

UNICEF **CHILD ALERT**

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Refugee and Migrant Crisis

**CHILD ALERT**

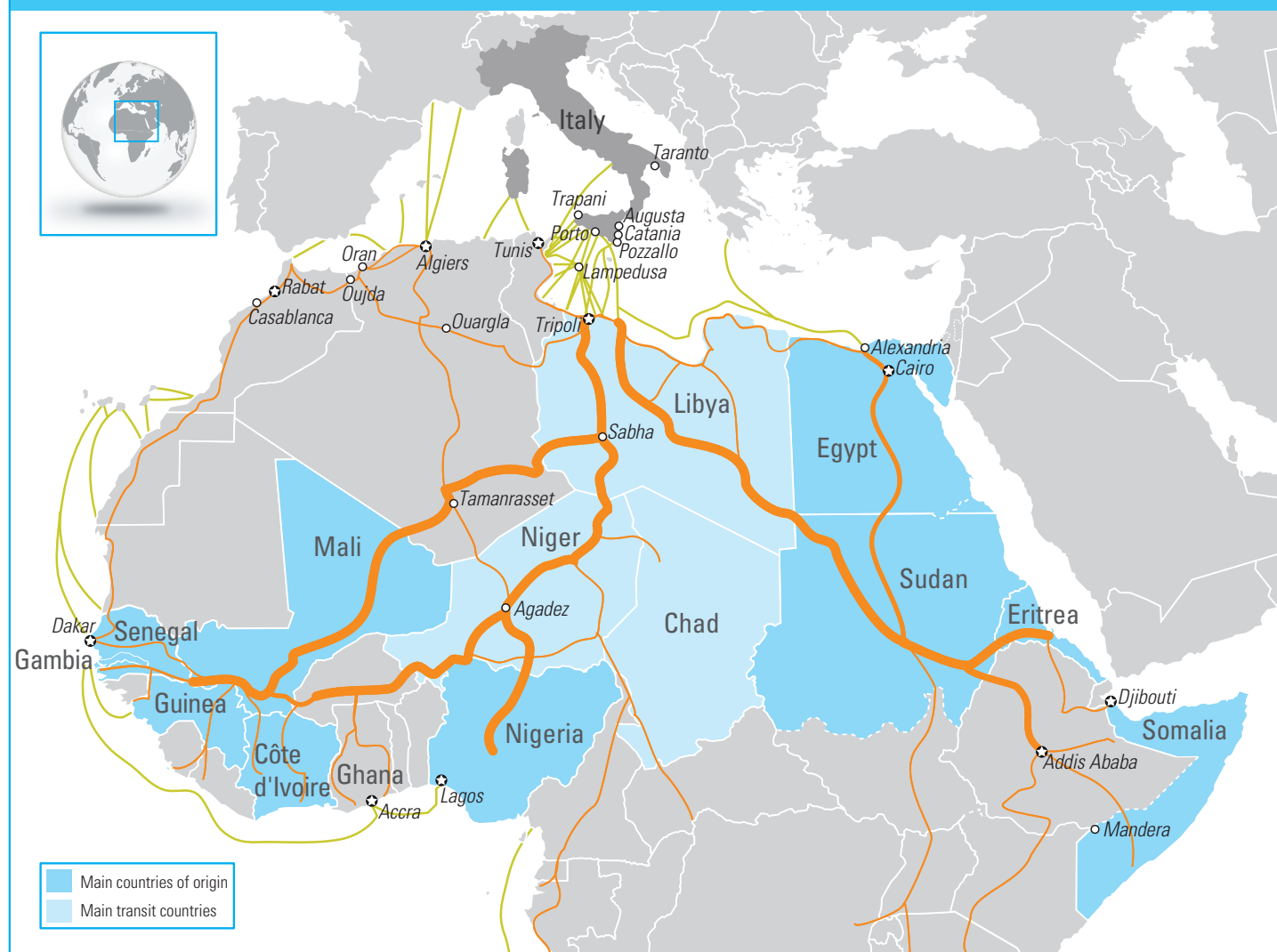


# A Deadly Journey for Children

The Central Mediterranean Migration Route

#ChildrenUprooted

## Central Mediterranean migration routes



**Note:** This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined.

**Source:** Adapted from European Union, Emergency Response Coordination Centre (EERC), *Refugee Crisis – Central Mediterranean Route: ECHO Daily Map*, 4 November 2016, <http://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/getdailymap/docId/1801>

## Fast Facts

- As of September 2016, an estimated 256,000 migrants have been identified in Libya,<sup>1</sup> of which 28,031 are women (11 per cent) and 23,102 are children (9 per cent), with a third of this group including unaccompanied children.<sup>2</sup> The real figures are believed to be at least three times higher.<sup>3</sup>
- Of the 181,436 arrivals in Italy in 2016 via the Central Mediterranean Route, 28,223 or nearly 16 per cent were children.<sup>4</sup>
- Nine out of ten children who crossed the Mediterranean last year were unaccompanied. A total of 25,846 children made the crossing, which is double the previous year.<sup>5</sup>
- An estimated 4,579 people died crossing the Mediterranean between Libya and Italy last year alone, of which over 700 were children.<sup>6</sup>



# A DEADLY JOURNEY FOR CHILDREN

## Jon\*, 15

"In Nigeria there is Boko Haram, there is death. I did not want to die. I was afraid. My journey from Nigeria to Libya was horrible and dangerous. Only God saved me in the desert, no food, no water, nothing. The guy who was sitting next to me on the trip died.

And once one dies in the desert, they throw away the body and that's it. I have been here [in the detention centre] for seven months. Here they treat us like chickens. They beat us, they do not give us good water and good food. They harass us. So many people are dying here, dying from disease, freezing to death."

Jon is an unaccompanied child from Nigeria who is in detention in Libya.



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It's a route with many tributaries. It carries children and women from the hinterlands of Africa and the Middle East, across the Sahara to the Mediterranean Sea in Libya.

Every day, thousands travel this route with the hope of reaching safety in Europe. They flee war, violence and poverty. They endure exploitation, abuse, violence and detention. Thousands die.

It is not only a risky route taken by desperate people, but also a billion-dollar business route controlled by criminal networks. It is called the Central Mediterranean Migration Route.<sup>7</sup> It is among the deadliest journeys in the world for children. A lack of safe and legal alternatives means they have no option but to use it.

