



HPG Working Paper

# Protection of displaced Libyans

## Risks, responses and border dynamics

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# Contents

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	<b>Acronyms</b>	v
	<b>Executive summary</b>	1
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	3
	1.1 Methodology	3
	1.2 Caveats	3
	1.3 Terminology	3
<b>2</b>	<b>The armed conflict in Libya</b>	5
	2.1 From political ‘revolution’ to internal armed conflict	5
	2.2 Libya and Tunisia – historical relations and the spill-over effect of today’s armed conflict	7
<b>3</b>	<b>The protection crisis in Libya</b>	9
	3.1 Libya’s protection crisis – the proximate drivers of forced displacement	9
	3.2 Displacement trends	11
	3.3 Concerns, threats and risks during displacement in Libya and Tunisia	12
<b>4</b>	<b>Responses to forced displacement</b>	17
	4.1 Coping strategies and self-protection	17
	4.2 National responses to displacement	19
	4.3 International humanitarian responses to displacement	20
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	22
	<b>Bibliography</b>	24

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# Boxes

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Box 1: History of the Libyan ‘nation state’ 7

Box 2: Abuse of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers caught up in the conflict in Libya 8



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# Acronyms

<b>DCIM</b>	Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration
<b>GNA</b>	Government of National Accord
<b>GNC</b>	General National Congress
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team
<b>HoR</b>	House of Representatives
<b>HPG</b>	Humanitarian Policy Group
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch
<b>ICC</b>	International Criminal Court
<b>ICG</b>	International Crisis Group
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<b>IED</b>	improvised explosive device
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>LNA</b>	Libyan National Army
<b>LPA</b>	Libyan Political Agreement
<b>NSG</b>	National Salvation Government
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NTC</b>	National Transitional Council
<b>OCHA</b>	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>SRS</b>	Special Representative of the Secretary General
<b>TRCS</b>	Tunisian Red Crescent Society
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNHRC</b>	United Nations Human Rights Council
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>UNSMIL</b>	United National Support Mission in Libya

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# Executive summary

The escalating political and security crisis in Libya has led to the breakdown of its state institutions and widespread violence and crime. According to the UN, hundreds of thousands of people have been forcibly displaced from their homes as a result, either within Libya or across the border into Tunisia. Many are acutely vulnerable to threats from targeted or generalised violence and face challenges accessing public services and adequate shelter. Protection and assistance for these vulnerable people has been inadequate.

This Working Paper focuses on the situation of Libyans displaced since 2011, both within Libya itself and in Tunisia. While the legal frameworks governing their rights during displacement differ, many of the drivers of their displacement are shared, and they face similar threats to their physical, legal and material safety. The paper explores these threats, and the strategies displaced Libyans have used to protect themselves. It considers the local capacities and social capital displaced individuals have drawn on to mitigate threats, including in relation to family, tribal or other affiliations.

Displacement has been driven by a range of serious protection threats, including, targeted and indiscriminate attacks – including sexual and gender-based violence – against civilians by all the parties to the conflict. Targeted attacks against civilians have included kidnapping, detention, unlawful killings and injury and the appropriation of property of individuals perceived to be affiliated with an opposing party, human rights activists, judges and prosecutors and members of particular religious groups. The conflict is extremely dynamic, with frontlines shifting and conflict parties fragmenting, restructuring and changing allegiances. This, together with the pervasive war economy and rising crime, means that civilians cannot know when or if they may be the target of an attack.

Some Libyans also face serious protection threats during their displacement in Tunisia, including the continued risk of targeted attacks, increasing poverty and depleted assets, insecure legal status and limited access to livelihoods. The relatively limited access to assistance and support inside Tunisia compounds their situation. In Libya, an estimated 97,000 of the 194,000 Libyans internally displaced in 2018 were in need of humanitarian assistance. The majority of these vulnerable

internally displaced persons (IDPs) are believed to be in urban areas, in private rented accommodation, with family or friends or in informal settlements.

Displaced Libyans have adopted various strategies, some of them high-risk, to try to cope with and mitigate the threats they face. Flight, whether internally or to Tunisia, has been the main response, but beyond that displaced Libyans have made considered ‘choices’ about where to seek refuge, who can offer them some measure of protection and how they can best use their capacities and assets to sustain themselves during displacement. Most interviewees for this research explained that they had deliberately chosen Tunisia, and particularly Tunis, because the border with Tunisia is relatively close and accessible and the Tunisian government has a visa-free entry policy for Libyans. Tunisia’s more stable security environment, relatively liberal social environment and family and cultural ties were other factors in the decision. Within Libya, many people displaced from their homes have moved relatively short distances, both because they want to return home as soon as the situation allows, but also to avoid the security risks involved in moving significant distances across the country.

Many interviewees highlighted their reliance on family or tribal associations as a key source of protection and support. Close family members provided shelter and assistance and immediate family were, many felt, the only ones they could rely on or trust to provide the kind of long-term emotional support they needed to recover from their ordeal. Several activists explained that they had fled Libya in part to prevent armed groups from retaliating against their relatives. Capitalising on periods of relative stability or lulls in fighting, people also moved back and forth across the border with Tunisia to access certain services, including medical care, to access savings, property or business assets and to check on relatives. This did not mean that they felt it was safe for them to return permanently. A number of interviewees, including peace and women’s rights activists, highlighted how they had adjusted their behaviour while in displacement by adopting a much lower political, social or social media profile.

The Tunisian government has provided some support in allowing displaced Libyans to cross the border

and has not as yet undertaken action against those overstaying their short-term visas. But support inside Tunisia from the government has been limited and it does not have capacity to offer displaced Libyans much more than political refuge. The response of the Libyan government to the protection and assistance needs of displaced people appears to have been ineffective and inadequate. The internationally recognised Libyan government – the Government of National Accord (GNA) – has yet to put in place a coherent strategy to address the immediate and longer-term needs of displaced Libyans, and there is no comprehensive national legal or policy framework to protect or assist Libyan IDPs.

The response of international humanitarian organisations to the needs of Libya's displaced people has not been optimal. Although UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assistance programmes are available to the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers, including Libyans, few displaced Libyans interviewed for this study had sought this assistance or indicated that they were aware of it. International humanitarian organisations trying to respond to the needs of displaced people inside Libya face major challenges from insecurity, and the existence of competing centres of authority

in different parts of the country has complicated the registration and monitoring of aid projects.

The Protection Working Group of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) has developed a protection strategy, but some stakeholders interviewed for this research expressed concern at what they saw as a lack of in-depth understanding of the cultural, tribal, social and religious context, and the role these factors play in the protection of Libyan civilians. Donor support has been inadequate: the international humanitarian appeal for 2018 received only \$82 million or 26% of requested funds.

Displaced Libyans have faced a range of serious threats to their safety, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee their homes. While the international humanitarian response has been severely constrained by insecurity, inadequate funding, government policies and international politics, increased efforts to understand the complex array of social, tribal, ethnic, religious and other dimensions of the conflict, how these relate to the protection threats Libyans face and how Libyans have sought to deal with or mitigate those threats is critical to understanding how best to support these populations with the limited financial resources and political support available.

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# 1 Introduction

Since the uprisings across the Arab world in 2011, Libya has been locked in an escalating political and security crisis that has resulted in the breakdown of its state institutions, widespread violence and criminality. The initial uprising quickly evolved into a protracted and dynamic armed conflict. The UN estimates that more than 1.6 million people have been directly affected, including hundreds of thousands who have been forcibly displaced from their homes, either within Libya itself or across the border in Tunisia. Displaced populations are acutely vulnerable to threats from targeted or generalised violence and face challenges in accessing public services and adequate shelter. Protection and assistance for these vulnerable people has been inadequate.

This Working Paper focuses on the situation of Libyans displaced since 2011, both within Libya itself and in Tunisia. While the legal frameworks governing their rights during displacement differ, many of the drivers of their displacement are shared, and they face similar threats to their physical, legal and material safety. The paper explores these threats, and what strategies displaced Libyans have adopted to protect themselves. It considers the local capacities and social capital displaced individuals have drawn on to mitigate threats, including in relation to family, tribal or other affiliations.

This case study is part of a wider research programme on ‘Cross-border networks and protection in conflict: values, systems and implications’. This two-year programme explores local and self-protection response efforts, as well as how borders impact and influence the dynamics of protection threats and responses from local and international protection actors.

## 1.1 Methodology

The analysis presented in this report is based on primary data collected through field research, as well as an in-depth review of available literature and select qualitative interviews with key stakeholders from the international humanitarian community. Fieldwork focused on engagement with Libyans who have sought refuge in Tunisia from the conflict in Libya. It was conducted in Tunis and Tripoli between

March and September 2018 by three local researchers. This fieldwork included over 50 interviews with Libyans inside Tunisia and Tunisian and Libyan civil society leaders. Interviews were also conducted with international humanitarian organisations, both in Tunis and remotely. All interviews were semi-structured and based on a series of research questions. The literature review looked at a range of documentation, including grey and academic literature in Arabic and English.

## 1.2 Caveats

The research for this report faced a number of challenges. First, finding accurate statistics on Libyans displaced to Tunisia is very difficult, and the available information on their situation is limited. Second, the reasons why Libyans are in Tunisia are multiple, complex and difficult to unpack through research alone. Third, heightened security risks in Libya are still affecting the safety and security of Libyans in Tunisia, including individuals interviewed for this research. Finally, while there is some data and analysis on the current situation of people internally displaced within Libya, this too is limited. The research team took steps to mitigate these challenges, including protecting the identity of interviewees and where possible cross-checking data provided by displaced interviewees with key stakeholders and available literature.

