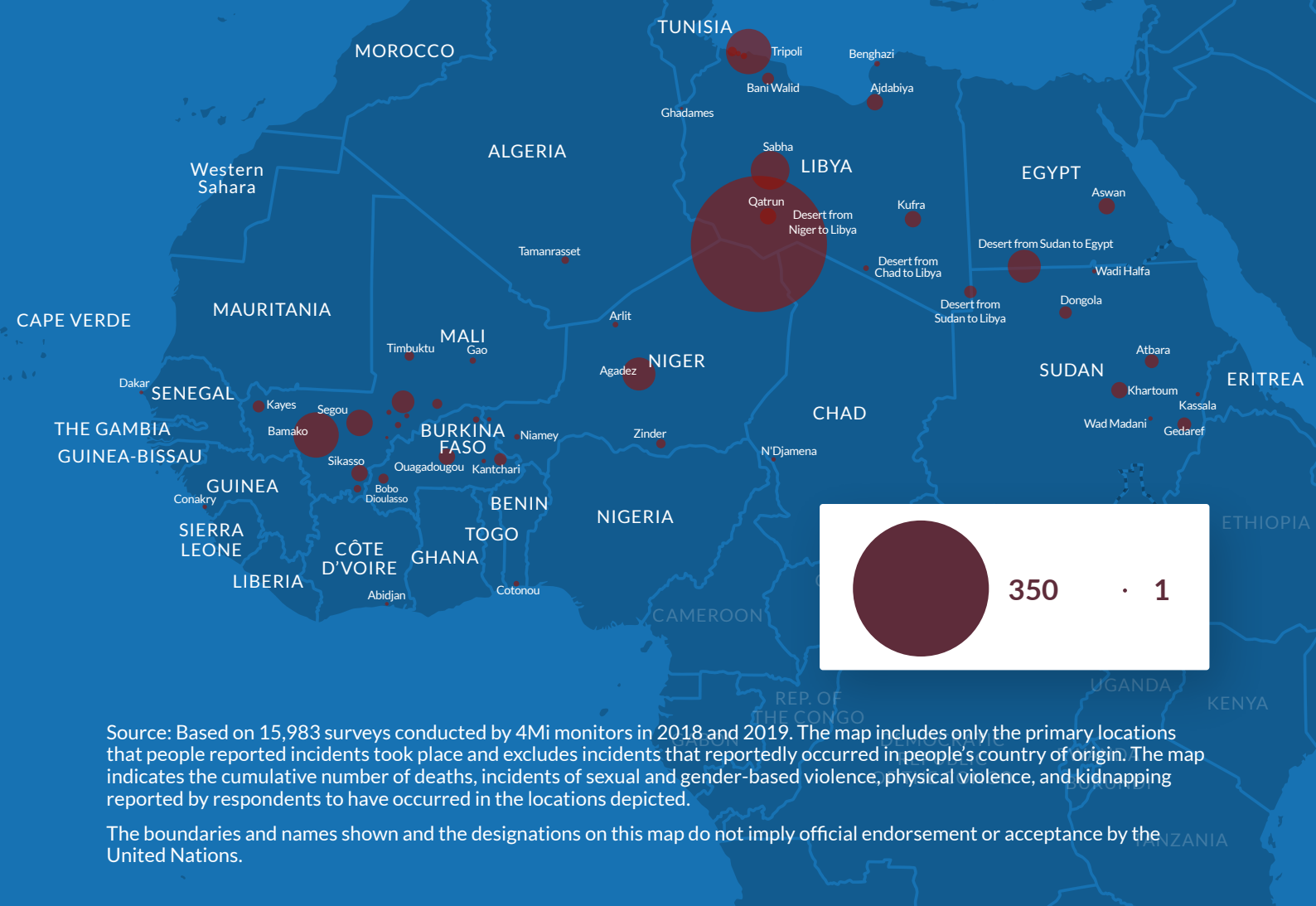
6. Continue efforts to strengthen the collection of data on movements to and through North Africa, including protection incidents that occur along the route especially in places about which there is currently more limited information such as in northern Mali and southern Algeria.

To the international community

1. Subject any assistance provided to Libyan authorities to clear and effective measures to mitigate the risk of human rights violations. Libya is not a place of safety and no persons rescued at sea should be disembarked there unless doing so is the only means to respond to imminent risks to life at sea in a situation of distress or force majeure. Persons rescued at sea should always be disembarked in a place of safety, and in the case of asylum-seekers, a place where they can seek and receive international protection in line with international standards;
2. Support the work of the UN Panels of Experts on Libya, Mali, and Sudan and other experts to identify those engaged in consistent abuses of refugees and migrants in the region, and list, as appropriate, such perpetrators for sanctions purposes;
3. Enhance efforts on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea to investigate financial transactions involved with trafficking and kidnap for ransom, including cross-border payments, as a means to identify and disband networks;
4. Provide further support in the context of the Global Compact on Refugees for livelihoods and self-reliance so that refugees can better meet their needs in the countries to which they have fled rather than undertake risky journeys to and through Libya;
5. Increase the recording of deaths along the Central Mediterranean route by recording further details of each death reported during surveys, in official detention centres, reported to humanitarian actors in Libya, or following rescue at sea or in the desert, and work with the International Commission on Missing Persons and the International Committee of the Red Cross to increase the identification and notification of family members;
6. Urge the Libyan authorities to end detention and release the refugees and migrants who are arbitrarily detained in centres across Libya in an orderly manner and to cease detention of those disembarked in Libya after being rescued or intercepted at sea; and
7. Continue efforts through the Khartoum and Rabat Processes to strengthen cooperation that would help better protect refugees and migrants on the move, and increase accountability for perpetrators of abuses as described in this report.

¹ For more, please see <https://www.tellingtherealstory.org/en/>.

DEATHS AND ABUSES ALONG THE WHOLE ROUTE



Source: Based on 15,983 surveys conducted by 4Mi monitors in 2018 and 2019. The map includes only the primary locations that people reported incidents took place and excludes incidents that reportedly occurred in people's country of origin. The map indicates the cumulative number of deaths, incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, physical violence, and kidnapping reported by respondents to have occurred in the locations depicted.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the reduction in the number of people crossing the sea to Europe from North Africa since mid-2017, refugees and migrants continue to regularly face horrific abuses along the routes to and through North Africa. In 2019, some 17,700 people departed from the Libyan coast trying to cross the sea to Europe, a 45% decrease compared to 2018,⁴ and more than half of them (54%) were intercepted or rescued at sea and disembarked in Libya.⁵ As of the end of June, some 11,300 people have tried to cross the sea from Libya in 2020, of whom 50% have been disembarked in Libya. UN agencies, NGOs, researchers, and media have documented the multiple human rights violations many refugees⁶ and migrants suffer in Libya.⁷ Due to such widely reported violations and the absence of protection from them, including the absence of a functioning asylum system, UNHCR continues to urge against disembarkations in Libya.⁸

While the number of people departing from North Africa to Europe by sea has dropped since 2017, resulting in a decrease in the total number of deaths,⁹ refugees and migrants traveling along the land routes to and through Libya, Egypt, as well as parts of Algeria continue to risk death, kidnapping, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), physical abuse, and other violence. As a result, the journey from West Africa or the East and Horn of Africa to Libya or Egypt remains one of the world's most dangerous. UNHCR refers to this route, and the subsequent sea journey some take, as the Central Mediterranean route.

Refugees and migrants arriving by sea to Europe from Libya have told UNHCR staff during disembarkation about the many horrors they had faced during their journeys. Some reported spending more than a year detained in warehouses

where traffickers subjected people to severe physical abuse¹⁰ in order to extract payments. Many had attempted the sea journey more than once, and had been held in detention centres following disembarkation in Libya. Daily experiences of abuse in Libya, and SGBV were frequently reported to UNHCR staff by newly-disembarked refugees and migrants, along with appalling conditions in official detention centres as well as warehouses or other places where people are held by smugglers or traffickers. Similarly, refugees evacuated from Libya to Italy, Niger, and Rwanda reported witnessing and experiencing potentially traumatic experiences such as SGBV against women and girls as well as men, severe physical abuse, and deaths. UNHCR staff and partners reported that many were experiencing severe mental health conditions as a result of their experiences.¹¹ In 2020, some of the risks refugees and migrants face along the route may be further increased as COVID-19-related border closures or movement restrictions may result in the use of more risky routes and further exposure to abuse, exploitation, and trafficking.¹²

As an agency entrusted with the global mandate to provide international protection and assistance to refugees and other persons within its mandate, and to find, together with Governments, solutions to their predicament, UNHCR's work is entirely non-political, humanitarian and social in character. UNHCR does not have a law enforcement or security mandate.¹³ However, UNHCR has an interest and responsibility where serious crimes, including murder, SGBV, and trafficking,¹⁴ affecting refugees, asylum-seekers, and others of concern are committed.

At the end of 2017, UNHCR shared recommendations related to trafficking with several key States and agencies to encourage further actions to protect refugees and migrants from abuses along the Central Mediterranean route. In follow up to those recommendations, UNHCR, together with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC),¹⁵ seeks to draw further attention to the human rights abuses that take place along multiple sections of the Central Mediterranean land route. In doing so, and through the recommendations included in this report, UNHCR and MMC call for measures to hold perpetrators of crimes and human rights violations along the route accountable; for more measures to assist and protect victims; and for greater cooperation between States to increase protection and access to solutions, and enhance access to justice.

This report does the following:

- Highlights the primary routes refugees and migrants use as they travel to and through Libya and Egypt;
- Describes some of the major risks they face along the way, based on the latest developments as of June 2020;
- Maps the main locations along the route where refugees and migrants consistently reported over a two-year period that serious violations and abuse took place, using data collected by the MMC's Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi)¹⁶ monitors between January 2018 and December 2019;
- Identifies the profiles of those reported to be responsible for abuses along different sections of the route, according to 4Mi respondents, and examines the different causes of deaths along particular stretches of the route;
- Provides examples of some measures to support survivors of abuses along the route, and notes some of the gaps in the protection available; and
- Highlights steps that need to be taken to curtail these crimes, bring perpetrators to account, and strengthen the support and safety mechanisms available to survivors.

JOURNEYS THROUGH WEST AFRICA, THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA, AND NORTH AFRICA

The Central Mediterranean route runs from West Africa and the East and Horn of Africa to Libya and/or Tunisia, and Egypt and onwards to Europe for those who attempt the perilous sea crossing. People move along the route in different ways with some only traveling one section and then remaining there, others stopping and working for some time before moving on, including as their intended destination changes, and people using different variations of the route. The report focuses in particular on movement to Libya as well as Egypt, including because 4Mi monitors consistently collected data on these routes in the time period covered.

