



LEAVING LIBYA

Rapid Assessment of Municipalities of Departures of Migrants in Libya

Prepared by Altai Consulting for the Embassy of the Netherlands to Libya – June 2017



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands



This report was prepared by Altai Consulting for the Embassy of the Netherlands to Libya. It was written in June 2017 by Valerie Stocker, under the direction of Marie-Cecile Darne. Fieldwork in Libya was conducted by Karim Nabata, Younes Nanis and Shukri Ftis.

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Altai has developed significant expertise in migration throughout its existence. Our migration practice produced numerous research reports and provided strategic advisory guidance on migration for governments, international institutions and aid agencies such as IOM, UNHCR, ILO, DFID, NRC, DRC, and Save the Children.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCU	<i>Counter Crime Unit</i>
CMR	<i>Central Mediterranean Route</i>
CSO	<i>Civil Society Organisation</i>
DCIM	<i>Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
EUBAM	<i>European Union Border Assistance Mission</i>
GNA	<i>Government of National Accord</i>
GNC	<i>General National Congress</i>
IOM	<i>International Organization for Migration</i>
IS	<i>Islamic State</i>
KI	<i>Key Informant</i>
KII	<i>Key Informant Interview</i>
LNA	<i>Libyan National Army</i>
NGO	<i>Non-Governmental Organisation</i>
PPD	<i>Passport Police Department</i>
STACO	<i>Sheikh Taher Al-Zawi Charity Organization</i>
UN	<i>United Nations</i>
UNHCR	<i>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</i>
MMWG	<i>Mixed Migration Working Group</i>

Please note:

For the purposes of this report the term “migrant” is used broadly to refer to all people on the move along the routes studied, including economic migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and involuntary migrants (victims of trafficking, kidnapping and misinformation), unless a distinction is otherwise made. This study does not look at the situation of internally displaced persons.

Similarly, the terms “smuggling” and “smugglers” refer to both smugglers and traffickers, unless otherwise specified, the line between the two being often blurry in the context of northwest Libya.

Opinions expressed in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Embassy of the Netherlands to Libya.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In April 2017, Altai Consulting was commissioned by the Embassy of the Netherlands to Libya to conduct a rapid study on migration-related dynamics and actors in the main municipalities for Europe-bound departures along the West Libyan coast. The study had four core objectives:

- Provide a general overview of the smuggling industry, local balance of power, migration-related judiciary and law enforcement agencies;
- Identify key stakeholders and ongoing migration management-related initiatives;
- Analyse factors of success and actions taken in Zuwara;
- Recommend possible programmatic responses.

The findings detailed below are based on secondary research and 34 interviews with smugglers and former smugglers, Municipal Council members, Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM) officials, migrant detention centre directors, Coast Guard (military unit) officials, Coast Security (police unit) officials, members of security bodies (brigades, military council, security directorate), civil society organisations, migrants, public prosecutors, business representatives, local academics and local elders in Zuwara, Sabratha, Garabulli, Al-Zawiya, and Tajura.

Main areas of boat departures along the northwest Libyan coast



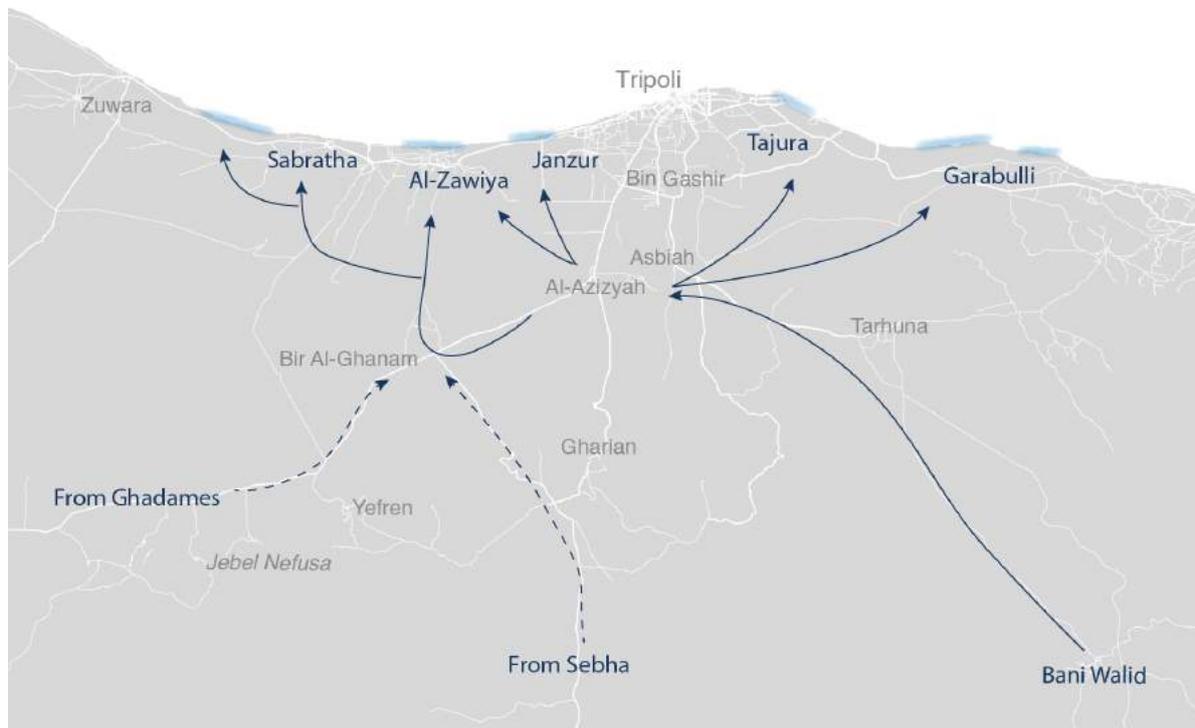
KEY FINDINGS

SMUGGLING HUBS

Boat departures from the West Libyan coast have drastically increased since 2013. Traffic and activity in smuggling hubs fluctuate based on the local political and security context, with migrant boats usually departing from beaches and spots located around Sabratha and Al-Zawiya (west of Tripoli) and Tajura and Garabulli (east of Tripoli). Departure zones form a continuum and specific spots are sometimes used by smugglers from several neighbouring municipalities. Surman and Al-Mutrid (between Sabratha and Al-Zawiya) are gaining importance. The crackdown on smugglers in Zuwara in 2015 shifted

smuggling activities to Sabratha, now the major hub, and other coastal cities. At the same time, the almost continuous closure of the coastal road west of Tripoli between October 2015 and March 2017 redirected more flows to Tajura and Garabulli, and led smugglers in Sabratha and Al-Zawiya to seek alternative routes. Smugglers generally avoid the coastal road and main entrances to cities, instead transporting migrants via smaller roads coming from the south and gathering them on farms and warehouses in rural suburbs.

Smuggling routes to the main boat departure areas



SMUGGLERS AND TRAFFICKERS

The smuggling industry in Libya today is composed of a multitude of pre- and post-revolutionary actors who vary widely in size, degree of organization and experience. The major groups are undergoing a process of professionalization. This is illustrated by the division of tasks of their members, the variety of services they offer, and their linkages to other groups along the migrant route, from countries of origin to destination. At the same time, the revolution and its aftermath opened the door to many amateur smugglers, who often use violence to carve out a place in the industry. International rescue missions moving closer to the Libyan coast since 2014 also allowed smugglers who dispatch migrant boats to scale down on equipment and services, the objective no longer being to reach European mainland but only international waters.

Armed groups are increasingly taking over the smuggling industry, often while presenting themselves as law enforcement actors. In most departure zones, smugglers can no longer operate without the approval of local armed groups, who demand protection money or run the business themselves.

There are not only Libyans in the industry but also many foreign nationals, usually acting as migrant recruiters (*samasira*) but sometimes also as high-level middlemen and coordinators. High-level smugglers are usually known within their community: while they operate discreetly, they do not live in

hiding. Smuggler groups compete for zones of influence and clients, but for the most part they seem to avoid armed confrontations.

Smuggling is increasingly entwined with human trafficking, with reports of forced labour and extortion of migrants in the coastal cities. Key informants interviewed attributed the increased brutality of the smuggling industry to the multiplication of actors, adding to a general context of violence, impunity and economic hardship. Another feature of the smuggling industry post-2011 is the correlation between local conflict and smuggling. Smugglers often benefit from instability to expand their operations. Moreover, armed groups increasingly rely on smuggling and other criminal enterprises for funding, which in turn fuels conflicts at the local and sometimes even regional level.

COMBATTING SMUGGLING

The national security agencies mandated to stem irregular entry of foreign nationals and human trafficking are primarily the DCIM, the Passport Police Department, the Coast Guard, the Coast Security Agency and the Border Guard. All of these agencies are part of the Interior Ministry or the Defence Ministry and operating under the Government of National Accord. The security agencies are not equally represented in all coastal cities; their activities are determined by existing infrastructure, local security arrangements, and capacities. Official actors generally operate with the help of “support forces” (local armed groups which they integrated), whose members are not usually trained police or soldiers. This increases access and capacities, but also poses disciplinary problems and entails a risk of conflicting interests. Arrests of smuggling actors (usually low-level players) sometimes take place and there is a system in place to transfer and prosecute them in Tripoli.¹ However, these efforts remain superficial overall, as Libyan officials lack the means and local support to effectively dismantle smuggling groups and arrest major players. Moreover, DCIM officials and judicial actors face pressure from smugglers and their supporters, resulting in a trial backlog. Finally, Municipal Councils and civil society groups take little action to combat smuggling, limiting their role to public information campaigns.²

MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Due to the challenge of tackling smugglers, Libyan officials focus largely on managing migration flows. Irregular migrants are detained after being rescued at sea, stopped at checkpoints or arrested during raids. As per the law they must face trial, but in practice they remain in detention (usually for several months) until they are either released, expelled or they voluntarily return to their countries of origin, without a judicial order.

Detention has therefore become a major humanitarian issue in Libya, with Libyan officials and facilities overburdened, while migrants are held in precarious conditions or shuffled between centres. Many detention facilities were initially set up by local armed groups and progressively taken over by the DCIM,³ although in many cases DCIM oversight is nominal. Detention facilities that are outside DCIM authority continue to exist in parallel.

In Sabratha and Janzur, detention centres and local officials have developed innovative approaches to migration management by running “release-for-work” programs. Under this system, migrants are released when an employer agrees to vouch for them, and allowed free movement in the respective town and protection from arrest. However, the system is problematic in several ways: firstly, there do not appear to be any mechanisms to prevent the exploitation of migrant workers, secondly the law does

¹ There is a special migration prosecutor at the attorney general's office.

² With the exception of Zuwara, see dedicated section.

³ The DCIM now has about 24 centres under its authority.

not in fact allow such local arrangements. This has so far prevented the expansion of this system to DCIM-run detention centres.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Smuggling generates formidable profits for those involved, as well as boosting legal businesses that cater to migrants and smugglers. Most people interviewed thought that the smuggling industry is significant in scale, but has not fundamentally transformed economic structures.⁴ Respondents had little hope that smugglers could be lured with legal economic alternatives, which are far less lucrative. While it is partially the lack of alternatives that draws young people towards smuggling, reversing the cycle is difficult. Many respondents argued that young Libyans are not easy to integrate into the job market as their expectations are high and their qualifications often low. Libya's dire economic and financial situation moreover restricts the capacity of public institutions to pay their employees or hire new staff, as well as curtailing private enterprise.

Thus far, there have been no concerted efforts to promote economic alternatives to smuggling in migrant departure zones. Local authorities sometimes encourage business creation but have little tools to effectively promote this. Yet, the private sector in the departure municipalities is not altogether stagnant, and some respondents see potential in certain sectors, including fishing, farming, transportation services and construction.

Foreign workforce traditionally plays a key role in the Libyan labour market. Respondents acknowledged the importance of migrant workers, although they would prefer if people were hired through legal channels.⁵

CIVIL SOCIETY MOBILIZATION AND SOCIAL PRESSURE

Only Zuwara has seen a collective mobilization against smugglers involving security forces, civilian authorities and civil society. Demonstrations have taken place in some of the other cities, but with no tangible results. Tribal elders often speak out against smugglers, yet ultimately hold little sway against high-level smugglers and armed groups. Moreover, local stakeholders' willingness to act against "their sons" appears to be conditioned on reciprocity in neighbouring cities. Social control is nevertheless an important mechanism in the fight against smugglers and human traffickers. Respondents expressed the hope that smugglers would choose "honour over money" if they were faced with more pressure and a chance for redemption. In Sabratha and Al-Zawiya, some respondents argued in favour of using religious discourse to socially marginalize smuggling, noting that some smugglers make the effort to justify their actions based on religious rulings.

LOCATION-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

ZUWARA

Formerly the main migrant departure area on the coast, Zuwara is a (largely) successful case of civic mobilization against migrant smugglers. In 2015, local stakeholders launched a campaign of arrests, building on residents' anger about the negative impact of smuggling.⁶ The crackdown was made

⁴ However, respondents noted that the renting and purchase of farms and houses by smugglers had inflated prices.

⁵ The security deterioration has significantly reduced the presence of regular expatriate workers. Hence, both public and private employers nowadays hire mostly from the pool of readily available irregular migrant workforce.

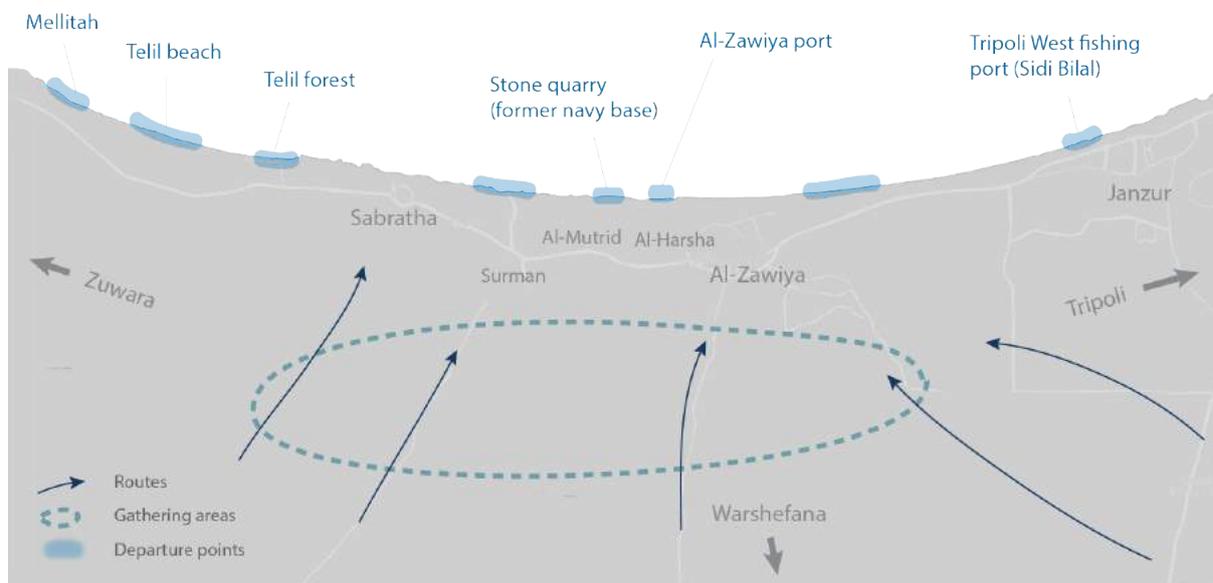
⁶ Respondents mentioned the bodies washed up on the beach, rise of violence, fear of diseases, and Zuwara's bad reputation at the time.

possible because of the relatively cohesive community (strong local identity, partially based on ethnicity) greater degree of self-reliance than other cities (in terms of economy, local governance and security), and an active civil society. Trials were held outside the judicial system, which raised concerns in Tripoli. While disrupting the local smuggling industry, the crackdown ultimately led many local smugglers to relocate their operations to other departure areas (Sabratha, mostly) or switch to fuel smuggling. The local economy has potential (fishing, minerals extraction, trade, etc.) but little has been done to develop it. Local authorities encourage private business and are trying to obtain the resumption of a major infrastructure development project.

SABRATHA

Territory and power are divided along tribal lines, with a small number of influential families controlling key positions in the security apparatus. Official security bodies rely on – or have integrated – local brigades, which yield considerable power. Lines are blurred between security provision and organized crime, as some of the brigades are also involved in migrant smuggling. Yet, the same brigades are respected in the community for taking part in the uprising against Islamic State (IS) militants who attempted to seize the city in 2016. The smuggling industry consists of a small number of big players, who divide the territory between them. Smaller smugglers and groups from other cities that use departure spots near Sabratha must pay them protection money. Smugglers exert pressure on the DCIM, limiting its capacity to act. There is no official detention centre in Sabratha; arrested migrants are directly transferred to Surman or Zawiya. Respondents thought that young men have few options other than smuggling or joining armed groups.

Departure points and migrant gathering areas to the West of Tripoli



AL-ZAWIYA

Al-Zawiya is embroiled in protracted internal⁷ and external conflicts,⁸ and divided administratively.⁹ Tribal divisions undermine the security sector, while the power of criminal groups obstructs law enforcement. The migrant smuggling industry is smaller than in neighbouring Sabratha, with local players focusing on control of the Al-Zawiya oil refinery and fuel smuggling business. The interception of a group of smugglers in April 2017 (and the death of two of them) allegedly curtailed the business somewhat. At the same time, the most active security force in terms of combatting smugglers, the Coast Guard, has been accused of running its own smuggling network. The Coast Guard is based at the oil refinery and patrols the wider coastal area, including Sabratha, frequently carrying out rescues. There are two detention centres that are nominally under DCIM authority, but at least one of them (Al-Nasr centre) is effectively run by a local armed group. The comparatively diversified and large local economy offers opportunities for development, but security developments (clashes, road closures) hamper private enterprise.