## 1.3 Terminology

Throughout this report, the authors have applied the relevant international legal or policy definitions as follows.

Refugee: any individual who, ‘owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country’ (Article 1, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951). The authors have applied the term ‘refugee’ to Libyans who fled to Tunisia due to targeted and/



or generalised violence, even where these individuals may not have sought asylum in Tunisia or undergone Refugee Status Determination by UNHCR (see Section 3.3.4 for more details on the legal context for refugees in Tunisia).

Internally displaced person (IDP): ‘persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border’ (Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998 and replicated in Article

1(k), African Union Convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons in Africa – the Kampala Convention).

This study is in four parts. Chapter 2 provides background on the armed conflict in Libya, and its spill-over effects in Tunisia. Chapter 3 outlines the drivers of displacement, both across the border and within Libya, the wide-ranging threats that Libyans face during displacement and their prospects for return, resettlement or local integration. Chapter 4 explores the strategies adopted by displaced Libyans to protect themselves, and the efforts of other stakeholders to support them in these efforts. The final chapter presents key conclusions from the research.

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# 2 The armed conflict in Libya

## 2.1 From political ‘revolution’ to internal armed conflict

### 2.1.1 Political revolution and the first Libyan civil war

The crisis in Libya began in 2011 with the growth of a popular and initially peaceful revolt against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, Libya’s leader of some 40 years and, from the 1980s onwards, an international pariah. A crackdown by the security services on a civilian protest in Benghazi in February 2011 rapidly escalated into a campaign of armed repression by security forces and the military. By March, attacks against civilians had become ‘widespread and systematic’, and may have amounted to crimes against humanity (UNSC, 2011a). A full-scale civil war developed between forces loyal to Gaddafi, later known within Libyan circles as the ‘September group’,<sup>1</sup> and anti-Gaddafi forces (the ‘February group’).<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) responded by referring the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and, under Resolution 1973, authorising the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to ‘take all necessary measures ... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi’ (UNSC, 2011a: op para 4). Operation Unified Protector was launched on 31 March to implement Resolution 1973 and enforce a Security Council-authorized no-fly zone and arms embargo. With the assistance of Western and Arab states, Libyan rebel forces captured the capital, Tripoli, in August 2011. Gaddafi fled, but was captured and killed the following October.

The National Transitional Council (NTC), formed in February 2011, published a Constitutional Declaration in August outlining its intention to establish a democratic Libya. The following month UN Security Council Resolution 2009 established the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to assist the transitional authorities in restoring public order and promoting

the rule of law, political reconciliation and electoral processes, strengthening state institutions, promoting and protecting human rights and supporting economic recovery (UNSC, 2011b). With support from UNSMIL and other international actors, the NTC held national elections in July 2012 to form a General National Congress (GNC).

### 2.1.2 The second civil war

Conflict resumed in May 2014 following political disagreements between different power-holders across the country. The GNC was given an 18-month deadline to craft a democratic constitution. When it failed to do so a new House of Representatives (HoR) was elected, replacing the GNC in August 2014. The HoR, headquartered in Tobruq in eastern Libya, is supported by armed groups that came to be referred to as ‘Libya Dignity’. A minority faction of former GNC members rejected the HoR and instead declared a National Salvation Government (NSG) based in Tripoli in the west, supported by a coalition of groups known as ‘Libya Dawn’. Each coalition has its own parliament and government.

In a bid to resolve the conflict between the two camps, a UN-led initiative, the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), helped form a Government of National Accord (GNA) in December 2015. This interim administration is recognised by the international community as the legitimate executive authority in Libya, but has struggled to secure public support or exert control over the country. While the HoR declared its support for the LPA in December 2015, the NSG publicly rejected it the following March. The resulting political impasse sparked renewed violence in Tripoli and Benghazi, Libya’s two largest cities, and the continued absence of a functioning, legitimate central government. The conflict across the country has since deepened among and between the various political factions involved.

This pattern of violence has continued into 2019. There were armed clashes between 26 August and

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1 The reference here is to the coup d’etat of September 1969, also known as the al-Fateh Revolution or the 1st of September Revolution. The coup was carried out by the Free Officers Movement, a group of military officers led by Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, which led to the overthrow of King Idris I.

2 The reference here is to the uprising against Gaddafi which erupted on the 17th of February 2011.

4 September 2018 in Tripoli, with tanks and heavy artillery operating in the city, looting by armed gangs and prison breakouts. A ceasefire negotiated by UNSMIL on 4 September brought a temporary halt to the violence and some stability in the city (Salame, 2018). In early 2019, fighting continued, particularly in the south, where the LNA has been advancing its forces: in Derna, for example, the UN and other international organisations have warned of the dire situation of civilians trapped by fighting between conflict parties in the old part of the city (HRW, 2019b; OCHA, 2019).

### 2.1.3 A governance vacuum

Libya remains torn between its multiple ‘governments’. Both the eastern-based HoR and the western-based NSG have remained intransigent in their claim to legitimacy despite their mutual inability to govern. Meanwhile, the GNA has been described as a ‘Frankenstein type creation with zero legitimacy’ (Galustian, 2016). Dialogues in Italy, Switzerland, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, France, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt have made little substantive progress, and in any case these governments represent very few of the parties actually engaged in the conflict (Anderson, 2017; Mezran and Varvelli, 2017: 8). The consequent lack of central authority and state security and justice institutions has allowed a state of lawlessness to prevail across the country.

### 2.1.4 International terrorist groups

Libya has been ‘a major hub’ for the global jihadist movement for several decades, but after the fall of the Gaddafi regime its position became particularly strategic. For several years, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has used the country as a base for its fight elsewhere in the region and as a training ground for new fighters. It has also gained control of large areas of territory (Brahimi, 2017; Pack et al., 2017). While the group’s brutality sparked a backlash from Libyans, including in its ‘proto-state’ in Sirte in central Libya, ISIS remains active across the south, with smaller operations in the west and coastal areas (Brahimi, 2017; Saleh, 2018; UN News, 2018; UNSC, 2019). Home-grown armed Islamist groups including the Derna-based Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade and the now-disbanded Ansar al-Sharia in Libya also flourished in the post-revolutionary period, with some reportedly

establishing links with Al-Qaeda (Ezrow, 2017). The UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) and head of UNSMIL, Ghassan Salamé, has expressed fears that Libya ‘may become a shelter for terrorist groups of all persuasions’ (UN News, 2018).

### 2.1.5 Economic insecurity and the war economy

The economic situation in Libya has deteriorated. Oil production – the country’s primary source of income – has declined as a result of attacks on oil infrastructure by militia and armed groups, creating a fiscal crisis, while general insecurity, a liquidity crisis, rapid price inflation and black market speculation has seen the Libyan Dinar crash from 1.4 to the dollar to between six and ten.<sup>3</sup> According to the World Bank, ‘Libyan households ... [have] lost almost 80 percent of their purchasing power’ due to the cumulative impact of rising inflation, and that this has ‘almost certainly pushed more Libyans into poverty and hardship and worsened inequality’ (World Bank, 2018). By 2017, many basic commodities were no longer easily accessible or affordable for many Libyans: the price of bread, for example, increased five-fold between 2014 and 2017 (Mercy Corps, 2017: 1). Youth unemployment was 40% in 2016, and livelihood opportunities are limited (Fasanotti, 2016).

This economic deterioration is part and parcel of a ‘pervasive’ war economy, where powerful individuals, militia and criminal gangs use violence to gain control of oil, gas, transport, the import and export infrastructure and highly lucrative smuggling routes (Eaton, 2018: 2). Cross-border smuggling was rampant even before 2011, with Gaddafi frequently leveraging the profits to reward loyalists and communities that owned land along the border (Chauzal and Zavagli, 2016; Meddeb, 2017). This cross-border economy continues to thrive, with the illegal trade in cigarettes, fuel and, to a lesser extent, arms and drugs worth an estimated half a billion dollars in 2015 (Kartas, 2013; World Bank, 2017). There are geographical differences in how the war economy functions in the east, west and south of the country but the key characteristics of the war economy include ‘the direct sale of commodities/goods through smuggling; the generation of rents and use of extortion; and predation on state resources’ (Eaton, 2018: 7). In addition, control of the smuggling

3 Due to the unavailability of foreign currency through the official banking system, and the extreme shortage of Libyan dinars, black market currency traders have become the de-facto cash distribution system of the country setting their own ‘real’ transaction rates which track the value of the Libyan Dinar more accurately than the Central Bank’s exchange rate which remains at its SDR peg of 1.4 Dinar/\$ and only available to importers who can access a ‘letter of credit’. The difference between the ‘street value’ of foreign currencies and the rate at which credit from the Central Bank is distributed has created a thriving black market where fraudulent claims of import are made and the ‘cheap’ foreign cash is imported and sold at the black-market rate with these fraudsters accumulating tremendous profits on the arbitrage.

trade and other aspects of the war economy are fundamental to the political power of the various conflict parties (HPG interviews, 2019). The overall impact of the last eight years of armed conflict, political instability and the war economy on poverty rates among Libyan families and communities is assumed to be profoundly negative, particularly in those areas of the country, such as the south, which already had high poverty levels (World Bank, 2018; HPG interviews, 2019).