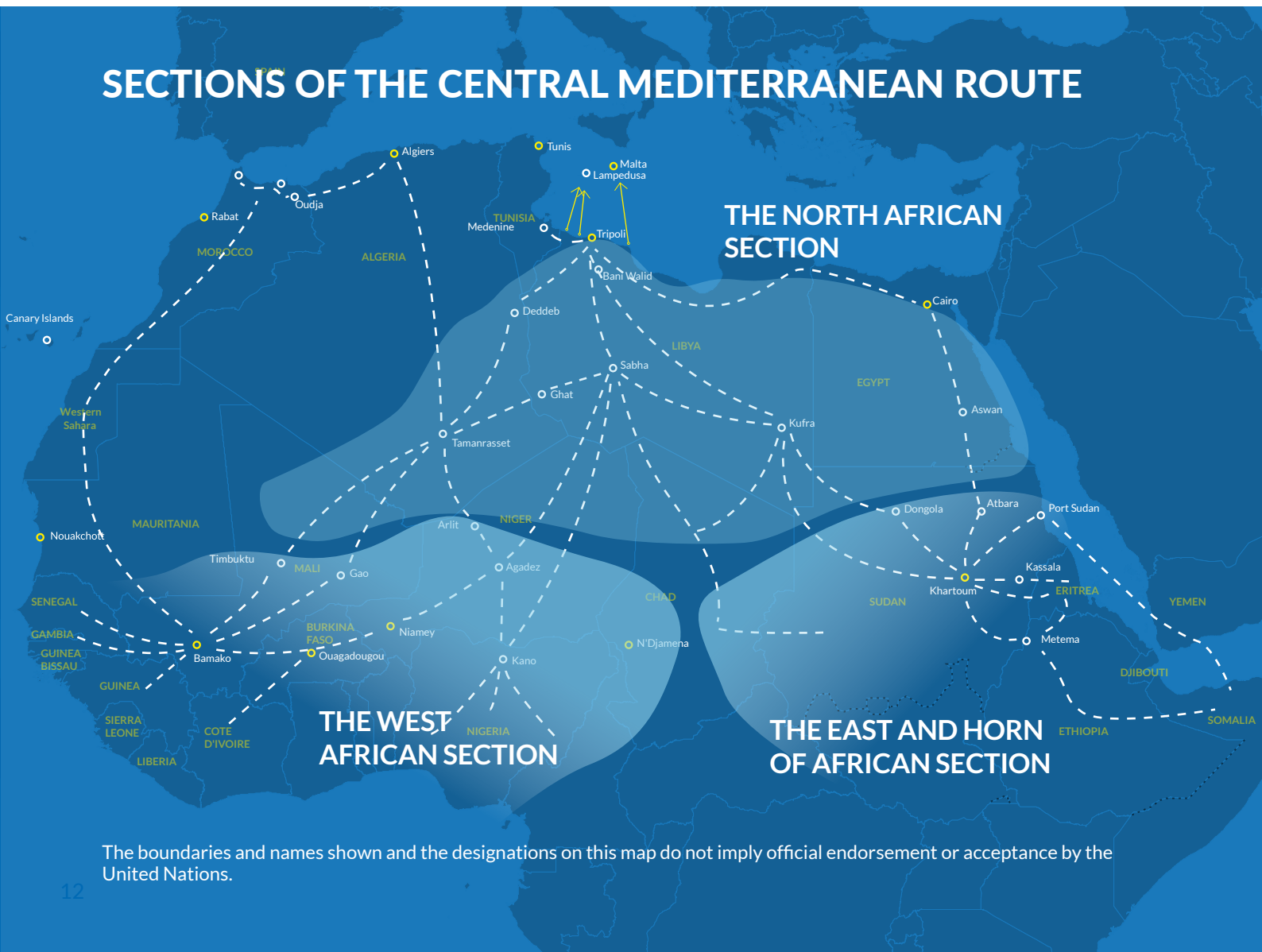
Despite fewer people being able to cross the sea from Libya to Europe since mid-2017 as well as increased border controls along parts of the route towards Libya, people have continued to travel towards North Africa from West Africa and the East and Horn of Africa for different reasons, including seeking protection, seeking employment, or joining family members. Many of those

surveyed by 4Mi monitors initially had different final destinations in mind, including Europe, Libya, Algeria, and Egypt.

For the purpose of this report, we refer to three different sections of the Central Mediterranean route, including because the means of travel may be different and because people usually become more dependent on smugglers from the point at which they need to cross the Sahara Desert. The three sections are as follows:

- **The West Africa section:** From West Africa, including via Mali and Burkina Faso, to or around Agadez (Niger) or Gao or Timbuktu (Mali) (after which people cross the desert);
- **The East and Horn of Africa section:** From the East and Horn of Africa to Atbara or El Shemaliya in Sudan (after which people cross the desert to Libya or Egypt); and
- **The North Africa section:** The journey onwards through the desert to and through North Africa (focusing mostly on Libya and Egypt).

SECTIONS OF THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE



The boundaries and names shown and the designations on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



Prior to crossing the desert, refugees and migrants traveling from West Africa usually pass through Mali, Burkina Faso, and/or Niger where Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regulations allow nationals of member states to travel visa-free with national identification documents.¹⁷ This means that citizens of ECOWAS countries holding such documents can potentially travel on public transport as far as Gao (Mali) or Agadez (Niger) without the need to resort to smugglers.¹⁸ While passing through the region, many have reported being subjected to bribery demands by state officials, including at roadblocks.¹⁹ Once in Gao or Agadez those traveling north through the desert usually first stay in ghettos or foyers as they arrange to travel on with smugglers.²⁰

In contrast, refugees and migrants traveling in the East and Horn of Africa, where freedom of movement for nationals of countries in the region has not yet been implemented,²¹ are far more reliant on smugglers to cross borders and in some countries, risk arrest if apprehended while undocumented or without permission to leave a refugee camp. This includes people traveling to capital cities for purposes including family reunification interviews at embassies. Those traveling to Libya or Egypt from the East and Horn of Africa all transit through Sudan, often arriving in the eastern towns of Gedaref and Kassala, sometimes with smugglers who may keep them in or around the towns for several days before transporting them on to Khartoum.²² Once in Khartoum, some may

then stay and work or may otherwise arrange with other smugglers to move onwards to Libya, sometimes via Chad, or to Egypt.²³ From Khartoum, groups usually head north in pickup trucks or buses to towns such as Dongola or Al Dabba both in El Shemaliya State in northern Sudan from where they prepare to cross to Libya or Egypt, including via Wadi Halfa, or else to Atbara before crossing to Egypt.²⁴

In order to cross the desert along the North African stretch, refugees and migrants are usually entirely dependent on smugglers. From this point onwards, some remain held by smugglers for the duration of their time in Libya, which may sometimes be two years or more.²⁵ Journeys through the north of Niger are mostly on the back of overloaded pickup trucks that travel fast and vary their routes while attempting to avoid detection.²⁶ For those crossing to Libya from Sudan, groups are usually handed over to Libyan smugglers in the border regions, sometimes resulting in people waiting in the desert for several days until they arrive.²⁷ Once in southern Libya, some may stop or be held in the towns of Sabha, Qatron, or Kufra or else be smuggled north towards Tripoli and the coast, sometimes stopping in smuggling hubs such as Bani Walid²⁸ and Ash Shwayrif.

The number of people moving to Libya via Sudan and Niger is understood to have reduced significantly since 2016 when, for example, IOM monitors recorded over 24,000 refugees and migrants passing through the north of Niger in a single month,²⁹ while

some 162,900 people crossed the sea to Italy from Libya that year.³⁰ This reduction in numbers traveling to Libya follows the introduction of legislation and other measures in Niger with European Union (EU) support to tackle smuggling through the north of the country,³¹ along with increased efforts by Sudanese authorities to reduce movement to Libya, also with EU support.³² At present the scale of movement from Niger, Algeria, Chad, and Sudan to Libya is not known but the majority of those interviewed by UNHCR or partners following arrival in Europe from Libya or at disembarkation in Libya have reported being in Libya for one year or more. In 2019, 7,450 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy and Malta from Libya, with a further 5,400 arriving in 2020 as of the end of June. The largest groups departing from Libya were Sudanese nationals, Bangladeshi,³³ Somalis, Moroccans, Malians, and Eritreans. Approximately a quarter of those who crossed the sea were children, most of them unaccompanied. A further 14,300 refugees and migrants were disembarked in Libya between January 2019 and June 2020, mostly after rescue or interception at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard.

RISKS DURING THE JOURNEY

Deaths

The risks along the different sections of the route are multiple. Many deaths are known to occur along the route, but the exact scale of deaths is unknown, as most deaths are believed to go unrecorded. Deaths occur in a variety of contexts with many people reported to have died in recent years while crossing the desert³⁴ or in captivity or detention in Libya.³⁵ Data published by IOM,³⁶ available from open sources,³⁷ and extracted from the interviews by 4Mi monitors,³⁸ suggests that some 1,750 people may have died during journeys along the land section of the Central Mediterranean route between 2018 and 2019, although the actual figure may be much higher.³⁹ As of 30 June, at least 68 refugees or migrants are known to have died along the Central Mediterranean land route in 2020, mostly in Libya, including 30 killed by the family of a trafficker after being reportedly kidnapped and subjected to physical abuse.⁴⁰

In addition, some 1,830 deaths were reported at sea after departing from Libya in 2018 and 2019 (1,133 in 2018 and 697 in 2019). While the number of deaths reduced in 2019 compared to 2018, a higher proportion of those who departed Libya by sea died in 2019. As of the end of June 2020, some 136 people are known to have died during the sea journey from Libya.⁴¹



The reckless and careless driving of Hilux drivers or smugglers in the desert are a major cause of the death of many migrants who unfortunately died along the journey. And many of the victims who died as a result of drivers' reckless driving were men due to the way they normally arrange the men at the edge of Hilux vehicles. So, despite all the smuggler's overloading and the poor seating arrangement of people, the drivers are still driving without caring about many of us who sat at the edge of the Hilux. And their careless driving led to the death of one of the men who fell while the vehicle was at high speed. And his body was buried in the desert by the driver. After the body was covered with sand, they later covered the ground with some stones in order to indicate it is a burial ground. Then I later realized that there are a lot of people who have died in the desert because there were many of the same signs in the desert."

Nigerian man, interviewed by MMC in December 2019

Sexual and gender-based violence

UNHCR and others have received multiple testimonies about continued high levels of SGBV at multiple stages of the journey, including as people flee their countries, as well as in many places as people travel onwards, affecting women and girls, as well as men and boys.⁴² SGBV along the route takes place in various situations, including at checkpoints,⁴³ in border areas,⁴⁴ as people cross the desert with smugglers, in detention centres,⁴⁵ in places where people are kept by smugglers,⁴⁶ and many other places. A report by the Libya Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (AOR) for the period January to September 2019 noted:

Sexual violence is used for extortion, subjugation, punishment, and entertainment, and frequently involves elements of profound cruelty and psychological torture. Sexual victimization is usually not a single event: findings suggest that refugees and migrants are repeatedly exposed to multiple forms of sexual violence by a variety of perpetrators in contexts of impunity. Men and boys are forced to witness sexual violence against women and girls (including lethal rape with objects) in official and unofficial centres of captivity and in the desert. It is frequently mentioned that men and boys are forced to rape women and girls, including family members. Women are also forced to perpetrate sexual violence against refugee and migrant men and boys. Much of this violence is carried out in public or filmed for humiliation and/or extortion purposes.⁴⁷



Bani Walid was even worse. They constantly tortured and punished my husband. I was raped again. They had no contraception, so they used plastic bags. Again, I became pregnant and again I lost my baby.”

Somali woman, evacuated from Libya by UNHCR, 2019

Trafficking, severe physical abuse, and kidnap for ransom

Trafficking in persons⁴⁸ is a historically under-detected crime, due to its hidden nature, the stigma attached to its victims and the vulnerable nature of their situation. These factors often contribute to making victims less willing to come forward, and make it difficult for relevant actors to identify them.

Globally, the majority of detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation have been female, while more than half of identified victims trafficked for forced labour were men.⁴⁹ Both trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour are believed to remain common along the route. Many women and girls arriving by sea from Libya are believed to have been victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation,⁵⁰ including in parts of southern Libya such as Sabha and Qatrun.⁵¹ In 2019, authorities in Africa and Europe made a number of arrests and freed multiple Nigerian and other West African victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.⁵²

For some traveling to Libya, what begins as smuggling may turn into trafficking, including in the event that people are unable to pay the smuggler on arrival in Libya, and are instead sold for labour or sexual exploitation, or held in debt bondage.⁵³ Others may negotiate to work for the smugglers to pay their debt but may still fall victim to trafficking. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has also expressed concerns about people being sold from official detention centres in Libya for forced labour or sexual exploitation.⁵⁴ In Italy, between 2018 and 2019, Territorial Commissions, the authorities that process asylum applications, referred some 10,000 possible victims of trafficking to specialist organizations.

Elsewhere along the route, people crossing into Sudan from Ethiopia or Eritrea are sometimes abducted as they cross the border on foot or once in Sudan, sold to traffickers by smugglers after failing to pay their smuggling fees, or deceived by smugglers and held for ransom or sold for sexual or labour exploitation.⁵⁵ Many have reported being held and subjected to abuse in a place known as Hajar, near Khartoum.⁵⁶ Between January 2017 and December 2019, UNHCR recorded over 630 cases of trafficking

of refugees and asylum-seekers in eastern Sudan, with nearly 200 women and girls reporting being survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. In West Africa, as people transit through Niger en route to Libya and Algeria, IOM reported identifying 326 victims of trafficking between 2016 and July 2019, with almost half from Nigeria.⁵⁷

Kidnap for ransom is also believed to remain common along parts of the route.⁵⁸ For example, kidnap for ransom practices have continued to be reported in parts of Sudan.⁵⁹ In some cases, kidnap for ransom may also occur in the context of people being initially unable to pay their smuggler or the smuggler demanding more money than was initially agreed upon. In Libya, with further reduced opportunities to arrange successful passage across the sea to Europe in 2019, some smugglers have reportedly turned increasingly to other means to make money from those under their control, resulting in increased demands for ransom, with some people being ransomed on multiple occasions,⁶⁰ as well as used for forced labour.⁶¹ Groups arriving by sea from Libya in 2020 or evacuated to Niger or Rwanda have told UNHCR about horrific experiences of repeated physical abuse,⁶² SGBV,⁶³ forced labour, and starvation⁶⁴ while being held for ransom in places such as Bani Walid.⁶⁵ In some cases, perpetrators of abuses may be of the same nationalities as the victims.