TAJURA

Tajura has gone through internal upheaval due to the affiliation of local groups with rival civil war factions. The local smuggling industry was boosted by the closure of the coastal road west of Tripoli, which reduced access to Sabratha, as well as the rise of Bani Walid as a major transit hub. Respondents reported that local armed groups are involved in smuggling, but that there are also many non-professional individuals who offer low-cost services. Local authorities and security forces have recently stepped up efforts to combat smuggling, although the most influential force (First Division) plays an ambiguous role. The local DCIM branch opened a new detention centre in April 2017 and runs it together with a local brigade.¹⁰ Maritime forces are based in Tajura, and the Coast Guard regularly carries out rescues. As part of Greater Tripoli, Tajura has a relatively developed economy. An extensive project to renew urban infrastructure was interrupted by the revolution.

GARABULLI

Garabulli has been affected by its troubled relations with Misrata¹¹ and Tarhuna.¹² The area has a long history of smuggling dating back to the 1990s, with direct connections to Kufra and Sebha. Smuggling increased after the departure of the Misratan forces in 2016. Smugglers either recruit migrants locally or bring them from Bani Walid, often using secondary roads via areas south of Tripoli. Departure areas used by Garabulli smugglers extend from Tajura to Ghanima, halfway to Al-Khoms. The Coast Guard does not currently have a presence in Garabulli and rescue operations are carried out by units based in Tajura or Tripoli. The DCIM was described as not very active. A migrant detention centre was burned down by a smuggling gang in 2016. Garabulli economy is largely limited to agriculture, trade of food items and construction materials, with many locals working in transportation.

⁷ Internal conflicts are due to ideological and political divisions mixed with tribal and family feuds.

⁸ Conflict with Warshefana, which resulted in the coastal road being blocked for extended periods of time.

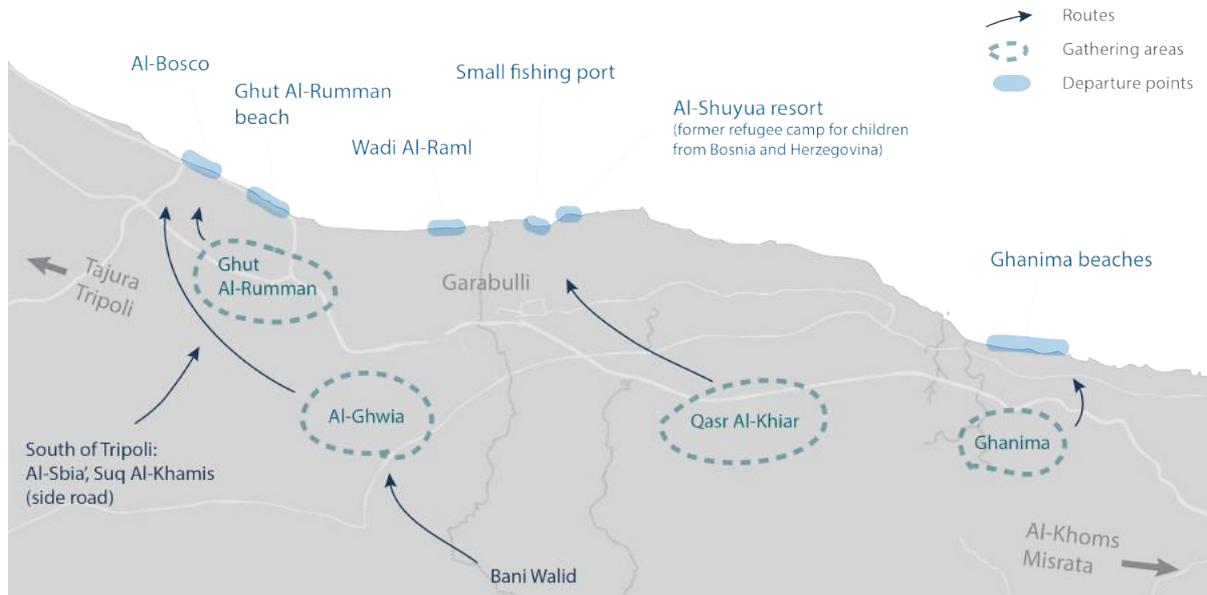
⁹ Because of elections were disrupted, the city has two councils for West and South Zawiya, while central Zawiya remains without representation.

¹⁰ Migrants were previously held by the Tajura Passport Police and quickly transferred to other areas.

¹¹ The presence of Misratan forces during 2014 and 2015 led to violent clashes.

¹² Frequent scuffles between armed groups and criminal gangs from Garabulli and Tarhuna in 2016 and 2017.

Departure points and migrant gathering areas to the East of Tripoli



CONCLUSION

The crackdown in Zuwara has given the region a very encouraging example of how local communities can change the course of events. It was made possible by a series of contextual factors (see table below) as well as: a) anti-smuggling campaigns led by local authorities and civil society; b) a cohesive front around the marginalization and social accountability of smugglers; c) efficient law enforcement and d) the medialization and general awareness of the negative impact of smuggling.

However, the crackdown did not come without drawbacks. First, many Zuwaran smugglers relocated their activities to neighbouring cities or turned to fuel smuggling. Second, the root causes of migrant smuggling remain and the networks have not been severed, meaning that migrant smuggling might resume if conditions change. Third, the lack of positive response to the crackdown from the state and neighbouring cities created resentment in Zuwara. On the contrary, the crackdown attracted criticism, due to justice being made locally, outside the national judicial framework.

Migrant smuggling networks remain largely unchallenged outside Zuwara, as no attempts to organize a similar crackdown have taken place in other migration hubs so far. Local context matters hugely and the Zuwaran experience cannot be easily reproduced elsewhere. The table below presents factors that made a crackdown possible and mostly successful in Zuwara, against the environmental challenges in other cities.

Nevertheless, possible ways forward are apparent. In most cities of departure, anger and frustration with the smugglers is tangible and there is demand for better law enforcement and harsher punishments for smuggling. Civic values and activism are also manifest and can be strengthened. Youth unemployment being a key factor fuelling smuggling and militarization, any efforts to develop alternatives to smuggling will have to tackle this issue. Generally, smuggling in northwest Libya must be addressed from different angles, as neither economic incentives nor social pressure will likely be enough on their own. There should also be concerted action throughout the region to eliminate “safe havens” for smugglers.

Zuwara	Sabratha, Al-Zawiya, Tajura, Garabulli
Relative social and political cohesion	Political and tribal divides
Smuggling industry led by influential individuals	Smugglers closely affiliated with armed groups
Smuggling industry deeply-rooted but no tribal backdrop	Smuggling industry entwined with pre-existing feuds between families and tribal actors
Alternative types of trade due to the proximity with the Tunisian border (including informal trade and fuel smuggling)	Fewer attractive economic alternatives, except for fuel smuggling (Al-Zawiya). Legal businesses affected by the financial crisis
Effective mediatisation and anti-smuggling campaigns	Occasional campaigns that gained no momentum
Collective mobilization to stop smuggling and social marginalization of smugglers	Some efforts (such as statements by tribal elders) but no collective mobilization
Relatively efficient law enforcement (CCU) and local endorsement thereof	Law enforcement obstructed by local divides and smugglers exerting pressure on authorities

RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS

The recommendations offered in the following subsections focus on strengthening effective migration management and combatting smuggling along the West Libyan coast. However, at the strategic level, the research team believes that these initiatives alone are not sufficient to tackle the issue at hand in a sustainable and dignified manner. This report therefore recommends the following seven strategic orientations:

- **Address the root causes of migration and forced displacement in countries of origin:** improving opportunities and working towards the prevention and mitigation of major threats.
- **Ensure the protection of asylum seekers and refugees:** including early identification of those needing protection, adequate reception facilities in destination countries and durable solutions.
- **Provide legal opportunities to come to Europe for economic migrants who are not eligible to international protection:** legal channels of migration must be clear, well implemented, accessible, affordable and not require unreasonable amounts of time.
- **Invest in humanitarian response and in the development of opportunities in transit countries where migrants could safely settle:** direct assistance to migrants in these transit countries, access to livelihoods and education as well as possibilities to be regularized.
- **Enhance international coordination to fight smuggling and trafficking globally:** strong cooperation between police forces in Europe, in countries of transit and of origin.
- **Develop synergies between programs along the migration routes:** cooperation between layers of countries; between countries; between governments, civil society, international organisations and the private sector; amongst international organisations; within governments; and at the international level.

- **Continue humanitarian assistance efforts while other strategic orientations are being implemented:** protection at sea operations and support to victims of trafficking in particular.

COMBATTING SMUGGLING AND MANAGING MIGRATION IN NORTHWEST LIBYA

Continue Efforts to Stabilize Libya

- Continue dialogue and peace-building efforts, focusing on the local and regional levels.
- Help stabilize local communities through direct development assistance.
- Assist the GNA and the Central Bank of Libya in addressing the financial crisis.

Support Law Enforcement

- Assist relevant law enforcement agencies in strengthening their organizational structure and monitoring their components and affiliates.
- Continue and expand capacity building for Coast Guard and Coast Security, but with a greater focus on vetting and monitoring.
- Support existing efforts to develop a comprehensive border management system.
- Continue offering material assistance to the Coast Guard and Coast Security provided that strong monitoring mechanisms can be put in place.
- Communicate on support provided by the international community to Libyan security agencies.
- Promote good governance and adherence to human rights in the security sector.
- Advocate for greater multilateral cooperation on combatting migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

Strengthen Local Authorities and Coordination Mechanisms

- Raise the capacities of Municipal Councils and other local stakeholders for migration management.
- Support migration management through direct contributions to local authorities, humanitarian and security actors.
- Promote coordination between local actors, and programming at the local level that includes Municipal Councils as well as local social and security actors.
- Engage with authorities at the central level and advocate for the need for enhanced inter-agency coordination.

Develop Economic Alternatives

- Support private sector development and SME creation: through training and coaching, small loans or grants, networking opportunities or contributing and developing existing programs.
- Conduct market studies in the main municipalities of departures to identify gaps and opportunities on the local job market.
- Look into supporting vocational training facilities to broaden their offer and establish partnerships abroad.
- Communicate on existing economic opportunities, vocational training and programs for business promotion.

- Focus also on developing economic alternatives in Libya's southern border communities, where even limited initiatives to create employment would have a greater impact than along the coast, to complement border monitoring.

Focus on Protection and Integration of Migrants

- Support the introduction of a comprehensive registration system for migrants, but consider carefully how information is shared.
- Advocate for the development of a solid referral system between the different actors that can provide support and protection for migrants.
- Assist migrants with administrative processes.
- Encourage the development of a proper asylum system: advocating for a change in legislation and for the protection of people eligible for asylum.
- Insist on, and support more thorough assessment and monitoring of migrant detention centres.
- Carry out a comprehensive assessment of CSOs working with migrants.
- Facilitate migrants' inclusion in the local labour market.
- Look into the feasibility of implementing a release-for-work program across west Libya.
- Look into the establishment of an agency overseeing migrant employment at the municipal level.
- Monitoring of human rights violations.

Encourage Community-led Initiatives and Civil Society

- Encourage local authorities, media and civil society groups to step up anti-smuggling campaigns, both as a preventive measure and to socially marginalize smugglers.
- Engage with local dignitaries (such as tribal elders, religious figureheads, influential citizens) to increase social pressure on smugglers.
- Give credit and support to engaged community stakeholders.
- Establish synergies between existing campaigns to fight fuel smuggling and migrant smuggling.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONTEXT

Flows to Libya as well as departures from Libya to Europe significantly increased in 2016. Last year alone, 181,436 migrants arrived in Italy through the Central Mediterranean route – which in almost all cases involves passing through Libya, making it the most used route to Europe.¹³ Although no exact figures exist on the number of migrants currently residing or transiting through Libya, estimates range between 1 and 2.5 million, with new arrivals multiplying.¹⁴

Indicators show that Libya will likely remain the main hub on the way to Europe for migrants from all over Africa in the coming years. In addition to its strategic geographic location, instability in the country fostered the development of strong smuggling networks and hinders border control. At the same time, the instability pushes refugees and migrants already in Libya, who planned to remain there, to cross the sea to Europe.

The main departure points along the Libyan coast are currently all located in the Tripolitania region (West Libya). Boats usually leave from isolated beaches surrounding the towns of Sabratha, Al-Zawiya, Garabulli and Tajura. There is a tendency for the routes to shift depending on the level of control along the coastline. Zuwara for example – half way between Sabratha and the Tunisian border – used to be a major departure point with an active smuggling industry, before a locally orchestrated crackdown in 2015 made it very difficult for migrant smugglers to operate there.

The European Union (EU) is committed to increasing the protection of migrants and to strengthening effective migration management in the region. The EU notably mobilized additional funding in 2017 through the European Union emergency trust fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EU Trust Fund). Given the disunity within Libyan national authorities, the EU and other international community stakeholders are looking to collaborate with municipalities in a number of areas.

1.2. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The study aims at informing sustainable responses to the current migration crisis and targeted programming in the main municipalities of departure along the coast of West Libya. The research engaged with local authorities and communities to involve them in the process of identifying needs and formulating potential migration policies, as well as to strengthen local governance – notably through Municipal Councils.

The objectives of this report are as follows:

- Provide an overview of the situation on the ground in the main municipalities of departure, in terms of balance of power, smuggling industry, economic integration of migrants, and migration-related judiciary and law enforcement agencies;
- Identify key stakeholders, ongoing migration management-related initiatives, gaps and needs;
- Analyse factors of success in managing irregular migration flows departing from Zuwara;
- Recommend possible programmatic responses relevant to the local context in other municipalities of departure.

¹³ Data from UNHCR, available at this [link](#).

¹⁴ See *Mixed Migration in Libya: Changing Dynamics*, Altai Consulting for UNHCR, 2017.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The study provides a rapid overview of migration-related dynamics and actors in five migrant smuggling hotspots along the West Libyan coast: Zuwara, Sabratha, Al-Zawiya, Tajura and Garabulli.

The research revolves around the following four major axes:

- **Political and security context:** power structures, key tribes and families, influential armed groups and political alliances, recent political and security developments.
- **Smuggling industry:** structure and modus operandi of smuggling networks, connections with the local power structures, evolution of migrant flows and smuggling operations over the past years.
- **Responses to the smuggling industry:** actions taken by law enforcement agencies and judicial bodies, attempts made at the local level by public officials and citizens to curtail the power of smugglers, civil society initiatives, general management of migration flows.
- **Economic implications and opportunities:** impact of the smuggling industry on the local economy, efforts made or to be made to offer viable alternatives to people involved in smuggling, significance of the migrant workforce for the local economy.

This rapid overview does not represent a comprehensive picture of the situation on the ground for each research axis, but rather an initial scoping exercise, identifying potential areas of opportunity for more in-depth work in the future. Given the limited extent of data collection, findings provided for each research axis should be considered as essentially indications of the situation on the ground, based off at least one interview with a relevant key informant for each axis in each location.

2.2. DATA COLLECTION

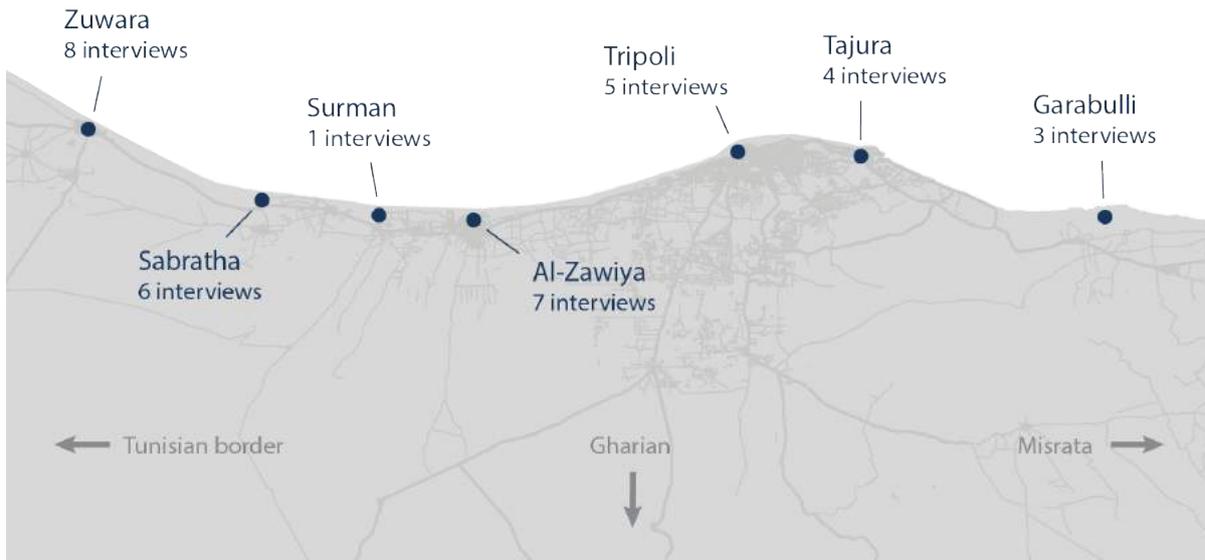
This research exercise is qualitative by nature and based on five case studies on Zuwara, Sabratha, Garabulli, Al-Zawiya and Tajura. The data collection consisted of secondary research (news articles, statistical data, reports and academic literature) and 34 key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted across the target locations.

Fieldwork in Libya took place over a period of two weeks in May 2017. Interviews were carried out in person by three Libyan researchers from the area and lasted an average of an hour and a half. Key informants interviewed included:

- Five Municipal Council members
- Three smugglers and former smugglers
- Five migrant detention centre directors: three of them Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM) staff, one from the Passport Police department, and one belonging to the Knights of Janzur brigade
- Three DCIM officials (from the headquarters in Tripoli and the Surman-based unit)
- Three Coast Guard (military unit) officials
- A Coast Security (police unit) official
- Three members of other security bodies (military council, security directorate, brigade)
- A public prosecutor
- Three civil society organisations (CSOs)

- Three migrants
- Two business representatives
- A tribal elder
- A local academic working on migration

Figure 1: Map of fieldwork locations



Seven questionnaires were designed, to reflect the different types of stakeholders interviewed. Questionnaires were translated into Libyan Arabic and back-translated, after what interviewers were trained for a day on the project and tools.