## 2.2 Libya and Tunisia – historical relations and the spill-over effect of today’s armed conflict

### 2.2.1 Historical relations

Tunisia and Libya have old historical links; the border between the two countries has always been permeable due to the historic relationship and deep-rooted connections between communities on either side of the border as well as between the two nation states. Prior to the French colonial invasion of North Africa in the 19th century, the Jefara region encompassing the northern border region between Tunisia and Libya enjoyed stability under the control of the Werghemma tribe in the west and the Nwayel in the east. The arbitrary division between French and Italian colonial powers destroyed that stability as well as the region’s economy (Lamloun, 2016). Ironically, the regional economy was later revived when political tensions between the governments of Tunisia and Libya in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in a flourishing black market based on cross-border tribal alliances.

### 2.2.2 The spill-over effects of Libya’s armed conflict

Reflecting the history of their shared border, stability on the Tunisian side is intrinsically linked today to that on the Libyan side (Gramer and Jilani, 2018). The government has faced difficulties in securing the physical, economic, social and ideological ‘border’ between the two countries, resulting in a growing spill-over effect, including increased insecurity (Zelin, 2015). At the outset of the conflict the Libyan government border control collapsed, with the National Guard and police withdrawing from these areas (Lamloun, 2016). Rival militia from nearby towns in Zuwara and Zawiya clashed over their attempts to exert control of the crossing at Ras Jedir, including the lucrative smuggling trade (Pollock, 2018). The Tunisian authorities have sought to counter insecurity spilling over the border, including through building

## Box 1: History of the Libyan ‘nation state’

The birth of the Libyan state speaks to the relativity of borders in the post-colonial nations of North Africa and the Middle East. The territory that is now Libya historically consisted of three separate provinces of the Ottoman Empire: Tripolitania (the province of Tripoli), Cyrenaica (the independent sanjak of Benghazi), and Fezzan. The name ‘Libya’ was adopted as the official name of a colony made up of the three provinces by Italian colonisers. It was only when Italy lost possession of its colonies following the Second World War that Libya was given ‘nation state’ status and in 1951 emerged as the independent United Kingdom of Libya under the leadership of King Idris.

Libya’s experience with post-colonial state formation is similar to others in the Arab region. With artificial borders and a political process that was imposed on the people, ‘the colonial experience left the Arabs as a community of nations rather than a national community’ (Rogan, 2012: 11). Arab intellectuals developed an interest in the ‘state’ only in the 1980s and prior to this, they were mostly preoccupied either with the ‘Islamic umma’ or with ‘Arab nationalism’ but not with the territorial bureaucratic state (Ayubi, 2009: 4).

trenches and a 200km barrier, enforcing a military buffer zone and on at least one occasion closing the official crossing at Ras Jedir (Strickland, 2014; Cuttitta, 2016; Meddeb, 2017).

As elsewhere in the world, extremist ideologies have effectively ignored the physical border between the two countries. Since 2015 ISIS has successfully expanded its reach across into Tunisia, exploiting its home-grown jihadist militancy as well as the institutional and ideological vacuum which was left following the demise of the radical Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia in Tunisia (AST) and the weakening of the former state security structures in the aftermath of the country’s own political crisis (Kausch, 2015). Their expansion into Tunisia has also been facilitated by a stagnant economic situation in which marginalised Tunisian youth have turned to joining armed groups for perceived financial benefits as well as by the friction between Islam and the forced secularisation overseen under Habib Bourguiba and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali over the previous five decades (Chauzal and Zavagli, 2016).

### 2.2.3 Migration and people smuggling

Prior to the conflict Libya was already both a major destination for migrants from elsewhere in Africa and a key point on the route to Europe. The volumes of migrants passing through Libya en route to Europe have increased dramatically over the last eight years as traffickers take advantage of the collapse of law and order in the country. Many of these migrants sought refuge on the Tunisian border when the conflict broke out in 2011. UNHCR set up four camps in the south-east of Tunisia to accommodate these populations, with more than 200,000 individuals from over 120 countries receiving some form of assistance (UNHCR, 2013a). The vast majority of these people were quickly repatriated, though some 4,500 have refused to return due to fear of persecution in their countries of origin (Tringham, 2014). By 2014 the Tunisian authorities had stepped up control of the country's ports, and while the number of smuggling boats leaving from the Tunisian coast has reduced, the Tunisian Coastguard continues to intercept and rescue boats off the coast of Libya. Those rescued – the rescapés – are often handed over to the Tunisian Red Crescent Society (TRCS), and frequently end up in the Tunisian cities of Zarzis and Ben Guerdane (UNHCR, 2014; Cuttitta, 2016).

### Box 2: Abuse of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers caught up in the conflict in Libya

According to the UN and its partners, migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are some of the most vulnerable people in Libya today (OCHA, 2018a; Protection Working Group Libya, 2018). As of January 2019, there were an estimated 669,000 migrants and over 57,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Libya (UNSC, 2019: 11). They face a range of serious violations of human rights, perpetrated by 'State officials, armed groups, smugglers, traffickers and criminal gangs' (UNSC, 2019: 8; see also HRW, 2019a). People detained in Libya have been subject to detention in appalling conditions. There are reportedly approximately 25 centres, managed by Libya's Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM), holding 3,500 people from all over Africa. Detainees are held for long periods in conditions of chronic overcrowding, poor sanitation, insufficient access to healthcare and lack of food, with no formal charges issued, without trial and without access to their families. They suffer from disease, malnutrition and physical and sexual violence (HRW, 2016; UNHRC, 2016). As at the beginning of 2019, approximately 5,300 migrants and refugees were being detained in Libya, including 3,700 in need of international protection (UNSC, 2019).



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# 3 The protection crisis in Libya

## 3.1 Libya's protection crisis – the proximate drivers of forced displacement

The conflict in Libya has forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes within Libya and across the border with Tunisia since 2011. The following analysis summarises some of the key protection threats emanating from the conflict: 'Now, for many, every day is a personal emergency' (Salame, 2018a).

### 3.1.1 Armed violence and crime

Since 2011 there has been a pattern of both targeted and indiscriminate attacks against civilians perpetrated by all the parties to the conflict, including the Libyan National Army (LNA), groups under the coalition Operation Dignity, other militia groups, such as Libya Dawn (including the Libya Shield Forces, the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade and Janzour Knights Brigade), armed groups in western Libya opposed to Libya Dawn (including Al-Sawa'iq, Al-Qa'qa'a, Al-Madani) and tribal groups in the south (including Tabu, Al-Qadhadhifa, Al-Megharba and Awlad Suleiman) often associated with either Operation Dignity or Libya Dawn (UNHRC, 2016). Targeted attacks on individual civilians and civilian infrastructure have also been a key tactic of Islamist extremist groups including ISIS and Ansar al-Sharia (USDoS, 2016). These attacks have included kidnapping, detention, unlawful killings and injury and the appropriation of property of individuals perceived to be affiliated with an opposing party to the conflict, human rights defenders/activists, judges and prosecutors and members of some religious groups, such as Coptic Christians (UNHRC, 2016).

The persecution of specific groups began early in 2011 when forces aligned with Gaddafi or affiliated armed groups targeted those believed to be involved in the uprising against his regime (often referred to as the 'February' people). As the tide of the conflict turned, forces that had fought against the old regime began to target Gaddafi's supporters (often referred to as the

'September' people). This cycle of targeted violence and reprisals has become a feature of the conflict. Journalists and civil society activists, particularly women's rights activists, are specifically targeted by Islamist extremist groups, which consider them a 'corrupting force' in Libyan society, and by Libyan militia forces or armed groups which believe they are working against their interests (Aliriza, 2015; Moore, 2015; UNHRC, 2016; Counter-extremism Project, 2018; HPG interviews, 2018; UNSC, 2019). Under the Gaddafi regime there had essentially been no independent media, and its fall facilitated the development of a nascent free press (Aliriza, 2015). Paradoxically, however, this has led to attacks on journalists as conflict parties seek to control the public narrative of the war and their role in it: since 2011, 13 journalists have been killed in Libya, and another four are missing, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.<sup>4</sup> The country was ranked 162nd out of 180 in Reporters Without Borders' press freedom index.<sup>5</sup> In this climate, many journalists have been forced to flee the country (Alriza, 2015; HPG interviews, 2018).

Libyan peace and human rights activists interviewed for this research report having been targeted or threatened by local militias, resulting in serious psychological as well as physical trauma (HPG interviews, 2018). One women's rights activist reported to the research team how she was abused on social media, denounced as a 'non-believer' and threatened. Another described being kidnapped and beaten by local militia in Tripoli (HPG interviews, 2018). Several activists explained that they had fled the country to reduce the risks to their families as well as themselves (HPG interviews, 2018). Targeted attacks are not limited to those with opposing political views. As the war economy and general lawlessness have thrived, so individuals are increasingly being targeted for kidnapping for extortion – a lucrative source of income for conflict parties – or even to exact personal revenge (BBC News, 2017; UNSC, 2019). One interviewee explained how their brother – a wealthy local

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4 Statistics sourced at <https://cpj.org>

5 Data sourced at <https://rsf.org/en/libya>

businessman – had returned for a visit to Libya having previously fled to Tunisia, only to be kidnapped for ransom and killed (HPG interviews, 2018).