In 2016, over 181,000 migrants – including more than 25,800 unaccompanied children – put their lives in the hands of smugglers to reach Italy.<sup>8,9</sup>

The most dangerous part of the route is a 1,000-kilometre journey from the southern border of Libya's desert to its Mediterranean Coast combined with the 500-kilometre sea passage to Sicily. Last year 4,579 people died making the crossing or 1 in every 40 of those who made the attempt.<sup>10</sup> It is estimated that at least 700 children were among the dead.<sup>11</sup>

In Libya, security is precarious, living conditions are hard and violence is commonplace. The country is riven by conflicts as militias continue to fight with each other or with government forces. Different regions are controlled by conflicting militias who make their own rules, control border crossings and detain migrants for exploitation.

On every step of this dangerous journey, refugees and migrants are easy prey. Children are the most vulnerable.

\*All names have been changed to protect the interviewees.

# SURVEY OF A JOURNEY

UNICEF staff on the ground working with children on this route have heard and documented many cases over many years of this abuse. UNICEF works in the countries of origin, transit and destination protecting children from violence, helping them get an education and meeting their basic needs. To build on this work and to further gauge what was happening to migrant children and women who were making this journey, UNICEF's Libya Country Office commissioned a needs assessment survey in 2016. This gave us a window into the scale of the challenge.

The final sample comprised 122 participants, including 82 women and 40 children. The migrant children interviewed for the study represented 11 nationalities. Some of the child interviewees were born in Libya during their mothers' migration journeys. Among the 40 children interviewed, 25 were boys and 15 were girls between the ages of 10 and 17 years old.

The survey was conducted on the ground by a UNICEF partner, the International Organization for Cooperation and Emergency Aid (IOCEA), with support from Feinstein International Center at Tufts University. The assessment also incorporated interviews with government officials and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Though its scope was affected by security restraints and lack of access to militia-run prisons, the survey still provides important insights into the appalling situation women and children face as they journey along this trail. This child alert is not only based on this survey but also on our wider programme experience in North Africa and with children in Italy, and the stories and testimony our staff on the ground have heard countless times from very vulnerable children and adolescents.

*"50 million children are on the move, some fleeing violence, war, poverty and climate change. They shouldn't be forced to put their lives in the hands of smugglers or be left vulnerable to traffickers. We need to address globally the drivers of migration and as importantly put in place stronger measures to protect children on the move through a system of safe passage for all refugee and migrant children. If these were our children, alone and frightened, we would act."*

Afshan Khan, UNICEF Regional Director and Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe.

## Key findings from the survey<sup>12</sup>

1. Three quarters of the migrant children interviewed said they had experienced violence, harassment or aggression **at the hands of adults**.
2. Nearly half the women interviewed reported suffering **sexual violence** or abuse during the journey.
3. Most children and women indicated that they had to rely on smugglers leaving many in debt under 'pay as you go' arrangements and vulnerable to **abuse, abduction and trafficking**.
4. Most of the children reported verbal or emotional abuse, while about half had suffered **beating or other physical abuse**. Girls reported a higher incidence of abuse than boys.
5. Several migrant children also said they **did not have access to adequate food** while on the way to Libya.
6. Women held in detention centres in western Libya, accessed by UNICEF, reported harsh conditions such as **poor nutrition and sanitation**, significant overcrowding and **a lack of access to health care and legal assistance**.
7. Most of the children and women said they had expected to **spend extended periods working in Libya** to pay for the next leg of the journey – either back to their home countries or to destinations in Europe.
8. Although most of the married women (representing three quarters of those interviewed) brought at least one child with them, **more children were left behind**.



# DANGEROUS TRAVEL



## Pati, 16

"The journey was hard, because we had to walk, no cars, without any drinking water. We crossed the desert walking, it took almost two weeks. Sometimes we had to walk a full day without drinking any water - sometimes we went two days without water - before we arrived in Libya. Without enough water, without enough food."

Pati is from Nigeria.

Children and women making the journey are forced to live in the shadows, unprotected, reliant on smugglers and preyed upon by traffickers.

Transport used by women and children interviewed in the survey were mainly trucks, taxis or private cars. About one third indicated that they had travelled long distances on foot or by motorcycle, boat or animals.

Travel through the desert usually required traversing rough sand roads while exposed to heat, cold and dust. Nearly one third of the women interviewed reported that they had experienced fatigue, disease, insufficient access to food and water, lack of funds, gang robbery, arrest by local authorities and imprisonment.

Children also said they did not have access to adequate food while on the journey.

The primary hazards encountered include sexual violence, extortion and abduction.<sup>13</sup> Nearly half the women and children interviewed had experienced sexual abuse during migration – often multiple times and in multiple locations.

Women and children were often arrested at the border where they experienced abuse, extortion and gender-based violence.<sup>14</sup> Sexual violence was widespread and systemic at crossings and checkpoints. Men were often threatened or killed if they

intervened to prevent sexual violence, and women were often expected to provide sexual services or cash in exchange for crossing the Libyan border.

More than one third of the women and children interviewed said their assailants wore uniforms or appeared to be associated with military and other armed forces. These violations usually occurred at security checkpoints within cities or along roadways.

Three quarters of child participants in the study said they had experienced harassment, aggression or violence by adults. Most of the child respondents had suffered verbal or emotional abuse, while about half experienced beating or other physical abuse. Girls reported a higher incidence of abuse than boys.

Most of the women and children who suffered such abuse did not report it to the authorities. Many participants cited their fear of being deported or placed in detention centres, and their feelings of shame and dishonour, as reasons not to report sexual violence.

The abuse reported by the children took place in several different contexts, with no definitive trends emerging. About half reported abuse that took place at some point along the journey or at a border crossing.

Approximately one third indicated they had been abused in Libya. A large majority of these children did not answer when

asked who had abused them. A few children said they had been abused by people who appeared to be in uniform or associated with military and other armed forces, and several others said that strangers had victimized them.