3. NORTHWEST LIBYA SMUGGLING INDUSTRY AND RESPONSES

3.1. SMUGGLING INDUSTRY ON THE WEST LIBYAN COAST

KEY TAKEAWAYS

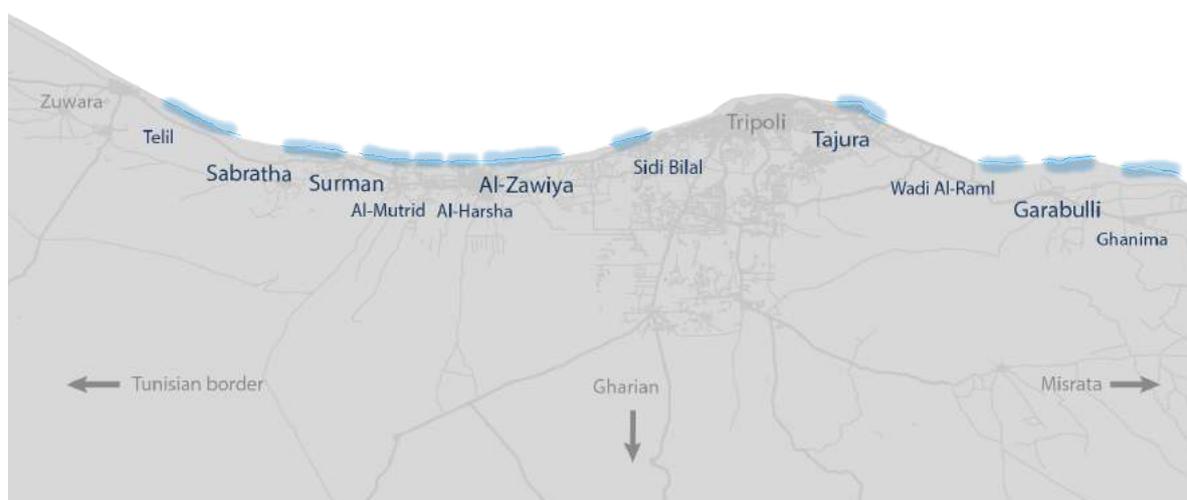
- Migrant departures from west Libya have increased significantly over the past few years but fluctuate depending on the political and security context.
- After a crackdown on migrant smugglers in Zuwara in 2015 almost halted departures from there, Sabratha emerged as Libya's main departure hub.
- The importance of Tajura and Garabulli as departure areas rose in 2016 due to developments west of Tripoli, and to the establishment of Bani Walid as key transit city.
- The smuggling industry in Libya is composed of a multitude of pre- and post-revolutionary actors who vary widely in size, degree of organization and professionalism. After the revolution, many new actors entered the smuggling scene.
- Foreign nationals play a key role in the industry, not only as recruiters but also as transnational coordinators.
- Armed groups are increasingly involved in smuggling in areas of departure, demanding protection money from smugglers or also serving as smugglers.
- There is a clear correlation between local conflict and smuggling, and the smuggling industry itself has become more violent.
- Tasks are usually distributed between different smuggling actors (boat experts, transporters, recruiters, and hosts) although some smugglers provide several services at once.
- High-level smugglers are usually known within their community; they operate discreetly but do not live in hiding.
- Smugglers avoid the coastal road and main entry points to coastal towns; they tend to use secondary roads and gather migrants on farms before departure.
- International search and rescue missions at sea induced operational changes on the smugglers' side (increased use of rubber boats, less safety equipment, usually no attempts to recover boats).
- Boat procurement is a continuous challenge for smugglers; rubber boats are imported, and attempts to locally fabricate them have failed.
- Fares fluctuate based on a variety of factors, such as nationality of migrants, season, type of equipment, level of service and operating environment.
- Extortion practices are on the rise, linked to multiplicity of actors and general context of violence, impunity and economic hardship.

The northwest Libyan coastline is in most cases the last leg of the Europe-bound migrant trail referred to as the Central Mediterranean route. Boat departures mostly take place from the 200km-long coastal stretch between the cities of Al-Khoms (120km east of Tripoli) and Sabratha (80km west of Tripoli). **The smugglers who organize departures mostly operate from municipalities within this area: Sabratha, Surman, Al-Zawiya, Tajura and Garabulli.**

This includes smaller localities or villages within these municipalities, such as **Al-Mutrid and Al-Harsha**, which are located between Surman and Al-Zawiya, and **Ghanima** (between Garabulli and Al-Khoms). Boats usually depart from beaches or scarcely inhabited areas. Specific locations include Telil (west of Sabratha), Sidi Bilal (within the municipality of Janzur) or Wadi Al-Raml (north of Garabulli). Rather than precise points on the map, departure zones should be regarded as a continuum, in particular as they require no specific infrastructure and shift in ways that are hard to predict.

The field research conducted for this report confirmed that the above stated municipalities are key to the smuggling trail. All interviewees were able to name relevant municipalities, and many also pointed out specific locations used for boat departures. Boat departure areas are visualized on the map below.

Figure 2: Main boat departure areas in northwest Libya



Migrant departures across these different locations fluctuate depending on the political and security context. Research conducted by Altai in 2013 and 2014 showed that most departures at the time would take place between Tripoli and Zuwara, and to a lesser extent from beaches between Tripoli and Misrata.¹⁵ In 2013, Sabratha was not considered a major departure point, due to an apparent increase in security and monitoring of the area, but its role subsequently increased. The use of certain departure points varied with the level of control. Whenever local security forces clamped down on departures, boats immediately started to depart from different locations.

Zuwara had long had a reputation as “smuggling capital” on the Libyan coast. Its location made Libya’s westernmost city a comparatively convenient departure point. Smugglers could bring migrants through the Jebel Nafusa without having to take the riskier coastal route or going through the area of Warshefana, where criminal gangs would have to be bribed. Moreover, Zuwara is closest to

¹⁵ See *Mixed migration: Libya at the Crossroads*, Altai Consulting for UNHCR, 2013, and *Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots*, Altai Consulting for IOM, 2015.

Lampedusa, even though the time factor mattered less after international rescue operations were expanded (see section 4.1.3 Sea Voyage).

Smuggling routes were affected when the Libyan conflict erupted into open warfare in Tripoli in 2014, and fighting subsequently spread to the Jebel Nafusa, Warshefana and Al-Zawiya, among other areas. From 2014, frequent disruptions of the coastal road due to roadblocks at Bridge 17 in Janzur contributed to making the cities west of Tripoli – Al-Zawiya, Sabratha and Zuwara – less accessible to migrants.¹⁶ This partly shifted smuggling operations to departure areas east of Tripoli, such as Tajura, Garabulli and Al-Khoms. Unable to use the coastal road, some smugglers eventually struck deals with groups in Warshefana, enabling them to avoid Greater Tripoli and Al-Zawiya, and access the coast via small roads from the south.¹⁷

The biggest game-changer was the crackdown on migrant smugglers in Zuwara in August 2015, which largely ended departures from the Zuwara-controlled area (stretching from Abu Kammash to the edge of Mellitah).¹⁸ This led to a rise in departures from areas further east, in particular Sabratha and Al-Zawiya. Smuggling operations in Sabratha were curtailed when IS militants declared their presence in late-2015, but they regained momentum after the US struck an IS position in February 2016 and local armed groups asserted their control over the city.

Due to the security troubles and obstacles for smugglers east of Tripoli during the period 2014-2016, relatively peaceful Garabulli became a popular departure point. Garabulli is also convenient because it is relatively close to the key transit point Bani Walid. Boat departures were, however, curtailed due to the presence of a security brigade from Misrata, which was controlling access to the town.

But in June 2016, clashes erupted between the Misratan force and a Garabulli brigade, triggering the withdrawal of the Misratans and lifting the pressure on local smugglers once again. According to Key Informants (KIs) in Garabulli and Tajura, migrant departures increased dramatically in the summer of 2016.

Since the Zuwara crackdown, **Sabratha has emerged as the main departure area, followed by Al-Zawiya, Surman and – to a lesser extent – Tajura and Garabulli.** Departures also take place from other areas, such as the Tripoli neighbourhood of Gargaresh or the city of Misrata, but on a much smaller scale.

Surman and the nearby village of Al-Mutrid are relatively recent departure zones, but their importance will likely increase in coming months – despite elders in Al-Mutrid recently speaking out to revoke social protection for migrant smugglers. As explained by a Surman-based DCIM officer, “*Surman has the potential to become a major departure point for boats, because it is well connected to migration routes.*” For the most part, the beaches of Surman seem to be used by the more influential smuggling groups from Sabratha and Al-Zawiya. In Al-Mutrid, smugglers currently use a car junkyard by the sea to launch boats.

“ Sabratha and Al-Zawiya are now the main cities for smuggling, although Tajura and Garabulli are also important. But smuggling is concentrated in the area west of Tripoli. The main reason is logistics: there is more space along the coast. Also, these areas have long been smuggling zones.”

Ex-smuggler – Garabulli

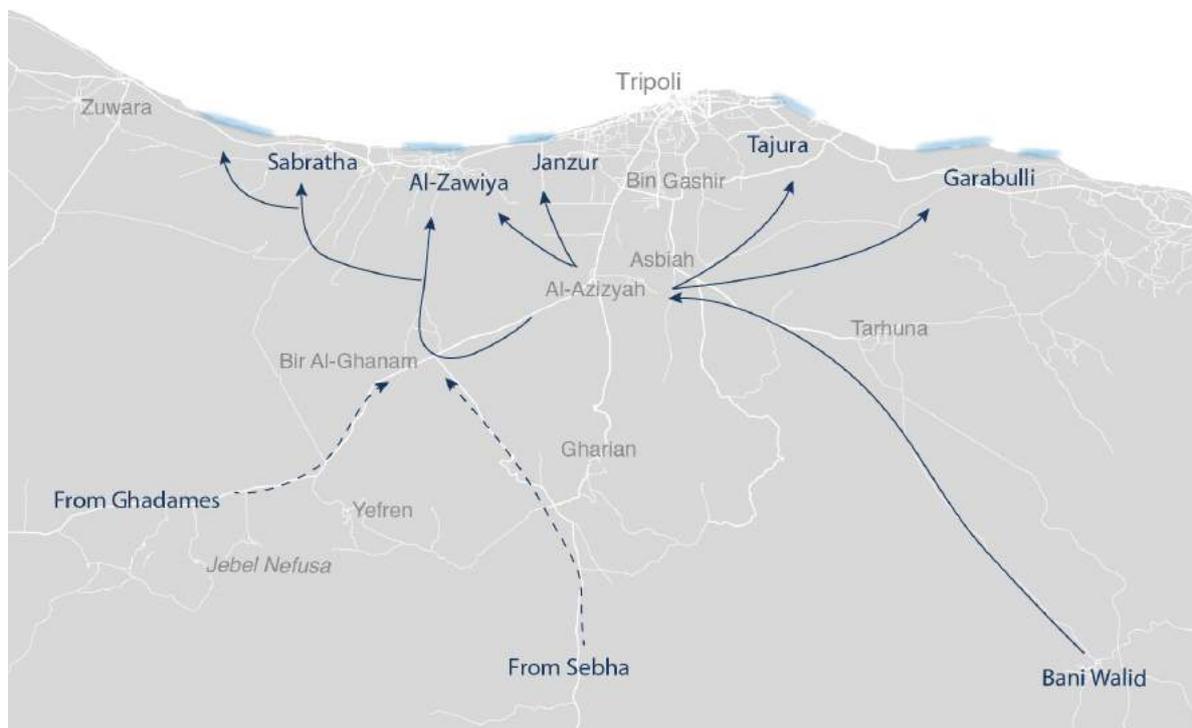
¹⁶ The coastal road was not continuously closed, but became overall riskier for travellers. Negotiations between stakeholders in Al-Zawiya, Janzur and Warshefana at times succeeded in having roadblocks lifted, but circulation was mostly disrupted until March 2017.

¹⁷ The Warshefana area southwest of Tripoli was not a natural choice for smugglers from the coastal towns due to a persistent conflict between Warshefana, Al-Zawiya and Janzur groups, as well as criminal gangs robbing and carjacking travellers passing through Warshefana.

¹⁸ See section 5.1 on Zuwara for more details.

The major smuggling routes from the south have also been affected by changes in the political and security context. The route from the southeast (Kufra area) to the northeast via Ajdabiya is no longer used. It was deemed too dangerous after IS militants in the Sirte area raided migrant transports on several occasions in the first half of 2015, taking women and children captive and executing dozens of Ethiopian and Eritrean Christians. Moreover, the Libyan National Army (LNA) established firm control over the Ajdabiya and Jufra areas in 2016. The loss of the Ajdabiya route likely contributed to making Bani Walid a key transit hub, as migrants arrive directly from both Sebha and Kufra.

Figure 3: Smuggling routes to the main boat departure areas



3.1.1. SMUGGLING ACTORS AND NETWORKS

Since the revolution, the Libyan smuggling industry has undergone significant transformations. The security vacuum that resulted from the collapse of state structures opened the gates to larger numbers of undocumented immigrants, as well as facilitating market entry for new smuggling actors.

Gaddafi reportedly at times used migration towards Europe as a tool to exert pressure on EU countries and was able to influence smuggling dynamics to some extent. According to respondents, during the revolution, the regime openly encouraged migrant smuggling, in what was likely an attempt to instil fear in European decision-makers and prompt a last-minute change of attitude.

The former regime was complicit in the development of smuggling networks. Whenever it wanted to play the migration card it would ask us directly to increase the number of migrant arrivals. During the revolution, I was working daily to bring migrants from Tarhuna, Bani Walid and Jufra to Tajura and Al-Khoms. I saw security officials personally load migrants onto boats. Regime officials would come to our area and pay us.

Ex-smuggler (transporter) – Garabulli

Smuggler Profiles

The smuggling industry in Libya today is composed of a multitude of pre- and post-revolutionary actors who vary widely in size, degree of organization and professionalism. Large and professional groups, which might offer different services and own facilities and equipment, coexists with amateur smugglers, who have entered the business recently, or are merely seizing an opportunity to make fast money.

Prior to 2011, the smuggling scene consisted of fewer stakeholders, who were known to the regime and who mostly knew each other.¹⁹ **When Gaddafi's regime collapsed, a multitude of actors entered the scene and the industry became more chaotic.** Essentially, smuggling became more affordable and less risky. Previously, small-scale smugglers would not be able to afford a boat unless they pooled their resources. But after the revolution, the demand rose and smugglers could generate quick profit. There were also less operational challenges: no longer did one require contacts to regime officials to set up a business. Now, smugglers could negotiate with the local brigade or set up their own force.

Many of the old smugglers have struggled to adapt to the new reality, dismissing new players as “amateurs” and “criminals.”

The difference as opposed to before 2011 is that now the smuggling business is open to everyone and there are many criminals involved who don't care about anything but money. The situation is now out of control and chaotic. Now, we hear that in every town there are tens of big smugglers, while before they were not more than twenty on the whole west Libyan coastline.

Ex-smuggler – Garabulli

In the interviews, current day smugglers were frequently described as “ex-convicts”, reflecting the idea that many of the newcomers are former prison inmates who escaped or were released during the revolution. While this may apply to some individuals, the smuggling industry attracted a wide range of people – including even university students, graduates or public sector employees – who saw smuggling as a short-term opportunity to make money. According to a key informant interviewed in Zuwara, “*The Zuwara smugglers of the past years were mostly just young guys who wanted to make a bit of money to show off with big cars and have fun in Tunisia.*”

At the same time, **major players in the smuggling industry are undergoing a process of professionalization.** The division of tasks within smuggling groups illustrates this. The smugglers who arrange boat departures may host migrants prior to departure, but are rarely in charge of transporting them across Libya. Typically, individuals and groups in the departure areas are only responsible for the last leg of the journey: they receive migrants from other groups in migrant transit hubs such as Bani Walid, gather them on farms and then arrange the boat trip. They need to be in contact with smugglers further down the “supply chain,” but the services they offer to migrants are limited in scope.

Professionalization does not necessarily mean that smuggling groups have a corporate structure. They can resemble loose networks of individuals who each have their task or expertise and who collaborate sometimes, while also occasionally working with other people.

¹⁹ Smugglers interviewed for this study, for instance, were part of the “old guard” – people who had been in the business before 2011 – although not from the same generation. Smuggler A from Zuwara entered the business in 1998, and has been operating out of Sabratha since the Zuwara crackdown. While he started out as a “boat expert” fixing boats going from Abu Kammash to Lampedusa, he is now at the head of a network, coordinating operations from afar. Smuggler B from Zuwara started in 2004 preparing boats for departure to Lampedusa. He worked in Sabratha after the Zuwara crackdown but recently quit the business to become a civil servant. Smuggler C from Garabulli entered the smuggling business as migrant transporter between Kufra and the coast in 2007 and quit in 2013.

The smugglers interviewed for this report were of three types:

- The manager, at the head of a smuggler group, who coordinates and supervises from afar (over the phone or through emails). A Zuwaran smuggler currently organising boat departures from Sabratha reported *“I don’t ever leave my area; the middlemen call me,”* adding that he now also has farms where he accommodates migrants under the supervision of his staff.
- The expert, who prepares boats and navigation equipment. A former smuggler from Zuwara explained: *“I was the expert who showed them how to fix the boat.”* The “manager” smuggler mentioned above entered the business as a boat expert as well: *“My role was to prepare the boat and the engine and to choose the ‘captain’ who will steer the boat. I instructed him how to use the equipment, such as Thuraya satellite phones.”*
- The transporter, who picks up migrants from a gathering point and takes them to the boat departure zone. According to a former smuggler from Garabulli: *“My role was limited to receiving migrants from certain locations outside Kufra city. I would then drop them in hangars outside Garabulli.”*

Smugglers work with a network of intermediaries, either *samasira* (pl. of *simsar*) or *manadib* (pl. of *mandub*). Both terms mean “agent” but *samasira* are usually foreign nationals while *manadib* are Libyans. *Samasira* mostly recruit among people from their country of origin. Most commonly they are Sub-Saharan Africans, but there are also other nationalities, such as Bangladeshis or Egyptians. A former smuggler from Zuwara emphasized that *“There are samasira of many African nationalities – Nigerians, Gambians, Sudanese, etc. – and they are based all over Libya.”* When smuggling actors are arrested, it is usually foreign intermediaries. They are more exposed and not as protected by society as the Libyan smugglers are.²⁰

“ Sometimes we capture members of smuggling networks, either manadib or samasira, and mostly they are foreigners. Their role is to gather migrants in hangars and farms in preparation of a departure.”