Indiscriminate attacks have included the targeting of entire neighbourhoods with imprecise or wide-area weaponry, such as rocket-propelled grenades and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and restrictions on the movement of civilians and essential supplies. In March 2017, for example, the LNA lifted a two-month siege of an apartment complex in the Ganfouda neighbourhood in Benghazi where the Benghazi Defence Brigades (BDB) were holding out. The siege involved cutting off all supplies including food and medicines to the area, and restrictions on freedom of movement (OCHA, 2018a). The prolonged battle for Derna has involved the LNA tightening its siege on the city restricting access to food, fuel and medical supplies, and air strikes that have reportedly resulted in civilian deaths and injuries (Amnesty International, 2018a; OCHA, 2019). In Tripoli, armed clashes between rival militia in August and September 2018 resulted in shortages of medical supplies, attacks on and looting of medical personnel and ambulances, damage to water networks and shells falling ‘on wide swaths of the city’ (Libya Inter-sector Coordination Group, 2018: 1).

The armed conflict is extremely dynamic, with frontlines shifting and conflict parties fragmenting, restructuring and changing allegiances. This, together with the pervasive war economy and rising crime, means that civilians cannot know when and if they may be the target of an attack. As one interviewee explained: ‘if you had asked me three years ago then I would have said that I was personally targeted but nowadays it is different, it is random and there is no system or methodology to danger’ (HPG interviews, 2018). The vast majority of Libyan refugees interviewed for this research explained that they and people they knew did not feel safe in Libya irrespective of their political, religious, social, ethnic or other affiliations (HPG interviews, 2018). These fears are compounded by widespread impunity. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), ‘key institutions, most notably law enforcement and the judiciary, are dysfunctional in most parts of the country, virtually guaranteeing domestic impunity’ (HRW, 2018). Individuals responsible for the gravest violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have not been held to account: three arrest warrants have been issued by the ICC on charges pertaining to war crimes and crimes against humanity, but no one has yet been brought before the court (ICC, 2018).

*‘All the September people do not feel safe and it is easy to understand why but now it is no longer just the September people who feel unsafe. Even the people who supported the February Revolution are affected. In Benghazi, Salwa Bughaighis who was aligned with the Revolution from the beginning was killed by Daesh. So how can anyone feel safe?’* (HPG interviews, 2018).

### 3.1.2 Sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence – against women and men – has been a key feature of the conflict. Reports of rape and other sexual violence against women by Gaddafi loyalists were reported in 2011, but information has emerged more recently indicating a cyclical pattern of such violence. While sexual violence was prevalent in Libya before 2011, the high levels of violence and almost total impunity have greatly exacerbated the threat (Allegra, 2017). A 2016 report by the US State Department, for example, found that, over the preceding 18 months, ISIS had abducted at least 63 women and forced them into sex slavery for its fighters (USDoS, 2016). Libyan armed groups, including the LNA and other militia linked to Libya Dawn, have also engaged in sexual violence against women (UNSC, 2018). Sexual violence against women’s rights activists is presumably intended to have a chilling effect on efforts to speak up for women’s rights (UNHRC, 2016; HRW, 2017; UNSC, 2018). Attacks seem to coincide with increasingly negative social attitudes towards women, as evidenced in decrees by religious leaders and restrictions on women’s freedom of movement and right to work (UNHRC, 2016). One interviewee told HPG researchers ‘people will believe anything negative said about women. This is the norm. You see people regard women activists as the corrupt apple that will corrupt their girls’. There is also evidence of rape and other sexual abuse of males – Libyans and third-country nationals – being held in detention by armed groups. Research reported in *Le Monde* and *The Guardian* newspapers in November 2017 described the use of sexual violence against males ‘to humiliate and neutralise opponents’, with inmates forced to perpetrate abuse against each other, often filmed by their captors (Allegra, 2017).

General lawlessness, the collapse of judicial structures, lack of access to specialist survivor services and the social and cultural stigma attached to sexual abuse all discourage survivors from reporting incidents (USDoS, 2016; OCHA, 2018a; Protection Working Group Libya, 2018; UNHRC, 2018). Women subject to sexual violence by terrorist or extremist groups

in Libya, including ISIS, have been detained by the Libyan authorities as ‘accomplices’, rather than treated as survivors (UNSC, 2018).

### 3.1.3 Enforced disappearances

Since 2011, both government forces and militia acting outside government control have kidnapped and ‘disappeared’ an unknown number of individuals, with little effort made to investigate or punish the perpetrators or prevent incidents from happening (USDoS, 2016). Individuals at particular risk include activists and critics of the different governments/ de facto authorities across the country (Amnesty International, 2011). As the SRSG reported in September 2018, ‘in various cities and towns, civilians are routinely grabbed off the streets or from their homes without legal process sometimes simply for holding the wrong opinion. Some reappear in prisons, where they are tortured. The bodies of others are recovered in the streets. Others simply join the long list of missing and disappeared since 2011’ (Salame, 2018b).

### 3.1.4 Crossing the Mediterranean

Such is the dire situation in Libya, including for displaced populations, an increasing number of Libyans have attempted to reach Europe across the Mediterranean (OCHA, 2018a; UNHRC, 2018; HPG interviews, 2019). Despite an overall fall in the number of migrants making the crossing since 2016, the number of Libyans reported arriving on the Italian coast increased from 887 in 2016 to 1,234 in 2017 and the number in the first eight months of 2018 was 428 (OCHA, 2018a: 13). Those interviewed by UNHCR and partners indicated the continuing armed conflict and its affects on access to services, livelihoods, etc. as the key reasons for attempting this perilous journey (OCHA, 2018a; HPG interviews, 2019).

## 3.2 Displacement trends

With the outbreak of the civil war in February 2011, an initial wave of mixed populations fled across the border to Tunisia in search of safety (IOM, 2016). This included Libyans who were supporters of Gaddafi or their families fearing reprisals (Brookings Doha Center, 2015; Jaidi and Tashani, 2015). These groups were relatively small: only around 3,500 Libyans were recorded crossing the border by UNHCR between 20 February and 2 March 2011 (out of an estimated 85,000 people) (UNHCR, 2011a; 2011b). A reported 90,000 arrived between April and June 2011, according to the Tunisian government (UNHCR, 2011c).

These groups sought refuge primarily with Tunisian families or relatives rather than in the UN-organised camps established primarily to facilitate the repatriation of third-country nationals (Brookings Doha Center, 2015). Points of entry to Tunisia used by Libyans reflected political affiliations, with Gaddafi supporters using the Ras Jedir crossing and settling around Ben Guerdane, and opposition supporters crossing through Dehiba-Wazen into Tataouine (tribal affiliations also played a part in the distribution patterns) (Kartas, 2013; UNHCR, 2013a). By September 2011, UNHCR estimated that 77% of Libyans who had arrived in Tunisia that year had since returned (UNHCR, 2011c). This is borne out by this research, with a number of refugees explaining how they had fled the country in 2011 and returned later once the situation had stabilised.

Internal displacement was also a key feature of the armed conflict in 2011, with approximately 500,000 having fled their homes for other areas of the country. Many fled as a result of threats from anti-government armed groups targeting them for their perceived affiliation with or support for Gaddafi and his regime (IDMC, 2014). Most of this first wave of IDPs sought shelter in urban areas, particularly Misrata and Tripoli in the west of the country, and were able to return home towards the end of 2011, though those with specific Gaddafi affiliations remained fearful of returning to their areas of origin (IDMC, 2012; 2013). By the end of 2011, following Gaddafi’s death, 154,000 Libyans were internally displaced (IDMC, 2012).

### 3.2.1 Forced displacement since 2014

The second conflict has again resulted in large-scale forced displacement of civilians, both across the border into Tunisia and within Libya. Those who fled across the border in 2014 included people escaping the generalised violence and institutional chaos in the country following the breakdown of the nascent central government. This group of displaced Libyans also included people fleeing targeted persecution, primarily related to their support for the revolution against the Gaddafi regime, who now found themselves at risk of retaliation as the conflict lines shifted once again (IOM, 2016). Many of these families were reportedly moderately well-off (wealthier Libyans reportedly having fled to Europe or Australia instead) (IOM, 2016).

Within Libya, the renewed conflict resulted in a six-fold increase in IDPs, reaching approximately 400,000 people (IDMC, 2015). Similar to those forced across the border, people displaced internally included those fleeing generalised violence and chaos in their areas of

origin, as well as former Gaddafi loyalists or perceived loyalists among the Tawergha, Mashashya, Gualish and Tuareg communities who, having fled initially in 2011, were displaced again in 2014 (IDMC, 2015). Unlike in 2011, many of those internally displaced in 2014 were unable to return home quickly and/or have been displaced again subsequently as the front lines of the conflict have shifted. Of the 304,000 Libyans internally displaced at the end of 2016, 13% had been displaced in 2011, 5% were displaced between 2012 and 2014 and the remaining 82% were displaced between 2014 and 2016 (IOM, 2017). New displacements have also continued, though in smaller numbers: interviewees for this research indicated that they had fled Libya as late as 2017 (HPG interviews, 2018); in mid-2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of IDPs estimated that approximately 2–3% of the Libyan population was still internally displaced.