In Algeria, during profiling by UNHCR of over 1,800 refugees and asylum-seekers in 2018, 31% reported protection incidents perpetrated mainly by armed groups and smugglers (extortion, physical and SGBV, including exploitation and rape).



The woman that took us out of Nigeria was introduced to me by a friend. She told me about the woman and explained that she would like to take some girls... that she needs some girls to take to Europe and that if interested, we should let her know. We were eight so she took us all. She said we would be going to work in Europe. She didn't tell us the nature of the work, but we were eager to leave Nigeria because of the situation of the country...As we reached Libya, the woman said that we had to work a bit before proceeding to the crossing, since the road wasn't clear. I asked what the work would be and she said connection work [sex work]. Then I started crying, a friend of mine and I refused to do it. They started to beat us saying we must do it. That's the scar on my face. They beat us and said we must do it.”

Nigerian woman interviewed by Telling the Real Story, 2019

An Eritrean father holds his daughter in Tripoli after release from detention, December 2018.
© UNHCR/Farah Harwida



Risks in detention

Refugees and migrants in Libya, including many of those disembarked following interception or rescue at sea, continue to be arbitrarily detained.⁶⁶ Although three detention centres were closed in 2019, as of June 2020, according to UNHCR Libya there were still some 2,500 refugees and migrants in official detention centres. Reports from OHCHR and others have voiced concerns about severe overcrowding, food shortages,⁶⁷ very poor hygiene conditions, lack of consistent access to medical attention, as well as reports of abuse,⁶⁸ forced labour, and people going missing from within detention centres.⁶⁹ Libyan legislation (Law 19 of 2010), includes a provision allowing for people who have entered the country irregularly to face imprisonment for an undefined period of time, fines and hard labour.⁷⁰

The risks refugees and migrants face in detention centres increased in 2019, including as a result of the conflict. In July 2019, some 53 people were killed when an airstrike targeted the Tajoura detention centre.⁷¹ This was the second such strike on the facility that year, while shelling had also hit neighbourhoods close to where other detention centres are located⁷² and there had been a shooting incident at one centre.⁷³ Some refugees and migrants held in detention also reported being conscripted to fight in the conflict⁷⁴ or made to perform tasks including loading or cleaning weapons,⁷⁵ repairing and cleaning military vehicles, and removing bodies from the battlefield.⁷⁶ Since 2018, in just one detention centre in Zintan some 25 people are known to have died of tuberculosis and other illnesses.⁷⁷



I was held in a detention centre in Libya. So many people there are sick, most have tuberculosis. There is no medical treatment available. We would see people dying every day. At least two to three people each day. They took some people, at least 50 and said they would take them for treatment...but they never came back. We don't know if they are alive or not. The people have no access to sunlight or to fresh air. Me, I did not go outdoors from 2017 until now. My sisters, they are still there. It hurts me inside."

Eritrean man evacuated from Libya by UNHCR, 2019

Other risks

Other risks refugees and migrants face along the route also include death or injury in conflicts in parts of Burkina

Faso,⁷⁸ Mali⁷⁹ and Niger,⁸⁰ robbery,⁸¹ and frequent demands for bribes by local authorities.⁸² Arrest and expulsion,⁸³ especially in cases where people face threats to their lives or freedom upon return, also pose significant risks. In the East and Horn of Africa, some endure the risky sea journey to Yemen before traveling on to Libya via Sudan, while others face risks while leaving their own country.⁸⁴

While the prevalence of abuses along the route is not clear, surveys conducted by UNHCR and IOM in 2017 suggested that around 75% of people arriving to Italy from Libya had experienced some form of abuse along the route.⁸⁵ A MEDU report from March 2020 based on over three thousand testimonies between 2014 and 2020 notes that 85% of refugees and migrants who had passed through Libya suffered torture and inhuman or degrading treatment there.⁸⁶

MAPPING ABUSES: SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The dataset in this report was collected by MMC's 4Mi monitors⁸⁷ under the guidance of the 4Mi External Ethical and Methodological Review Team and the principle of 'do no harm'⁸⁸ between January 2018 and December 2019. 4Mi monitors conducted almost 16,000 interviews⁸⁹ in 21 locations in West Africa, the East and Horn of Africa, and North Africa, together with a smaller number in Europe with people who had travelled along the Central Mediterranean route. Most interviews used in this sample were conducted in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Germany, Libya, Mali, and Niger.

The survey used by 4Mi does not capture when incidents occurred, and as a result, the sample used in this report focuses on those who had been traveling for two years or less in order to gather data on more recent incidents related to current movement patterns.⁹⁰ The sample also only includes incidents that took place outside the respondent's country of origin, as a means of distinguishing between incidents that may have contributed to flight from the country of origin and those that occurred while in transit.

4Mi monitors⁹¹ are not present in every country along the route, and are only present in key transit locations in countries of data collection. 4Mi surveys use non-probability sampling, meaning that those interviewed are not necessarily reflective of all using these migration routes. As a result, some profiles are likely under or overrepresented within the sample. In addition, some profiles may not be accessible to monitors within Libya, such as those who are in detention or are being held in captivity by traffickers.⁹² Therefore, incidents in detention centres or in captivity may be underreported

in this sample. 4Mi monitors only interview adults and therefore the findings do not reflect the experiences of refugees and migrants under 18. However, other research has highlighted that children face similar abuses along the route.⁹³

In addition, the data analysed actually comprises three datasets, of which 54% consists of the West Africa dataset,⁹⁴ 32% the Libya dataset,⁹⁵ and 14% the East and Horn of Africa dataset.⁹⁶ Of the three combined datasets, 65% of those interviewed were males and 35% females. The primary nationalities were Nigerians (15%), Ethiopians (10%), Burkinabes (9%), Guineans (7%), and Ivorians (7%). As respondents were interviewed in different locations, they had completed different sections of the journey. As a result, rather than focusing on prevalence of incidents, the analysis in the next section examines types of abuses by location, including as a means of identifying areas of particularly high risk along the journey, according to the available data.⁹⁷ It also identifies the profiles of those reported as being responsible in each location. The data focuses on the following:

- Deaths witnessed along the route,
- Kidnappings experienced,⁹⁸
- SGBV (witnessed or experienced); and
- Other physical violence experienced.

To increase the reliability of information on deaths, reports of single incidents involving high numbers of deaths that did not include sufficient detail about the cause were filtered out. This was to avoid places being identified as 'high risk' areas based on one or two insufficiently substantiated reports in which high numbers of deaths at that location were claimed. As a result, more than 85% of the reports about deaths along the route were of incidents involving five or fewer deaths. Based on the information supplied about the causes of death, perpetrator (where applicable),⁹⁹ and location, deaths were categorised by whether they were related to crime or not. Incidents considered related to crime included those where factors such as physical abuse were reported (sometimes together with sickness and lack of access to medical help), as well as those that were reported to have occurred during journeys through the desert, due to smugglers' negligence.

MAPPING ABUSES: SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

The results of the almost 16,000 interviews conducted by 4Mi monitors, when filtered to reflect the experiences of those interviewed in 2018 and 2019, who had been traveling along the Central Mediterranean route, who

had been traveling for two years or less, and who were not reporting incidents in their own countries, further illustrates how refugees and migrants have to navigate various risks at multiple points along the route. As stated above, the results below do not indicate the total number of deaths that occurred along the route, or prevalence rates (including because some types of abuse such as SGBV is consistently underreported), but shows the locations where people most frequently reported abuses or deaths occurred, the primary causes of deaths in different locations, and identifies the type of actors refugees and migrants reported to be responsible for most abuses in the different locations along the route.

Deaths along the route

- 2,204 deaths were reported by 1,079 people. Of these deaths, 68% appeared to be directly related to crime, rather than deaths solely due to illness or accidents along the way;
- Of the 2,204 deaths reported, at least 1,395 took place in 2018 or 2019,¹⁰⁰ amounting to an average rate of almost 60 deaths per month.
- In the three samples, the highest number of deaths was reported to have occurred along the North Africa section of the route (59%), followed by the West Africa section (36%).¹⁰¹ The proportion of deaths directly related to crime was also particularly high along the North Africa section of the route (92%) followed by the East and Horn of Africa section (82%) with only some 27% of the deaths along the West Africa section related to crime.
- Of those who reported witnessing deaths, 14% witnessed deaths on more than one occasion.
- The primary location where deaths were reported was in the desert (28%), especially during the crossing from Niger to Libya, with many also reported in Sabha, southern Libya (7%). Other locations where higher numbers of deaths were reported were Bani Walid, Agadez, Tamanrasset, Bamako, Tripoli (all 3%), as well as the other locations as indicated in the accompanying map.
- Causes of death along the entire route were multiple and often overlapping. Many people reported that sickness and lack of access to medicine was a primary cause (915 deaths or 42%) but often this was in combination with other factors such as dehydration, starvation, and lack of adequate shelter usually indicating deaths during transport across the desert by smugglers or possibly in captivity. For others, the sickness and lack of access to medical attention was in combination with factors such as physical abuse or SGBV, which are likely indicators of deaths in captivity (190 deaths or 9%). Another common cause was

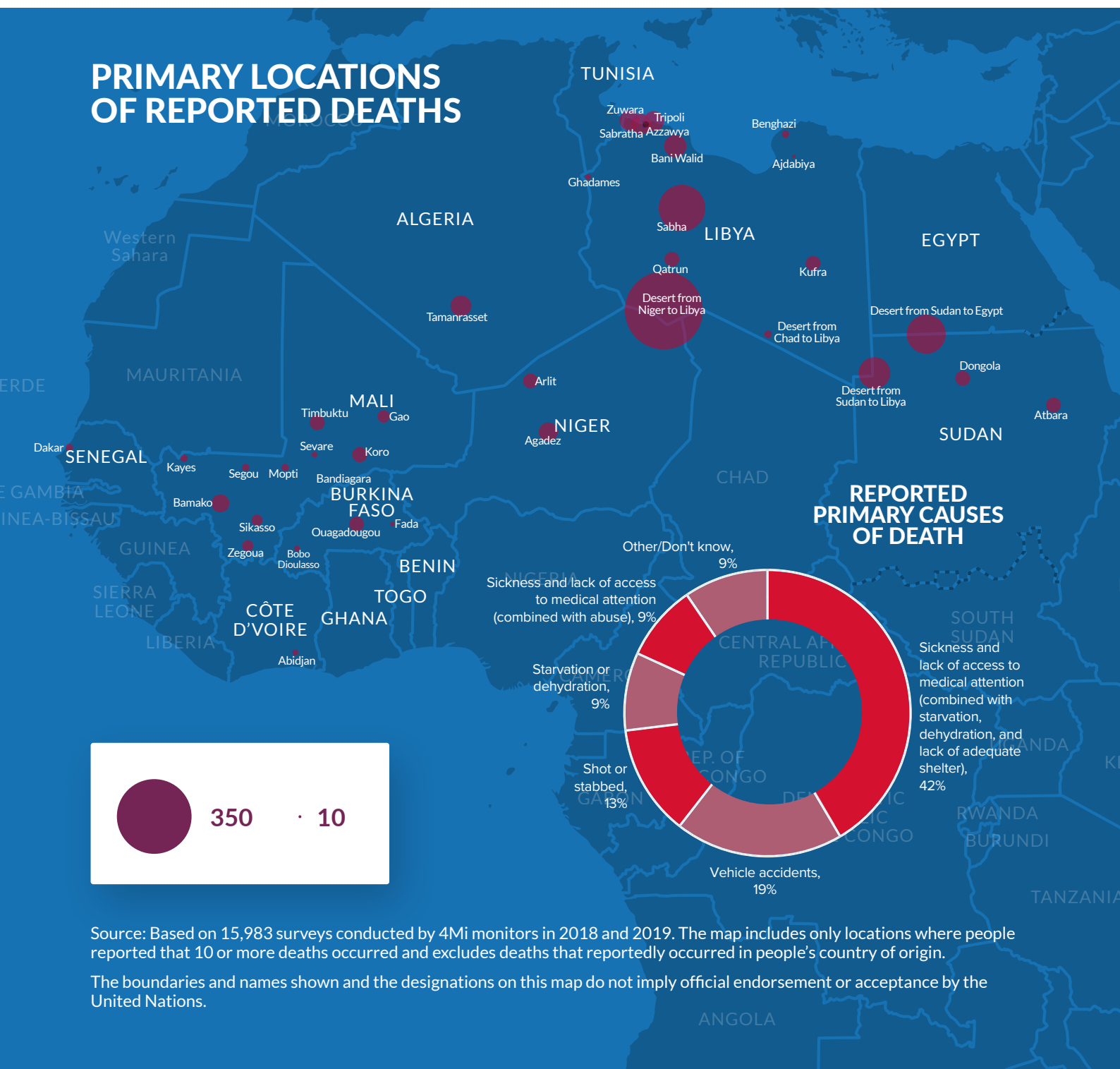
vehicle accidents (419 deaths or 19%), often during desert crossings which appeared to include people who had fallen from vehicles and died, had been abandoned, or had died during transport following abuse. Many others (276 people or 13%) were shot or stabbed or died as the result of physical abuse or SGBV. A further 9% (194) died as the result of starvation or dehydration, in combination with other factors, suggesting deaths in the desert or in captivity.