DCIM official – Tripoli

The influence of non-Libyan players nonetheless exceeds the recruitment level. There are non-Libyan smugglers who operate in Libya, or operate internationally but temporarily hide in Libya. The most prominent example is Ermias Ghermay, the Ethiopian head of a transnational smuggling ring that stretches from East Africa to Europe via Libya. Ghermay is a wanted person, both in Libya and abroad.²¹ He has been living in Libya since before the revolution, running his smuggling network from Tripoli, until security forces there attempted to arrest him in 2015. Since then, he has been hiding in Sabratha, according to local sources quoted in a September 2016 media investigation.²² In 2016 he allegedly expanded his operations by joining a Sabrathan smuggler (see more in section 5.2 on Sabratha). Also operating from Sabratha is a Nigerian smuggler believed to run a trafficking network (young women), who is known as Mr. Pow. The Nigerian allegedly works with Sabrathan smugglers and runs a migrant

²⁰ Several *samasira* in detention were interviewed for previous Altai research. See for instance *Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges*, Altai Consulting for UNHCR, 2017.

²¹ Italian prosecutors issued an arrest warrant against him in 2013. Mered Medhanie, an Eritrean national nicknamed “The General,” who was part of Ghermay’s Libyan group until 2015, was arrested in Sudan in May 2016 and extradited to Italy in June 2016. It has since emerged that the individual extradited is likely a different person with a similar name, and that Medhanie is still on the loose. Another member of Ghermay’s network, Atta Wehabrebi, was arrested in 2015. Wehabrebi grew up in Libya and lived in the same Tripoli neighbourhood as Ghermay prior to his departure to Italy in 2007. From Italy, Wehabrebi oversaw the northern leg of the network, transporting migrants who arrived from Libya to other European countries and arranging for fake paperwork. See “People-Mmuggling ‘Kingpin’ Mered Medhanie Extradited to Italy”, BBC News, 8 June 2016, available at this [link](#).

²² “On the Trail of African Migrant Smugglers”, Spiegel, 26 September 2016, accessible online at this [link](#).

gathering camp in the city.²³ KIs mentioned that another influential Eritrean smuggler at the head of a transnational network currently operates out of Bani Walid.

Smugglers are not necessarily specialized only in one type of trade, and once networks are established they can be used for other purposes. According to interviews conducted, when Zuwarans cracked down on migrant smuggling, many switched to fuel smuggling. Different types of smuggling may also overlap. In the border zones, smugglers may use their vehicles for migrants, food items, fuel or drugs.

Groups and Networks

Asked to describe smuggling groups in their areas, KIs mostly said that **professionals and highly organized groups coexist with amateur players**. While smuggling actors in departure areas have connections to other smugglers and intermediaries across the country and abroad, their work teams tend to be relatively small. The smugglers interviewed said that they were – or had been – working in teams of around a dozen close collaborators but that the networks they worked in were larger.

Smugglers have always worked in networks that guarantee access to migrants and transport from one city to another. Usually there is more than one smuggler in each town working with the same network. This is highly organized and tasks are distributed according to specialization: ground transportation, accommodation, maritime transport, etc. Most smugglers work with specific migrant communities [countries of origin]. Some smugglers only deal with Arabs (Egypt, Syria), others deal with East Africans (Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan), and others with West Africans (Ivory Coast, Cameroun, Sierra Leone, etc.).

Ex-smuggler – Garabulli

Smugglers working in one group usually know each other prior to becoming involved in the business because they are from the same city and sometimes from one circle of friends. Shared origins are an important binding factor, as smugglers feel that they can rely on each other for discretion and fair business. One of the two Zuwaran smugglers interviewed stated that “*Arabs and Amazigh have different customs and don’t entirely trust each other*”, a viewpoint reiterated in other interviews conducted in the predominantly Amazigh city of Zuwara. However, both Zuwaran smugglers interviewed worked in the predominantly Arab city of Sabratha following the Zuwara crackdown on smuggling (see section 5.1 Zuwara).

There are also cases of smugglers merging their operations to widen their networks, such as Abu Ghrein in Sabratha allegedly joining forces with Ethiopian smuggler Ermias Ghermay in 2016.

According to our interviews, smugglers largely operate secretly, yet do not live in hiding. Influential players are mostly known by name and reside within their towns. While some smugglers – in particular those affiliated with armed groups like Al-Ammu in Sabratha – evidently do not care much about their reputation, others prefer discretion.

“ I never tried to grow my operation. I use my expertise as asset. I’ve always kept a low profile to avoid complication, and this kept me from growing.”

Smuggler – Sabratha

Nexus of Smugglers and Armed Groups

A key feature of the smuggling industry post-2011 is the **correlation between local conflict and smuggling**. In places where different tribal and security actors rival for territory and power, smuggling has often become a means to make money to strengthen one’s military capacity. Smuggling therefore

²³ See related tweet by Migrace Organisation, available at this [link](#).

fuels conflict at the local and sometimes regional levels. One of the respondents pointed out that in places like Sabratha and Al-Zawiya, smuggling networks are built upon pre-existing feuds between families and tribal actors, and militias are the main actors in the smuggling industry. This was not the case in Zuwara before the crackdown, according to KIs: smugglers there tended to be from the old guard or small-scale “entrepreneurs”, but not affiliated with major armed groups.

Armed groups are currently heavily involved in smuggling in areas of departure. Taking advantage of the fact that territory is largely outside state control, armed groups or semi-official brigades present in boat departure or transit zones require smugglers to pay protection money in exchange for facilitating and securing their operations.

Smugglers have been bribing members of armed forces and officials to conduct their business in peace since before the revolution. For instance, a smuggler from Garabulli recalled that before 2011 he would pay about 1,000 Libyan dinars at checkpoints along the way between Kufra and the coast. However, the sums are much more significant now. According to a smuggler working in Sabratha: *“Now we must pay the Sabratha brigades 10,000 dollars for each rubber boat that leaves. The brigade provides security at the beach, while the migrants get on board.”*

A Zuwaran smuggler, who until last year provided his expertise to networks in the Sabratha area, said that armed groups were paid 10,000 dinars – rather than dollars – per boat. If this reflects standard prices paid by smugglers in 2016, it would mean that prices increased substantially over the past year, which could be credible given that fees generally fluctuate with demand, and that armed groups have further consolidated their power.

Some armed groups have taken their involvement to the next level, acting as smugglers themselves and thereby further blurring the distinction between security sector and organized crime. Section 5. Case Studies provides more detail on the relevant armed groups in each city and their affiliations.

Smuggling groups naturally compete for zones of influence and clients, but for the most part they seem to avoid armed confrontations. KIs mostly

said that smugglers were not in confrontation with each other but split territory among themselves and largely respect these boundaries. At the same time, they collaborate with smugglers in other towns along the supply chain. KIs attributed this to there being “no shortage of customers” and smugglers having “a common interest to keep the business going.” The larger smuggling groups also build up military capacity to deter their rivals from attacking them or interfering with their business.

“ Smuggling groups compete for zones of influence in Sabratha and coordinate with smugglers outside town. Overall they respect the territorial divisions between them.”

Security official – Sabratha

This does not mean that relations between smugglers are always peaceful. In Garabulli, one smuggling group reportedly burned down a local detention centre held by another group in 2016. Respondents mentioned that the same year, in Sabratha, smugglers from Zuwara and Al-Zawiya fought over boat departure zones. There have also been accounts of smugglers attacking their rivals’ migrant boats. Where smuggler rivalries are coupled with tribal and political feuds, the situation is likely more prone to escalation.

3.1.2. SMUGGLING LOGISTICS, PRICING AND PROFITS

Recruiting Migrants

Recruitment is mostly done by foreign national intermediaries and by “spreading the word” in migrant communities in Libya, as well as using the internet.

Social media have become a key tool to reach out to migrants. A former smuggler from Zuwara, speaking to the BBC in May 2015, claimed that between 10 and 20 migrants contacted him via Facebook per day.²⁴ The ex-smuggler said that until 2012 he did not use social media at all, and that, by 2015, it accounted for 30% to 40% of his business. Many of the KIs interviewed for this report were aware of smuggler Facebook pages existing, although not all smugglers seem to use this tool.

Figure 4: Screenshots of a currently active Facebook page offering boat trips departing from outside Sabratha (displaying phone numbers and exact gathering locations)²⁵



The most common way to recruit migrants however remains the use of intermediaries (*manadib* or *samasira*). Higher level smugglers tend to avoid direct contact with migrants, leaving this to their associates and intermediaries. As a smuggler operating in Sabratha pointed out: “*I work with the intermediaries. Working directly with migrants makes you lose time.*” Intermediaries are a key success factor for smuggling enterprises, because they can build trust within migrant communities and convince fellow countrymen of the quality and safety of a certain smuggler’s services. *Samasira* are generally based in Libya but may have connections to other intermediaries in countries of origin or transit. They often work with several smugglers at a time.

Middlemen – in my case people based in Tripoli or Al-Zawiya – bring migrants to the coastal cities. Every middleman has a smuggler he usually works with. I have an email account, which I use only to communicate with the African middlemen. For my personal safety, I frequently change my number.

Smuggler – Sabratha

Intermediaries recruiting migrants operate in different ways. According to interviews, one of the Eritrean *samasira* working for Ethiopian smuggler Ermias Ghermay used his job at the cafeteria of the Eritrean Embassy in Tripoli to “sell” boat passages. He was arrested in 2016 and has been held in the Triq Al-Sikka detention centre. Another Eritrean intermediary, whom an Altai researcher interviewed at the Triq Al-Sikka detention centre in November 2016,²⁶ said he was working as an intermediary for powerful Eritrean smuggler Aissa Kidani, sorting out logistics and coordinating with about 30 other individuals within the network. The intermediary explained that in most cases migrants were recruited before entering Libya, but that he also arranged boat passages for Eritreans who arrived in Tripoli on their

²⁴ “The Facebook Smugglers Selling the Dream of Europe”, BBC News, 13 May 2015, available at this [link](#).

²⁵ “قوارب الهجرة من ليبيا الى ايطاليا” Facebook page accessible at this [link](#) (accessed 8 June 2017).

²⁶ See *Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges*, Altai Consulting for UNHCR, 2017.

own. He only communicated with migrants and smugglers by phone, without having to personally approach people.

Some migrants, mostly those from Mali, Gambia and Nigeria, come individually from their home countries and get in touch with intermediaries in Niger. There are also intermediaries for migrants from Asia, mostly Bangladesh.

Ex-smuggler – Garabulli

The more organized Libyan smuggling groups are believed to have connections to individuals in countries of origin, of transit and destination. New trends have emerged over the past few years that illustrate the benefits of these transnational linkages. As detailed in Altai Consulting’s 2015 report for IOM, *“Rather than making the journey to Europe in stages, as it was the case before 2011, migrants started purchasing their journey from their country of origin all the way to Europe. This has been particularly prevalent among East African migrants and refugees, namely Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalians. There have also been reports of smugglers selling journeys to particular parts of Europe, not just Italy, for a higher price. Upon arrival in Italy, the migrant would be put in touch with someone in the smuggler’s network there who then facilitates the onward journey.”*²⁷

KIs interviewed for this study were generally convinced that smugglers have transnational linkages rather than merely communicating with other smugglers further south in Libya. A Coast Guard officer interviewed in Tajura, for instance, believed that: *“From the concentration of certain nationalities (Eritreans, Somalis) and the short duration of stay of the migrants in Libya, it is obvious that smugglers have linkages to international networks. This shows that they are organized.”* Italian prosecutors investigating on Ermias Ghermay have found that he maintains direct contacts with smugglers in Sub-Saharan Africa, allowing him to “buy loads” of migrants from other smugglers and thereby increase his profit.²⁸

Smugglers in the departure zones sometimes make deals between them to maximize efficiency. A smuggler working in Sabratha, for instance, explained: *“Sometimes I would get paid for the fill up of a bigger boat belonging to another smuggler.”*

Transportation and Accommodation

Some migrants are recruited in the coastal region, but most of those heading to Europe enter the smuggling circuit at an earlier stage – either in their countries of origin or in other transit and gathering areas. According to many KIs, most migrants who are captured at embarkation points have not been on Libyan territory for longer than a few weeks, suggesting that their trip is arranged from abroad.

Bani Walid has become the main Libyan transit hub, where routes from the south – Sebha and Kufra – converge and migrants are then “distributed” to departure zones along the coast. But other routes continue to be used as well, such as Sebha to Sabratha without passing through Bani Walid, via Shweirif, Mizda and Gharian. Most migrants enter Libya through the southern borders (from Niger, Algeria, Chad and Sudan). However, a small proportion also enters from Tunisia, usually avoiding the official border crossings of Ras Al-Jdir

“ All routes come from the South, mostly passing through Bani Walid, which is the biggest gathering area for migrants. There they have up to 4,000 people in a single hangar.”

DCIM official – Tripoli

²⁷ See *Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots*, Altai Consulting for IOM, 2015, page 97.

²⁸ See “On the Trail of African Migrant Smugglers”, Spiegel Online, 26 September 2016, available at this [link](#).

and Dhiba.²⁹ Migrants at the Choucha refugee camp in southern Tunisia near the Libyan border claimed that smugglers there offer transportation to the beaches in Sabratha for 400 euros.³⁰

Smugglers usually avoid the coastal road and main entry points to coastal towns, where they could run into checkpoints. Being stopped by one of the many security forces and brigades could mean arrest or having to pay more bribes. Instead, migrant transporters tend to take back roads and agricultural tracks, passing through scarcely inhabited areas and approaching the coastal zones from the south.

Migrants are usually accommodated in hangars on farms or in houses that are not on the coast but just south of the coastal towns. The farms used for accommodation may be rented, or owned by smugglers themselves. Renting appears to be a common practice because many KIs noted that local land and farm owners were profiting from the smuggling industry. Smugglers also use livestock and chicken farms, as well as industrial facilities that are abandoned or occupied by armed groups. For instance, a pharmaceutical company by the coast of Al-Maya is allegedly occupied by a militia and being used to gather migrants for boat departures.³¹

Figure 5: Migrants coming out of the back of the truck in which they had been hidden by smugglers to reach the coast from Bani Walid



When coming from the Bani Walid to the coast, migrants are usually transported on normal paved roads (as opposed to the tracks on which smugglers drive their pick-up trucks in the south of Libya). To avoid attention, smugglers often hide migrants in trucks or empty containers (see Figure 5 above). Some migrants also use regular taxis or mini-buses (so-called “Ivecos”).

²⁹ *Displacement Tracking Matrix - Libya's Migrant Report*, IOM, March-April 2017, available at this [link](#)

³⁰ “Holding Out for a Miracle”, *Zenith Magazine*, 22 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

³¹ According to Migrace Organisation, tweet (with map) available at this [link](#).

Sea Voyage

Until 2013, the sea voyage to Malta or Lampedusa would usually take between two to six days but sometimes up to ten days if the boat drifted at sea.³² According to a Zuwaran smuggler interviewed for this study, some boats would be able to reach Lampedusa in ten hours if departing from Zuwara, and 16 hours if departing from Tripoli.

But since the expansion of international sea rescue operations, smugglers have adapted their techniques. The objective is no longer to reach Maltese or Italian mainland or territorial waters, but merely to enter international waters and alert a rescue ship. In the first years after the revolution, “upper range” travel packages³³ would typically include large wooden boats, life jackets and navigation equipment (GPS device, satellite phone), as well as an experienced sailor.

Now, smugglers predominantly use inflatable rubber boats and provide no, or little, additional equipment. Smugglers have also reduced the quantities of fuel for the engines.³⁴ According to a February 2016 internal Operation Sophia report³⁵ covering the period June to December 2015, two-thirds of carriers used for migrant smuggling were rubber boats. The report states that wooden boats were more common west of Tripoli, while rubber boats were more common east of the capital.

“ We mostly use rubber boats with 40 horse power motors. The quality of the equipment keeps decreasing. It doesn’t really depend on how much the migrant pays, but on what is available on the market.”

Ex-smuggler – Zuwara

Since 2015, the overall use of wooden boats has declined, however, because, as the Operation Sophia report states, “Smugglers can no longer recover [wooden] smuggling vessels on the High seas, effectively rendering them a less economic option.”³⁶ According to a Zuwaran smuggler interviewed in September 2015, a wooden boat cost

around 10,000 dollars at the time.³⁷ In the past, smugglers would follow their better-quality boats into international waters and then recover them once migrants were rescued. But this has become dangerous for smugglers due to Operation Sophia vessels patrolling international waters to destroy migrant boats after rescue and intercept smugglers.³⁸ According to smugglers interviewed for this report, recovering boats is no longer done systematically.³⁹

This has further limited the availability of wooden boats for migrant departures. Local boat manufacturing is too visible, and smugglers have long been purchasing fishing boats in neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt and bringing them to Libya by sea, or using Libyan fishermen as intermediaries.

³² See *Mixed migration: Libya at the Crossroads*, Altai Consulting for UNHCR, 2013, page 112.

³³ One of the key tendencies in the smuggling industry post-2011 has been the differentiation of services depending on the customer’s financial means and origins. Syrian refugees and other Arab travellers would be sold “safer” journeys for an increased price, including a life jacket and a place on the upper deck of the vessel. Sub-Saharan migrants would be routinely accommodated in the lower decks where cases of asphyxiation were common and where they would be the first to drown if the boat went into distress. See *Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots*, Altai Consulting for IOM, 2015.

