

Libya: Assessing the Human Impact of the EU-Libya Cooperation on Migration

26 June 2024

Tunis, Tunisia – In the wake of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the Libyan Anti-torture Network (LAN) express their deep concern regarding the European Union's (EU) and Italy's cooperation with the Libyan authorities to "regulate" migration, frequently contributing to Libyan Coast Guards violent sea operations. This includes interceptions and search and rescue operations of people on the move that violate international human rights standards and jeopardize the safety and life of people on the move attempting to cross Mediterranean waters. Recent announcements about a decrease in migration numbers¹ fail to acknowledge the harrowing human consequences of such policies.

While the EU and Italy celebrate declining migration figures, evidence suggests a disturbing reality for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers residing and transiting through Libya. Many intercepted at sea by the Libyan Coast Guard, funded and trained by the EU and its member states, are returned to Libya and face arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, human trafficking, enslavement, forced labour, extortion and smuggling with the complicity of State institutions and government security forces².

It is with concern that we take note of the tweet from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Libya office that commends Italy's commitment to providing "humanitarian corridors" for refugees in Libya³. Instead of facilitating safe passage, current realities leave people on the move with little option but being prey to continuous cycles of abuse and violence in Libya.

The recent sudden visits of the Italian Prime Minister to both governments in east and west Libya with the aim to reportedly suggest for the Libyan government to join the Rome Process⁴ – an externalization agreement aiming to intercept migrants in the Mediterranean Sea before they reach Italian shores, sets the wrong signal and further amplifies the worrisome situation.

Since the beginning of 2024, 312 people were found dead and 532 more went missing according to the most recent numbers published by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)⁵. Extensive reports by the OMCT and the LAN, Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders, the UN Fact-Finding Mission to Libya, have also documented torture, ill-treatment, sexual abuse, including extrajudicial and unlawful killings in detention facilities and at sea.

¹ [Migrants, Meloni: "Illegal arrivals reduced by 60%. Alarming data flows from monitoring"](#), ADNkronos, 21 June 2024.

² Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya, [A HRC 52 83](#), Paragraph 4.

³ [UNHCR Libya, Italy's National Day tweet](#), 2 June 2024.

⁴ [Italy's Meloni in Libya to talk migration](#), Infomigrants, 5 May 2024.

⁵ [Maritime Update, Migrants intercepted at sea and returned to Libya](#), IOM, 1 June – 15 June 2024. In 2023, 17 190 migrants in total were intercepted and returned to Libya, 962 deaths and 1 536 missing. In 2024, 312 deaths and 532 missing were reported.

Underscoring the gravity of the situation, the OMCT and the LAN will shortly publish a report about the human rights violations faced by Sudanese migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Libya who are disproportionately impacted by these policies, highlighting the dire conditions endured by this particularly vulnerable group in the country.

OMCT and LAN call on the Libyan authorities to:

- Uphold Libya’s obligations under international law and meet minimum humanitarian standards towards people on the move in Libya.
- Cease any aggressive and life-threatening approach in interceptions of migrants at sea.
- Respect the human dignity and the rights of people on the move, particularly of refugees and asylum seekers.

OMCT and LAN urge the European Union and Italy to:

- Prioritize human rights in any EU migration policies and ensure a proper monitoring and reporting mechanism for EU funds in Libya. This includes repeatedly demanding respect for human dignity for all, including for people on the move while at sea or once returned to Libya.
- Ensure that future funding for the Libyan Coast Guard and other migration-related programs in Libya effectively addresses the root causes of migration while respecting human rights. The EU should establish clear benchmarks linked to compliance with human rights law and the non-refoulement principle.
- Encourage the Libyan authorities to cease their excessive use of force against people on the move immediately either those held in Libya or intercepted at sea. These actions violate international law and human rights principles.

By prioritizing human rights and accountability, the EU, Italy, and Libya can work together to create sustainable solutions for people on the move.