### 3.2.2 Data on displacement

Reliable statistics for the number of Libyans displaced across the border to Tunisia are difficult to obtain (see for example IOM, 2016). Libyans are not recognised or registered as refugees in the country, border crossings are irregularly monitored and Libyans displaced across the border regularly cross back again for short periods (see Chapter 3). The Tunisian authorities have provided various figures for the number of Libyans in the country, with the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs estimating between 800,000 and 1.5 million in 2016, but these statistics do not distinguish the reasons for their presence, and are therefore largely unhelpful in determining how many Libyans actually sought refuge from the conflict in Tunisia (De Bel-Air, 2016). A survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in cooperation with the Tunisian government in late 2015 indicated that over 8,000 Libyans were residing in Tunisia, having fled the conflict (IOM, 2016). Research conducted by the World Bank a few months later suggested that, by February 2016, 12,783 Libyans were living in Tunisia, approximately 30% or 3,800 of whom stated that they had moved to Tunisia specifically because of the conflict (World Bank, 2017). The majority of Libyans involved in that research also indicated that they had been in the country for less than three years at the time (2016), suggesting that most of those who had fled across the border in 2011 had returned home – at least temporarily (World Bank, 2017). There has as yet been no fully comprehensive assessment or analysis of displacement across the border, and therefore current analysis is only indicative.

While there is more data available on the scale of internal displacement within Libya, it is also incomplete (HPG interviews, 2019). Many of those internally displaced have moved multiple times since their initial period of displacement, and due to the nature of their situation – often characterised by having fled persecution or targeted violence – many IDPs are reluctant to be identified, preferring to live anonymously in urban areas. Access to these populations, particularly in the south and other areas of active conflict, has been extremely limited, making it difficult for international humanitarian organisations to conduct assessments. Collecting data is also complicated by the shifting patterns of displacement and return, whereby some IDPs have returned to areas of origin but have been unable to fully resettle in their homes or neighbourhoods due to destruction of property, continued fighting or the presence of unexploded ordnance (HPG interviews, 2019).

*Internal displacement has become a permanent feature of life for many in Libya*  
(UNHRC, 2018: 1).

## 3.3 Concerns, threats and risks during displacement in Libya and Tunisia

### 3.3.1 Targeted threats of violence in displacement

One of the most pressing concerns for many displaced Libyans is that threats of violence or persecution that originally forced them to flee their homes have followed them into displacement. A number of those displaced to Tunisia interviewed for this research explained that they had personally received direct threats from individuals or militia forces via social media, in some cases had received threatening calls to their mobile phones and in at least one instance had been subject to attack on the streets of Tunis. In most cases, these individuals were being targeted for their perceived or actual opposition to the various ideologies or political agendas of militia or other armed groups inside Libya. One interviewee asserted that ‘Tunis is a meeting place for militia leaders’, and that, although they felt safer than in Libya, the threat was still very real (HPG interviews, 2018). Similarly, for many IDPs who fled targeted violence or persecution, there is a genuine fear that threats to their personal safety will increase if their identities become known in their place of displacement (UNHRC, 2018).



*‘Those militias threaten people [in Tunisia] and it is not difficult for them to do so given that they command power, money and authority. Some of them come here on a regular basis. [...] In 2013 or 2014, we heard of Libyans who had escaped to Tunisia but a militia came to Tunis, drugged them and put them in an ambulance and took them back to Libya so they would not be suspected at the border. Another method used is to threaten to hurt a family member in Libya to force certain activists to come back to Libya. You see, in Tunisia, it is not very difficult for them to hurt you. They don't need to take you back to Libya; they can hurt you here’* (HPG interviews, 2018).

### 3.3.2 Increasing poverty and depleted assets

The socio-economic situation of Libyans who fled to Tunisia varies, as evidenced in the diverse experiences of the individuals interviewed for this research. Many of those who fled across the border were moderately wealthy intellectuals or professionals, with access to assets that they were able to use to sustain themselves during the initial period of their displacement (HPG interviews, 2018; see also IOM, 2016). World Bank research on the demographics of Libyans living in Tunisia in 2017 found that the population was primarily middle class, with household spending of 38,800 Tunisian Dinars annually (roughly \$50 per day), which is two to three times the spending power of the average Tunisian household (World Bank, 2017). Many of those who fled across the border were state employees who were still receiving regular salary payments even after having left the country (IOM, 2016; HPG interviews, 2018 and 2019). Some return for short periods to check on or access their remaining assets and family in their areas of origin (see Chapter 3 for more details).

It is also evident that, as displacement has become protracted, so the socio-economic situation of some of those displaced across the border has deteriorated, with implications for their physical safety. Several interviewees told HPG researchers that they had exhausted the finances they had in reserve, that their property, business or other assets in Libya had been looted or destroyed and that they had struggled to access regular employment in Tunisia (HPG interviews, 2018; see also IOM, 2016). Those who did have savings in Libyan banks have seen their value eroded by the rapid decline in the value of the Libyan Dinar, and have in any case faced restrictions on accessing these funds due to the imposition of a cap on withdrawals put in place by the Libyan Central Bank to try to address the liquidity crisis (Watson,

2012; HPG interviews, 2019). There are also concerns that the initial surge of solidarity among relatives, friends and society in general in Tunisia has begun to wane (IOM, 2016).

The situation of vulnerable Libyans in Tunisia is compounded by the relative lack of assistance available to them in accessing the full range of their human rights. In terms of education, an IOM survey published in 2016 found that 25% of school-age Libyan children were not enrolled due to administrative and financial challenges, and 80% of those who were enrolled in schools, including from vulnerable families, were not receiving any assistance (IOM, 2016: 18). Interviewees told HPG researchers that their children faced challenges navigating the Tunisian education system. The IOM survey also found that 80% of Libyans interviewed in late 2015 had not accessed healthcare or benefitted from social assistance programmes, aside from ad hoc civil society interventions (IOM, 2016: 19). Although Libyans have for decades crossed into Tunisia to take advantage of the better-quality health services there, private clinics in the country reportedly no longer accept patients with chronic or serious needs, and displaced Libyans can only access healthcare services through private insurance – which many displaced Libyans cannot afford (IOM, 2016; HPG interviews, 2018). At least one interviewee told HPG researchers that she had been forced to return to Libya, at great personal risk, in order to access urgent medical care for her child, which she could not afford in Tunisia (HPG interviews, 2018).

The principal challenge Libyans displaced to Tunisia highlighted to HPG researchers was their lack of access to livelihoods. Several noted that they had been unable to find any work or knew of others who had held professional positions in Libya but were now forced to undertake casual labour, domestic work and even sex work, with all its attendant risks. Research by IOM in late 2015 found that many Libyans are struggling to access the regular labour market, with 48% of those interviewed stating that the main barrier they faced in this regard was the lack of a residence permit from the Tunisian authorities (IOM, 2016: 19).

The socio-economic situation of IDPs inside Libya is also precarious. According to the 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) published by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), an estimated 97,000 of the 194,000 Libyans currently internally displaced are in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2018a: 12). The majority of these vulnerable IDPs are believed to be in urban areas, in



private rented accommodation, with family or friends or in informal settlements established in abandoned factories, public buildings, construction sites or accommodation previously occupied by foreign and migrant workers (UNHCR, 2013b; OCHA, 2018a; UNHRC, 2018). Those living in informal settlements are believed to have the most acute needs, with limited access to services, cramped and inadequate shelter and attendant protection and health risks (OCHA, 2018a; UNHRC, 2018; HPG interviews, 2019). Many IDPs also lost identity documentation, including passports, during their flight and have been unable to renew documents without returning to their area of origin – a risk that many are not able to accept even though lack of ID is a constraint on their ability to access services and assistance, including health services (UNHRC, 2018; HPG interviews, 2019).

The Tawergha – an ethnic tribe from southern Libya – are the largest group of vulnerable IDPs, at an estimated 40,000 people, many of whom are living in dire conditions in informal settlements. They were displaced from their homes in 2011 by militia forces from nearby Misrata, who accused them of supporting the Gaddafi regime. They have continued to face violent reprisals, including forced evictions from informal settlements: in August 2018, around 2,000 Tawerghas were forcibly evicted by a local militia from an informal settlement in Tariq-al-Matar in Tripoli, where they had been living since 2011 (Amnesty International, 2018b; OCHA, 2018a). They also face major challenges to their return (see below). More worrying still is the situation of IDPs in the south of the country, where the UN and other international humanitarian actors have little or no access and are therefore unable to determine the exact scale and nature of internal displacement (UNHRC, 2018).

### 3.3.3 Diminishing resilience and negative coping strategies

Interviewees also highlighted that the protracted nature of the conflict and resulting prolonged displacement were undermining the resilience of many of Libya's displaced people. Several interviewees described their own or others' increasingly desperate circumstances, explaining that, with no source of income or material support in Tunisia, some had been forced to return to Libya and accept the serious risks that involved. IDPs in Libya have similarly had to rely on their own capacities and resources – or those of their communities or relatives – to sustain themselves during their displacement. An estimated 70% of IDPs currently live in self-paid rented accommodation, suggesting a high degree of self-sufficiency (IOM, 2019: 1). However, data collected by humanitarian organisations indicates that, as the conflict has become

more protracted, the resilience of some Libyans, including IDPs, to withstand the impact of the conflict has deteriorated, with increasing reports of negative coping strategies including reducing household expenditure on food, reducing meal sizes and nutritional content, begging and socially degrading, high-risk and illegal income-generating activities, including survival sex (OCHA, 2018a).

