

A WORD FROM THE CHIEF OF MISSION

Federico SODA

Over the past few months, we have seen many developments in Libya in relation to an ongoing situation of prolonged insecurity and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these developments warrant reflection.

Life for migrants in Libya has become increasingly difficult since the identification of the first COVID-19 case in late March and the ongoing intense fighting in and around Tripoli. Many already vulnerable migrants continue to experience a further deterioration in living conditions and now face the added challenge of movement restrictions. Most have limited or no access to health care due to their legal status and discrimination. The downturn in economic activity has affected the job market; many migrants, who are typically employed in construction, trades, and agriculture have less or no work at all. This means that an increasing number are facing difficulties in covering the most basic of living costs related to food and housing. Less work and lower income also means fewer remittances; a hardship that will increasingly be felt in countries of origin.

In response, IOM is undertaking a food security assessment in migrant communities to assess increasing humanitarian needs, in coordination with WFP and the food security sector partners. This assessment will guide operations and inform the humanitarian and international community of needs on the ground.

More Europe-bound boats have departed from Libya in April than in March. Due to mounting concerns about the spread of COVID-19, the Maltese and Italian governments introduced further restrictions on disembarkation in their ports. Nonetheless, migrants continue to leave Libyan shores, driven by catastrophic conditions in the country. During the month of April, 395 migrants were returned to Libyan shores by the Libyan Coast Guard and a commercial vessel.

Heavy fighting around the Tripoli main port and COVID-19 preventative measures installed by Libyan authorities have led to delays and dangerous disembarkations in Tripoli. On 15 April, 51 migrants were rescued in the Maltese search and rescue zone by a Maltese fishing vessel and returned to Libya. Five migrants died due to dehydration and lack of food while seven were reported missing at sea, after rescue was delayed for four days. Some migrants were released, some escaped, and others were taken to detention centres that are not under the authority of the Libyan Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM). These migrants remain unaccounted for and this is cause for serious concern. IOM continues to advocate against the return of migrants to Libya as it cannot be considered a safe port.

The rate of departure from Libya is determined by many different factors. Smugglers take advantage of the security situation and improved weather conditions to send desperate people on these perilous journeys. Safety, security and stability in Libya are key elements to ensure a reduction in migrants' departures from the Libyan coasts and to pave the way for more comprehensive migration governance in Libya. Whether departures will increase again in coming months remains to be seen. Much will depend on these three factors.

In April, there was also mass migrant movement at the land borders. More than 2,500 migrants were deported from Libya to Niger, Sudan, Chad and Egypt. Over 1,250 Tunisian migrant workers trying to return to Tunisia were stranded at the Ras Ajdir border crossing point for over two weeks. IOM estimates that there are at least 6,000 Tunisians in Libya.

We continue to advocate for a humanitarian management of borders that takes into account the vulnerabilities and realities of migrants; and respects human rights, public health concerns and dignity.

We have adapted to ensure that our activities on the ground continue, while also prioritizing the safety of our staff and the people we are assisting, amid restrictions and the risk of COVID-19. Our personnel are our most valuable asset and we take the opportunity here to share their experiences and contribution, through a new feature "Spotlight from the Field".

KEY FIGURES



IDPs



373,709
Individuals



73,499
Families



Returnees



448,573
Individuals



89,597
Families



Migrants



653,800
Individuals

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE CLASHES (April 2019)



201,168 Individuals displaced



98,640 Migrants in proximity of conflict-affected areas in Tripoli

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED IN APRIL 2020



1,222 Migrants received Health Assistance



519 IDPs received Health Assistance



1,052 Migrants received core relief items



1,658 IDPs received core relief items

CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN UPDATE



395 Migrants returned to Libya in April



4,666 Migrants arrived in Italy and Malta in 2020



of which **3,462** departed from Libya (According to the Italian Ministry of Interior)



146 Recorded Deaths in 2020 (According to Missing Migrants Project)

SITUATION OVERVIEW

In April, the ongoing conflict continued to detrimentally impact civilian population in Tripoli and other locations in western Libya. Heavy clashes were reported in the third week of April in the area between Tarhouna and Garabolli, approximately 70km east of Tripoli, and led to the displacement of over 3,100 people to surrounding areas.