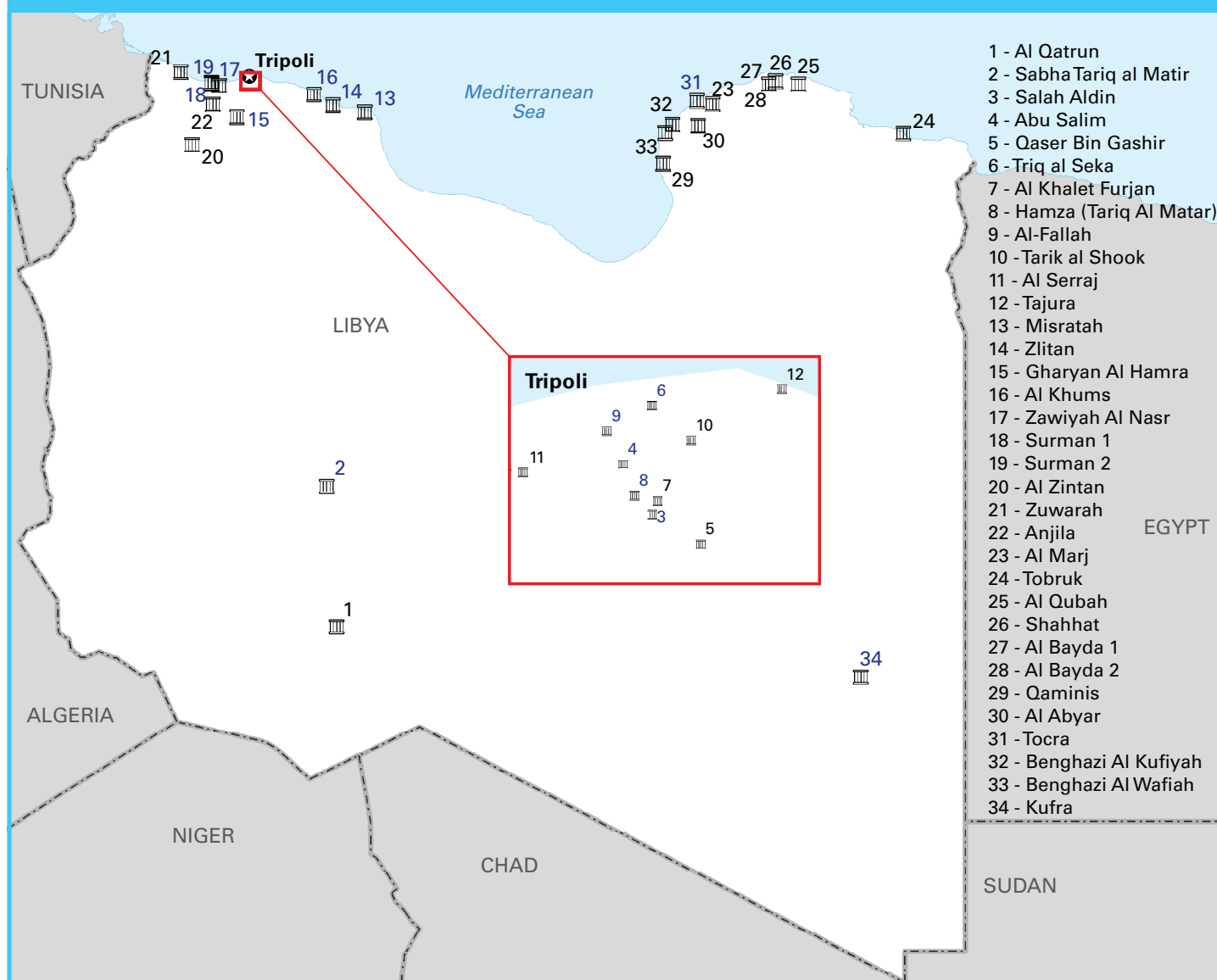
Many refugee and migrant women and girls were prepared for this possibility and took precautions against it, depending on the routes they planned to travel.<sup>15</sup> Some women and girls from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia who passed through Khartoum, Sudan, got contraception injections and brought emergency contraception with them on the journey.

Migrant women and children generally tried to travel together for safety reasons but would often be separated. Many women and children also travelled with men to increase their overall security. Despite these efforts, guards often separated men, women and children from each other, once they arrived at detention centres.

Although it was rarely discussed, men and boys also experienced various forms of sexual violence.<sup>16</sup>

## Detention centres identified in Libya

34 detention centres have been identified in Libya



**Note:** This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

**Source:** Adapted from UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *Libya: Detention Centres in which UNHCR and Partners are carrying out activities*, January 2017. [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/unhcr\\_libya\\_detentioncentres\\_jan\\_2017.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/unhcr_libya_detentioncentres_jan_2017.pdf)

## Issaa, 14

"I left Niger two and a half years ago. I wanted to cross the sea, look for work, work hard to earn a bit of money, to help my five brothers back home. My father collected money for my journey, he wished me good luck and then let me go."

Issaa arrived in Libya from Niger alone and is now in detention.

*"He wished me good luck and then let me go"*

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# UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

It is unclear from the present study how many of the 40 children IOCEA interviewed had arrived unaccompanied in Libya. Almost half the children stated that they arrived with friends, suggesting that they may have arrived with other children. The other half reported that they arrived with parents or relatives.

Estimating the number of unaccompanied children in Libya is difficult.

Of the 256,000 migrants estimated to be in Libya, 23,000 are children (9 per cent). One third are believed to be unaccompanied. However, the International Organization for Migration believed the actual figure is three times higher.<sup>17</sup> The number of unaccompanied children who arrived in Italy in 2016 – more than 25,800, or three times the number believed to be in Libya – is in itself a clear indication of this.

Ninety-two per cent of all children who arrived in Italy last year were unaccompanied, in contrast with the number of children in Libya who are unaccompanied.

Although more research is needed to understand what is happening to separated and unaccompanied children in Libya, we know that some end up in detention centres with no adult supervision or support.<sup>18</sup>

Unaccompanied children are especially vulnerable to all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation, including human trafficking.

They often have no choice but to beg for food and rarely have access to physical or mental health care.

# IN CAPTIVITY

*“They arrested us and brought us into the Zawia prison. No food. No water. They beat us every day. No doctor, no medicine.”*

Kamis, a 9-year-old Nigerian girl in detention in Libya.

An estimated 34 detention centres have been identified in Libya.<sup>19</sup> The Libyan Government Department for Combatting Illegal Migration runs 24 detention centres. They hold between 4,000 and 7,000 detainees. Armed groups hold migrants in an unknown number of unofficial detention centres.<sup>20</sup>

The international community, including UNICEF, only has access to fewer than half of government-run detention centres.

Women interviewed reported harsh conditions with detainees suffering from the intense heat in the summer and extreme cold in the winter. They were generally not provided adequate clothes or blankets.

The women also reported a lack of food, confirming reports that inmates were significantly undernourished as the quantity and quality of available food were substandard.

The majority of women in the detention centres also reported verbal and physical violence perpetrated by the predominantly male guards.

Children did not receive any preferential treatment and were often placed in cells together with adult detainees, which increased the risk of abuse. Some observers have also reported abandoned migrant children in detention centres and hospitals.<sup>21</sup>

The survey confirmed that sanitation conditions were substandard and the centres were, worryingly overcrowded, increasing the likelihood of the spread of infectious diseases. This was compounded by the fact that health-care services were not available, leaving women and girls unable to access feminine hygiene products or medicines. It was estimated that 20 per cent of the detainees were women.