This gradual deterioration of individual resilience and growing reliance on negative coping strategies is likely to have serious psychological consequences (OCHA, 2018a). With the depletion of assets, insecure or inadequate shelter, a lack of medical care and other assistance, insecure legal status, the continuing threat of violence and the absence of a credible opportunity for return are likely taking their toll on the mental health of displaced Libyans (HPG interviews, 2018; OCHA, 2018a). The negative change in social and economic circumstances has been acute in some cases: as one refugee highlighted, 'imagine yourself as a working person, a productive person and suddenly you are nothing'. The need for gainful employment was highlighted repeatedly by the refugees interviewed for this study, and is clearly linked to a desire for some semblance of normality and stability, and a need to feel that they have escaped the violence and can sustain themselves with some degree of dignity until returning home becomes possible.

### 3.3.4 Insecure legal status in Tunisia

The Tunisian authorities have continued to maintain their stance that Libyans who fled the conflict are welcome as 'guests', but do not recognise them as refugees or asylum-seekers. Despite having ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, this is a long-held position, reportedly intended, at least in part, to avoid confrontation with the Libyan government (Cuttrita, 2016). In June 2011, following the first wave of displacement across the border, UNHCR signed an Accord de Siège cooperation agreement with the Tunisian government (UNHCR, 2012) and the Tunisian government signalled to UNHCR its willingness to adopt a national asylum law, though this has yet to be done (UNHCR, 2011; HPG interviews, 2019). In the absence of national asylum legislation, UNHCR has been the sole actor undertaking refugee status determination in Tunisia, including for Libyans whose protection needs cannot be met in Tunisia (HPG interviews, 2019). Currently, TRCS is UNHCR's frontline partner responsible for individual case management of asylum applications.

As a result of the 1974 Union of Djerba between the Libyan and Tunisian governments, Libyan nationals

are allowed entry into Tunisia without a visa for up to 90 days (Chauzal and Zavagli, 2016). The agreement also grants certain privileges to Libyan nationals in Tunisia, including the right to work and establish businesses (Chauzal and Zavagli, 2016). However, Article 9 of the Tunisian law regulating the status of foreigners requires all Libyans in Tunisia staying for more than three continuous months or six non-continuous months within a single year ‘to obtain a visa and temporary residency permit’ (Tunisian Law No. 7, Mar. 1968). Article 23 of the same law provides for imprisonment of up to one year for failure to apply for a residency permit within the legally required period (Tunisian Law No. 7, Mar. 1968). With limited options to regularise their stay in Tunisia, displaced Libyans are therefore forced to cross the border back into Libya and return again to renew their temporary visa (IOM, 2016). Over 77% of respondents in an IOM survey in late 2015 indicated that they had overstayed their initial six-month visa for Tunisia (IOM, 2016: 18). Crossing back into Libya is simply not possible for all Libyans and, having overstayed their tourist visas, some are now at risk of punishment and deportation under domestic law, though the authorities have not, to date, strictly applied these regulations (Jaidi and Tashani, 2015).

The Tunisian government’s narrative of offering ‘hospitality’ to Libyans seeking refuge from the conflict effectively denies their right to asylum (Jaidi and Tashani, 2015). Some Libyan refugees interviewed by HPG researchers have found themselves unable to leave the country due to lack of funds and the risks related to returning home, but have no legal permission to stay in Tunisia in the long term. This may increase their vulnerability to extortion or demands for bribes when stopped or questioned by security personnel, or to scams by criminals offering to help regularise their status (Jaidi and Tashani, 2015; HPG interviews, 2018). Jaidi and Tashani (2015) also highlight that many Libyan refugees fear approaching the Libyan Embassy in Tunis for assistance due to concerns that their documents may be confiscated and they may be unable to renew their papers. At the end of 2015 the Tunisian authorities stated that Libyan passports issued before 2007 would no longer be recognised (IOM, 2016). Although passports can be renewed at the Libyan Embassy in Tunis, they must then be validated by the GNA in Libya (HPG interviews, 2018). The risks involved in returning mean that some Libyans – particularly those unable to return to Libya due to targeted persecution – have been left with no legally valid ID (HPG interviews, 2018; see also IOM, 2016).

### 3.3.5 Limited prospects for durable solutions

The majority of interviewees for this research held out no hope of returning to Libya in the near future, citing continuing instability in the country, ongoing high levels of violence and criminality and the prevalence of the war economy as key factors preventing their safe return. It was also evident that many of those interviewed feared for their lives if they returned due to targeted threats and persecution. Local integration in Tunisia was not a permanent option for some, both because of the practical, legal and other challenges involved, and because of their ongoing desire, despite everything they had experienced at home, to return to Libya. IOM (2016) reported that over 70% of Libyans it interviewed in late 2015 wanted to return home as soon as the political and security situation allowed. In the survey, IOM also noted increasing anti-Libyan sentiment in Tunisia resulting from the lack of a clear government position on the need for protection of vulnerable Libyans, public statements over-estimating the number of Libyans who had sought refuge in the country and the negative impact of the Libyan conflict in terms of security and instability inside Tunisia (IOM, 2016). That aside, local host communities appear to have remained generous in their understanding of the plight of vulnerable Libyans, and most Libyans interviewed for the IOM survey and in HPG’s research felt that they were being adequately tolerated, and in some cases welcomed in local host communities (IOM, 2016; HPG interviews, 2018).

Several Libyan interviewees told the researchers that they had considered seeking resettlement elsewhere in the Middle East or in Europe, not through formal asylum procedures, but rather through seeking employment via personal contacts, but they were not hopeful that this would be possible. None of those interviewed by HPG who had faced or continued to face persecution from conflict parties in Libya reported that they had identified themselves to UNHCR or been referred to the agency as individuals in need of international protection. It was unclear whether this was because they had no faith in this formal process, whether they did not understand that this was an avenue they could pursue or whether it was linked to the Tunisian government’s long-standing policy against local integration. The IOM survey in 2016 similarly found that few displaced Libyans had approached UNHCR to make asylum claims, and speculated that this was either because they were aware that their claims were unlikely to be successful or out of a sense of pride that prevented them from asking for assistance (IOM, 2016).

The prospects for durable solutions for many of Libya's IDPs are similarly complex. A large number of IDPs – an estimated 445,000 – did return between 2016 and the end of 2018, with approximately 84% being able to return to their original properties (IOM, 2019). But many of these returnees have since faced problems relating to continued insecurity (targeted or indiscriminate) in their areas of origin, threats of eviction and poor or damaged service infrastructure: an estimated 116,000 are in need of shelter, food, health, water and sanitation assistance (OCHA, 2018a; IOM, 2019; REACH and LISCG, 2019; UNHCR, 2019). Others are unable to return due to ongoing violence in their areas of origin, the destruction of homes and basic infrastructure, the appropriation of land and assets, widespread contamination of unexploded ordnance and, in the case of the Tawerghas, several other ethnic groups and individuals affiliated to the former regime, due to continuing persecution or targeted threats (see for example OCHA, 2018a; UNHRC, 2018).

Concerns related to housing, land and property rights remain a key obstacle to durable solutions for many displaced Libyans – both those within Libya and those across the border (HPG interviews, 2018; UNHRC, 2018). A number of the Libyans interviewed for this research indicated that their homes, property and

other assets in Libya had been looted, appropriated or destroyed, either immediately before their flight or during their displacement. The ability to recoup assets lost or obtain compensation is made more complex by two practical factors: first, the fact that many displaced people have lost identity documents means that they cannot prove ownership of certain assets; and second, some of the displaced obtained their land and property through a sweeping 'redistribution' of property imposed by the Gaddafi government in the 1970s (UNHCR, 2013b) in a bid to curry favour and reward regime loyalists (UNHCR, 2013b).

The legislation that allowed for this redistribution has since been rescinded by the Tripoli-based government, but it remains unclear how valid or enforceable that action is, or how such cases can be resolved (UNHCR, 2013b). For example, the Tawerghas were given property appropriated by the Gaddafi regime, but had this property and land appropriated from them in turn during the current conflict. The resolution of their ownership of land in the south remains a key obstacle to return (UNHCR, 2013b). Inability to access former homes, cultivate former lands or access property assets impacts not just on the ability to return home: it also prevents displaced people from drawing on these assets to sustain themselves during displacement (HPG interviews, 2018).

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# 4 Responses to forced displacement

## 4.1 Coping strategies and self-protection

Libyans have adopted various strategies, some high-risk, to try to cope with and mitigate the threats they face. The process of fleeing their homes in search of safety, including across the border with Tunisia, has been the main self-protection strategy – i.e. the process of removing oneself from the source of imminent risk, namely militia or armed groups or armed clashes in their areas of origin. Beyond that, displaced Libyans have also evidently made considered ‘choices’ about where to seek refuge, who can offer them ‘protection’ and how they can best use their capacities and assets to sustain themselves during displacement.

### 4.1.1 Destinations of choice

Displaced Libyans’ choice of destination has often been quite strategic. The majority of interviewees for this research explained that they had deliberately chosen Tunisia, and particularly Tunis, for a number of specific reasons. From a practical perspective, the border with Tunisia is relatively close and accessible, particularly for people from Tripoli. This proximity has been critical given widespread violence and the security risks involved in travel. Several refugees also said that they wanted to be able to return home quickly and easily as soon as the situation allowed. The Tunisian government’s visa-free entry policy for Libyans has also been a key factor, meaning that those fleeing violence in Libya could cross without bureaucratic restrictions – at least in the first instance. These explanations are also consistent with research by IOM in 2016. Several interviewees highlighted to HPG researchers that Tunisia’s more stable security environment, as well as its relatively liberal social environment, particularly in Tunis, were important in their decision on where to seek refuge, particularly for women travelling alone.