To curb the spread of COVID-19, Libyan authorities extended public health measures that were put in place in March 2020. These measures include travel and mobility restrictions due to the closure of airports, points of entry (POE) along land borders and maritime boundaries, as well as domestic movement restrictions. Furthermore, after identifying nine new COVID-19 cases on 14 April, Libyan authorities announced a 10-day 'lockdown' starting 17 April, aimed at limiting non-essential movements by establishing a 24-hour curfew. Exceptions included movement on foot to cover basic needs, such as food, between 7a.m. and 12p.m.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Despite all the access challenges, IOM teams continued to ramp up lifesaving activities in April to assist more vulnerable people in Libya.

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) kept monitoring and tracking internal movements of migrants and displaced Libyans, and mobility restrictions due to COVID-19. IOM adopted precautionary measures—such as physical distancing and use of masks and gloves—at all sites of IOM activities including distributions, outreach sessions, and trainings to protect staff and assisted persons.

To support Libya's national emergency preparedness and response capacities, IOM provided training on health measures for responding to COVID-19 to more than 120 Libyan frontline healthcare providers from across the country. Participants are now equipped to conduct case definition, outbreak investigation, response and contact tracking; and are informed on proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), which will help safeguard the safety of health professionals and patients.

IOM also provided much needed medical supplies to the Libyan National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the municipalities facing constraints in supply (such as Qatroun and Zwara). IOM continues to engage closely with the Libyan Ministry of Health on how it can best support national response capacities and strengthen local efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19.

During April, IOM teams continued to conduct sanitation campaigns – coupled with hygiene promotion activities and raising awareness sessions – in all detention centres and disembarkation points, as part of comprehensive response efforts to protect migrants against COVID-19.

While the Libyan airspace is still closed to commercial traffic, the IOM Voluntary Humanitarian Return Programme (VHR) continued its information sharing and outreach services to migrant communities, registering migrants for two potential chartered flights. The VHR team will continue its counselling services to support migrants who anxiously seek to return to their countries of origin.

ASSISTANCE TO MIGRANTS AND LIBYAN COMMUNITIES



In April, IOM **Direct Assistance** teams provided core relief items such as blankets, mattresses, hygiene kits and clothing to **1,052** migrants (657 in detention centres and 395 at disembarkation points) as well as **1,658 internally displaced persons** (IDPs) in Alkhums, Azzawya and Tripoli.



During April, **IOM medical teams** carried out **1,741 medical consultations** to migrants, IDPs, and host communities, including responding to emergency cases, referral to secondary and tertiary health care facilities, and conducting regular medical visits and follow-ups in different locations across Libya.

As part of the efforts to improve health access services for migrants, IDPs and conflict affected populations in Libya, IOM provided **916 medical consultations using mobile clinics** that targeted urban locations. IOM also deployed its MRRM teams along the migratory route; specifically in Bani Waleed, Qatroun, Sabha, Tripoli (Hay Alandalus) and Zwara. IOM doctors provided a total of **1,433 medical consultations to migrants living in urban areas** along with vulnerable cases from the host community; providing relief to individuals who are increasingly challenged in accessing health services. Additionally, two training workshops (**Response for Frontline Healthcare Workers**, and **Response for Rapid Response Teams**) were organized for frontline healthcare workers in the Ministry of Health.



The **Protection** team conducted **58 vulnerability assessments** (30 men, 19 women and 9 families). During April, the team distributed 46 hygiene kits, 66 clothing kits, 8 baby Kits, 3 children kits and 31 food baskets to **78 individuals** from multiple nationalities.

Protection-oriented COVID-19 awareness session was also carried out at Zwara detention centre, in coordination with a local NGO, Kafa.

The Alternatives to Detention (ATD) programme conducted **18 monitoring visits** with follow-up distribution of food baskets, hygiene kits, mattresses, pillows and blankets to ATD beneficiaries, all who are placed with host families in Tripoli. The team also facilitated medical follow-up consultations for eight ATD beneficiaries (6 men and 2 women) Tripoli.



The **Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)** team continued to respond to the mental health and psychosocial needs of migrants by providing counselling, PFA (psychological first aid), psychiatric assessments, organizing awareness sessions about Covid-19, distributing drawing kits to children, and following up on vulnerable migrants including persons with mental health conditions. MHPSS team provided services to **120 migrants** (93 men, 27 women) including 18 children in Tripoli and Zwara; including migrants at disembarkation points following their rescue at sea, and in detention centers. The MHPSS team organized COVID-19 awareness sessions which included messages on psychosocial health and strategies to recognize and addressing COVID-19 related stressors. The sessions were conducted in urban locations in Tripoli and Zwara and delivered to **43 migrants** (35 men, 8 women).