³⁴ *EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia: Six Monthly Report 22 June – 31 December 2015*, European External Action Service, 2015, available at this [link](#).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ “Inside Zuwara, the heart of Libya’s people-smuggling trade”, BBC, 4 September 2015, available at this [link](#).

³⁸ On April 2017, Operation Sophia reported having neutralized 422 boats since the start of the operation. See *EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia Factsheet*, European External Action Service, 2017, available at this [link](#).

³⁹ However, a recent video released by Channel 4 shows smuggler escorts waiting close by in a separate fishing boat, without trying to hide, for all migrants to be on board the NGO’s rescue ship before recovering the rubber dinghy they used. See “Are charities inadvertently encouraging migrant trade?”, Channel 4, 3 July 2017, at 4’45 minutes, available at this [link](#).

Hence, inflatable rubber boats have become the more available option. Moreover, they have the advantage of not requiring any depth to berth – they can be launched from any beach, in shallow water. The rubber boats are typically six to nine metres long and loaded with 100 to 200 people, well over capacity.⁴⁰

Rubber boats can be purchased in Libya, where they are legally imported in large quantities – as confirmed by an internal Operation Sophia report. It revealed that Maltese customs had stopped a container with a cargo of 20 packaged rubber boats destined for the port of Misrata, but eventually released it for having no legal basis for confiscation. Given the general lack of oversight of private-sector imports, rubber boat cargoes are likely very common.

Facing shortages and trying to reduce costs, smugglers have also tried to fabricate rubber boats locally. So far, this appears to have been unsuccessful. According to a former Zuwaran smuggler who used to operate in Sabratha: *“Last year some smugglers tried to make boats from zero. They bought big rolls of rubber from Egypt and glued them together here. The workers doing this were Egyptians, and it failed, of course.”* A Zuwara local resident added that the main difficulty for the fabricators was not the quality of the rubber, but the connection to the engine, which would detach itself from the rest of the boat when running.

Given the increased risk for smugglers to be arrested in international waters, **migrant boats are no longer steered by professional sailors but usually by migrants who receive some instructions from the boat expert.** In exchange, these migrants get a discount on their travel fare. Boats have been steered by “non-professionals” since 2014, one smuggler said. It can be presumed that the 109 smugglers that Operation Sophia reported having arrested since the start of the operation and handed over to Italian prosecutors are for the most part migrants and small level smugglers,⁴¹ who played a limited role in the smuggling network, if any.⁴²

To save costs, smugglers sometimes tow migrant boats that are not equipped with engines out to sea and then leave them to float. Smugglers also sometimes escort their migrant boats to protect them against extortion by rival smuggling groups, according to Operation Sophia information. Due to the EU patrols, the escorts now usually turn around when the boats reach international waters, or follow them at a greater distance, disguised as fishermen.⁴³

Migrants also risk having their engines stolen on sea by fishermen or so-called “engine fishers,” who then sell them back to smugglers. On 5 May 2017, the Zuwara Coast Guard pulled out three migrant boats they said had been launched from the Sabratha area but deviated from their course and arrived off the coast of Zuwara. One of the three boats had no engine as it had been stolen on sea. On another occasion, rescued migrants told one of our field researchers that a fisherman had approached their boat on sea after their engine broke, promising to tow them back to land if they handed over the engine.

⁴⁰ “Libyan Smugglers Import Rubber Boats from China”, Xchange Research on Migration, 19 February 2016, accessible at this [link](#).

⁴¹ People escorting migrant boats or sent out to recover the boat used after the rescue. See for instance the video “Are charities inadvertently encouraging migrant trade?” released on 3 July 2017 by Channel 4 and available at this [link](#). This video shows smuggler escorts waiting close by in a separate boat, without trying to hide, for all migrants to be on board the NGO’s rescue ship before recovering the rubber dinghy they used (at 4’45 minutes).

⁴² *EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia Factsheet*, European External Action Service, 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁴³ *EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia: Six Monthly Report 22 June – 31 December 2015*, European External Action Service, 2015, available at this [link](#).

Instead, the fisherman took off with the engine and left the migrants to their fate. Foreign rescue crews report that engine fishing has become a widespread practice.⁴⁴

As departing migrants are often not provided with a satellite phone, it can be smugglers themselves, or fishermen, who alert rescue vessels or the Italian coast guard of an approaching migrant boat. Reports of rescue groups receiving these alerts and being in direct contact with fishermen on the high seas has led to accusations of complicity between humanitarian actors and smugglers. In some cases, smugglers are said to have also informed the Libyan Coast Guard of departing ships. This could be to sabotage their rivals' operations, or to save one of their own boats in distress. One such incident was reported in May 2016 regarding a boat that left near Sabratha.⁴⁵

Smuggler Fees and Profits

The expansion of the smuggling business after the revolution and the change of actors has affected pricing and profits. According to a smuggler from Garabulli, *"Before 2011 there was less business and also less profit. I would earn 2,500 to 3,000 dinars for each trip [from Kufra to Tarhuna or Garabulli], transporting at least 50 migrants at a time in empty containers that I would collect from the port. I would pay about 1,000 dinars at the security checkpoints along the way."* Now, the same journey would be divided into several legs involving various actors from a same network and likely be more profitable for the transporters involved.

Overall, the **smugglers' pricing has become less standardized**. Today, **the price of a particular route or segment of the journey depends on the nationality of the migrant and the level of service he is willing to pay for**. The pricing of boat passages has been described as similar to a low-cost airline: the passenger pays a basic fare but all "extras" add substantial costs, including food and water rations, life jackets, the use of the satellite phone, etc.⁴⁶ In addition to the level of service, fees charged differ depending on the nationalities or ethnicities of migrants and the size of the group, according to smugglers interviewed.⁴⁷ Individuals who worked for smugglers (as house servants for instance) or managed to gather large groups of migrants might get a discounted or free ticket.⁴⁸ External factors, such as the season, the security context and what equipment is available at a given time also affect pricing. Finally, prices vary between smugglers, and the multiplicity of actors has made it more difficult for migrants to estimate the cost (if they travel in stages) and to compare costs between different service providers.

A smuggler from Zuwara who currently operates in Sabratha told the research team that the current price for a seat on a rubber boat was 1,500 dollars, but added that rates changed from one day to another. Meanwhile, a Gambian migrant interviewed at the Al-Zawiya detention centre said he paid smugglers in Al-Zawiya 1,000 dollars for the sea crossing in April 2017.

⁴⁴ "New Evidence Undermines EU Report Tying Refugee Rescue Group to Smugglers", The Intercept, 2 April 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁴⁵ "Sabratha People Traffickers Tipped Off Coastguard: Report", Libya Herald, 22 May 2016, available at this [link](#).

⁴⁶ "Confessions of a Human Trafficker Who Smuggled Desperate Migrants into Europe", The Daily Beast, 6 May 2014, available at this [link](#).

⁴⁷ A recent investigation into Algerians leaving by boat to Europe from the Libyan coast, for instance, showed that a Zuwaran smuggler (organising departures from the surroundings of Sabratha) chose to offer migrants from of Kabylie a discount, on the basis of their shared Amazigh origin. See "Enquête sur la plus grande filière de migrants clandestins au Maghreb", Middle East Eye, 1 July 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁴⁸ For more details on the fluctuation of prices, see *Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges*, Altai Consulting for UNHCR, 2017.

Generally, however, prices are reported to have fallen much lower. Interviewed in May, a former Zuwaran smuggler who until recently organised boat departures from Sabratha claimed: “*Last week I heard of ten Bangladeshi guys who got on a big boat for 3,000 Libyan dinars [360 dollars on the black market].⁴⁹ The old rates were between 2,000 and 3,000 dollars.*” On 17 June, the price for departure from Sabratha was reported to be 300 dollars for a seat on a rubber boat and 500 dollar on a wooden boat, excluding life jackets.⁵⁰ Syrian migrants who left from Sabratha in April 2017 told Italian investigators that they agreed to pay 3,300 Libyan dinars [400 dollars on the black market] per person for a small wooden boat carrying about 30 passengers.⁵¹ Some reports mention prices as low as 200 dollars or less.⁵² Another Gambian migrant interviewed in Sabratha (who had not attempted the sea crossing yet) said he believed the current price for a boat trip to be 1,500 Libyan dinars [180 dollars on the black market]. This low fare is corroborated by witness accounts quoted in several media reports. For instance, a Senegalese migrant, who went through four failed departure attempts from Libya in 2016 and 2017 and was stranded in southern Tunisia, said that he paid 1,500 Libyan dinars for a rubber boat from Sabratha in October 2016 and 800 Libyan dinars [100 dollars on the black market] on another occasion in May 2017.⁵³

Profits made by smugglers are irregular and vary greatly from an individual to another. The Zuwaran “manager” interviewed, who organises departures in Sabratha, said he currently made 80,000 dollars for each rubber boat departure, all costs deducted (his services include accommodating migrants prior to departure). This revenue is likely shared between the thirteen people he said he worked with. Meanwhile, the Zuwaran “boat expert” interviewed, who quit the business last year, said he made only 2,000 dinars per boat departure, likely the price he is paid to prepare and/or fix a boat. Smugglers who run cross-border networks further maximise their profits.

According to Italian prosecutors,⁵⁴ the Ethiopian smuggler Ermias Ghermay and his group would earn between 800,000 and 1 million dollars (before deducing costs) for each boat trip of 600 people back in 2015. Nowadays, rubber boats take around 100 migrants, reducing the profit per voyage. While material costs have decreased over the past two years (owing to smugglers using more rubber boats), bribes have certainly increased. In Sabratha, smugglers now pay up to 10,000 dollars per boat in protection money to local brigades, according to respondents. Smugglers based in the coastal areas also usually pay the intermediaries who refer migrants to them, and the transporters for the last segment of the journey.

Migrants pay smugglers or intermediaries in dollars or Libyan dinars – there is no overall rule regarding currency, but payment terms depend on the smuggler and at what stage the payment is made. Migrants pay either in cash or through informal transfer mechanisms (*hawala*). Given the financial crisis in Libya, receiving payments in dollars represents a significant advantage. Smugglers can multiply their earnings by trading dollars on the currency black market. For those who deal with intermediaries outside Libya, foreign bank accounts are important. Italian investigations have provided some insights into the logistical and financial aspects of running a smuggling network. In phone calls that were tapped and

⁴⁹ The indicative prices in dollars were converted using the black-market exchange rate on 12 June 2017 mentioned on <http://libyanbusiness.tv/table-currency/> (8.240 LYD = 1 USD).

⁵⁰ As reported by Migrace Organisation, see tweet at this [link](#).

⁵¹ “Catania, sbarco del 5 marzo: fermati due presunti scafisti libici”, *New Sicilia*, 9 march 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁵² See for instance “What Pricing Tells Us About the Nature of the Smuggling Business”, *Refugees Deeply*, 9 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁵³ “L’Épopée maudite de Yacouba, migrant sénégalais réduit plusieurs fois en esclavage en Libye”, *Le Monde*, 26 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁵⁴ “Suspected Human Trafficking Kingpin Extradited from Sudan to Italy”, *Reuters*, 8 June 2016, available at this [link](#).

later disclosed, Ermias Ghermay and one of his associates⁵⁵ argued that US and Canadian accounts were better than UAE accounts because “*There they don’t ask you where the money comes from.*”⁵⁶

3.1.3. EXPLOITATION OF MIGRANTS

Various KIs reported that the smuggling industry had become more ruthless over the past few years, and that migrants were more often exploited, robbed and abused. Extreme forms of “merchandising” of migrants and extortion by smugglers, which KIs said emerged over the past two years, have become a great risk.

Even before the revolution, migrants would often be singled out at checkpoints and have their money taken away, or be arrested and forced to pay a bail to be released. This still happens at migrant detention centres, as confirmed by numerous witness accounts, including a migrant interviewed for this report. Officials in charge of detention centres usually insist that detainees are not released, or only in exchange for an employer’s guarantee (see section 4.2.4 Migrant management).

An even greater problem is extortion by smugglers, often meaning that migrants are detained in “safe-houses” and forced to pay to be released or to be able to continue their journey. This often involves torture to pressure the migrants’ families at home to transfer the ransom. There are many other forms of mistreatment and exploitation in the smuggling industry, such as forced labour, rape and sexual exploitation, torture or beatings.⁵⁷

Generally speaking, **migrant smuggling in Libya is increasingly intertwined with human trafficking.** The two phenomena are often confused and need to be distinguished.⁵⁸ Smuggling takes place when a person facilitates the transportation, attempted transportation or illegal entry of someone into another country with the aim of making a profit.⁵⁹ While smuggling is a service that migrants consent to, trafficking involves exploitation and coercion.⁶⁰ Smuggling is, by definition, transnational, while human trafficking can occur within national boundaries. Usually, migrants start their journey voluntarily, choosing to use the services of smugglers, but end up in the hands of human traffickers. These may be

⁵⁵ Mered Medhanie, arrested in Sudan and extradited to Italy in 2016

⁵⁶ “Migrant Boat Disaster: Smuggler Known as ‘The General’ Laughed About Deaths on Crossing From Libya to Italy”, The Independent, 21 April 2015, available at this [link](#).

⁵⁷ A video that emerged in June 2017, for instance, shows 260 Somali and Ethiopian migrants locked up under extreme conditions in an undisclosed location in Libya. People speaking on the video say they are subject to physical torture and sexual abuse to force their families at home to pay ransom. One man on the video says he has been at this location for eleven months, with the captors breaking his teeth and hand to obtain 8,000 dollars. See “Facebook Video Circulates Showing 260 Somali and Ethiopian Migrants and Refugees Abused, Held Against Their Will by Gangs in Libya”, IOM, 15 June 2017. Statement available at this [link](#)

⁵⁸ Note that unless specified, the terms “smuggling” and “smugglers” have been used broadly to refer to both smugglers and traffickers in this report.

⁵⁹ The UN defines smuggling as “*The procurement in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.*” UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, Article 3(a), 2000.

⁶⁰ The UN defines trafficking in humans as follows: “*The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.*” UN Convention Against Organized Crime, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Article 3(a), 2000. According to the Trafficking Protocol quoted above, the notion of exploitation includes at a minimum “*The exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organ.*” The consent of a victim of trafficking to the intended exploitation is irrelevant when the means described in the Convention have been deployed. In the case of children, the “*Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation is considered trafficking even if it does not involve the means in paragraph (a).*”

smugglers who decide to exploit their “clients,” or gangs who kidnap migrants along the way.

Some KIs believed that the increasing level of brutality in the smuggling industry can be explained by the ever-growing inflow of people and smuggling actors getting accustomed to seeing human suffering and violence around them. Respondents also attributed the increasing violence to the multiplicity of actors, who they claimed included “*militias and ex-convicts*,” who “*use all means to make money*.” According to KIs, there had been some level of accountability when the industry was smaller, with smugglers wanting to keep a good reputation within the migrant community. The current chaotic nature of the smuggling scene makes it difficult for migrants to assess the danger of smuggling networks and routes. KIs in Zuwara claimed that some local smugglers had quit after witnessing how smugglers in Sabratha and Al-Zawiya dealt with migrants. According to a Zuwaran interviewed, “*People think that all smugglers are heartless people, but in reality, there are varying degrees of brutality*.”

Another argument put forward by respondents was that foreign intermediaries and smugglers also treat migrants poorly, because they are not subject to any form of social pressure. The use of extortion by foreign smuggling actors has been documented, for instance in “safe houses” run by Ermias Ghermay and his associates. In September 2016, Libyan security forces arrested three Bangladeshi nationals accused of bringing Bangladeshi migrants across the Egyptian and Tunisian border and using extortion methods. The accused had admitted to kidnapping 140 migrants to extort money from their families, and were facing trial in Libya.⁶¹

“*The constant inflow of migrants has had a big impact on smuggling hubs, where migrants are now treated as commodity.*”

CSO member – Sabratha

⁶¹ “القبض على شبكة من مهربي المهاجرين في ليبيا”, Afrigate news, 1 November 2016, available at this [link](#).

3.2. COMBATTING SMUGGLING

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The main security agencies mandated to combat irregular migration and smuggling are the Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM), the Passport Police Department (PPD), the Coast Guard, the Coast Security and the Border Guard.
- Due to the make-up of the current Libyan security apparatus, semi-official brigades and support forces affiliated with official bodies are often more active on the ground, at the expense of transparency and accountability.
- Chains of command between the headquarters of national security agencies and their local units tend to be weak, with local commanders often making independent decisions.
- Law enforcement is largely limited to arresting and detaining migrants and intermediaries. Little action is taken against high-level smugglers, who are generally well armed and protected by their tribes and allies.
- The DCIM operates mainly through its arrests & investigation units and a network of migrant detention centres; the general perception is that DCIM has little actual influence.
- The prosecution of smugglers takes place through the DCIM and the General Prosecutor's office, but standard procedures are often not followed and there is a backlog of trials.
- Maritime forces lack adequate equipment for surveillance, sea patrols and rescues, and some of their units have been accused of mistreatment of migrants and involvement in smuggling.

3.2.1. RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Entering the national territory without a visa, or assisting someone to do so, is criminalized in Libyan law. **There are several laws and decrees that regulate immigration, but no cohesive legal framework to cover the broader migrant smuggling and human trafficking phenomenon.**

The legislation commonly applied and referred to by Libyan officials is Law 6 of 1978 (On the Regulation of Aliens Entry, Residence and Exit in Libya) and Law 19 of 2010 (On Illegal Immigration). From the mid-2000 on, the former regime started to devise more specific mechanisms for dealing with irregular migrants, but these remained largely unimplemented. In 2008, the regime signed an agreement with Italy, which entailed the refoulement of migrant boats from international waters back to Libya.