The decision to seek refuge in Tunisia was also rooted in pre-existing family and cultural ties, and specifically to access the support and social capital expected

through these connections. The border between Libya and Tunisia, drawn during the colonial period, has long been permeable, and historical links between the two countries mean that many Libyans have Tunisian heritage, have relatives still living there or regularly crossed the border for family, social or economic reasons before the crisis in Libya began. This was particularly the case for urban residents from Tripoli, several of whom explained that they had closer links with Tunis than with other parts of their own country (HPG interviews, 2018). Tunisia was thus the first choice, as one refugee explained: ‘I came here because I know the country and have friends here and actually, I never considered any other option’ (HPG interviews, 2018). This strategy was relatively effective, with many of those displaced initially in 2011 being taken in by local Tunisian families and relatives and others seemingly having found reliable employment, accommodation and services (Brookings Doha Centre, 2015; IOM, 2016; HPG interviews, 2018; 2019). Overall, however, Tunisia has not generally offered the degree of protection many hoped for, with some individuals continuing to face threats to their physical, material and legal safety as outlined earlier.

Similar considerations have been at play in displacement patterns for IDPs. Many of the people displaced by armed clashes or generalised violence in their areas of origin have moved relatively short distances, both because they want to return home as soon as the situation allows, but also to avoid the security challenges of moving significant distances across the country (IOM, 2019). The fact that many IDPs have remained within their general geographic area of origin – i.e. within eastern, western or southern areas – is also likely to be related at least in part to the long-standing regionalism inherent in the ages-old cultural divisions between eastern, western and southern areas of the country (Apps, 2011).

### 4.1.2 Family and tribe as a source of protection

Many interviewees highlighted their reliance on family, particularly immediate family, as a key source of protection and support in the face of multiple threats

to their safety: 'Our family would put themselves in every situation we would go through which makes us protect one another against any danger. If anyone got hurt, we were all there' (HPG interviews, 2018). Close family members had provided shelter and assistance and immediate family were, many felt, the only ones they could rely on or trust to provide the kind of long-term emotional support they needed to recover from their ordeal. Several of the activists interviewed by HPG researchers also explained that they had fled Libya in part to prevent armed groups from retaliating against their relatives and were effectively exiling themselves in order to protect their family. IDPs too have relied on family or tribal links for protection. The majority are believed to have initially sought refuge with relatives or within tribal or other groupings, and many have remained relatively close to their areas of origin (UNHRC, 2018; IOM, 2019).

The attitudes of refugees interviewed for this research towards the social capital inherent in Libya's tribal system were more complex. There are an estimated 140 different tribes in Libya, including Berber, Arab and African tribes, and tribal structures constitute one of the country's 'oldest, long-standing societal institutions' (Al-Shadeedi and Ezzedine, 2019: 1). Tribes historically offered both a way of life and a source of local governance in many parts of the country, but their relevance in modern Libya has evolved, with urban residents in Tripoli and other major cities identifying less with the tribe than perhaps those living in more rural areas (al-Ameri, 2011; Sbeta, 2016): 'some feel that tribal affiliation is a part of the past, some do not even know what their tribe is, and others simply do not have a tribe they belong to' (Sbeta, 2016; see also Cole and Mangan, 2016). Several interviewees echoed this, saying that, having been raised in a modern urban context in Tripoli, tribal structures simply no longer had any relevance to them. Some explained that, although they had a tribal identity and recognised that tribal structures could provide some form of protection, they were highly reluctant to rely on this support themselves. In some cases they rejected it outright for fear of the quid pro quo that was likely to be required, including acquiescence to the conservative social practices that many tribes espouse (particularly for women) or pressure to take up arms in defence of their tribe when it came under attack.

From a practical perspective, whether a tribe is considered a source of protection in the context of the armed conflict is likely linked to how an individual or family perceive their tribal identity. As Sbeta (2016) puts it, given the current situation in Libya 'a tribal

identity can become useful, because it provides a sense of belongingness that fills up the holes left by the absence of a functional state'. Some commentators have suggested that tribes have filled a local security and governance vacuum left with the collapse of state institutions, reflecting their past role as de facto magistrates and arbiters on property and family law (Apps, 2011; Cole and Mangan, 2016; Sbeta, 2016; El Kamouni-Janssen et al., 2018; Al-Shadeedi and Ezzedine, 2019). Some assert that tribes have also acted as a counter-weight to or limit on the spread of radical Islamist and Salafist groups (Varvelli, 2013).

In practice, the capacity of tribal structures to provide protection is dynamic and varies across the country. The armed conflict has exacerbated the divisions between tribes that Gaddafi had 'fomented and engineered' for many years in his 'national policy of divide and conquer' (al-Ameri, 2011). But the conflict is not, Libyan commentators argue, a 'tribal' one; rather, it has undermined structures within tribes, with some traditional tribal leaders sidelined or ignored by militia (Sbeta, 2016; HPG interviews, 2018). One interviewee explained that:

*some groups are no longer controlled by the tribe and this is one of the reasons why we are having threats in the south. Militias now follow external actors or internal ones other than the tribe so the Sheikh has lost control over them... When tribal leaders meet and reach an agreement, after they finish, the complete opposite of what they agreed upon takes place by those militias that are no longer under the control or authority of the tribe. There are still a few militias, however, that are under the command of tribes, not the majority though.*

Research published in 2016 argues that, in the absence of effective central government law and order, tribes were viewed more positively as a security actor in local populations in the east of the country, where tribal structures are more stable, than in the west or south, where tribal fighting has been more prominent (Cole and Mangan, 2016).

#### **4.1.3 Accessing assets and support inside Libya**

Capitalising on periods of relative stability or lulls in fighting, the majority of interviewees for this study explained that they had crossed back and forth across the border with Tunisia for short or longer visits on several occasions. This practice – which was also highlighted in research by IOM in late 2015 – has seemingly been adopted in order to respond to the dynamics of life in displacement, particularly in



relation to economic challenges in Tunisia; to access certain services, including medical care; to access savings, property or business assets; and to check on relatives. Interviewees explained that they constantly re-evaluated changing risks inside Libya to determine when or where it might be safe to visit, often relying on close family members within the country to provide information to inform their analysis. Their ability to return to Libya for short periods did not mean that they felt that the country was safe enough to return permanently, but was rather part of a strategy, often adopted by refugee populations elsewhere in the Middle East and in other areas of the world, to assess the situation at home and prepare for eventual return (see for example Harild et al., 2015; Yahya et al., 2018).

#### 4.1.4 Modifying behaviours

A number of interviewees, including peace and women's rights activists, also highlighted how they had adjusted their behaviour while in displacement, deliberately adopting a much lower political, social or social media profile than previously in an effort to avoid the continued negative attentions of or threats from those who wished to persecute them. This self-censorship is unsurprising given the nature of the threats and the cross-border reach that technology and social media in particular has afforded perpetrators. But it is also concerning given the already diminishing space for rights promotion and other civil society activities in Libya (HPG interviews, 2019).

This self-censorship is closely linked to the deep sense of mistrust many interviewees have in their fellow Libyans. Several explained that they were highly suspicious of anyone other than immediate family members, fearing that people they were less close to may be informants for militia or may inadvertently pass on information about them to militia. This sense of distrust is not unfounded, with militia or members of armed groups also regularly crossing into Tunisia, as discussed earlier. But it is also indicative of the impact of the conflict on Libyan society, where old friends and alliances cannot be trusted, with each individual or family fighting for their own interests and protection in the absence of central government control.

## 4.2 National responses to displacement

Responses by both the Tunisian and Libyan governments to the protection and assistance needs of displaced people appear to have been ineffective and inadequate. As noted, the Tunisian authorities have officially continued to allow Libyans to cross the

border without a visa – at least for short stays – and have not enforced regulations against people who have remained for protracted periods. They also facilitated the establishment of a large-scale international humanitarian response in 2011 and, in theory at least, have an agreement with the Libyan authorities permitting Libyans to access national healthcare services in Tunisia (HPG interviews, 2019). This tolerance was acknowledged by some interviewees:

*'We have to be honest and acknowledge that Tunisia has embraced us. We don't need a residency to stay here so I never really felt not at home ... Nobody really bothers you here about whether or not you have a driving licence or if your passport is valid or expired; they have overlooked many issues about our presence here'.*

At the same time, it is also important to recognise that Tunisia currently has limited capacity to offer displaced Libyans much more than political refuge. Its own economy has deteriorated since the Arab Spring, recently leading to widespread protests by Tunisians frustrated with rising inflation and high unemployment. Although the country's 2011 revolution was relatively peaceful compared to others in the Middle East, the political and security situation still remains fragile, in large part as a result of the spill-over effects of the Libyan conflict. The extent to which ISIS has expanded its reach into Tunisia was demonstrated by terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016 by perpetrators reportedly trained at ISIS camps in Libya (Meddeb, 2017). Recent estimates suggest that between 1,000 and 3,000 Tunisians are fighting or training with extremist groups, including ISIS, in Libya (Zelin, 2015; Chauzal and Zavagli, 2016).