- Along the West Africa stretch of route, where only 27% of the deaths appeared to be related to crime, the primary causes of deaths were sickness without access to sufficient medical attention (33%) and vehicle accidents (31%), as

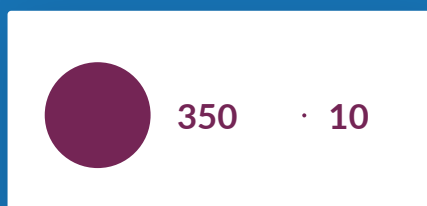
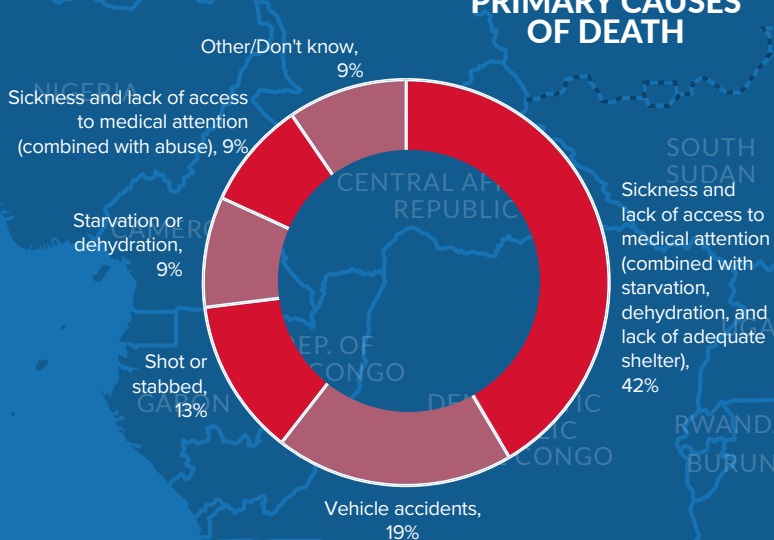
well as physical abuse or SGBV or being shot or stabbed (13%).

- Along the North Africa stretch, 54% of deaths were reported to be caused by factors such as sickness without being able to access medical attention, dehydration, and starvation; while 28% of deaths were attributed to factors including physical abuse or SGBV, or people being shot or stabbed.
- Along the East Africa stretch, 45% were reported to have died from sickness without being able to access medical attention in combination with factors such as dehydration and lack of shelter; while 28% were attributed to factors including abuse.

PRIMARY LOCATIONS OF REPORTED DEATHS



REPORTED PRIMARY CAUSES OF DEATH



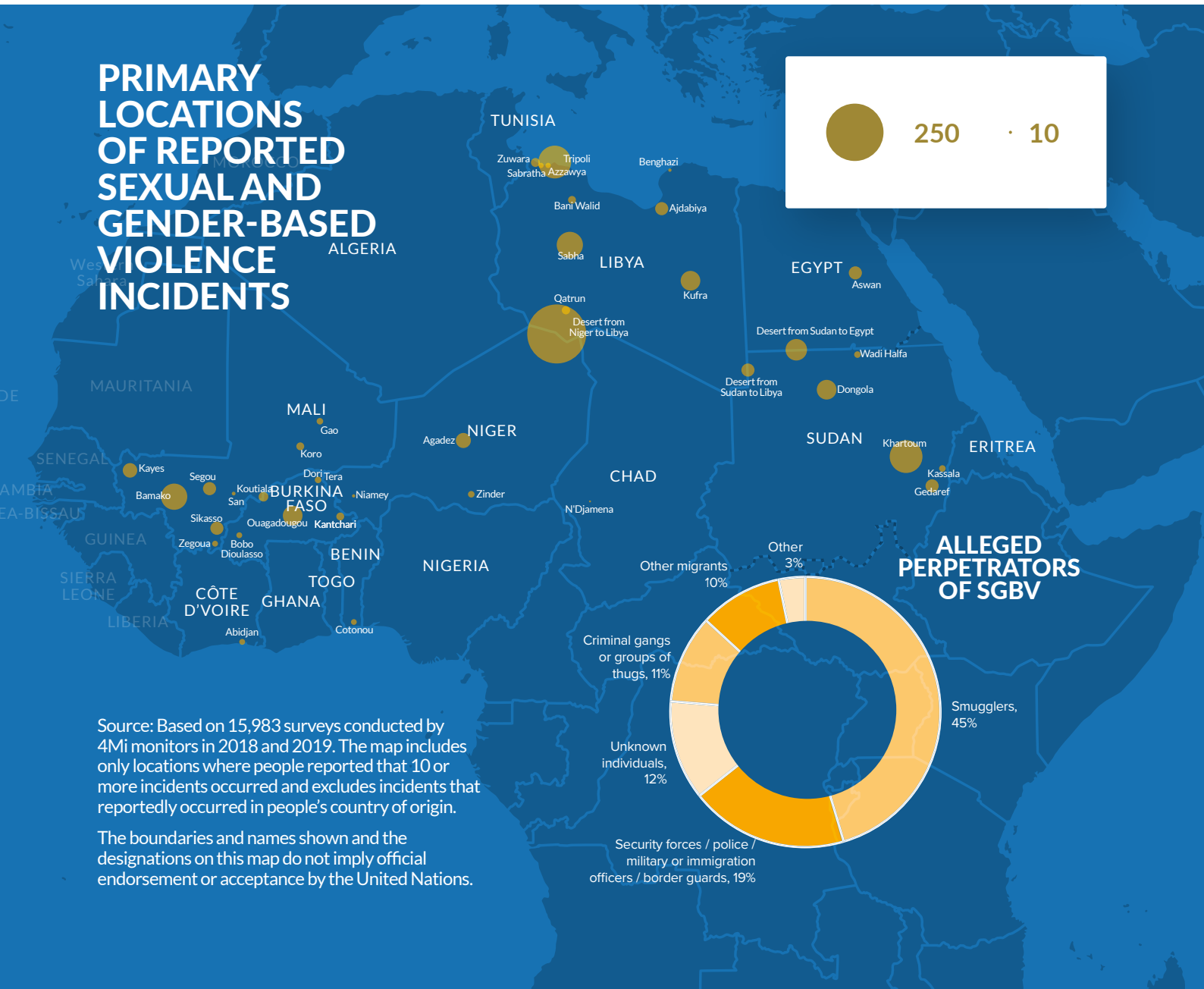
Source: Based on 15,983 surveys conducted by 4Mi monitors in 2018 and 2019. The map includes only locations where people reported that 10 or more deaths occurred and excludes deaths that reportedly occurred in people's country of origin.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

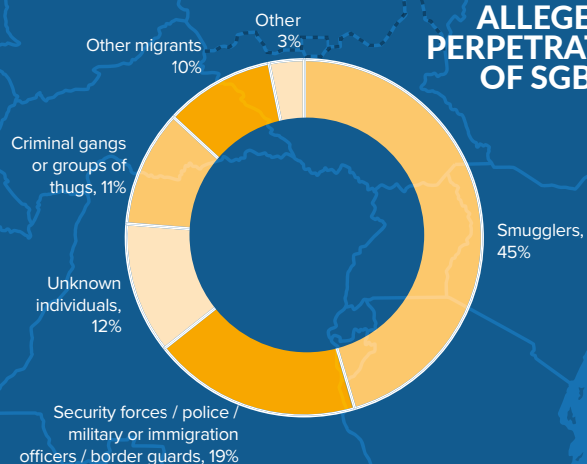
Sexual and gender-based violence, survivors, and alleged perpetrators

- 1,634 respondents reported witnessing or experiencing almost 2,008 incidents of SGBV affecting more than 6,100 people.
- While acknowledging that SGBV is known to be underreported and that prevalence levels are likely to be far higher than reported in this report, SGBV was most commonly reported along the North Africa section of the route (45% of reported SGBV incidents) followed by the West Africa section (38%) with a further 17% along the East and Horn of Africa section. Along the West African section of the route, most incidents reportedly took place in Mali (43%), Burkina Faso (26%) and Niger (16%).
- The primary locations where respondents reported that incidents had occurred were in the desert (especially while crossing from Niger to Libya, and from Sudan to Egypt) (18%), Tripoli (6%), Khartoum (6%), Bamako (5%) and Sabha (5%).
- Most of those who answered that they had witnessed or experienced SGBV incidents were women (65%).
- Some 31% of people who witnessed or experienced SGBV did so in more than one location.
- Along all three sections of the route combined, the primary perpetrators were reported to be smugglers (45%), security forces/police/military (19%), unknown individuals (12%), groups of thugs or criminal gangs (11%), and other migrants (10%).
- The primary perpetrators along the North African stretch of the route were reported to be smugglers (almost 60%), and armed groups in Libya (16%). Along the West African section of the route, the primary perpetrators were reported to be security forces/police/military (25%), single unknown individuals (24%), and other migrants (18%), while along the East and Horn of Africa section, smugglers were reportedly responsible for almost 90% of incidents.

PRIMARY LOCATIONS OF REPORTED SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE INCIDENTS



ALLEGED PERPETRATORS OF SGBV



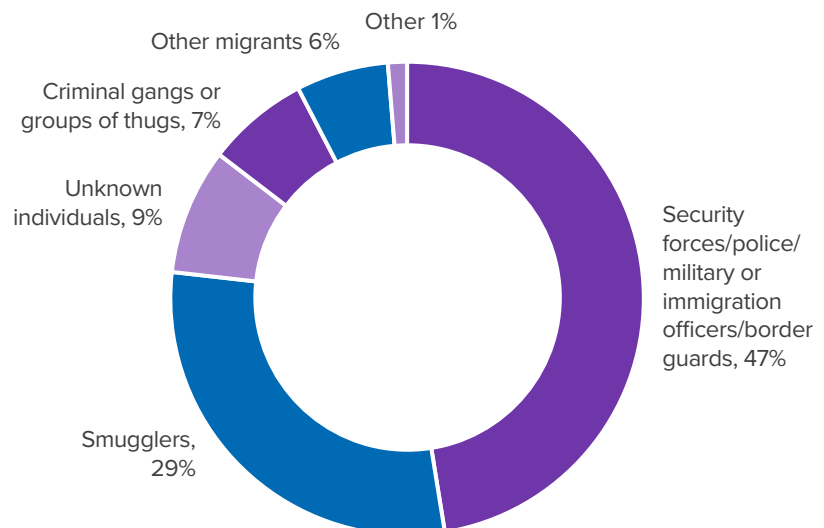
Source: Based on 15,983 surveys conducted by 4Mi monitors in 2018 and 2019. The map includes only locations where people reported that 10 or more incidents occurred and excludes incidents that reportedly occurred in people's country of origin.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Physical violence and alleged perpetrators


- 4,468 incidents of physical violence were reported to have been experienced by 2,883 people.
- Physical violence was most commonly reported along the West Africa section of the route (57%) followed by the North Africa section (36%). Along the West Africa section of the route, most incidents were reported to have occurred in Mali (56%), Burkina Faso (19%), and Niger (15%).
- The primary locations where physical violence was reported to have taken place were in the desert (especially while crossing from Niger to Libya) (11%), Bamako (8%), Tripoli (6%), Segou in Mali (5%), and Agadez (5%).
- 63% of those who reported experiencing physical violence were men. But given that 65% of those interviewed (prior to filtering) were male, this points to women also suffering from high levels of physical violence along the route.
- Most incidents of physical violence reported along the entire route were reportedly caused by security forces/police/military or immigration officers/border guards (47%), followed by smugglers (29%).
- The primary actors reported to be responsible for physical abuse along the West Africa stretch of route were security forces/police/military (63% of all incidents), while along the North Africa stretch and East Africa stretch, it was smugglers (52% and 91%, respectively).
- While men along the West African route reported that 70% of all physical violence incidents were caused by security/police/military, women reported a range of actors with security forces/police/military responsible for the highest number (51%), followed by single unknown individuals (12%), and immigration officials/border guards (10%). Along the other two stretches of route, men and women were generally consistent in their attribution of responsibility for physical abuse.
- Some 38% of people who reported experiencing incidents of physical violence reported experiencing this in more than one location, with 14% reporting experiencing violence on three or more occasions.