The detention centres often had as many as 20 migrants crammed into cells not larger than two square metres for long periods of time. This resulted in significant adverse health outcomes including the loss of hearing and sight, and extremely challenging psychological challenges.<sup>22</sup>

The militia-run detention centres were no more than forced labour camps, farms, warehouses and makeshift prisons run by armed groups. For the thousands of migrant women and children incarcerated, they were living hellholes where people were held for months at a time without any form of due process, in squalid, cramped conditions. Serious violations, including allegations of violence and brutality, were commonplace.

UNICEF did not have access to these centres for security reasons, but reports by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights painted a systematic pattern of human rights abuses.<sup>23</sup>

The militias developed their own detention centres because they could profit from migrants who wished to pass through certain areas. Each militia typically operates its own centre, detaining migrants on the perceived grounds that they bring disease, engage in prostitution and are criminals or mercenaries.

A report by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya revealed high levels of violence with many migrants including children receiving punishment, including torture, for no discernible reason. Migrants were at a loss for words when attempting to explain why the torture or punishment was taking place.<sup>24</sup>

Migrants were rarely addressed by name but instead were referred to using dehumanizing terms. Sub-Saharan Africans were generally treated much worse than other migrants from Egypt, the Gaza Strip or the Syrian Arab Republic.

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*“The results of this rapid assessment demand action. We can’t have a situation where children and women disappear into a hellhole. They are being sexually assaulted, abused, exploited and killed.”*

Justin Forsyth, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director.

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*“Before we left Nigeria, I told my mother ‘I want to be a doctor.’ My mother answered, ‘Don’t worry. When we reach Italy, you will be a doctor.’”*

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## Kamis, 9

“My mother tried to bring us to Libya because of the difficult situation in Nigeria. We had no money because my mother was not working. We came from Nigeria to Libya via Agadez, Niger. A man died in our car. So we were sad.

“The men who pushed us on the boat told us to look at the stars. The boat was in the middle of the sea and everybody was crying. The wind was moving our boat so everybody was shouting. Everybody was crying. When we saw a small ship, we shouted: ‘Please come and rescue us.’ They rescued us and took us to dry land. Then, we were moved to Sabratha detention centre where we stayed for five months. There was no food and no water. In Sabratha, they used to beat us every day. There was no food there either. A little baby was sick but there was no doctor on-site to care for her. That place was very sad. There’s nothing there. They used to beat us every day. They beat babies, children and adults. One woman in that place was pregnant. She wanted to deliver the baby. When the child was born, there was no hot water. Instead, they used salt water to take care of the baby.

“What do I want to do when I grow up? I want to be a doctor in my future because I like medicine. Before we left Nigeria, I told my mother, ‘I want to be a doctor.’ My mother answered, ‘Don’t worry. When we reach Italy, you will be a doctor.’”

## Aza, Kamis’ mother

“I decided to leave Nigeria because there was no work. I wanted to work and help my children. I did not know the journey would be so dangerous. I realized it when we were approaching the sea and I thought that this was not going to be so easy. They did not tell me the truth. They did not tell me the risks involved or the difficulties I would face. It all became a reality for me when I saw the situation. The sea that expanded right before my eyes. But once we were at sea we could not turn back. I paid US\$1,400 for that trip. If I had decided not to leave, no one would have returned the money to me. I have done all this for my children and for their future, and I did not want to lose them. During our time at sea I thought: If it’s me, it is okay [to die] but not them.”

Kamis and Aza are from Nigeria; they are in detention in Libya.

# THE SMUGGLERS

When asked whether they paid anyone to help them migrate, nearly all the children surveyed indicated they had paid smugglers. Smugglers charged the women and children between US\$200 and \$1,200 each for the journey, though it was unclear whether the children had made the payment themselves.

In addition, about three quarters of the children reported that someone else helped them along the journey. Almost all those who had received additional assistance got it from family, neighbours or other relatives. Several children also reported that police or other government officials helped them at some point on the journey.

Almost all the women interviewed indicated they had paid a smuggler at the beginning of their journey to reach Libya, after which it was expected they would have to work in transit to raise necessary funds to make the next leg of the journey to Europe.

In addition, the women and children reported that they needed additional funds to cover supplies on the journey including food and other basic needs. Nearly 75 per cent of participants borrowed on average US\$650 from family, friends or neighbours to cover these costs.

Some interviewees reported abusive treatment by smugglers and said they were always fearful when moved from one location to another, then handed off to a different smuggler they did not know.

Militias also control or exploit 'connection houses' where migrants are transferred between smugglers. Smugglers have also been known to take migrants from detention centres to these connection houses where they are often forced to work for an undetermined period based on the smugglers' demands.<sup>25</sup>

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*"The smugglers exist because they supply a service that desperate people can't legally obtain. They care about nothing other than the blood money they are extracting from tens of thousands of women and children and think nothing of sending children to their deaths crossing the Sahara or the Mediterranean Sea."*

Justin Forsyth, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director.

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## Victor, 5

Victor was rescued from the Mediterranean Sea with a boy named Emmanuel after being separated from his mother. Victor was detained in Surman detention centre for nearly two months. One day while he was playing in the dirt between the detention centre buildings, a migrant woman arrived in custody of the authorities. When she saw Victor, she shouted, "My son, my son!" and ran toward him. She threw her arms around Victor and cried, holding him tightly. All those watching cried too – some shed tears of joy for Victor and his mother; others, tears of sadness from having been reminded of their lost loved ones.

**Victor and his mother, both from Nigeria, are currently in detention in Libya.**

## Will, 8

"We wanted to go to Italy. We were on a boat. After a while the boat began to take in water and soon after it sank. There was a boy who survived, and I held onto him for many hours.

He saved me. But my father and mother both died. I did not see them again."

**Will, an unaccompanied boy from Nigeria, is now in detention in Libya.**





## Timothée, 61

The journey of Timothée and his family is a remarkable tale of resilience, perseverance and unity. Beginning in the Democratic Republic of the Congo more than five years ago, their journey has brought them to Libya where they plan to remain until they are ready to continue to Europe.

The killing that ended the lives of their extended family members left Timothée and his family with no choice but to flee their home in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, knowing that in all likelihood they would not be able to return in the near future. The family's 36-month escape route took them through Kinshasa to Brazzaville, then to Cameroon and the Niger before they arrived in Libya in October 2013. Timothée, 61, his wife Dina, 51, daughters Christelle, 15, and Tsunon, 12, and his son Timothée, 10, are hopeful they will eventually reach their destination in Europe.

Prior to the outbreak of the armed conflict and insecurity in the country, the two girls and the boy were enrolled in primary school and were enjoying their education with their schoolmates and teachers. The events that unfolded forced the whole family to change their plans. Suddenly, the children found themselves out of school and running for their lives with their parents. The children did not have access to education during the escape causing them to miss several years of schooling.

Through the journey and since their arrival in Libya, the family has faced difficult times. They have been exposed to violence, harassment, discrimination, abuse and attempted sexual assault.