For its part, the internationally recognised Libyan government – the GNA – has yet to put in place a coherent strategy to address the immediate and longer-term needs of displaced Libyans (HPG interviews, 2019). None of the Libyans interviewed for this research had been able to obtain protection or substantive assistance from the Libyan government through the Embassy in Tunis, and several stated that they were afraid to approach Embassy staff for support. One interviewee indicated that what support might be on offer could only be accessed via personal connections:

*'The situation for Libyans is very bad here because of lack of facilities for Libyans. I don't blame the Tunisian government for this, I blame my Embassy ... They provide services to certain members but the simple people are suffering. It is all about connections, who you know in order to get your problems sorted' (HPG interviews, 2018).*

Although a Ministry of State for Displaced Persons Affairs and a High Committee for the return of IDPs have both been established, there is still no national comprehensive legal or policy framework to protect or assist Libyan IDPs (UNHRC, 2018). More critically, the continuing lack of control by the GNA in terms of national and local security, the judiciary, basic infrastructure and public services means that it is powerless to prevent the forced displacement of Libyan civilians, incapable of responding to the needs generated by forced displacement and has been unable to effectively facilitate durable solutions, including returns, or to address deep-rooted socio-economic conditions stemming from pre-existing neglect and under-development (HPG interviews, 2019).

### 4.3 International humanitarian responses to displacement

The response of international humanitarian organisations to the needs of Libya's displaced people – both those who fled to Tunisia and those who remained within the country – has also been largely inadequate. A significant international response was put in place in 2011 when the largest waves of civilians crossing the border took place, but this focused initially on third-country nationals through the provision of shelter and assistance in camps (ICG, 2013). As tensions within refugee-hosting communities grew later in 2011, UNHCR began providing community-based support to 80,000 Libyans living with Tunisian families (UNHCR, 2012). However, although UNHCR assistance programmes are available to the most vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers, including Libyans, few displaced Libyans interviewed for this study had sought this assistance or indicated that they were aware of it (HPG interviews, 2019).<sup>6</sup>

International humanitarian organisations trying to respond to the needs of displaced people inside Libya have faced major challenges, particularly in the south, where needs, including of IDPs and returnees, are believed to be greatest. Despite having recently re-established their operational hubs in Tripoli after

having to relocate to Tunis in 2014 due to the security situation, access for these organisations remains constrained by threats of abduction of international personnel and difficulties in negotiating safe access across shifting conflict frontlines or with armed groups that lack clear command structures, as well as the widespread contamination of unexploded ordnance (OCHA, 2017; UNHRC, 2018; HPG interviews, 2019). The existence of different authorities in the east and west of the country has complicated the process of registration and monitoring of aid projects (HPG interviews, 2019). In 2019, the HCT aims to provide an integrated inter-sectoral response targeting 189,000 of the most vulnerable IDPs and returnees with shelter, health and other assistance (OCHA, 2018b).<sup>7</sup> The Protection Working Group of the HCT has developed a protection strategy to improve monitoring and assessment of protection risks, provide specialised protection services including referrals and advocate for increased adherence by the conflict parties to their responsibilities under international humanitarian and human rights law (OCHA, 2018b; Protection Working Group Libya, 2018). However, several stakeholders interviewed for this research expressed concern at what they saw as a lack of in-depth understanding of the cultural, tribal, social and religious context, and what role these factors play in terms of the nature of the risks to the physical, material and legal safety of Libyan civilians, and how these risks can be mitigated.

There has also been inadequate financial support from donor governments. The international humanitarian appeal for 2018 received only \$82 million or 26% of the requested funds.<sup>8</sup> This lack of funding may be attributed to a number of factors, including a misconception that Libyans were relatively wealthy at the beginning of the crisis and have assets that they can use to sustain themselves; an attempt by donors to pressure the GNA to invest its own funds in supporting its people; and a greater focus by donor governments on domestic priorities, namely stemming migration via Libya to Europe (see for example Mzioudet, 2016; HPG interviews, 2019). Several stakeholders interviewed for this study also highlighted a tension between the authorities in

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6 Information available from <http://reporting.unhcr.org/tunisia>

7 The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is 'a strategic and operational decision-making and oversight forum' based in an humanitarian crisis situation and led by a UN-appointed Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). HCTs are comprised of representatives from the UN agencies, funds and programmes present, IOM, international NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. The HCT is tasked to develop and implement a common strategy and action plan for the international humanitarian response – the Humanitarian Response Plan. For more information, see [www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/cameroon/humanitarian-country-team-hct](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/cameroon/humanitarian-country-team-hct)

8 Data available from <https://fts.unocha.org/>

Libya, which want international aid to be directed to Libyans, and donor countries, which want to provide funding for refugees and migrants in the country who are facing some of the most acute vulnerabilities.

For Libyans interviewed for this study, the consistent lack of protection and assistance from the international community has resulted in increasing frustration and a sense of both despair and neglect: ‘the United Nations helped us in 2011 and then,

unfortunately, left us stranded. Are they not able to support us at all? Since the outbreak of the Revolution, they have just stood there watching us’. Several interviewees mentioned that they had been approached by human rights organisations including Amnesty International, HRW and UNSMIL’s Human Rights Officers to obtain information or document their experiences, but that they had received no actual protection or assistance from these or other international organisations.

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# 5 Conclusion

As the analysis outlined in this report indicates, displaced Libyans – both those who have remained inside the country and those who sought refuge in Tunisia – have faced a range of serious threats to their physical, legal and material safety. These threats have forced them to flee their homes and areas of origin and have, in some cases, followed them into displacement. In response, individuals, families and sometimes whole communities have adopted a range of strategies in an effort to protect themselves.

The international border between Libya and Tunisia itself has offered some form of protection. The border has always been fluid, with people crossing back and forth for social, economic, cultural and other reasons. The resulting long-standing cultural, familial, social and economic ties have provided social capital that many Libyans have been able to draw on at least during the preliminary phase of their displacement. Those fleeing generalised violence have found solidarity and support from relatives and friends across the border who opened their homes to large numbers of displaced Libyans in 2011. For individuals fleeing targeted persecution, Tunisia has also offered a temporary refuge with a strong sense of familiarity.

Crossing the international border has not always provided the effective protection that many expected. As their displacement has become more protracted, some of those who fled to Tunisia have become increasingly vulnerable, with little material assistance available to them and no clear legal protections or status granted by the Tunisian authorities. The permeable nature of the border has also enabled militia and other armed groups to cross into Tunisia, including to attack or threaten individuals trying to escape them.

To an extent, displaced Libyans – both refugees and IDPs – have retreated within traditional social or familial boundaries, which offer some refuge and support. But the tribal structures that once acted as key providers of local governance and security are distrusted or rejected by some Libyans, are simply irrelevant to those from urban contexts and, in some areas of Libya, do not offer much protection due to the corrupting impact of the conflict on the leadership and authority of these structures.

The experiences recounted by interviewees in this research suggest that there are as yet undetermined (though probably relatively small) number of Libyans living in displacement inside Tunisia who are suffering acute vulnerabilities. Identifying them has proved challenging because many prefer to remain anonymous given the nature of the persecution they face, because of government policies that are more focused on preventing local integration or resettlement of Libyan refugees, or because of the lack of resources to conduct such an assessment. For IDPs too there are challenges in accurately assessing the numbers and circumstances of those with acute vulnerabilities, including relating to the political priorities of the Libyan government and donors and the access constraints faced by humanitarian organisations. Whatever the challenges, the response to date to the protection and assistance needs of displaced Libyans has not been adequate. The Libyan authorities have essentially provided no support for Libyan citizens displaced across the border, little to those displaced within the country and has expended only limited efforts to facilitate durable solutions.

Despite maintaining a relatively open border, continuing to allow visa-free entry and permitting access to some medical services, the response of the Tunisian government has left the most vulnerable Libyans without effective protection within the meaning of international refugee law – contrary to Tunisia's obligations as a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol. These vulnerable individuals and families are unlikely to be able to return permanently to their homes in safety until there is a substantive shift in the situation in Libya, but there is currently little indication that this is likely in the near future. As a result, the protection of vulnerable Libyans in Tunisia must be enhanced, their socio-economic situation stabilised and their potential to contribute economically, as well as socially, to Tunisia maximised.

The response of donor countries has not been strategic. Eight years on from the international outcry at the treatment of civilians by the Gaddafi regime, some international donor countries appear to have prioritised short-term domestic objectives, namely staunching the flow of migrant populations

and security threats to their own countries (HPG interviews, 2019). While this approach has logic from their domestic perspectives, it has also likely increased the risks to Libyan and third-country nationals inside the country and, by failing to make concerted long-term political and financial investments in stability in Libya, it is also likely to be less effective in mitigating the transnational risks posed by extremist groups operating from the country.

For their part, international humanitarian organisations have been severely constrained in

their provision of support to Libya's displaced populations by insecurity, inadequate funding, government policies and international politics. Irrespective of these constraints, increased efforts to understand the complex array of social, tribal, ethnic, religious and other dimensions of the conflict, how these relate to the protection threats Libyans face and how Libyans have sought to deal with or mitigate those threats is critical to understanding how best to support these populations with the limited financial resources and political support available.



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Cover photo: Amazigh women line up at the funeral for a young Libyan killed while fleeing to Tataouine, Tunisia in 2011. © Magharebia