ALLEGED PERPETRATORS OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE ALONG THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE



Kidnapping and alleged perpetrators

- 171 respondents reported 291 instances of having been kidnapped. Some 70% reported being kidnapped for ransom more than once.
- Kidnapping was most commonly reported along the North African section of the route (57%), followed by the East and Horn of Africa section (40%).
- In this sample, most kidnappings were reported to have taken place along the route from Sudan to Egypt with the primary locations reported to be Atbara in northern Sudan (21%), Aswan in southern Egypt (18%), the desert between Sudan and Egypt (18%), and Gedaref in eastern Sudan (12%).
- Smugglers were overwhelmingly reported to be the primary perpetrators (79%).



'I was held prisoner several times since I left my country, I've been locked up in a room, without food or water for days; nobody tells you why you are detained, it happened all the time in the route, they stopped us in the desert and their intention was to kill us but you can die in the desert, you can die in Libya, you can die in the sea.' A West African asylum-seeker, 19, was rescued by a Spanish fishing boat together with 11 people at the end of 2018 after departing from Libya and later disembarked in Spain.

© UNHCR/Markel Redondo

When we got to Libya, they took us to a big building with a lot of people. After they took me there, they asked me to pay the money. It was a basement and there were many people, around 300. There were people with a lot of problems, and some were sick. After we entered the place, they asked me to pay the money. They asked me to pay \$8,000. I called my mother. I told her that I have been held for \$8,000 ransom. My mother said, "I don't have \$8,000! You want me to sell the house. I will look for what I can for you."

After that, the man took me outside every day and asked me if I had paid the money. I told him that it was coming and to wait. Just like that, he used to take me outside everything and do this. He put water in a bucket and poured it on me, and Libya is cold. He undressed me in front of everybody, he took off my hijab, and poured water on my head. He put my head in the bucket and hit my legs with the stick.

Finally, my mother called me and said, "I do not have anything. If I sell the house, I do not have anywhere else to sleep." And I told her not to worry and that Allah will take care of me. "I will leave this place one day. Do not feel pressured."

The men told me to pay \$8,000, otherwise they told me they will kill me and take me to the cemetery. "We will kill you by burning you alive." He then told me to pay, the man told me to pay \$4,000. My uncle and my mother looked for the money. My uncle said, "I have \$2,000. Should I send you the \$2,000?" I said to him, "If you send me the \$2,000, he will stop beating me and ease the pressure on me. So send me the \$2,000." He sent me the \$2,000.

He used to take me outside every night. On top of that, he used to take everyone, the 300 plus people, outside and tell me to wash even the walls. "Clean the place where the food is cooked! Clean my clothes! Clean my house." If he sees even the tiniest dirt on it, he grasps my ear and beats me. Yes, every night he used to bring me outside.

No, I was not raped in Libya, but I was beaten. There were girls that he used to take and keep all night. The man that was keeping us hostage, the Libyan man, he gets drunk and tortures everybody. There were girls he took, he used to take them, and take them to his house and rape them.

There were people he used to beat. Mostly the boys, he used to tell them to face the wall, all the men, and used to beat them. They used to face the wall. He used to use a stick. He used to undress them.

There were girls that we used to talk to. They used to take during the night whoever they want. You know, we used to sleep on the floor. He used to come in, and point his torch light just like that. Anyone he sees, I mean as soon as he sees the person, he takes her. It doesn't matter who, he used to take, but Allah never let this to happen to me.

I swear they used to come to us. All the girls gathered around. "This happened to me and this happened to me." They used to tell us about it, but what can we do. We cannot do anything, we just used to cry also.

Khadra from Somalia, interviewed by Telling the Real Story, 2018.

MAPPING ABUSES: THE WEST AFRICAN SECTION



If you get a flat tyre in the desert, it is difficult to change it because of the sand; the car jack is sinking in the sand. Therefore, they used a migrant that did not have enough money left to pay the passage. This man was used as a support for the car jack to protect the car from sinking in the sand. This man did not support the effort and he was abandoned there to die. They forced a friend of mine to kill his friend with a knife because he did not have money to give to them. If the women don't have enough money, they rape them in front of everyone."

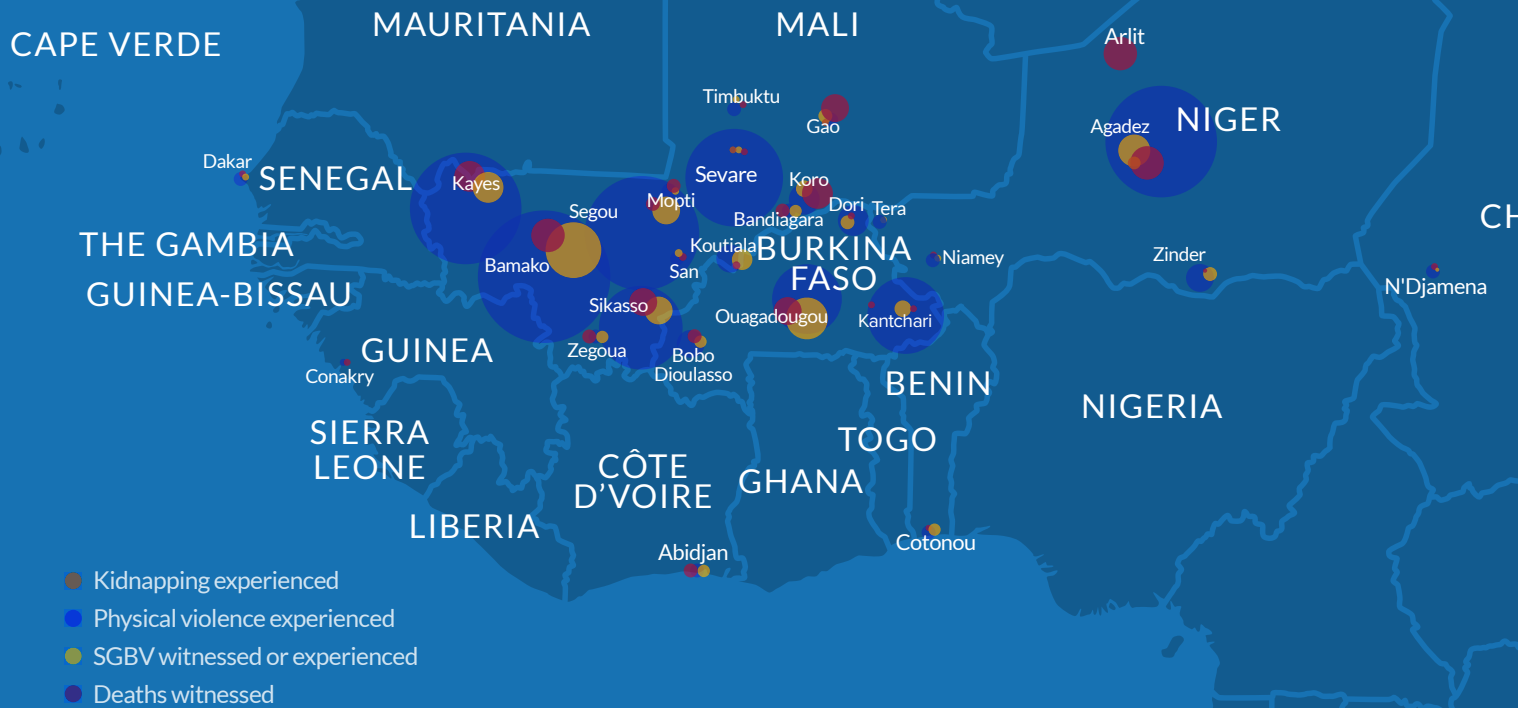
Guinean man describing crossing the desert from Niger to Algeria, interviewed in Europe by a UNHCR partner, 2019.

Along the West African section of the route towards Libya or Algeria, refugees and migrants consistently reported that incidents occurred in the capital cities of Mali and Burkina Faso, and to a lesser extent Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Senegal, Benin, and Chad. Very few kidnapping incidents were reported to have taken place along this section of the route but the countries where most deaths, incidents of SGBV, and physical violence were reported to have occurred were Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the primary three transit countries along this section of the route.¹⁰² Similarly, Bamako, Ouagadougou, and Agadez were the cities where most incidents were reported to have occurred.¹⁰³ Of the 27 cities in which relatively high numbers of incidents in one or more category were reported, 12 were in Mali, five in Niger, and four in Burkina Faso.

While most deaths witnessed by 4Mi respondents in West Africa were reported to be the result of people falling sick and not having access to sufficient medical attention, or vehicle accidents, cities where 4Mi respondents reported the highest numbers of deaths that appear to have been related to crimes were Arlit and Agadez (Niger), and Koro, Gao, and Timbuktu (all Mali). In Arlit, respondents reported that smugglers were responsible for all incidents due to physical abuse, while in Gao, Agadez, and Timbuktu, respondents reported that most deaths were caused by thugs or criminal gangs, with most deaths the result of people being shot or stabbed, subjected to physical abuse, or vehicle accidents following abuse.

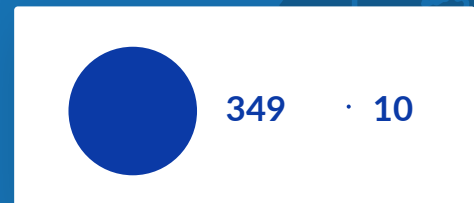
According to the information provided by respondents, the perpetrators of abuses varied along the route. In Mali, 78% of incidents of physical violence were reportedly perpetrated at checkpoints by security forces/police/military or immigration officials/border guards, while these same authorities were reportedly responsible for 42% of the incidents of SGBV. Other reported perpetrators of SGBV were other migrants (23%), thugs or criminal gangs (16%), and unknown individuals (11%). In Burkina Faso, 60% of incidents of physical violence were reported to have been perpetrated by security forces/police/military or immigration officials/border guards, including in border areas, followed by unknown individuals (15%). Most incidents of SGBV in Burkina Faso were reported to have been perpetrated by unknown individuals (49%), with security forces/police/military or immigration officials/border guards (15%), other migrants (12%), and thugs or criminal gangs (9%) also reportedly responsible for some incidents. In Niger, 40% of incidents of physical violence were reportedly perpetrated by security forces/police/military or immigration officials/border guards, 33% by smugglers, and 10% by other migrants. The primary perpetrators of SGBV against refugees or migrants, according to the data, were smugglers (35%), and other migrants (23%), and almost half the reported incidents took place in Agadez.

PRIMARY LOCATIONS OF REPORTED DEATHS AND ABUSES, WEST AFRICA SECTION OF THE ROUTE



Source: Based on 15,983 surveys conducted by 4Mi monitors in 2018 and 2019. Excludes incidents reported to have taken place in a respondent's country of origin.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



MAPPING ABUSES: THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA SECTION



We left Eritrea in early March and there were three young men who travelled with us but we did not know who they were. When we got to the border, the smuggler called someone and told them to come with a car. Three men came and asked us to board and immediately our smuggler disappeared. All of us were blindfolded and taken to a house where they started beating us and asked us to call our families, demanding more than \$6,000. Our families said they could not afford the money. My friend and I were tied up and we were raped in front of the young men. They continued doing this for five days. One night, my friend and I asked to go outside to answer a call of nature and we quickly jumped over the wall. The traffickers were in hot pursuit but we found a large tree where we hid for several hours. We walked barefoot because the traffickers had taken away our shoes. We were very scared. We walked for a full day before we came to a

homestead where a couple came out of the house and they took us in, where we were given food and also water and soap to bathe.”

Eritrean woman interviewed by Telling the Real Story, 2018.