Timothée and his family moved from one place to another inside Libya seeking shelter and peace. As the security situation in Libya continues to deteriorate, Timothée is actively seeking means to travel to Europe with his family. "Putting my family on illegal smuggling boats to Europe would never be an option," Timothée said. "Nowadays, it is a great concern for me that the children can be enrolled in school in a safe place so they can focus on their education," he added.

In 2011, before the family fled the country, Timothée had allowed his older children to escape to France because they were facing the possibility of being enlisted as child soldiers. They made a treacherous journey from Kinshasa to Brazzaville, then to the Central African Republic, Cameroon, the Niger and Libya. From Libya, they went to Malta, where they obtained legitimate legal documents and then travelled to France. One of his daughters is currently married to a French national and has a young child. Determined to succeed, she is applying for citizenship and studying at a professional college.

"Timothée's children in Libya are deprived of their right to education," says Ghassan Khalil, UNICEF Special Representative in Libya. "I spoke with his 15-year-old daughter, when I met the family at the gathering point in Zuwarah and she talked to me about her love for education and how she misses her days at school," adds Khalil.

Timothée stressed that he aspires to be relocated to any European country, where he can take charge of his family in a safe environment that will enable them to realize their dreams.



# HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN LIBYA

*“There are dozens of illegal prisons over which we have no control. There are at least thirteen in Tripoli. They are handled by the powerful armed militias that are playing a ‘double game’. With one hand they ask money from official government sources to keep the migrants, to buy food, water and clothing. With the other hand they directly control human trafficking, using the prisons to keep migrants waiting, until they are allowed to leave. These militias are the armed wing of the traffickers.*

*“Here in Tripoli one of the most powerful armed militias is the Sharikan one, no one can get close to the areas they control. They pretend to arrest illegal immigrants and keep them in their centres for a while, with no food and no water, take all the money they have, and then carry them to the Garabulli area, to the waiting rafts. We have no power over these prisons. We cannot even get close because of risk of being killed.”* **A police officer from the Libyan Government Interior Ministry.**

The link between smuggling and trafficking on the route through Libya is unmistakable. Broadly speaking, smugglers charge people fees to help them cross borders and move through countries by illegal means – it is a business transaction used by people everywhere in the world to overcome barriers that prevent them from seeking safety, protection and new opportunities. Traffickers, in contrast with smugglers, will in addition exploit the people they are transporting, either during the journey or at the destination.<sup>26</sup>

Although very little information about human trafficking was gathered through the IOCEA interviews, other research confirms that Libya is a major transit hub for women being trafficked to Europe for sex. Trafficked Nigerian girls are being sent to Europe on the same route that the smugglers use.<sup>27</sup>

Nigerian criminal groups typically ‘offer’ victims an irregular migration package to Europe for an estimated 50,000 to 70,000 Nigerian naira (roughly 250 euros) during the recruitment in Nigeria. Such a package promises land, sea or air transportation, making use of counterfeit documents or other means. The person accepts the price with the

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*“The link between smuggling and trafficking on the route through Libya is unmistakable.”*

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intention of paying it back by working in Europe. Once at destination, the debt is converted into 50,000 to 70,000 euros to be paid in the form of forced prostitution for a period that could last up to three years or longer.<sup>28</sup>

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, when foreigners are trafficked, the human-trafficking flows broadly follow the migratory patterns. Some migrants are more vulnerable than others, such as those from countries with a high level of organized crime or from countries affected by conflicts. Seventy-nine per cent of all detected trafficking victims are women and children.<sup>29</sup> However, trafficking data are not representative at this stage, as survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation, who are largely female, are more likely to be identified than survivors of trafficking for labour exploitation. Men, women, boys and girls are affected by trafficking for various purposes of exploitation.

A survey of migrants and refugees in Italy by the International Organization for Migration in Italy, between October and November 2016 revealed that 78 per cent of children answered “yes” to at least one of the trafficking and other exploitative practices indicators in relation to their own experience.<sup>30</sup>

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Libya did not have provisions for a specific trafficking in persons offence. In addition, the sea crossing from Libya is becoming increasingly difficult, with the European Union expanding its support to the Libyan authorities, including the coastguard. Along with the ongoing conflict there, the lack of a codified trafficking offence will continue to make women and children attempting to reach Europe reliant on smugglers and some even knowingly on traffickers. This will make future improvements unlikely, at least in the short term.

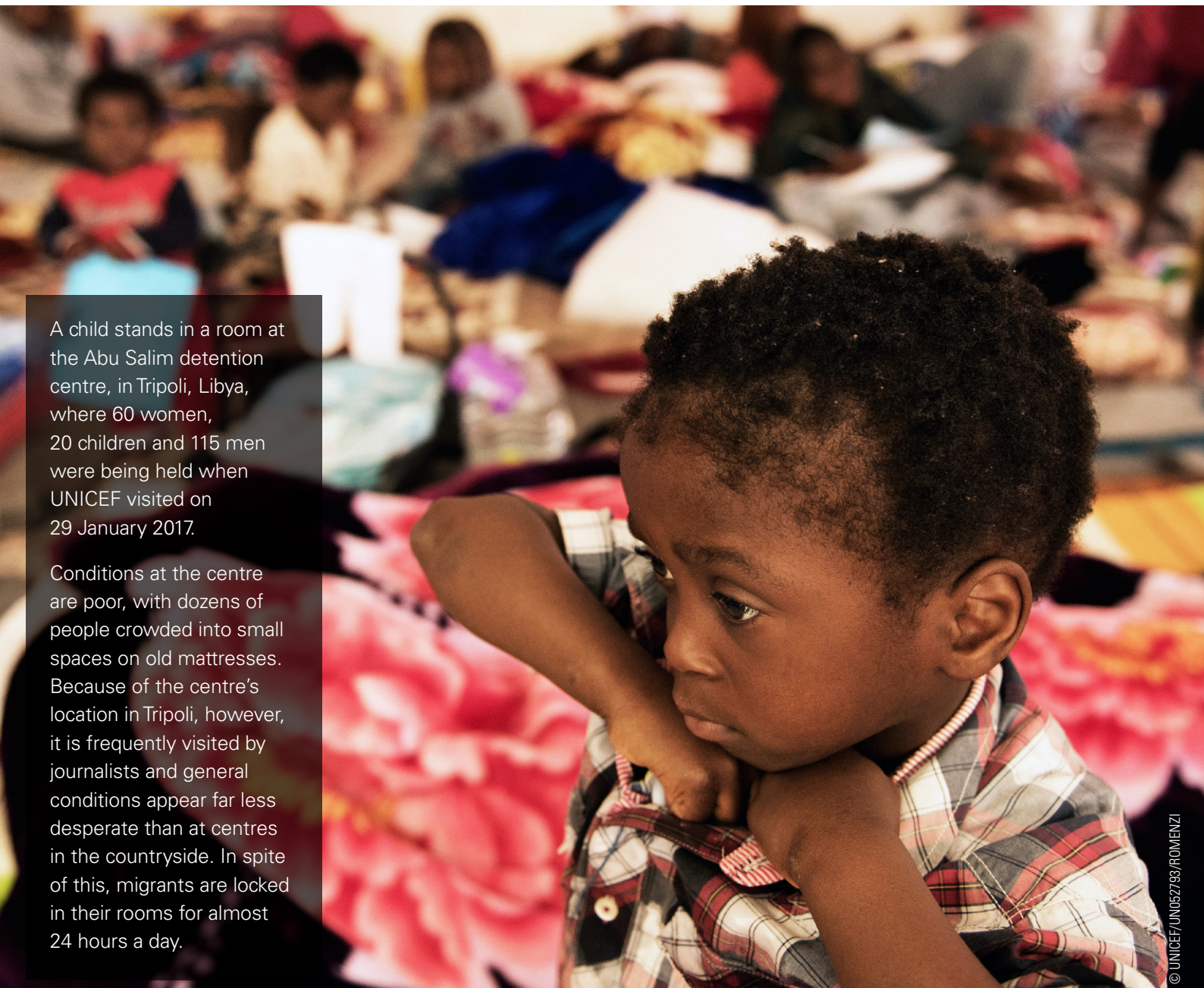
# PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