During the reporting period, IOM **Migration Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM)** teams in Bani Walid, Qatroun, Sabha Tripoli and Zwara **reached 6,684 migrants** (5,144 men, 1,540 women) from different nationalities mostly from Niger, Chad, Sudan, Mali and Nigeria. Of those individuals, 871 migrants received non-food items (hygiene kits, clothing kits, mattresses and diapers), 4,119 migrants received ready-to-eat (RTE) kits and high-energy date boxes, and 604 households received NFIs, RTE kits and date boxes. In April, the MRRM team in Zwara also stepped up to help over **1,250 Tunisians** who were stranded at the Libyan border, providing direct medical assistance and food.

MRRM teams also conducted 10 health awareness raising sessions and distributed health awareness flyers during their outreach visits and distributions. In Tripoli, the MRRM team collaborated with MHPSS to conduct joint awareness session on COVID-19 symptoms and impacts.



The **Community stabilization** team in **Sabha** continued working with the General Water and Wastewater Company (GWWC) to increase water availability to all 120,000 residents of the city. Three wells were completed and handed over to the GWWC in April and drilling of an additional 10 water wells in various neighborhoods is underway. The GWWC manages water resources with limited funding and has struggled to meet the populations' water needs due to the drying up of 42 of the 102 wells in Sabha.

Power blackouts impact on the ability to pump water from wells, particularly during the heat of summer when demand for electricity is highest. Once completed, the 13 wells will each have a generator connected to ensure consistent water supply. In Tegerhi, a neighborhood 1.5 km from the centre of **Qatroun**, which has a population of approximately 20,000, another well is nearing completion.

An additional generator was delivered and installed at the Altahreer well in Sabha following local resident requests at a Community Management Committee (CMC) meeting in the area. CMC meetings provide opportunities for local municipality staff and representatives of civil society organizations and residents to meet with IOM staff to determine local development priorities. Residents of Altahreer suffer from lengthy power cuts and were paying for water delivery by truck - an expensive and at time unhygienic way of accessing water for daily use. The provision of the generator will benefit approximately 10,000 local residents and contribute to a strengthened centralized water system across Sabha.

In **Qatroun**, the recently rehabilitated Naqr Knemma and Qasr Masoud Guest Houses received furniture, kitchen equipment, air conditioners and generators. Guest Houses are public buildings offering space for community meetings and accommodation for people displaced by natural disasters and conflict. The Qatroun municipality and other CMC members aim to promote and facilitate social cohesion within and between communities by providing equivalent facilities for each location. This initiative will benefit the large migrant population and residents of Arab or Tebu tribal affiliations residing in Qatroun.

In **Kufra**, IOM equipped Attia Al-Kasah hospital with a 500-kVA generator to support the health system in the region and ensure better service provision to more than 93,000 local residents, including 32,000 migrants and 6,800 internally displaced persons. This hospital - the only fully operational hospital in the region - is now equipped to provide services to multiple neighboring towns and villages without having medical services disrupted by frequent power cuts.

IOM LIBYA'S ACTIVITIES ARE SUPPORTED BY



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SPOTLIGHT FROM THE FIELD

Omar Sufian, MRRM team leader for the area/district of Zwara

Tensions at the Libyan-Tunisian border

On 30 March 2020, about 250 Tunisian migrants arrived at the Libyan-Tunisian border crossing point. All were men who were seeking to return home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The border crossing is 75km west of the city of Zwara. The migrants spent a week at the border and made their way across the border. There were around 35 border guards from Libya and Tunisia present on both sides of the crossing point.

A week later, a further 1,000 Tunisian migrants – all men – started arriving at the border, seeking also to return home. This second group spent about 20 days in the area while tensions increased.

On 20 April, around 600 Tunisian migrants crossed the border into Tunisia. Later that evening, the remaining Tunisian migrants were permitted to cross into Tunisia. Since then, the border has been closed.