As refugees and migrants entered or transited Sudan,¹⁰⁴ most abuses were reported to have taken place in Atbara, El Shemaliya, Gedaref, Khartoum and Wadi Halfa.¹⁰⁵ Most deaths (44%) were reported to have occurred in Atbara, a town in northern Sudan towards the Egyptian border, with all appearing to be related to crime. Respondents primarily reported that smugglers, and sometimes immigration officials or border guards, were responsible for the deaths with many being caused by physical abuse and SGBV, as well as sickness and lack of access to medicine, harsh weather without proper shelter, and dehydration – likely indicators of deaths during journeys through the desert. Atbara was also where the highest proportion of kidnappings for ransom (52%) along this section of the route was reported to have occurred. Respondents reported that smugglers were responsible for most. Physical violence (19%

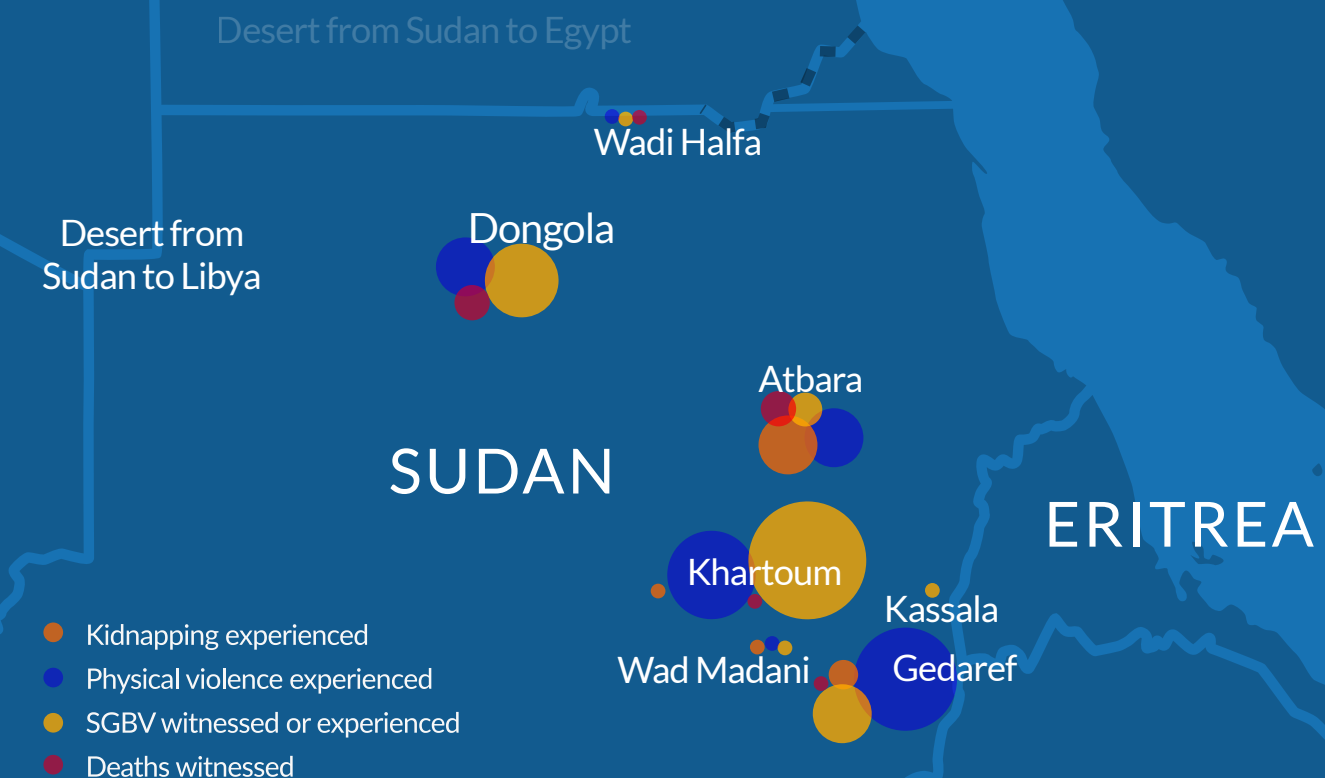
of incidents along this section of route) and SGBV (10% of incidents along this section of route) were also frequently reported in Atbara, with respondents again stating that smugglers were responsible for most incidents.

Deaths were also consistently reported in El Shemaliya (33% of incidents along this section of the route), northwest of Khartoum along the route to Libya or Egypt, with smugglers reported to have been responsible for most. Factors such as sickness and lack of access to medical treatment, together with dehydration, and lack of access to shelter, were the most common reported causes. SGBV was reported by many with the second highest numbers after Khartoum, as was physical violence. Smugglers were reported to be responsible for most.

Respondents interviewed by 4Mi monitors reported that many kidnappings for ransom also took place in Gedaref, close to the Sudanese borders with Eritrea and Ethiopia (31% of incidents reported along this route), with smugglers reported to be responsible for most. SGBV (16% of reported incidents) and physical violence (29% of reported incidents) was also frequently reported to have occurred here.

Finally, more than a third of all SGBV incidents reported along this section of the route were said to have occurred in Khartoum, with smugglers reportedly primarily responsible. In addition, 25% of the physical violence incidents reported took place in Khartoum, along with 10% of kidnappings for ransom.

PRIMARY LOCATIONS OF REPORTED DEATHS AND ABUSES, EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA SECTION OF THE ROUTE



Source: Based on 15,983 surveys conducted by 4Mi monitors in 2018 and 2019. Excludes incidents reported to have taken place in a respondent's country of origin.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

SOUTH
SUDAN

MAPPING ABUSES: THE NORTH AFRICAN SECTION



The smuggler driver that carried us from Agadez dropped us at Qatrun. On the second day another set of drivers carried us to Sabha. When we reached Sabha, the drivers dropped us at a house that has a compound and big gate. Immediately when we were dropped from the vehicle, I saw many people that looked malnourished, hence I realised that something terrible is happening there. After some minutes, the drivers came to us and told us to call our people to come and bail us out because they were told that we all came on credit. But the truth is that I was very confident that my brother paid my money before I left home. It happened that the wicked people we met in the compound mistreated us seriously. Some people also died there due to the heavy beatings and hunger. Later, I contacted my brother and he promised to do something fast. He sent money, and I was released through the help of some people.”

Ghanaian man, interviewed by MMC, 2019.

The journey through the desert to Libya or Egypt is known to be one of the most dangerous parts of the journey, and the data from interviews by 4Mi with refugees and migrants supports this. People interviewed in 2018 and 2019 reported witnessing some 619 deaths as they travelled through the desert. Of these, 53% appeared to have occurred while crossing from Niger to Libya, 25% during the crossing from Sudan to Egypt, 18% while crossing from Sudan to Libya,¹⁰⁶ with far smaller numbers reported during the crossings between Niger or Mali and Algeria, Chad to Libya, and Egypt to Libya.

Most deaths in the desert were reported to be caused by factors such as dehydration, starvation, lack of shelter, lack of access to medical treatment, and vehicle accidents. But along the stretch between Sudan and Egypt, a particularly high proportion (59%) of refugees and migrants compared to the other routes reported that physical abuse or SGBV was among the causes (often together with dehydration, lack of access to medical treatment, and starvation).

A relatively high number of kidnappings for ransom were reported along the stretch of desert between Sudan and Egypt, with only a handful of incidents reported during the journey through the desert from Sudan to Libya,¹⁰⁷ although in the latter case, kidnappings may be underreported, according to anecdotal information reported by refugees and migrants in information provided to UNHCR.

SGBV was reported by many during the journey through the desert, especially during the crossing from Niger to Libya, particularly at the hands of smugglers or armed groups. SGBV was also frequently reported during the desert crossing from Sudan to Egypt, with respondents reporting that smugglers were responsible for most incidents. Physical violence was particularly reported during the journey from Niger to Libya with smugglers (48%), and security forces or armed groups (34%) said to be primarily responsible.

Once across the desert, many refugees and migrants have reported being held and subjected to abuse in cities in southern Libya, such as Sabha, Kufra, and others.¹⁰⁸ The data collected by 4Mi supports this. For example, 4Mi respondents reported witnessing 165 deaths in Sabha, 48 in Qatrun, and 47 in Kufra. In Sabha, where many arriving from Niger first stop in Libya, respondents specifically reported that abuse or being shot or stabbed by smugglers or criminal gangs was a contributing factor to 66% of deaths. Most of the remaining 34% of reported deaths also appeared consistent with conditions of captivity, with people reportedly dying of factors such as dehydration, starvation, and lack of medical attention. Most of the 48 deaths in Qatrun were reported by people interviewed towards the end of 2019, with over 80% being reported by people who said they had been traveling for less than a year, suggesting many of the deaths were recent. Most reported deaths appeared to be the consequence of journeys through the desert or captivity, including starvation, dehydration, and lack of access to medical attention. In Kufra, the first stop in Libya for many on the journey from Sudan, most of the 47 deaths were reported to be the result of dehydration or lack of access to medical attention, also consistent with journeys through the desert and captivity. SGBV was also consistently reported in Sabha and Kufra, with smugglers reported to have been responsible for most (63% across the two locations).

In the north of Libya, most deaths (69) were reported in the smuggling hub of Bani Walid, with starvation, dehydration, and lack of medical attention, seemingly while in captivity, the cause of most.¹⁰⁹ SGBV was also consistently reported, with smugglers together with criminal gangs reported to be the main perpetrators. The second highest number of deaths in northern Libya was reported to have occurred in Tripoli (57). Some 54% of deaths in Tripoli were directly attributed to some form of abuse (including physical abuse, SGBV, or being shot or stabbed), while the remainder were related to lack of access to medical attention, sometimes together with starvation and dehydration, possibly due to

captivity. High numbers of incidents of SGBV were reported (126) with smugglers, sometimes together with criminal gangs reported to be the most frequent perpetrators (48%), followed by unknown individuals (28%). Most incidents of physical violence were reported to have occurred in Tripoli and respondents reported that smugglers (sometimes together with criminal gangs) (41%), unknown individuals (33%), and armed groups (11%) were the primary perpetrators.

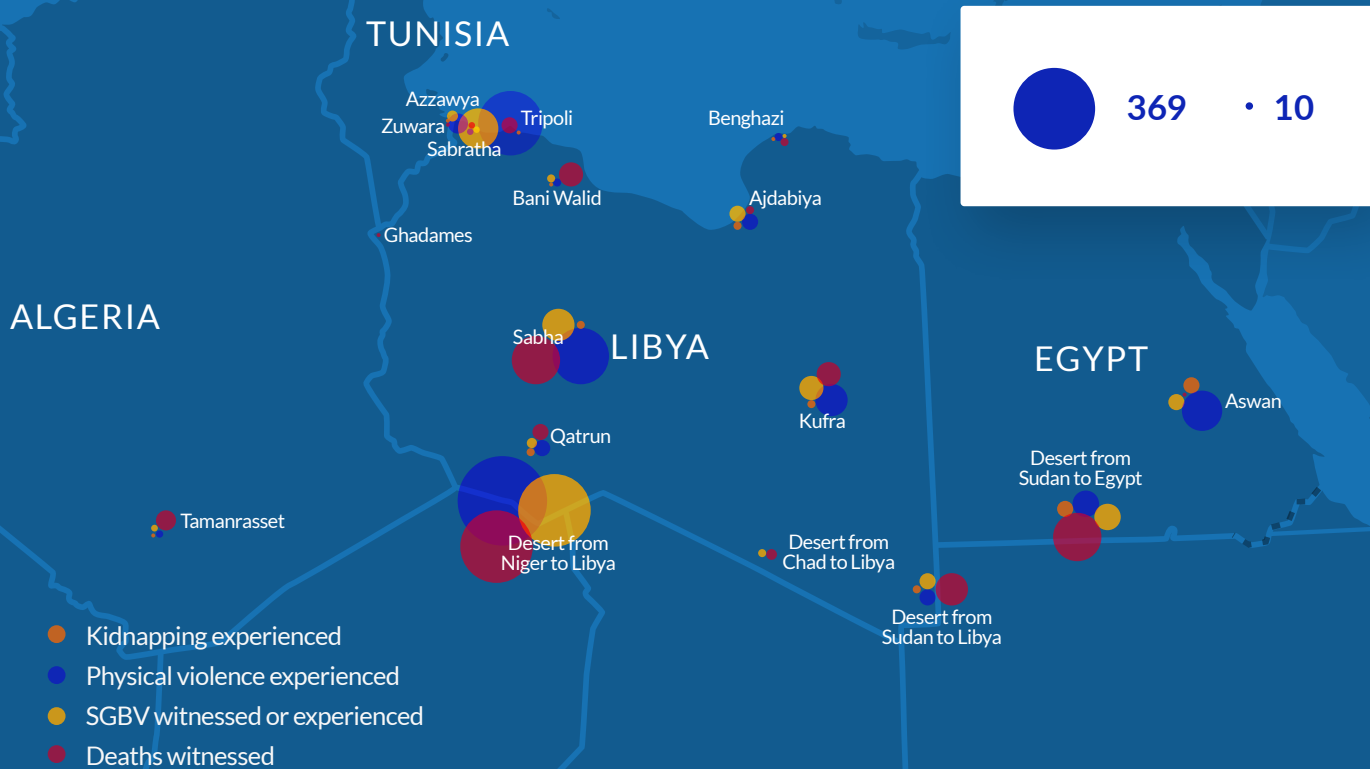
Along the coast to the west of Tripoli, respondents reported multiple deaths in Sabratha (37) and Zuwara (31), both departure areas for boats traveling towards Europe. Most deaths in both cities appeared due to conditions while being held by smugglers in captivity (including lack of access to medicines, starvation, dehydration). In addition, respondents reported 11 deaths in a detention centre and stated that detention conditions and physical abuse caused the deaths.