At the time, Gaddafi's regime also temporarily heightened security measures and cracked down on smugglers, as well as separating the Interior Ministry's Passport Police Department (PPD) from the Department to Combat Illegal Migration. According to Libyan officials interviewed for this report, the role of the Passport Police is in theory limited to checking travellers' documentation at the official border posts, as well as arresting and detaining foreign nationals whose residence permit is either forged or expired. Although the PPD currently is a central actor in migrant management along the western coast, officials emphasized that its role is not supposed to be to deal with "transit migration" on a wider scale.

As per Law 6, foreigners with no valid residence permit are to leave the country or be deported.⁶² The individual may be detained until his/her departure. As voluntary return or deportation depend on whether the individual's country of origin has diplomatic representation in Libya and is willing to assist, the duration of his/her detention may be indefinite. An alternative to detention – reporting to authorities – is provided for in Law 6, but does not seem to have been applied.⁶³

Law 19 introduced punishments for both migrants and smugglers. Irregular migrants are defined as “*Anyone who enters or resides in Libya without a permit from the relevant authorities and with the intention of remaining in Libya or crossing to another country*” (article 1).

Acts of smuggling, as listed in article 2, are:

- bringing irregular migrants into the country, or taking them out,
- transporting – or facilitation transportation of – irregular migrants within the country knowing that they are in an irregular situation;
- accommodating irregular migrants, hiding them from the relevant authorities, or withholding information to allow them to remain in the country or leave it;
- providing travel papers or forged identities to irregular migrants;
- managing, helping or directing other people to carry out mentioned activities.

Irregular migrants face detention with either forced labour or a fine not exceeding 1,000 Libyan dinars, prior to being expelled. These punishments must be determined in court. According to DCIM officials interviewed, irregular migrants are not usually taken to court, so these provisions are not implemented.

Migrant smuggling (i.e. any of the acts listed in article 2 of the law) is punishable “*If committed with the intention of obtaining direct or indirect material or non-material benefits for oneself or another*” (article 4). Punishment depends on the degree of the smuggler's involvement in the industry and the gravity of his actions, such as if he caused physical harm or death of migrants.

Acts of smuggling are liable to a maximum prison term of one year and a fine ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 dinars. However, if the smuggler is part of an “*organized migrant smuggling gang*,” he faces a minimum of 5 years in prison (up to perpetual) and a fine between 15,000 and 30,000 dinars. The punishment is to be increased if the smuggler works at the land or sea borders. If the smuggler causes permanent disability, he must be fined between 20,000 and 50,000 dinars, and if his actions lead to the death of migrants his prison term shall be perpetual (article 5). Whoever intentionally obstructs law enforcement in this regard is punishable by no less than one year in prison and between 1,000 and 5,000 dinars. Employing irregular migrants is liable to a fine of not less than 1,000 dinars and not more than 3,000. Committing multiple offenses multiplies punishment.

According to DCIM officials spoken to, there are also provisions in criminal law that are invoked in dealing with migrant smugglers.

⁶² While the law states that irregular migrants must leave the country within 15 days, apprehended individuals are not in practice given this possibility but placed in detention right away, according to respondents.

⁶³ *Assessment of Priorities for the Development of Libya's Migration Policy: A Strategic Vision*, IOM and Eurasyllum, 2014, page 54, available at this [link](#).

3.2.2. LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM)

The DCIM, which is the primary state agency for combatting irregular migration and smuggling, was created per Decree 386 of June 2014 issued by the Interim Government. The decree turned what had been a department of the Interior Ministry since 2008 into an agency affiliated with the Interior Ministry and disposing of an independent budget. The DCIM's tasks, as lined out in the decree, include arresting migrants, placing them in detention centres and organizing their expulsion, as well as gathering information on smugglers and investigating their cases. The DCIM's work rests essentially on two pillars: the department for arrest and investigation (of smugglers) and the department for migrant detention centres. DCIM officers describe their agency as “*the second ring*” of defence after the border protection agency.

The DCIM is headquartered in Tripoli and currently works under the Interior Ministry of the Government of National Accord (GNA). The overall number of staff is approximately 8,000; 80% of whom are police and 20% civilian employees.⁶⁴ DCIM officers stated that they were considered judicial police officers. The DCIM has units in most departure municipalities but often their staff is drawn from local brigades. Its main arrest and investigation units are in Tajura and Triq Al-Sikka (Tripoli).

From around 2013, the DCIM began taking over detention centres that were previously held by brigades that were not part of official security bodies. These brigades were encouraged to integrate the DCIM⁶⁵ and most of them did, as the fight against irregular migration and smuggling had come to be seen as priority and was expected to attract substantial state funds. But four years later, the salaries of brigade staff integrated within the DCIM can barely be paid, the financial situation has deteriorated, and the momentum has died down.

“ Back in 2013 and 2014 all the brigades were eager to join in, but now only a handful of them remain within the DCIM.”

Local researcher – Tripoli

In fact, **many of the migrant detention centres are run by brigades but in the DCIM's name.** Yet at the detention facilities visited for this research, the directors and DCIM officers naturally describe their facility as DCIM-run. DCIM officials in Tripoli acknowledged that the affiliation with brigades, such as the Triq Al-Sikka brigade, poses some “*disciplinary problems.*”

The Triq Al-Sikka brigade joined the DCIM in April 2015. Specialized in investigations, it is considered the DCIM's main “*task force.*” At its base, located on Triq Al-Sikka (Sikka Road) in Tripoli, it also runs a small detention centre, where a number of smugglers and smuggling intermediaries are in provisional detention. According to one of the field researchers contributing to this report (who visited the facility on several occasions, most recently in early 2017), the brigade has been expanding its detention capacity over the past two years, building cells where it previously only had a large hangar. The facility is also taking part in a broader initiative to set up a national database for migrants.

In other areas, brigades have shut down their migrant detention centres for lack of funding.⁶⁶

Judging by the KIIs conducted for this report, the DCIM lacks visibility in much of northwest Libya. Most respondents described it as “*barely active*” or “*not really present*” in their town, sometimes attributing this to its lack of capacity or local security challenges. In Sabratha and Tajura, KIIs moreover added that

⁶⁴ EUBAM Libya Initial Mapping Report Executive Summary, internal EU document dated 25 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁶⁵ Members of the brigades would then be paid official salaries as DCIM staff.

⁶⁶ This was the case, for instance, of the Fallah detention centre run by the Burki brigade, which closed in 2016.

the DCIM had no role in the fight against smugglers but only dealt with migrants. Directors of DCIM-run detention centres in Surman and Al-Zawiya complained about the lack of follow up by the DCIM in Tripoli. Interviews suggested that the DCIM's cooperation with other national authorities is weak and lacks consistency, a point also made in other reports.⁶⁷

In Zuwara, the DCIM was not operating at all at the time of research. A Zuwara resident claimed that the agency was seen as “*corrupt from the top*” and was thus “*never activated*” there. There appear to be latent tensions between the Zuwaran Passport Police Department and the DCIM, due to the former feeling neglected in its efforts to deal with the migrant crisis (more on this in section 5.1 on Zuwara).

“*The DCIM is given more attention and allocated more funds, even though the PPD also deals with migrants. The DCIM uses its political leverage to intentionally marginalize the PPD.*”

Local researcher – Zuwara

DCIM officials interviewed admit that their ability to tackle smuggling is limited. Main reasons cited are a lack of equipment, budget and discipline, along with the security and political context.

The DCIM is weak in comparison to some of the smuggling gangs, such as the Al-Ammu Gang in Sabratha. The general security situation since 2014 is an obstacle too as the armed conflicts turned some areas into zones outside state control, including Sabratha and Bani Walid. The political divide has also affected the structure of the DCIM, splitting it into East and West. Some of the brigades that joined the DCIM lack discipline, such as the Triq Al-Sikka brigade.

DCIM official – Tripoli

Maritime and Coastal Law Enforcement

Libyan waters and shores are patrolled by the Coast Guard and Port Security Agency and the Coast Security Department. The two entities were merged in 2007 and again separated in 2014.⁶⁸

Coast Security (الإدارة العامة لأمن السواحل)

The Coast Security Department, also referred to as the General Administration for Coastal Security (GACS), is part of the Interior Ministry. Its zone of responsibility extends to Libyan territorial waters (within twelve nautical miles) and to a 30-kilometer-wide band of land along the coast.⁶⁹ It has law enforcement powers and is mandated to counter irregular migration and trafficking within this zone.

The Coast Security plans to establish its headquarters in Tripoli but is currently still based in Tajura.⁷⁰ It has ten operational regional sectors, which include Tripoli, Al-Zawiya and Sabratha, as well as 55 local stations along the Libyan coast. It is thus present in all departure zones covered in this report.

⁶⁷ EUBAM Libya Initial Mapping Report Executive Summary, internal EU document dated 25 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁶⁸ The restructuring is believed to have been linked – at least in part – to inter-agency rivalries and power struggles between government officials.

⁶⁹ Until 2012, its zone of responsibility was limited to up to three nautical miles off shore. In 2012, this was extended to up to twelve nautical miles. Relevant legislation: Decision 160 of 2008, Law 10 of 1992 on Security and Police; Cabinet Decree 145 of 2012 and Interior Ministry Decree 982 of 2012.

⁷⁰ EUBAM Libya Initial Mapping Report Executive Summary, internal EU document dated 25 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

According to a report by EUBAM, the Coast Security counts 3,675 staff members in total.⁷¹ They operate from very basic facilities and do not have adequate patrol and surveillance equipment (only 34 vehicles for all of Libya, no radar system, etc.).⁷² Sea patrols and rescues are rare and the vessels used are not designed for the purpose. On paper, the Coast Security has a fleet of eight coastal patrol vessels and coastal patrol boats (between 14 and 35 meters in length), which date to pre-revolution days and all require maintenance. One vessel is berthed in Tripoli, another one in Zuwara. The remaining six are currently in Tunisia for maintenance. A Coast Security official interviewed in Tajura claimed that they had not yet been delivered on purpose: “Coast Security decided to keep the boats in Tunisia for the time being, so that they cannot be misappropriated by other forces. But they will soon be put into use.” The official also claimed that the boat in Zuwara had been “seized by locals” and was not at the disposal of the Coast Security unit there.

In some locations, such as Zliten, the Coast Security has units specialized in counter-smuggling, but generally it seems to play a lesser role than the Coast Guard in this regard.⁷³

Coast Guard and Port Security Agency (جهاز حرس السواحل وامن المواني)⁷⁴

The Coast Guard is part of the Libyan Navy and depends on the Ministry of Defence.⁷⁵ It secures ports and monitors national waters, including territorial waters and the contiguous and economic zones beyond twelve nautical miles. Within this zone it is mandated to combat irregular migration and smuggling, as well as conducting search and rescue missions.⁷⁶

The Coast Guard is headquartered at the Navy premises, and operates from 50 stations in six sectors along the Libyan coastline, three of which are controlled by East Libyan authorities. The two sectors relevant for this report are the Western Sector and the Tripoli Sector. Coast Guard units are stationed at the ports of Zuwara, Mellitah, Al-Zawiya, and Tajura, as well as several positions in Tripoli (including Abu Sitta and Hamidiya). The main station west of Tripoli is the one at Al-Zawiya oil port and refinery. While there used to be a station in Garabulli, it does not seem to be operating at present. The Coast Guard’s reported total number of staff is 3,369.⁷⁷

“ State agencies are weak, especially the Coast Guard. We lack equipment, our boats are too small, we have no long-distance communication devices and we have had no training courses.”

Coast Guard official – Tajura

The Coast Guard accounts for at least half of migrant apprehensions overall (land and sea) and virtually all migrant apprehensions at sea (during rescue operations). Coast Guard officers interviewed in three locations – Zuwara, Al-Zawiya and Tajura – all confirmed that they carry out routine sea patrols and rescue operations, according to their capacities and weather conditions. They however regretted the lack of capacities and equipment. According to the Coast Guard officer interviewed in Al-

⁷¹ The breakup of this number being: 310 Commissioned Officers (Senior Management), 2,920 Non-Commissioned Officers (Petty Officers and Sailors) and 445 Civil Servants. See *EUBAM Libya Initial Mapping Report Executive Summary*, internal EU document dated 25 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁷² *EUBAM Libya Initial Mapping Report Executive Summary*, internal EU document dated 25 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁷³ The official Facebook page of the Coast Security’s counter-smuggling unit in Zliten is available at this [link](#).

⁷⁴ Official Facebook page available at this [link](#).

⁷⁵ The Coast Guard was established per Cabinet Decree 372 of 1996.

⁷⁶ *EUBAM Libya Initial Mapping Report Executive Summary*, internal EU document dated 25 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁷⁷ This includes 261 Commissioned Officers (Senior Management), 3,100 Non-Commissioned Officers (Petty Officers and Sailors) and 8 Civil Servants. Source: *EUBAM Libya Initial Mapping Report Executive Summary*, internal EU document dated 25 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

Zawiya, budget and equipment are insufficient and the management is weak: *“The Coast Guard has not seen any development for the past six years. In terms of equipment, we need weapons, vehicles, communication devices, and so on.”*

The equipment that is currently used is not adapted to extensive sea patrols or rescue operations. The Coast Guard in Tripoli has a small fleet of vessels that may be suitable for patrols but not for rescue missions, and that all require maintenance.⁷⁸ West of Tripoli, there is only one equipped speed boat (14 metres long), which is being used in Al-Zawiya.⁷⁹ The Coast Guard in Zuwara uses a 15-seat military scouting boat, which is designed to be used in conjunction with a larger vessel. The Coast Guard officer in Zuwara explained: *“This boat is not a rescue boat. It is only meant to go six to seven nautical miles off shore, but we go up to 20 miles off shore.”* Otherwise, Coast Guards use rubber dinghies (“zodiacs”) and small fibre glass boats (retrofitted fishing boats). All of these should not go further than five nautical miles from shore.

“ We have two rubber boats and patrol the sea almost daily, but sometimes bad weather conditions make this impossible. At sea, we are more in danger than the migrants, because our boats are smaller than theirs. Sometimes we nevertheless take the risk of going out 25 sea miles.”

Coast Guard official – Tajura

An additional four coastal patrol vessels (26.4 meters long and with a range of 770 nautical miles) were handed back to the Coast Guard in May 2017.⁸⁰ These boats belonged to Libya’s pre-revolutionary fleet, which was largely destroyed in NATO airstrikes in 2011.⁸¹ The four boats underwent maintenance in Italy as part of an agreement with the Libyan government. According to media reports in May 2017, the agreement entails the delivery of ten boats overall, with six yet to be provided.⁸² Initial positive reactions to the arrival of the four vessels were marred when one broke down on its way to Tripoli and it emerged that two others still had mechanical problems despite the maintenance. Coast Guards moreover complained that the vessels were old and had little space on deck for rescued migrants, Reuters reported.⁸³

Inter-agency cooperation

Due to repeated restructuring, the mandates of the Coast Guard and the Coast Security overlap. Their level of involvement is determined by locally available equipment and capacities. **The Coast Guard mostly takes the lead on sea patrols and rescue missions, while Coast Security operates essentially on land.** That being said, a Coast Security officer in Tajura told researchers that they do carry out patrols in that area. In Zuwara, the Coast Security unit does not have a fleet of its own and therefore borrows boats from fishermen.

⁷⁸ Pictures of the vessels of the Tripoli Coast Guard can be found online [here](#).

⁷⁹ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, available at this [link](#).

⁸⁰ The four vessels arrived in two batches, on May 4 and 14. Photos available on the Coast Guard’s official Facebook page [here](#) and [here](#).

⁸¹ According to the Coast Guard spokesman, NATO bombings in 2011 inflicted extensive damage to Libya’s naval fleet, destroying all of the Coast Guard’s patrol boats. After the revolution, Italy agreed to refurbish four patrol vessels and provide training to 87 Coast Guards. See “Embattled Libyan Coastguard Struggles to Stop Migrants”, Financial Times, 15 May 2015, available at this [link](#).

⁸² “Italy Tries to Bolster Libyan Coast Guard, Despite Humanitarian Concern”, Reuters, 15 May 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁸³ “EU Effort to Halt Migrants Founders in Libya’s Chaos”, Reuters, 26 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

According to EUBAM, the two entities have agreed on procedures relating to migration and hold regular coordination meetings, as well as setting up a joint operations room⁸⁴ Coordination with the DCIM, Passport Police and local Security Departments, on the other hand, seems to be somewhat haphazard. Some Coast Guard officials said they regularly exchanged information with other agencies, while others said that there was no meaningful coordination. Some were also dismissive of other security actors. *“The DCIM and police are not active at all. Nobody in Libya is making any anti-smuggling efforts except the Coast Guard”*, the Coast Guard official in Al-Zawiya said.

Institutional makeup

In terms of internal procedures, some officials interviewed thought that chains of command within the maritime security agencies exist only on paper or are purely for administrative and budgeting purposes. Beneath the few commissioned officers at each Coast Guard and Coast Security station, the crews mostly consist of revolutionary or post-revolutionary armed groups that were incorporated into the official structures. In Tripoli, for instance, the Nawasi brigade reportedly forms a Coast Guard unit. In some places, these armed groups remain a separate entity and are referred to as “support” (*isnad*) units, for instance the Coast Security Support Unit in Zuwara. In other places, their members have been enrolled as individuals, with or without formal training. As a result, Coast Guard or Security units tend to act with a large degree of autonomy with regards to their headquarters, according to several KIs. Coast Guard officers emphasized that they were following orders and that their capacity to act is restricted due to the problems at the national level. A member of the Coast Guard interviewed in Tajura stated: *“We are part of the army’s naval forces and we receive orders from Tripoli.”* The Zuwara Coast Guard official said, *“We exchange information with [the Coast Guard / MoD in] Tripoli and we are still under Tripoli bureaucratically speaking. But Tripoli has no budget because of the political stalemate and we are stalemated with them.”*

Capacity building

The Coast Guard and Coast Security have not implemented any significant training programs since 2011, and existing training facilities are not operational. The EUBAM report notes that over 3,000 Coast Security officers that were enrolled from local armed groups have not been trained at all.⁸⁵ Only the international community has delivered training, according to the report. It states that EUBAM organised several training courses on search and rescue, the treatment of migrants and maintenance during the first half of 2014.