The majority of women and children in the study reported significant psychological and social impacts as a result of the migration experience. In addition to traumatic events during the journey, most migrants had endured difficult conditions in their countries and communities of origin, which contributed to their decision to migrate.

Some of the migrant women said they were forced to leave their children in their country of origin with family, friends or

neighbours. Although most of the married women (representing three quarters of those interviewed) brought at least one child with them, more children were left behind.

While in transit very few participants reported that they were able to send money to help support their children back home. This situation resulted in psychological stress for both the mothers and their children – as well as the caregivers in home communities.



A child stands in a room at the Abu Salim detention centre, in Tripoli, Libya, where 60 women, 20 children and 115 men were being held when UNICEF visited on 29 January 2017.

Conditions at the centre are poor, with dozens of people crowded into small spaces on old mattresses. Because of the centre's location in Tripoli, however, it is frequently visited by journalists and general conditions appear far less desperate than at centres in the countryside. In spite of this, migrants are locked in their rooms for almost 24 hours a day.



# CONCLUSION

There is no let-up in the number of children and women forced to make the journey to Italy. In January 2017, the height of winter, 4,463 people had to rely on smugglers for the passage to Italy.<sup>31</sup> In the last week of January alone, a staggering 1,852 people made the dangerous crossing, eight times higher than the same week in the previous year.<sup>32</sup>

The number of those dying during the crossing via the Central Mediterranean Route is climbing too. An estimated 228 deaths in all are reported so far this year – 1 in 21 migrants in January, compared to 1 in 24 in December 2016, and 1 in 41 for the entire year 2016. UNICEF estimates that 40 children died in January alone.

The Central Mediterranean Route has become a massive people smuggling operation, which has grown out of control for the lack of safe and alternative migration systems. It exploits porous and corrupt border security, the sparse Saharan terrain and the vacuum created by the Libyan conflict.<sup>33</sup>

It is time to stop the exploitation, abuse, and death of women and children on this route of misery. Women and children deserve to be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse along their journey. They should not have to put their lives in the hands of smugglers. They should be afforded safe and legal pathways to a better life.

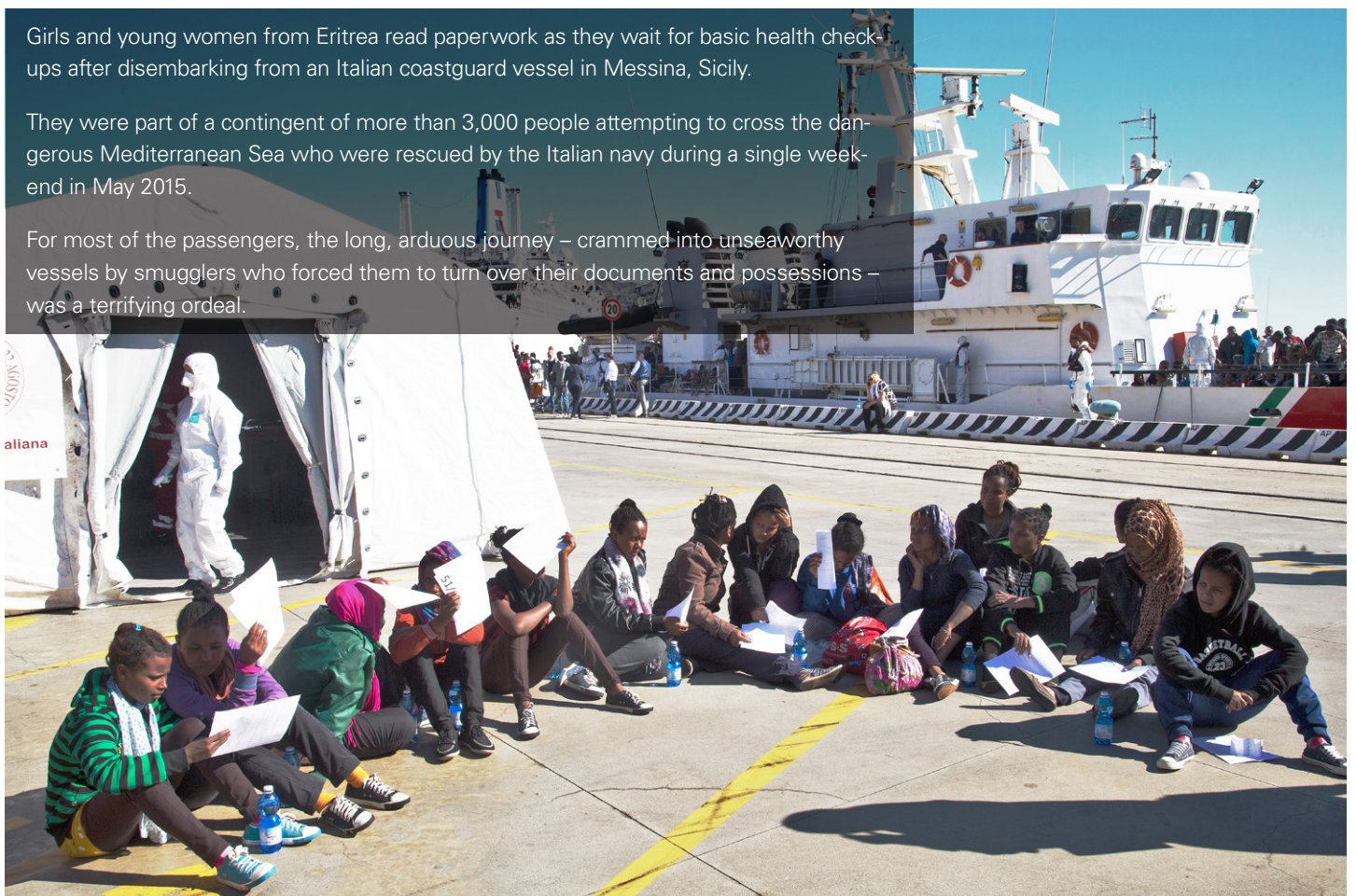
*“The Central Mediterranean Sea Route is now a thoroughly criminalized enterprise with children and women bearing the cost. The smugglers and traffickers are winning. It is what happens when there are no safe and legal alternatives. It is time the international community comprehensively addresses this issue in particular protecting children on their journey.”*