In eastern Libya, Ajdabiya and Benghazi were the cities where respondents reported protection incidents, with 24 deaths in Benghazi and 12 in Ajdabiya, but many incidents of SGBV in Ajdabiya, with smugglers reported to be responsible for most.

Southern Egypt and Algeria

Elsewhere in North Africa, respondents reported many incidents in Aswan, in southern Egypt, and Tamanrasset, in southern Algeria. In Tamanrasset, respondents reported 63 deaths, with 68% reportedly caused by factors such as dehydration, lack of access to medical treatment, and starvation, and some 32% attributed to factors including physical abuse, starvation, and being shot or stabbed. Responsibility was only attributed in 22% of cases and of these, criminal gangs or thugs were reported to be responsible for most. In Aswan, there were high numbers of reports of kidnappings for ransom (52) with smugglers reported to be responsible for all, as well as almost all of the 49 incidents of SGBV.¹¹⁰

PRIMARY LOCATIONS OF REPORTED DEATHS AND ABUSES, NORTH AFRICA SECTION OF THE ROUTE



Source: Based on 15,983 surveys conducted by 4Mi monitors in 2018 and 2019. Excludes incidents reported to have taken place in a respondent's country of origin.

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Many of those we see at the ETM after evacuation from Libya have had very traumatizing experiences having witnessed deaths, suffered severe physical abuse, sexual violence, and often starvation. Many of the women we see have suffered sexual violence, along with some of the men, but it usually takes people a long time to be open about this. The impact of this abuse that we observe includes PTSD with symptoms including flashbacks and nightmares; severe depression, and in some cases, self-harm. Many of those we see are very resilient, despite their experiences, but may need the option of access to psycho-social support in the longer term to help deal with the trauma.

Marzia Vigliaroni
Mental Health Psychosocial Support Officer
UNHCR Niamey



SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS OF ABUSES ALONG THE ROUTE

At present, support for survivors varies significantly across the region. Some examples of key locations where there are positive interventions at present include in eastern Sudan, northern Niger and Rwanda, and at disembarkation in Italy.

Assisting victims of trafficking in Eastern Sudan

In eastern Sudan in Kassala, UNHCR helps to identify victims of trafficking and supports two gender-segregated safe shelters, managed by the Sudanese Red Crescent. These accommodate victims likely in need of international protection, victims facing serious risk of harm, and those requiring particular medical attention or care that cannot be monitored from within the camps. Admission to the shelters is strictly controlled as a safety precaution, and medical, mental health and psychosocial support, and legal support, as well as some skills training is available for residents. Stays at the shelters are temporary, and longer-term options are explored with residents, depending on their personal circumstances, such as relocation to Khartoum, resettlement, or return to one of the nearby refugee camps.¹¹¹ In addition, to support access to justice for victims of trafficking, in 2017, UNHCR supported the installation of a witness testimony room linked to the Kassala Anti-Trafficking Court via video and audio in order to protect the identity of testifying victims.

In addition to the safe houses, UNHCR also provides legal aid and support to victims of trafficking and witnesses, supports with family reunification especially in cases involving child victims, and conducts outreach to increase awareness of the risks involved in irregular migration, as part of the Telling the Real Story project.¹¹²

Assistance in Niger and Rwanda for people evacuated from Libya

Since November 2017, UNHCR has been evacuating groups of particularly vulnerable refugees from Libya to Niger, thanks to an Emergency Transit Mechanism established with the Government of Niger. A similar Emergency Transit Mechanism was established in Rwanda in 2019.¹¹³ As of June 2020, some 3,200 people have been evacuated to Niger since the start

of the programme and just over 300 people have been evacuated to Rwanda. Many of them are victims of horrific violence, including extreme physical abuse and SGBV. Once at the Emergency Transit Mechanisms, they are provided with accommodation, and programmes assisting with mental and physical health have been established, given the severe mental health conditions many are experiencing, along with the physical effects of the abuse they have suffered. At the same time, longer term solutions are explored for each person, including possible resettlement or support to settle locally.

According to UNHCR staff in Niger, refugees evacuated from Libya who have been subjected to severe physical abuse have demonstrated severe longer-term effects with most suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or severe depression and some with physical manifestations such as flashbacks, nightmares, and psychological trauma.

Identification of possible victims of trafficking during asylum procedures in Italy

In Italy, victims of trafficking are amongst those arriving by sea. As part of the modus operandi of some trafficking networks, some victims are encouraged to apply for asylum as a means of regularising their status in order for their exploitation to continue in Europe. In response, in 2016, UNHCR and the National Commission for the Right to Asylum developed guidelines to assist the Territorial Commissions to identify possible victims and refer them to groups specialised in protecting victims. This has significantly increased the number of potential trafficking victims identified by the Territorial Commissions and referred to the anti-trafficking network.

Other initiatives to identify and support victims elsewhere along the route include a partnership established between UNHCR and the national federation of road carriers in Burkina Faso to strengthen the identification of victims of trafficking and refer them to appropriate services, and a partnership in Chad between UNHCR and the Red Cross to increase the identification of people in need of international protection along key routes and refer them to the available services.

GAPS IN ASSISTANCE FOR SURVIVORS

Despite several positive initiatives, there remain many gaps in assistance for survivors of abuses along the route. One major challenge remains identification of survivors, including because people often transit quickly along the route. As demonstrated by the data results above, frequently violent crime targeting refugees or migrants occurs in locations where there is conflict, a reduced presence of state institutions, and where humanitarian actors have very limited access, including due to government policy, security factors or in remote desert areas. In the context of increased enforcement of border controls towards Libya imposed by some countries, in some locations, smugglers have reportedly changed routes or gathering locations to avoid detection.¹¹⁴ Once survivors have been identified, at present, coordination and referral systems between national authorities, humanitarian agencies, and community-based organizations are generally weak without clear agreements on how best survivors will be collectively assisted.

Similarly, more needs to be done to strengthen the identification of victims of trafficking, including following disembarkation in Europe. In Malta, at present, victims of trafficking are rarely identified soon after disembarkation and a comprehensive assessment of individuals' vulnerabilities may only take place months after arrival, including due to

limited social work capacity at the reception centres.

A second major challenge is the current shortage of safe shelters in which to place survivors of serious crimes following identification.¹¹⁵ In Sudan, at present, there are no formal safe shelters in Atbara or Dongola and only limited capacity shelter in Khartoum, for survivors of abuses. In Niger, there are plans to build reception centres for victims of trafficking in Niamey and Agadez, which would provide welcome shelter capacity.¹¹⁶ In addition, for those arriving by sea from Libya in Italy and Malta, there are at present insufficient safe shelters in both countries for victims of trafficking,¹¹⁷ while shelter in general for refugees and migrants in Libya remains a major challenge. In some countries along the route, victims face the risk of being detained, sometimes with the possibility of subsequent deportation, including potential *refoulement*.

At present, access to legal aid for refugee or migrant survivors of abuses is very limited along most of the route. In addition, because many people who are survivors of abuses along some sections of the route are travelling in an irregular manner and without the necessary legal permissions to enter or transit the territories of the concerned States, they may be vulnerable to arrest and deportation, may fear reporting crimes to the necessary authorities, and may not be able to access the necessary medical (including SGBV response services) and other support, including mental health and psychosocial support.¹¹⁸



A young couple sit with their two-month-old daughter on their first day at the Gashora Emergency Transit Centre in Rwanda following their evacuation from Libya, 2019. © UNHCR/Tobin Jones

In June 2014, when Winta had to say goodbye to two of her children she never imagined she would have to wait four years to see them again. She had left home with her two youngest children, Melat and Yonathan, and settled in Switzerland. Her two eldest, Ermias and Ksanet, stayed behind with her grandparents but with insecurity increasing in the region, they later fled and eventually tried to cross the Sahara Desert with their uncle. They planned to cross the Mediterranean and join Winta in Europe, but their convoy was attacked and they were kept in a detention centre in Libya with a ransom demanded for their release. Finally, in April 2018, following an intervention by UNHCR, they were reunited with their mother. © UNHCR/Mark Henley



In addition, at different points along the route, there is very limited financial assistance and psychosocial counselling available, including for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Similarly, there is very limited presence of humanitarian actors at many key points along the route, including places highlighted as being high risk areas by the data in this report. This means limited access to assistance for those in transit, as well as those who have already fallen victim to crime.

Support for children along the route remains very limited even though unaccompanied children continue to depart from some camps along the route. In October 2019, UNHCR launched its Live, Learn and Participate initiative with the intention to strengthen protection available in six key locations along the route from the East and Horn of Africa to Tripoli and Cairo, including through better identification, the provision of urgent support such as the provision of emergency housing and access to safe spaces, as well as improved access to family reunification and other legal pathways.¹¹⁹

In Libya, a further continuing challenge is the lack of a national registration system for refugees and migrants, including those disembarking after being intercepted or rescued at sea, as well as in detention centres. This leaves people vulnerable to going missing once disembarked or detained.

Lastly, legal pathways as a safe alternative to dangerous journeys towards Libya and Egypt remain far too limited in number. For example, as of June 2020, the number of places pledged to resettle refugees from some key countries along the route was limited with 1,280 places pledged for refugees in Sudan, 1,250 from Chad, and zero places for refugees in Mali. While some positive progress has been made with commitments for resettlement along the Central Mediterranean, challenges have been experienced in realising these commitments. Those hoping to join family members in other countries may face many difficulties in accessing family reunification,¹²⁰ including due to restrictive criteria and lack of consular presence in Tripoli for most countries. While resettlement from Libya has significantly increased from 2017 to the present, the resettlement process can be slow and the numbers remain limited. While Emergency Transit Mechanisms operate in Niger and Rwanda, capacity is limited and the process of resettlement from those locations may be slow. Increased resettlement places and expansion of expedited and more efficient procedures are required for both evacuation¹²¹ and resettlement from Libya to fulfil their potential to achieve solutions. Similarly, more support is needed for programmes to enable refugees to become self-reliant and access livelihood opportunities so that they can better meet their needs in the countries to which they have fled, without having to undertake dangerous journeys onwards.

From Sudan, in 2017, I decided to go to Libya. I found a smuggler to take me to Libya. He took me across the border to Kufra. They have a whole network in the country, the smugglers. In Kufra, they demanded that we pay them 3000 Libyan Dinars. When I finally paid, they would take us from place to place, smuggler to smuggler. The smugglers were all connected. But they would lie to us and say that the previous smuggler didn't give them any money and so they would demand more from us, but we didn't have it.

One smuggler finally said he would take us to Tripoli and that we would pay him there, but instead he took us to a warehouse in Bani Walid. When we arrived there, armed men came out and forced us into an underground cell, where we found around 500 other prisoners. The first thing they did was demand the phone numbers of our families so they could call them and make them give money for us. The first day, they beat us constantly, all day and all night long. The next day we were told to call our families. They demanded 10,000 Dinars from each of us, or they threatened to leave us to die for the rest of our lives in the underground cell.

The cell was awful. We had no toilets even. We had to do it where we slept. People were starving around us. They had around 35 foreign people working for them there. Some were other refugees or migrants, who they forced to work for them. We told them it was impossible to pay the fee that they asked, that we were poor and that our families did not have that kind of money.

Finally, we decided to try to escape... They shot through the door and killed seven people. Then they opened the door and came in, still shooting. They caught us and tied our hands and feet and started to torture us so badly. The torture killed seven more of our friends.

After, they tied us up in the corner of the warehouse. They continued to torture us non-stop for four full days. They put some of us in a pool of water and then put electric currents into the pool. They took us out and burned plastic onto our skin. They filmed everything and sent it to our families. For the four days, we had no food or water, we had to drink our own urine to survive. We suffered a lot.

They would take the beautiful girls out, they would force them to work in brothels as sex slaves. They stripped everyone naked. We were all so filthy. We had small insects living and moving on our skin.

For the torture, they would divide it by steps. First would be regular beatings, then beatings with a stick or plastic pipes, then electrocution or boiling oil on your skin. They would also heat up metal and put it against your skin. The type of torture depended completely on how much money you could pay. If you could pay nothing, you got the worst. If you paid something, it would be a bit easier. Some of my friends back home got together half of the money I needed, and so they mainly just beat me with sticks later.

Omar from Sudan, evacuated from Libya, 2019.