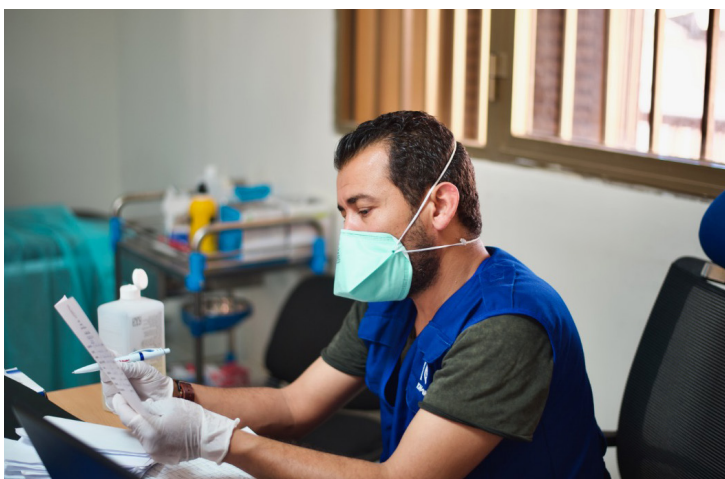
How IOM responded

IOM's Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism has a quickly deployable capacity to assist migrants in distress along the migratory routes, including in Zwara. My team was called to conduct a situation assessment, including a headcount of migrants at the scene and their living conditions.

We then distributed ready-to-eat food kits to migrants and helped them access medical treatment. IOM has a partnership with WFP which enables us to distribute food to migrants in urban settings. IOM and WFP coordinated swiftly to allocate food assistance to migrants at the border.

As part of providing critical humanitarian assistance, MRRM coordinated with Libyan authorities and the Libyan Red Crescent – which was the only other humanitarian partner at the site. IOM had permission to move freely to provide humanitarian assistance and we found the Libyan border authorities to be cooperative and open to IOM providing help. My team and most of the border guards are from Zwara; this commonality helped us to secure the trust and cooperation of authorities at the site. We were able to provide timely medical assistance. Many migrants have diabetes or high blood pressure, and there were also some with injuries (including broken bones) from clashes between them and the Tunisian border guard.

The Libyan border authorities were highly appreciative of IOM's presence and assistance at the site, as with so few Libyan border police, IOM was able to help reduce tensions. Our presence as a humanitarian organization can at times help to communicate with authorities that there is no need to use excessive force against civilians; and our assistance to migrants helped to manage individual and crowd expectations.



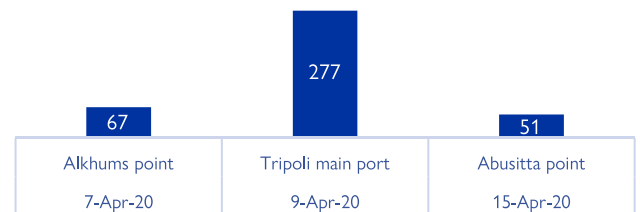


IN APRIL 2020

395 Migrants Disembarked in Libya



Disembarkation Location and Date (April 2020)



In 2019

9,225

DISEMBARKED IN LIBYA



121 Deaths 102 Missing

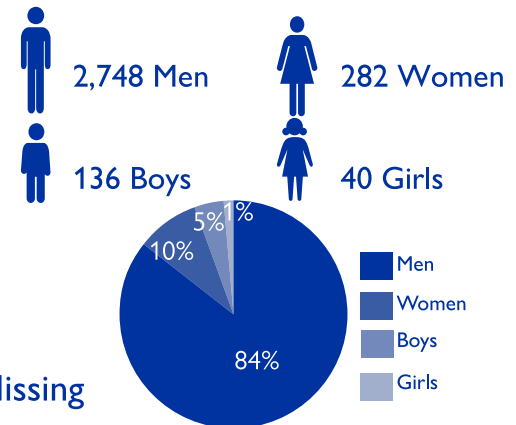
In 2020 so far

3,206

DISEMBARKED



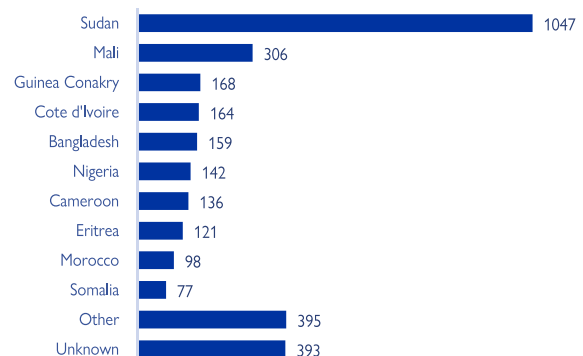
9 Bodies Retrieved 10 Missing



Monthly Disembarkation Trends 2019 and 2020



Nationalities of Individuals Disembarked in 2020



Disclaimer: Figures based on updates from IOM Libya Search and Rescue (SAR) data, compiled from disembarkations in Libya. For detailed data on deaths and missing migrants please refer to the missing migrants project. (<https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>)
Figures on Maritime incidents in Libya are estimates based on initial reports at the time of each incident, and are regularly updated as more information becomes available.