Justin Forsyth, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director.

Girls and young women from Eritrea read paperwork as they wait for basic health check-ups after disembarking from an Italian coastguard vessel in Messina, Sicily.

They were part of a contingent of more than 3,000 people attempting to cross the dangerous Mediterranean Sea who were rescued by the Italian navy during a single week-end in May 2015.

For most of the passengers, the long, arduous journey – crammed into unseaworthy vessels by smugglers who forced them to turn over their documents and possessions – was a terrifying ordeal.



## Policy recommendations for the Central Mediterranean crisis

**All concerned parties – Libya, neighbouring countries, the African Union, the European Union, international and national organizations with support from the donor community – should prioritize the following actions:**

1. Develop and support a regional initiative on the Central Mediterranean Route focusing on children at risk not only to ensure comprehensive and sustainable child protection interventions but also to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and exploitation of children. The initiative will include support for robust civil registry systems enabling birth registration, preventing and addressing trafficking; victim support; protection and rehabilitation services, especially for children; and post-return reintegration.
2. Facilitate a high-level dialogue among states along the main route used by children to engage in a regional approach to prevent abuse and protect children; establish a process whereby cross-border mechanisms could be put in place to help reunify families provided it is in the best interest of the child; develop transnational cooperation mechanisms among child protection authorities including European Union countries; and facilitate family tracing and best interest assessments of the children.
3. Provide safe and legal pathways for children fleeing from armed conflict, persecution and violence, or seeking better opportunities.

### In Libya

1. Put an immediate end to the detention of children for immigration control purposes and develop alternatives to detention centres for migrant women and children.
2. Support relevant authorities in implementing urgent prevention and response programmes to address the specific protection risks faced by migrant children in Libya, including capacity-building initiatives for government officials, support to civil society organizations and human rights groups. Once put in place, these programmes will help strengthen service delivery and child rights monitoring, including inside detention facilities, and build up investment in child protection and case management services.
3. Step up investment in strengthening national child protection services and systems in Libya for all children regardless of their legal status.
4. Provide training to border control agents, police and military forces working in detention centres, and other officials in contact with migrant women and children on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, human rights law and other relevant standards related to migration.
5. Assist the Libyan Government to establish a national screening and profiling system to deal with unaccompanied and separated children, in addition to building national capacity to deal with unaccompanied and separated children.
6. Continue to advocate for access to militia-run detention facilities.
7. Build a larger evidence base on the situation and urgent needs of migrant women and children in Libya, with attention to the situation of unaccompanied and separated children.
8. Address racism, xenophobia and discrimination against migrant and refugee children coming from sub-Saharan Africa. All public social services should be made available for all the children regardless of their status.



## UNICEF's Six Policy Asks for Uprooted Children

- Protect child refugees and migrants, particularly unaccompanied children, from exploitation and violence.** Introduce measures to strengthen child protection systems, including the training of social and child protection workers and working with NGOs and professional groups. Clamp down on trafficking, not only through enhanced law enforcement but also by creating more opportunities for safe and regular movement, and by providing better support to migrant children through the systematic appointment of qualified guardians. Provide better access to information regarding their own situation and the management of their cases; and access to legal assistance. Governments should also develop clearer guidance for case officers when determining the migration status of children to prevent the return of children and families to persecution, dangerous or life-threatening situations, using the 'best interest of the child' principle to guide legal decision-making in all cases.
- End the detention of children seeking refugee status or migrating by introducing a range of practical alternatives.** Children are particularly vulnerable to physical and psychological violence. Given the negative impact of detention on child development, introduce practical alternatives to detention wherever children (or their families) are involved. Examples of alternatives to detention include: the surrender of passport and regular reporting requirements; guarantors or bailees who may be family members or community supporters; foster care and supervised independent living arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children; and compulsory registration with authorities.
- Keep families together as the best way to protect children and give them legal status.** Develop clear policy guidance to keep children from being separated from their parents during border control processing and any migrant legal processes. States should speed up procedures and make it easier for children to reunite with their families, including with their extended families in destination countries. States should pursue all practical measures to reunify children with their families. Children born to migrant parents need legal identity for their future well-being. Governments should provide birth registration and/or other identity documents to enable children to access services and avoid statelessness.
- Keep all refugee and migrant children learning and give them access to health and other quality services.** An increased collective effort by governments, communities and the private sector is needed to provide education, health, shelter, nutrition, water and sanitation, and access to legal and psychosocial support for these children. A child's migration status should never be a barrier to accessing essential services.
- Press for action on the underlying causes of large-scale movements of refugees and migrants.** Address the root causes of conflict, violence and extreme poverty in countries of origin and entrenched discrimination of certain population groups. This should include increasing access to education and social protection; expanding opportunities for family income and youth employment; and fostering more accountable and transparent governance. Governments should facilitate community dialogue and engagement towards peaceful conflict resolution, tolerance and a more inclusive society; and should take measures against gang violence.
- Promote measures to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization in countries of transit and destination.** Coalitions of NGOs, communities, private sector, religious groups and political leaders should take responsibility for influencing public opinion to prevent the rise of xenophobia and discrimination toward refugees.