*Name changed for protection reasons

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PERPETRATORS

In November 2017, UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi, in an address to the UN Security Council, stated the need for “strong, collective action... to tackle the horrific abuses perpetrated by traffickers and to identify and prosecute them.”¹²² Commending the initiatives undertaken by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Europol, EUNAVFOR Med and others, he also requested the Council to consider the use of sanctions against senior figures involved in trafficking. In June 2020, he repeated the call to end impunity of smugglers and traffickers.¹²³ In the same vein in April 2020, a report by the UN Secretary-General to the Security Council noted:

*I am deeply concerned about the impunity with which the smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons towards, through and off the coast of Libya continue, and I call upon the relevant authorities to ensure that those who have fallen victim to abuse at the hands of smugglers, traffickers and their enablers across the region have access to justice and that those responsible are held to account. I further call upon all relevant authorities to ensure that those responsible for the horrific abuses perpetrated against refugees and migrants in Libya, including the grave human rights violations in detention centres, are held to account and that victims receive the assistance they need.*¹²⁴

Use of sanctions

In recent years, there have been increased initiatives aimed at addressing trafficking or smuggling of refugees and migrants towards Europe. Amongst the positive developments has been the decision by the UN Security Council, at the initiative of the Netherlands, to impose sanctions on six persons engaged in trafficking in Libya.¹²⁵ In September 2018, the UN Panel of Experts on Libya named additional persons engaged in trafficking and abuses against refugees and migrants and called for them to be added to the sanctions list.¹²⁶ In November 2018, the UN Security Council decided that perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence may also be subject to sanctions.¹²⁷ However, as of June 2020, no further names have been added to the sanctions list.

With regards to Mali, the UN Sanctions Committee in December 2018 added three people to the sanctions list, one of whom was reported to control the smuggling of refugees and migrants through a region at the border with Algeria and was reported

to have subjected people to forced labour, corporal punishment, imprisonment, as well as sexual exploitation.¹²⁸

In Sudan, the UN Panel of Experts has reported the involvement of armed groups in Darfur in trafficking, or providing protection and safe passage to traffickers, while noting that some members of the Rapid Support Forces have been accused of involvement in migrant smuggling.¹²⁹ A previous report by the Panel noted allegations of mistreatment of migrants captured along migration routes by some government authorities.¹³⁰ No one has recently been added to the sanctions list for Sudan in connection with trafficking or abuses of refugees and migrants.

National responses along the route

Within Libya, the Attorney General in March 2018 issued over 200 arrest warrants in connection with smuggling, together with trafficking, torture, murder, and rape.¹³¹ Some of those held and subjected to abuse for ransom were freed after interventions by Libyan groups¹³² and in October 2019, it was announced that two prominent traffickers had been arrested.¹³³ However, as of June 2020, those listed by the UN Sanctions Committee have not been arrested.

Further south in Niger, authorities have strengthened legal provisions to address trafficking and national authorities have made a number of arrests in connection with trafficking.¹³⁴ In addition, the Joint Investigation Team, comprised of French, Nigerian, and Spanish law enforcement authorities, in November 2018 arrested one of the primary smugglers of people from Niger to Libya.¹³⁵ One of the smugglers arrested was also allegedly involved in the trafficking of Nigerian women for sexual exploitation and reported to run a connection house in Sabha, in southern Libya, where women have reported rape and other violence.¹³⁶

In Ethiopia, in early 2020, two of the traffickers named by the UN Panel of Experts on Libya in 2018 in connection with their activities in Bani Walid, Libya were arrested in separate operations.¹³⁷

In Sudan, according to monitoring by a UNHCR partner, national authorities arrested and successfully prosecuted more than 50 people in eastern Sudan in 2018 in relation to trafficking with sentences of up to 20 years.¹³⁸ Sudanese authorities are also currently in the process of developing a new National Action Plan for 2020-2022 to combat human trafficking.

Amongst other initiatives by national authorities in the region, in Nigeria, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP),

One day, my brother left and he joined me in Sudan. But he was impatient, so one day he just left, to go towards Libya. I searched for him. I followed him through the Sahara. When I reached Libya and met others, they told me he spent two weeks in the Sahara, and finally died of thirst with four others.

From Khartoum to Libya, you can only travel with smugglers, but they don't ask for payment until after you arrive. Once you are on the journey, you can only trust in God. I heard so many stories about the Sahara and about Libya. But if you don't have peace of mind, what do you have?

The people you meet on the way become your family. If I'm falling, someone is helping me. You really become more than friends, you become a family. You have only one another.

The warehouse in Kufra was big. I think around 1,300 or 1,400 people. If they felt like it, they would give us pasta and water.

But the worst was for the women. People, smugglers... They would come at night, drunk or on drugs. They would come and take the women at night. It was so hard to see them taking them. You think of your own family. It got worse and worse and worse. You could hear the screaming.

There are moments when you don't care, when you don't want this life. Deep inside, I couldn't watch this. They beat me when I objected, but I didn't care if I lost my life. In my culture, you don't just abandon people, you do what you can to help them.

The women were the strongest on the journey. They even took care of us. But after this, after what they did to them, they changed. It hurts. Even now I can't talk. It hurts, it hurts. It is very painful. It was so hard to see how they changed, even now. I was with my cousin all the time. I don't want to talk on her behalf. She went through much worse hell than me.

Me, I paid what they asked me, so I was not tortured like the others. My uncle helped me to pay the money. I was only beaten when I tried to protect the women from them. I lost count of how many places they took me in Libya.

Here in Niger... I have no words now. Now, it is just tears. Maybe all of this was for something after all. I really have no words. I'm very positive about my life. Nobody knows what life holds, but I have a good feeling.

Samuel, evacuated from Libya, 2018.

*Name changed for protection reasons

A group of refugees and asylum-seekers arrive at the Emergency Transit Mechanism (ETM) centre in Hamdallaye – 40 kilometres outside Niamey.
© UNHCR/Giulia Raffaelli

secured the conviction of at least 31 persons in connection with trafficking in 2018, and rescued more than 400 people who were being trafficked for sexual exploitation or forced labour.¹³⁹ In 2019, the agency reported having rescued 1,152 victims of trafficking and secured the conviction of 25 traffickers.¹⁴⁰ The deployment of two Nigerian prosecutors to Italy and Spain, with the support of UNODC, is reported to have also strengthened judicial cooperation on the issue of trafficking and prosecutions in Nigerian courts.¹⁴¹

Elsewhere in the region, earlier this year, IOM reported the first conviction in Sierra Leone in connection with trafficking,¹⁴² while in November 2019, Interpol reported the rescue of 64 people, including victims of trafficking in Mali in an operation with Malian authorities.¹⁴³

Examples of responses in Europe

In Italy, several persons have been arrested and some successfully prosecuted in connection with their participation in abuses in places where refugees and migrants are held for ransom in Libya, in locations such as Bani Walid, Sabha, Sabratha, Azzawiya, and Kufra.¹⁴⁴ For example, in December 2018, two men were given life sentences in an Italian court due to their involvement in abuses including rape and physical abuse of refugees and migrants they were guarding.¹⁴⁵ Another man who had detained and abused refugees and migrants in Bani Walid, Libya was sentenced to life imprisonment in October 2017 after being found guilty of 13 counts of murder, as well as kidnap for ransom and SGBV.¹⁴⁶ Italian authorities have also made a number of arrests in Italy in connection with the trafficking of Nigerian women for sexual exploitation.¹⁴⁷

Also in Europe, there have been positive examples of international cooperation facilitated by Europol leading to the arrest of some alleged traffickers such as arrests in August 2017 in connection with the trafficking of Nigerians for sexual exploitation and involving cooperation between Spanish and Finnish authorities,¹⁴⁸ and arrests in February 2018 also in connection with the trafficking of Nigerian women, and involving cooperation between Spanish, Nigerian and UK authorities.¹⁴⁹ In France, 24 people were sentenced in November 2019 in connection with their involvement in the trafficking of Nigerian women for sexual exploitation.¹⁵⁰

International and regional mechanisms and initiatives

Recent international initiatives aimed at enhancing accountability for perpetrators also include the

establishment of a Crime Intelligence Cell by EUNAVFOR Med,¹⁵¹ the formation of a Regional Operation Centre in Khartoum to promote transitional information sharing and cooperation, and ongoing work by the International Criminal Court to look into crimes against migrants in Libya.¹⁵²

Other important initiatives include training provided to criminal justice officials in the region by UNODC,¹⁵³ training by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on better identifying victims and prosecuting offenders along migration routes,¹⁵⁴ while Interpol has played an important role in helping free several hundred victims of trafficking in West Africa and Sudan.¹⁵⁵

While these have been positive developments, some law enforcement authorities have told UNHCR that more needs to be done to strengthen coordination and information sharing across borders, including better sharing of information collected in Europe with countries along the route that may be able to take action.

Financial investigations

One accountability strategy that is perhaps being underutilised is the use of financial investigations to track the payments associated with ransoms of people being held in Libya and elsewhere along the route.¹⁵⁶ There have been various reports of cross-border payments being made in response to kidnap for ransom practices.¹⁵⁷ UNODC has recently provided training in North Africa on financial investigations to counter trafficking¹⁵⁸ while a new manual launched in November by the OSCE outlines ways of conducting such investigations in the context of trafficking.¹⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

The reduction in numbers of people crossing the sea from Libya to Europe since mid-2017 has perhaps masked the fact that refugees and migrants traveling to and through Libya and other parts of North Africa continue to be subjected to horrific abuses at multiple points during their journeys. There have been positive steps taken by several States to identify and hold perpetrators accountable, but further strengthening of cooperation between relevant actors all along the route is needed to ensure the effectiveness of these steps. In addition, far more needs to be done to strengthen the identification and protection of survivors all along the route, including through immediate access to safety mechanisms, asylum or alternative forms of protection, access to legal aid, mental health support services, and support for access to justice.

Endnotes

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- 4 In 2019, some 17,700 were known to have departed from the Libyan coast by sea with 9,000 subsequently disembarked in Libya, 4,100 in Italy, 3,400 in Malta, and 500 in Tunisia, along with some 700 deaths at sea. In 2018, some 31,900 are known to have departed from Libya, with 15,200 subsequently disembarked in Libya, 13,000 in Italy, 1,400 in Malta, 1,100 in Spain, and fewer than 100 in Tunisia, as well as just over 1,100 deaths at sea.
- 5 This was a higher proportion than in 2018 (49%).
- 6 A 'refugee' is defined as "a person who meets the eligibility criteria in the refugee definition provided by relevant international or regional refugee instruments, under UNHCR's mandate, and/or in national legislation. According to many of these instruments, a refugee is a person who cannot return to his/her country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of persecution or serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom." See UNHCR, *The 10-Point Plan in Action*, 2016 - Glossary, December 2016, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/59e99eb94.html>
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 - 15 The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC is part of, and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), but acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.
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 - 96 Of the East and Horn of Africa dataset, 64% of those interviewed were males and 36% females. The primary nationalities were Ethiopians (71%), Somalis (23%), and Eritreans (4%).
 - 97 The number of people interviewed per location also differed and this may have impacted the locations where more abuses were reported to have occurred.
 - 98 For the purpose of this report, a strict interpretation of kidnapping was applied in which only incidents that did not involve law enforcement/immigration personnel were involved were considered along with those in which persons not physically present had to pay the ransom (i.e. family members or others, rather than the person kidnapped or another person with them). This approach helped to distinguish incidents of kidnapping from incidents of bribery in which persons were temporarily detained and documents withheld by law enforcement/immigration officials until money was paid by the person affected or someone else travelling with them.
 - 99 Respondents could include more than one category of perpetrator, such as 'smuggler' as well as 'group of thugs/criminal gang'.
 - 100 As noted previously, the data recorded by 4Mi monitors does not note when each incident occurred. However, all those who reported the 1,395 deaths had only been traveling since January 2018 or later and therefore we can say for certain that at least these deaths fall into this time period.
 - 101 This in itself is not necessarily a reflection of the dangers along these two sections of the route in relation to the East and Horn of Africa section as the latter was a far smaller sample size.
 - 102 These are also the countries where 4Mi monitors are located, which may also contribute to more data on incidents in these countries.
 - 103 Given the non-representative nature of 4Mi sampling, we cannot conclude definitively that more protection incidents occur in these cities as compared to other locations; nonetheless, this highlights the need to be thinking of protection concerns even in more southern locations along the Central Mediterranean route.
 - 104 4Mi monitors were not collecting data in Sudan at the time this sample was collected and therefore data regarding Sudan was collected mostly in Libya and Egypt. No data was collected in Egypt between July and December 2019 and therefore this impacted on the number of abuses reported along the route between Sudan and Egypt.
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