The ongoing EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia training programmes were brought up in several interviews. In February 2017, a first batch of 89 trainees and their tutors completed a five-month training conducted aboard two EU navy ships. The training comprised various components from basic seamanship to more advanced specialist skills, including a substantial focus on human rights and international law.⁸⁶ The second package will be delivered throughout 2017 in a variety of locations in the Mediterranean area. Twenty Coast Guard and Navy officers are to receive training in areas including maritime legal aspects, human rights and raising gender awareness, as well as search and rescue operations.⁸⁷

The head of training at the Coast Security (based in Tajura) said that they currently had seven of their officers undergoing training in Tunisia on navigation skills and maintenance of equipment. According to

⁸⁴ EUBAM Libya Initial Mapping Report Executive Summary, internal EU document dated 25 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia Press Release from 7 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁸⁷ See EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia Press Release from 31 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

his information, 300 people would benefit from the EU-funded training in 2017 – 150 from Coast Security and 150 from Coast Guard.⁸⁸ The programme, he said, was divided into a one month and a half-long course in Italy, followed by one month in northern Tunisia. Trainees are dispatched in groups of 14 to 20, to form one crew for the future patrols.

Some KIs criticized the EU-funded training programme for its selection of trainees. The Coast Guard representative in Tajura, for instance, regretted that *“Until now none of our men has been trained. I know there are training courses with the Italians but they have not been extended to all Coast Guard units and I think the trainees are only from Tripoli.”* The commander of the Coast Guard in Zuwara allegedly turned down the invitation to attend a first training cycle because some of his colleagues had not been included.

Local CSOs and humanitarian organizations have also provided training on migration related issues to Coast Guard and Security officers in the departure municipalities. The Coast Guard officer in Zuwara said that Doctors Without Borders (MSF) had conducted a training on search and rescue and first aid in the city.

Passport Police Department

The PPD’s mandate is to arrest foreigners whose papers are forged or no longer valid. However, it does not consider itself to be in charge of the bulk of undocumented migrants who merely transit through Libyan territory.

A Zuwaran PPD official spoken to said that their role was *“To arrest and transfer to the district attorney any person holding counterfeit papers.”* This normally applies to migrants who have already spent some time in Libya – often Sudanese nationals, according to KIs. When documents are proven to be forged, the process is usually quick, with the document holder being trialled and expelled.

Other Relevant Security Bodies

Smuggling suspects are sometimes apprehended by brigades that are not affiliated with either Coast Guard or DCIM. For instance, the **Special Deterrence Force** in Tripoli has in the past arrested smugglers and is detaining individuals that were arrested by other forces in its Mitiga prison (for example, several smugglers arrested in Zuwara in 2016 were transferred to Mitiga). Zuwara is a special case altogether, because the DCIM does not operate there. Instead, a local force known as the Counter Crime Unit (or the Masked Men) carries out such tasks.

Generally, local brigades are well placed to either enforce the law or contribute to organized crime. Sometimes their role is ambiguous. Based in Tajura, the **Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade** – officially the First Division of the Interior Ministry’s Central Security Force – is sometimes said to deter smugglers from the coastal strip in controls, while others claim that the brigade is directly involved in smuggling. In Janzur, the brigade running the detention centre and the **Knights of Janzur Brigade** conduct smuggler arrests.

Some KIs were sceptical about the intention of brigades who claim to support anti-smuggling efforts. A member of the Red Crescent interviewed in Tripoli, for instance, believed that *“People have trust in state agencies but not in the militias that claim to be combatting smuggling.”*

Since the start of the year, authorities in Tripoli and across West Libya have been ramping up efforts to counter the flourishing fuel smuggling business. The entity spearheading these efforts is the **Fuel &**

⁸⁸ This figure does not match EU press releases; the accuracy of the information provided by the interviewee could not be verified.

Gas Crisis Committee, which is part of Brega Petroleum Marketing Company.⁸⁹ In January, the GNA Presidency Council instructed Coast Guard and Coast Security to stop and inspect all boats suspected of fuel smuggling and share information with prosecutors.⁹⁰ In April, the Libyan Navy and Air Force declared the start of a joint operation named “Mediterranean Storm” to support the Fuel & Gas Committee.⁹¹ Security forces across West Libya have joined the operation.

3.2.3. ANTI-SMUGGLING MEASURES

Until now, **law enforcement has been focused on migration management, with little action being taken against migrant smugglers.** Arrests of smuggling actors do occur occasionally, however, and there are procedures in place to transfer suspects to the relevant authorities and take them to court.

In principle, it is the DCIM that spearheads anti-smuggling efforts through the arrest and investigation of suspects. In practice, some of the more active “task forces” are brigades affiliated with the DCIM (Triq Al-Sikka) or non-affiliated (Special Deterrence Force).

The Coast Guard’s role in the fight against migrant smugglers is limited, given that high-level smugglers rarely expose themselves by going out to sea. Nevertheless, the Coast Guard in Al-Zawiya has on a few occasions intercepted members of smuggling groups who were accompanying migrant boats. KIs did not clarify whether any of these individuals were arrested or prosecuted. Since the start of the year, maritime forces have been focussing on fuel smuggling, intercepting unregistered oil tankers.⁹² But even rescue operations provide the Coast Guard with valuable information that can help DCIM and other security forces track down smugglers – for instance the location of boat departures and observations made (such as who steers the boat). The Coast Guard official interviewed in Zuwara said that his unit destroys the boats but hands the engines over to the PPD to open a case (although this is often impossible as the engine is already missing when the Coast Guard arrive). This is not only to reduce the number of engines available but also to track procurement. However, interviews suggested that it is unlikely that this is done in a systematic manner in all locations.

“Obstacles are essentially financial and military. Military actors lack equipment and are weak in comparison to the smugglers.”

Red Crescent staff – Tripoli

There is a legal framework for combatting smugglers, even if there are certainly gaps in the legislation and some provisions are not sufficiently clear. The human resources allocated to this mission (for DCIM and the judiciary) are not insignificant. But officials operate in a high-pressure and unsafe environment, where they can easily be manipulated and intimidated. As a result, influential players in the smuggling industry are largely unattainable and there is a prosecution backlog for suspects already under arrest, according to respondents. Overall, most **KIs expressed doubt regarding the capacity of the DCIM and other law enforcement agencies to act against smuggling.**

Arrests and Detention

The DCIM has an **Arrests and Investigation Department**, which **oversees arrests** and conducts a first investigation, questioning the suspect about collaborators and networks. According to DCIM officials, the “units” (or affiliates) that usually carry out these tasks are the ones in Tajura and Triq Al-

⁸⁹ See official Facebook page of the committee at this [link](#).

⁹⁰ “تهريب الوقود من ليبيا.. تجارة رانحة وأزمة إنسانية” Al-Ain, 28 March 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁹¹ “بدء عملية «عاصفة المتوسط» لمكافحة تهريب الوقود بالسواحل الليبية” Al-Wasat, 7 April 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁹² “Libya Captures Two Oil-Smuggling Tankers After Firefight”, Reuters, 28 April 2017, available at this [link](#).

Sikka, although **in some cases local brigades that are not affiliated with the DCIM also conduct arrests.**

Following arrest, suspects are placed in provisional detention. If they are arrested by a local brigade, they are usually transferred to a DCIM-run facility. In Janzur, for instance, a local brigade (Knights of Janzur) arrests smugglers but does not usually keep them for long.

We have our own department for arrests and investigations. When we arrest smugglers, we investigate them and then transfer their files to the special prosecutor for migration at the court complex in Tripoli. The smuggler is handed over to the DCIM, which keeps him until he is tried and transferred to one the judiciary prisons.

Head of detention centre – Janzur

The Triq Al-Sikka unit is currently detaining at least a dozen smugglers or smuggling intermediaries: four Libyans (from Zuwara and Garabulli), two Eritreans, and several Sudanese nationals. Other smugglers detained in the past have allegedly been released.

Sometimes, suspects are not transferred to the DCIM but to other security forces in Tripoli, such as the Special Deterrence Force and the General Security Force.

A number of small-scale Libyan smugglers and foreign *samasira* have been arrested over the past three years. Influential players, however, are mostly unattainable due to the leverage they have. As mentioned by a DCIM official interviewed in Tripoli, “Concerning high-level smugglers, the issue is very complex, because these people have more weapons and power than we do.” According to respondents, suspects occasionally manage to flee during arrests, especially in the case of foreign nationals caught steering a migrant boat. Additionally, KIs said that even minor smuggling intermediaries are sometimes freed by the smuggling group they work for.

“The judiciary’s security forces that are officially mandated to detain the smugglers are weak. Many prisons are outside state control.”

Public prosecutor – Tripoli

Prosecution

Since 2013, the **attorney general’s office has a special department for migration and human smuggling.** The standard procedure is as follows: once the DCIM’s arrests and investigation department has finished the investigation from its side, the suspect’s case is referred to the migration prosecutor at the attorney general’s office. The prosecutor then conducts his own investigation and finally refers the case to the judiciary for trial. The period that a suspect has already spent in provisional detention (in a DCIM facility or brigade base) is deducted from his jail sentence.

Once convicted, suspects are supposed to be transferred from the provisional detention facility they are held in to a regular prison under the authority of the judicial police. In practice, however, suspects usually remain in the provisional facility until they finish their sentence. According to DCIM officials and the prosecutor interviewed, regular prisons are considered unsafe because they are usually controlled by brigades rather than the judiciary police. The fear is that smugglers could obtain their release or escape by bribing or pressuring prison guards. It could be argued, however, that the convict is guarded by a brigade in both cases, and could just as easily escape from the provisional facility. The likely reasoning is that the brigade that arrests a smuggler has a greater stake in the fight against smuggling and is thus less likely to give in to outside pressure.

“There are cases in which smugglers manage to escape with the help of armed groups.”

Head of detention centre – Janzur

So far, only few trials have taken place and the sentences are usually mild. In most cases, suspects will have already spent a year or more in provisional detention by the time their trial takes place, and will only have another year or two to serve, according to respondents. This also means that smuggling suspects are rarely found guilty of aggravated smuggling charges, which can mean life imprisonment according to the law. According to KIs, many of the suspects prosecuted are Libyan nationals, but the investigations have shed light on the involvement of foreign smugglers, including individuals facing international arrest warrants.

Several KIs explained that **the judiciary is not capable of keeping up with the smuggler cases.** The Head of the Janzur detention centre, for instance, reported that “*Unfortunately, the judiciary is almost dysfunctional and the case files accumulate.*” The public prosecutor interviewed also elaborated on the extremely challenging working conditions.

Due to the difficult security situation, judicial bodies like the attorney general’s office, the judicial police and the courts all work only partially and intermittently. Judicial files are accumulating. The state has no authority as militias are in control. Under these circumstances, it is almost impossible for the judiciary to do its job. My colleagues at the migration department are in a particularly challenging position given the sensitivity of their cases. They are subject to pressure by parties that back the smugglers, including well-known security brigades. Some of my colleagues were pressured and threatened while investigating smuggler cases and ended up leaving the country out of fear.

Public prosecutor – Tripoli

3.3. MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The main security agencies mandated to combat irregular migration and smuggling are the Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM), the Passport Police Department (PPD), the Coast Guard, the Coast Security and the Border Guard.
- While largely shunning from measures to combat smugglers and traffickers, law enforcement agencies and local authorities focus on migration management.
- Migrants are captured during rescue operations at sea, at checkpoints, in raids on smuggler camps, and sometimes from their homes and workplaces (in the case of resident migrant workers).
- Most rescue operations at sea are carried out by the Coast Guard, whose Al-Zawiya unit plays the most active role west of Tripoli.
- Legal provisions (Law 19/2010) are not fully respected; migrants are detained and expelled by the DCIM without trial, or return voluntarily through IOM.
- Migrants are often shuffled between different centres and usually detained for months until they can be repatriated.
- Management of migrant detention centres varies: most are under DCIM authority but often run by or jointly with local armed groups; the PPD also runs temporary detention facilities where there are no DCIM centres; unofficial facilities run by local armed groups exist in parallel.
- Detention conditions are dire; the lack of oversight leads to some centres practicing purchased release and extortion.
- The “Release-for-work” programs that are implemented in some municipalities are in principle mutually beneficial but do not provide sufficient protection for migrant workers, as well as facing legal hurdles.

3.3.1. INTERCEPTION OF MIGRANT BOATS

Most KIs said they expected migrant arrivals to further increase this year, especially with the high season for boat departures (summer) starting. One of the main obstacles to efficient migration management in Libya is the lack of oversight and statistical data. Basic data of migrants is collected at disembarkation points (by the Coast Guard) and detention centres (by the DCIM, PPD or brigades) and in theory entered into the DCIM’s national database. In practice, however, there are substantial information gaps. A registration project launched by IOM together with the DCIM, was suspended in 2014 due to the escalation of the conflict and is only now being resumed.

Migrants are mostly arrested during rescue missions at sea, at checkpoints when entering towns along the coast, or in raids in residential areas. According to data provided by the DCIM for a 2014 IOM report,⁹³ most migrant apprehensions at the time were undertaken by the Coast Guard

⁹³ *Assessment of Priorities for the Development of Libya’s Migration Policy: A Strategic Vision*, IOM and Eurasyllum, 2014, page 56, available at this [link](#).

(some 50%), followed by the Ministry of Interior/police (25%) and militias (25%).⁹⁴ According to the DCIM (as quoted in the cited report), 37,881 apprehensions took place in 2013: 12,960 by the Ministry of Interior, and 24,921 by the Coast Guard and militias combined. Of these, some 900 migrants were subsequently released, while the remainder were returned to their country of origin.

The Coast Guard and Coast Security intercept migrant boats, sometimes before they are launched but usually when they are already in difficulties at sea. They are often alerted by fishermen and sometimes by the smugglers themselves. Coast Guard and Coast Security officials say they carry out routine patrols, but given their limited capacities it can be presumed that most rescue operations do not occur “by coincidence.”

“ Most of the time we are informed by fishermen [about migrant boats in distress].”

Coast Guard official – Zuwara

As of 30 April 2017, the Libyan Coast Guard had rescued/intercepted a total of 3,509 people in different locations along the Libyan coast since the start of the year, and local authorities had recovered 234 bodies.⁹⁵ Nearly 70% of the rescues occurred in Al-Zawiya, followed by Tripoli, Zuwara and Al-Khoms. In 2016, the Libyan Coast Guard rescued 14,332 people, 83% of which were intercepted off the coast of Al-Zawiya.⁹⁶ A total of 1,225 bodies were recovered during 2016. The disproportionately high number of sea rescues off Al-Zawiya is due to the fact that the local Coast Guard unit covers the wider area, intercepting boats that depart from surrounding locations such as Sabratha, Surman, Al-Mutrid and Al-Maya. Migrants are also disembarked at Mellitah port, where another Coast Guard unit is stationed, but this occurs much less frequently.⁹⁷

Some CSOs and humanitarian organisations provide medical assistance during rescue operations. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), through its partner International Medical Corps, is present at six disembarkation points (where boats are brought back to shore): Al-Zawiya, Tripoli (three locations), Tajura (Al-Hamidiya) and Al-Khums. At these disembarkation points, UNHCR provides medical and hygiene assistance.⁹⁸ So are the local Red Crescent branches. A Red Crescent member interviewed in Tripoli explained: *“We work with the Coast Guard on a permanent basis, especially during rescue operations. We provide medical assistance and medical check-ups immediately after rescue.”* The Red Crescent also coordinated with municipal authorities for the covering, identification and burial of dead migrants. Finding somewhere to bury the bodies is reportedly an issue. There is only one cemetery for unidentified bodies in the Sabratha and Al-Zawiya area and the public prosecutor and municipality of Sabratha do not allow migrants whose death has not been registered within the city borders to be buried there, according to CSO Migrace.⁹⁹

International organizations, human rights groups and rescue groups accuse the Coast Guard of mistreating migrants and, at times, endangering rescue operations. Human Rights Watch denounces *“Reckless conduct during recent rescue operations that endangered people being rescued in international waters.”*¹⁰⁰ Some of the alleged acts are documented – such as members of the Coast

⁹⁴ It is not clear where support forces affiliated with Ministry of Interior agencies fit into this classification.

⁹⁵ *Libya: Rescue at Sea, Monthly Update*, UNHCR, April 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁹⁶ *Libya: Rescue at Sea – Overview 2016*, UNHCR, January 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁹⁷ There is also a Coast Guard unit stationed at Mellitah port, but it is not very active. A total of 112 migrants were rescued off Mellitah and disembarked at the Mellitah Oil & Gas Complex on 16 June 2017, see [tweet](#) by a member of Migrace Organisation.

⁹⁸ *Libya: Rescue at Sea, Monthly Update*, UNHCR, April 2017, available at this [link](#).

⁹⁹ *Report on the Humanitarian Situation of Migrants in the Western Region*, Migrace Organization, 18 February 2017. The Facebook page of the organization is available at this [link](#).

¹⁰⁰ *EU: Shifting Rescue to Libya Risks Lives*, Human Rights Watch, 19 June 2017, available at this [link](#). See also Save the Children or Sea Watch statements [here](#) and [here](#).