# UNICEF IN ACTION

UNICEF is responding to the needs of children who are on the move, stranded or seeking asylum in Europe. Since the start of the response in late 2015, UNICEF provided 182,500 refugee and migrant children with a wide range of services. UNICEF and partners facilitated training and capacity development for more than 1,000 social workers in countries throughout the region. UNICEF is expanding and significantly scaling up its Mediterranean programme to support refugee and migrant children in Greece and Italy. UNICEF teams continue to conduct outreach to meet children's needs in contexts of shifting routes and heightened vulnerability to smuggling and trafficking networks. In Greece and Italy, UNICEF will continue to expand operations to support government efforts to improve reunification and better protect children by providing state institutions with technical assistance on reception, accommodation, safeguarding and alternative care and foster family options. UNICEF is advocating throughout Europe for a comprehensive response to the crisis in Europe for more durable solutions beyond a short-term response.

UNICEF works in the source countries of migrant children. For example, during the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic last year, UNICEF reached approximately 1.1 million children with informal and formal education. More than 1 million children received child protection and psychosocial support. In Nigeria, home to many children on the Central Mediterranean Migration Route, UNICEF treated nearly 160,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition; provided 4.2 million people with emergency primary health care; reached more than 185,000 children with psychosocial support; and equipped nearly 107,000 children with access to education.

UNICEF is planning to further strengthen the evidence base on the situation of unaccompanied and separated children in coordination with the UNICEF team in Italy. Findings from such evidence will be used to help shape future UNICEF-supported programming particularly on options for alternatives to detention.

In the meantime, UNICEF is currently working with 19 partners in Libya to address the protection and humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable children in the country, including migrant children. Despite the persistent access and security challenges, approximately 42,000 children were reached with structured, sustained psychosocial support services throughout 2016. Recreational activities for 277 unaccompanied and separated children are being provided at the Gharyan Al-Hamra detention centre.

In Benghazi and Sabha, UNICEF national partners are supporting migrant boys and girls to attend catch-up and remedial classes in safe learning environments. The classes, which are conducted in Arabic, also include Mine Risk Education. Up to

date, approximately 11,000 affected school-aged children have benefited from such UNICEF-supported programmes.

Following the spread of scabies in migrants' detention centres, UNICEF in cooperation with the NGO International Medical Corps, implemented sensitization and educational activities focusing on good hygiene practices. This activity covered 13 detention centres.

UNICEF continues its advocacy efforts towards upholding the rights of migrant women and children in Libya, including those municipalities with which UNICEF signed memoranda of cooperation under the Together for Children campaign launched in April 2015. In addition, municipal councils have been consistently encouraged through advocacy from UNICEF to respect the rights of refugees and migrants, and to promote the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and especially the principle of non-discrimination.

In Italy, in collaboration with partner INTERSOS, joint coastguard and UNICEF teams, composed of educators and cultural mediators, were mandated to support the identification, assistance and protection of unaccompanied and separated children during rescue operations at sea and on arrival of children at port. In addition, UNICEF has supported the establishment of child-friendly spaces on all coastguard rescue ships to provide immediate psychosocial support to children rescued at sea and the distribution of dignity kit for girls and women. Since January 2017, 380 unaccompanied and separated children have been identified and registered on the rescue boats.

UNICEF is scaling up its support to improve minimum standards in reception centres hosting unaccompanied and separated children, including access to psychosocial and legal support, education and social inclusion activities

Sicily and Calabria, two regions hosting the highest number of unaccompanied and separated children, respectively 41 per cent and 9 per cent of the total number, have been prioritized. Since the beginning of the operation, in August 2016, 690 children have been reached with protection and education activities in Palermo. By scaling up its interventions in other provinces of Sicily and in Calabria, UNICEF aims to provide direct support to 2,000 additional unaccompanied and separated children. In pilot centres, to date, 55 social workers have benefited from on-the-job training and coaching.

In partnership with the University of Palermo, UNICEF is training an initial group of 100 frontline workers with a plan to reach 1,000



more, from Sicily, Calabria and other regions through partnership with local universities. The training package, which focuses on adolescents and cultural diversity, is aiming at developing the knowledge and skills necessary for the implementation of minimum standards.

UNICEF has developed strong partnerships with ombudspersons, municipalities, judges and other key actors to reinforce child

protection systems through the extension of a pool of 200 volunteer guardians.

In addition, mobile teams are being established to monitor and identify refugee and migrant children at risk in urban and border areas. Since 2017, 349 unaccompanied and separated children, who had dropped out of the formal system, have been reached by mobile teams and referred to services.

## METHODOLOGY

The study is based on 122 interviews with migrants in Libya that included exchanges with women and children who were interviewed outside detention centres in urban and rural areas, plus women in detention centres run by the Department for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM) under Libya's Ministry of Interior. The interviewees came from a dozen countries across different regions, from the Middle East to North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. IOCEA conducted interviews for the study between October 2015 and May 2016, and a Tufts University researcher carried out key informant interviews during September 2016 in Tunis, Tunisia.

Data collection by IOCEA took place primarily in northwestern Libya. The complex political and security situation prevented the research team from conducting interviews in the eastern or southern parts of the country, or in unofficial detention centres operated by militia forces. Urgent efforts should be made to cover these hard-to-reach areas and sites in future research.

In Libya, IOCEA also held 12 key informant interviews with local mayors, health workers and detention centre managers, as well as representatives of the Ministry of Interior and the Libyan Navy. In Tunis, the Tufts University researcher interviewed officials from several humanitarian organizations supporting programmes inside Libya:

the Danish Refugee Council, the International Medical Corps, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya.

The interview data were analysed initially by the research team in Libya, then by the Tufts University researcher, who helped finalize the analysis. The research team also performed the desk review of existing literature on migration through Libya, which forms an integral part of the study. The study itself was drafted by IOCEA and Tufts University in September and October 2016, and validated by participants in a workshop held in Tunis, on 22 November 2016.

It is important to recognize that the qualitative study commissioned by UNICEF and carried out by IOCEA was not designed to reflect broad patterns. As indicated previously, the findings are based on interviews with only a relatively small sample of women and children in parts of northwestern Libya and do not represent the entire population of migrant women and children. The research was intended to provide new insights into the unique experience of this specific group while in transit, including interviewees' experience in detention. The researchers took strong measures to ensure the safety of the participants and the confidentiality of the information they shared.



Lovette, 16, a migrant from Nigeria, at Rainbow, a government-run centre in Palermo, Sicily, for unaccompanied girls. Rainbow provides shelter, food, education and legal help for unaccompanied asylum seekers. Of the 150,000 migrants and refugees who arrived in Italy in 2015, the majority were leaving African nations, including Eritrea, Nigeria and the Sudan.



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# A Deadly Journey for Children

## The Central Mediterranean Migration Route

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Child Alert is a briefing series that presents the core challenges for children in a given crisis location at a given time. This issue focuses on refugee and migrant children who are routinely suffering sexual violence, exploitation, abuse and detention along the Central Mediterranean migration route from North Africa to Italy. A robust system of safe and legal passage is essential to ensure the safety of children on the move.

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