Guard in Al-Zawiya hitting migrants with plastic tubes during a rescue operation.¹⁰¹ Migrants' witness accounts suggest that violence and intimidation are common practice during and after rescues.¹⁰² There have even been reports of coast guards boarding migrant boats to seize money and valuables from migrants prior to them being rescued by international actors.¹⁰³ Coast Guard officials have at times denied allegations of mistreatment¹⁰⁴ and at other times justified violence as a necessary means of crowd control. The Commander of the Al-Zawiya Coast Guard unit told Human Rights Watch that the use of force against migrants, such as beatings during rescue operations, was "*necessary to control the situation as you cannot communicate with them. Some can swim but others not.*"¹⁰⁵ On 17 August 2016, an MSF rescue vessel was directly shot at by the Libyan Coast Guard.¹⁰⁶ On 21 October 2016, the Coast Guard interrupted a rescue operation, cutting off a Sea Watch rescue vessel and thereby causing the drowning of 25 migrants, the German charity claims.¹⁰⁷ Some of these incidents appear to have been based on misunderstandings and misjudgements of the situation. On 26 May 2017, for instance, the Libyan Coast Guard reportedly shot at an Italian Coast Guard vessel in international waters, mistaking it for a migrant boat.¹⁰⁸ The Coast Guard also acts against any intrusion into Libyan territorial waters. On 11 September 2016, the Al-Zawiya Coast Guard unit arrested two German nationals working for NGO Sea-Eye, whose rescue boat had allegedly entered Libyan territorial waters.¹⁰⁹ The NGO, whose members were later released, subsequently claimed that their boat had been outside the 12-mile zone at the time of the interception.¹¹⁰

There have also been media investigations into claims that the Al-Zawiya Coast Guard is involved in the smuggling business (more information on this in the city-specific chapter). However, Coast Guard representatives repeatedly denied these allegations in the media.¹¹¹

3.3.2. DETENTION

When migrants are apprehended – at checkpoints, during raids, or during rescue operations – they are immediately transferred to a detention centre.

¹⁰¹ See "Video Shows Libyan Coastguard Whipping Rescued Migrants", *The Times*, 14 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁰² See for instance "Aid Workers Recount Libyan Coastguard Attacks on Refugee Rescue Boats as British Government Continues Support", *The Independent*, 18 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁰³ "Humanitarian Groups: Libya's Coast Guard Is Interfering With Migrant Rescues", PRI, 26 May 2017, available at this [link](#). See also video "Rescue Groups Accuse Libyan Coastguard of 'Endangering Lives'", Al Jazeera, 30 May 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁰⁴ "[The coast guard] dealt with the migrants in a very delicate way," Coast Guard spokesman Ayoub Qassem told PRI. Source: "Libya's Coast Guard is 'Endangering Lives' of Migrants Trying to Reach Europe", PRI, 24 May 2017, available online at this [link](#).

¹⁰⁵ *EU Shifting Rescue to Libya Risks Lives*, Human Rights Watch, 19 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁰⁶ A spokesperson for the Libyan navy claimed the MSF ship (the Bourbon Argos) was mistaken for an oil smuggling vessel, despite it being marked clearly with MSF banners, and accused its crew of failing to respond to calls. See "British Government Continues Support for Libyan Coastguard Despite Refugee 'Killings' and Attacks on Rescue Ships", *The Independent*, 18 January 2017, available at this [link](#), and "Aid Workers Recount Libyan Coastguard Attacks on Refugee Rescue Boats as British Government Continues Support", *The Independent*, 18 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁰⁷ "More Than 20 Refugees Feared Dead After Armed Men in 'Libyan Coastguard Vessel' Attack Migrant Boat During Rescue", *The Independent*, 21 October 2016, available at this [link](#).

¹⁰⁸ *EU Shifting Rescue to Libya Risks Lives*, Human Rights Watch, 19 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁰⁹ "Libyan Coast Guard Detains German Charity Rescue Boat", *Deutsche Welle*, 11 September 2016, available at this [link](#).

¹¹⁰ *What happened to the Speedy?*, Sea-Eye, available at this [link](#).

¹¹¹ See for instance "Can A Libyan Warlord Help Europe Solve the Migrant Crisis?", *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

There are over 30 detention centres across Libya to which UNHCR and its partner organisations have access,¹¹² as well as others that are run by brigades and not monitored. Some of the centres only open intermittently. The DCIM has 24 detention centres under its authority, **but not all are functional**. They hold between 4,000 to 7,000 detainees in total across Libya, with numbers varying significantly between centres.¹¹³ The PPD also holds migrants in some facilities, such as in Zuwara, where no DCIM-run centre exists.

The field research for the present report included visits to five **detention facilities currently functioning, in Zuwara, Surman, Al-Zawiya, Janzur and Tajura**. The centres in Surman, Al-Zawiya and Tajura are under DCIM authority, while the Janzur facility is managed by a local brigade (Knights of Janzur). The facility in Zuwara is often not described as a detention centre because it is merely a provisional facility run by the local PPD, and because migrants are meant to be transferred to DCIM-run centres from there. The former DCIM detention centre in **Sabratha (which is in fact near Mellitah) is no longer used. A centre in Garabulli was burned down last year in a scuffle between smugglers**.

“ Usually migrants stay in detention centres for long periods of time because there is no possibility to repatriate or transfer them to repatriation centres. Their respective embassies don't respond to our requests.”

Head of detention centre – Surman

Migrants detained in Surman and Al-Zawiya usually stay for a few weeks or months before they are transferred to DCIM-run centres in Tripoli or a centre in Gharian, which has more capacity and where migrants are gathered for return to their country of origin. Staff at the Surman detention centre confirmed that they transferred 500 migrants to Gharian over the past year. In the case of Zuwara, the duration of stay is even shorter because the PPD, which runs the centre, tries to immediately transfer migrants to DCIM-run facilities.

Migrants usually remain in detention for several months until their forced or voluntary return to their country of origin can be arranged. **Detention facilities are generally overcrowded, sanitation facilities are insufficient and there is no regular medical follow-up**. Detention centre staff also said that the DCIM does not, or barely, follow up with affairs at their facility. KIs – including detention centre staff themselves – described the detention conditions as dire. Detention centres usually hold men, women and children, although in a few places such as Surman, men and women are held in two separate centres.

“ We lack medical support – there is no on-site clinic and hospitals don't respond to our requests. We also lack of food supply, equipment, funds...”

Head of detention centre – Surman

Depending on the detention centre, irregular migrants can be released in the following cases:

a) Paperwork in order

Migrants who have a valid residency permit but no papers on them at the time of arrest can be released if someone can provide proof of ID for them. This presumably applies to very few cases.

b) Release-for-work

Some municipalities – namely Sabratha and Janzur – have systems for conditional release. Under this scheme, a migrant can be released provided that his identity is established and that an employer vouches for him. See chapter on economic implications and opportunities.

¹¹² UNHCR Libya – Detention centres where UNHCR and partners have access, UNHCR, April 2017, map available at this [link](#).

¹¹³ *Detained and Dehumanised: Report on Human Rights Abuses Against Migrants in Libya*, UNSMIL, December 2016, available at this [link](#).

c) On humanitarian grounds

Particularly vulnerable migrants have occasionally been released, upon request by UNHCR and IOM.¹¹⁴ This usually applies to refugees and asylum seekers from specific refugee-producing countries, unaccompanied minors, pregnant women and mothers with children. In such cases, the beneficiaries are accommodated in a safe-house until the return to their country of origin can be arranged, or their requests for resettlement are processed (in the case of refugees).

Respondents reported that numerous migrants say that they were **bought out of detention by smugglers**. Smugglers then have them transfer the boat fee, or work for free to earn their journey. A Senegalese migrant, for instance, told Le Monde newspaper that a middleman – Senegalese like him – paid 500 Libyan dinars (60 dollars) to have him released from an “official detention centre” in Al-Zawiya in late-2016.¹¹⁵

“*There is corruption at the detention centres and money is often paid to obtain release of migrants.*”

Security official – Sabratha

Sometimes migrants themselves are able to collect money for their release, and some have their employers pay for them, in the case of migrant workers. A migrant from Gambia interviewed at a detention centre in Al-Zawiya said that he had been detained four times in Libya, most recently in Zuwara, where he paid 700 Libyan dinars for his release. The other Gambian migrant interviewed said that his employer (manager of a metal workshop in Sabratha) paid 150 Libyan dinars per person for several of his migrant employees when they were repeatedly detained by “a militia in Sabratha.”

Officers at the detention centres visited denied that migrants under their guard were released or bailed out (to the exception of Janzur, where the detention centre officially allows this as part of its release-for-work scheme). Other KIs, however, spoke about this issue. A smuggler operating out of Sabratha, for instance, explained: “*Some smugglers bribe to get migrants out if they get caught. This is of course for migrants who were supposed to pay [the smuggler] when they are on the shore [about to board the boat] by making a call for the money to be transferred.*”

All detention facilities visited for this report allow access to humanitarian actors. Several international and local organizations assist migrants at detention facilities, mostly by carrying out medical check-ups, delivering food supplies and hygiene kits. The local organization that is most active in this field – based on interviews – is the Sheikh Taher Al-Zawi Charity Organization, also known as STACO¹¹⁶, which is one of IOM’s local implementing partners. STACO is also proposing a training program for detention centre staff.

International organisations and human rights groups have issued numerous reports on the mistreatment and exploitation of migrants in detention.¹¹⁷ Detention centre staff usually deny these accusations, cite a lack of budget and capacities, or justify incidents of violence as guards using legitimate defence against unruly inmates. Two of the detention centres visited by field researchers – Tajura and Triq Al-Sikka¹¹⁸ – used detained migrants to build their facilities, which is a form of forced labour.

¹¹⁴ In the last year and a half, UNHCR has been able to secure the release from Libyan detention facilities of more than 800 vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers. Source: UNHCR Press Release, “UNHCR Ramping up Its Humanitarian Response”, 21 May 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹¹⁵ “L’Épopée maudite de Yacouba, migrant sénégalais réduit plusieurs fois en esclavage en Libye”, Le Monde, 26 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹¹⁶ Facebook page of Sheikh Taher Al-Zawi Charity Organization / STACO available at this [link](#), website at this [link](#).

¹¹⁷ See for instance *Detained and Dehumanised: Report on Human Rights Abuses Against Migrants in Libya*, UNSMIL, December 2016, available at this [link](#).

¹¹⁸ The latter centre was not visited for this report but on previous occasions.

3.3.3. FORCED AND VOLUNTARY RETURNS

As explained above, Law 19 states that irregular migrants who are apprehended face fines and detention and must leave the country, but not before having been trialled first. In practice, however, **migrants are not taken to court unless they have forged paperwork or have committed a crime other than irregular entry into Libya**. Normally, migrants are therefore neither fined nor transferred to regular prisons.

Foreigners suffering from communicable diseases or carrying forged documents are usually given a formal deportation order (stamp on their passport) and expelled.¹¹⁹ All other returns, however, are assisted voluntary returns (for those who wish to return voluntarily to their country of origin or a third country where they have a permanent residence permit).¹²⁰

According to procedures, the DCIM contacts a migrant's embassy to establish his/her identity and obtain travel documents. This process normally takes several months. Migrants are not returned directly from the detention centres in the areas of disembarkation but from only a handful of centres in Tripoli, Gharian, and – at least previously – southern Libya.

“ Migrants are transferred to Tripoli. Then, their embassies come to facilitate their return. It was done by DCIM and lately IOM has been helping.”

Passport Police Department official – Zuwara

Migrants who cannot be returned, either because their identity could not be established or because their presumed countries of origin do not accept them, remain in the detention centres.¹²¹ According to DCIM officials only nationals of five countries, including Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan, are not returned to their country out of principle.

Returns are either organized by the Libyan authorities alone or, in the case of assisted voluntary returns, in cooperation with IOM. When their return is arranged by IOM, migrants must declare their consent. In the past, the DCIM organized frequent returns by road, hiring Libyan transportation companies to take the migrants to the southern borders and hand them over to border officials in neighbouring countries such as Niger.¹²² According to the DCIM, returns by road are still being conducted at present, but are little efficient.

DCIM officials spoken to for this research said that around 1,200 people are returned each month, in 5 to 6 separate operations. They did not specify whether this is by land or by plane. At the Surman detention centre, staff claimed that earlier in 2017, 50 migrants were returned to Nigeria and Cameroon “*in coordination with the Municipal Council.*”¹²³ These figures likely include voluntary returns through IOM. The DCIM is not entirely transparent on the issue of expulsions, and it is possible that legal provisions

“ Sending people back by land is not a viable mechanism because migrants escape even before the busses they are on reach their final destinations, and come back to Libya.”

DCIM official – Tripoli

¹¹⁹ *Assessment of Priorities for the Development of Libya's Migration Policy: A Strategic Vision*, IOM and Eurasyllum, 2014, page 56, available at this [link](#).

¹²⁰ See *Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration at a Glance*, IOM, 2015, available online at this [link](#).

¹²¹ *Assessment of Priorities for the Development of Libya's Migration Policy: A Strategic Vision*, IOM and Eurasyllum, 2014, page 57, available at this [link](#).

¹²² *Assessment of Priorities for the Development of Libya's Migration Policy: A Strategic Vision*, IOM and Eurasyllum, 2014, page 57, available at this [link](#). It is not clear whether the journey would end here, or whether the transportation companies would take migrants any further.

¹²³ It is unclear whether this involved IOM.

and procedures are not respected when people are expelled by land to the neighbouring countries.

3.3.4. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRANT CRISIS

Across the investigated cities, **migrants seem to be perceived primarily as either cheap labour or a nuisance**. Respondents usually made a distinction between those who come for work and those who merely transit on their way to Europe, although some KIs also noted that many of the working migrants eventually use their earnings to pay for the sea crossing. KIs generally acknowledged that foreign workforce plays an important role in the Libyan economy (see more on this below), but some argued that this should be managed through legal channels and that the massive inflow of irregular migrants is a burden on the country. They reported that residents in their cities are afraid of migrants transmitting diseases, and often associate migrants with drug abuse and prostitution. However, KIs also said that they still saw a great deal of compassion for migrants within their communities, especially after shipwrecks and bodies being washed up on shore.

According to respondents, Libyans in their areas generally think that detaining and expelling migrants to their countries of origin is legitimate and should be continued. Only very few KIs said that detention centres ought to be closed and migrants released. One interviewee argued that detention and expulsion was not only in the interest of the community, but also for the safety of migrants, as migrants who are on their own are frequently attacked by thugs and angry residents, and many of those who arrive to the coast with smugglers simply do not know where to find shelter. According to its official Facebook page, the Libyan Red Crescent occasionally finds migrants who live on the beaches or squat empty buildings, too afraid to look for food and work. Many other KIs spoke of widespread exploitation and abuse of migrants.

Migrants in Libya are generally in a bad situation, whether they are in detention or not. They face monetary and physical exploitation and a lot of abuses. This is due to the rise in numbers of migrants, the spread of smuggling networks and the general security situation. There are no ready-made solutions. Migration procedures must be codified, the country's need in terms of migrant labour must be defined and smuggling must be combatted by all security agencies.

Head of detention centre – Janzur

The migrant crisis is generally seen as a colossal problem that is impossible for national and local authorities to manage. A member of the Red Crescent, for instance, believed that: *“The DCIM does a lot but the number of migrants arriving every month is huge. It’s impossible for them to control the situation.”* Almost all KIs insisted that the only ways to durably reduce migrant flows were to monitor the southern borders, step up regional cooperation, and reinforce the capacity of security forces across the country.

3.4. ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The smuggling industry is significant in scale and benefits not only smugglers but also businesses that cater to them.
- Respondents however refuted the idea that smuggling is transforming economic structures.
- The financial crisis has increased the attractiveness of smuggling.
- Youth unemployment is a key factor fuelling organized crime and militarization.
- Respondents were not optimistic that smugglers could be lured with legal economic alternatives.
- There has been little effort over the past years to promote economic alternatives to smuggling in migrant departure zones.
- Cities of focus remain highly reliant on the public sector (administration, public companies), which is largely stalled and cannot absorb much new workforce.
- The coastal areas have largely untapped potential for industrial development and resource extraction. Major infrastructure projects are on hold due to the political and security situation.
- The private sector is centred around trade, with limited agricultural production and fishing.
- Technical professions and related training appear to have little appeal to youth.
- Respondents expressed scepticism regarding the employability of local residents, due to lack of skills and high expectations.
- Migrant labour is seen as essential to local economies and does not generally cause tensions with local job seekers.

3.4.1. IMPACT OF SMUGGLING ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Assessing what impact smuggling has on the economy overall and in specific locations is a complex task given the lack of statistical data and information on smuggling finances. A Zuwaran smuggler interviewed thought that “*Migrant smuggling accounts for 20% of the Libyan economy*”, but other KIs said that smuggling has not had a major impact on their local economy or transformed the economic structure. Yet, some KIs acknowledged that youth are generally drawn to smuggling and thus more likely to shun other jobs.

Many noted that **the benefits from smuggling extend to local businesses** that provide goods and services to smugglers (mainly transportation, food, water and fuel), as well as property and land owners who rent to smugglers. The smuggler from Zuwara mentioned above stressed that “*Most people are unhappy [about smuggling] but 40% benefit from it directly.*” However, the consensus was that smuggling money primarily goes to smugglers themselves and their families, while the community overall does not benefit significantly.

Smugglers often claim that they entered the business because they saw little alternatives.

I started during the Gaddafi era. There was no work. I was a university graduate without a job. I was skilled in the sea because I'm a fisherman and it [smuggling] was a natural road that presented itself. Before I started working with migrants I would take benzene [fuel] across the Tunisian border and bring back products like pasta and yogurt.

Ex-smuggler – Zuwara

An important aspect to point out is that Libya's liquidity crisis, which unfolded in 2014/2015, has made smuggling even more attractive. Smugglers have a colossal advantage over the vast majority of Libyans: easy access to cash and foreign currency. **The economic and financial situation therefore constitutes a push factor for people to engage in** irregular activities, in particular **migrant smuggling**. According to a Coast Guard official interviewed in Zuwara, *"The increase of smuggling and smugglers is not just because of the lack of legitimate business but also because honest people cannot get to their own money from the bank."*

3.4.2. IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY

It was generally acknowledged by respondents that **migrant labour is essential to local economies and could not be easily replaced**. The only argument against migrant labour brought forward in the interviews was that locally hired people who enter the country irregularly should be replaced by foreigners hired and brought to Libya through official channels.

Interviewees all agreed that **migrants are not perceived by the local community as competition on the job market**, as they are hired for jobs that Libyans are generally not willing to do.

Many migrants are employed by public companies (e.g. cleaning streets), but the private sector is also reliant on foreign labour, for instance in construction, metal workshops, car workshops and grocery stores. Many interviewees stated that migrant workers have technical skills that are not available locally, mentioning welding, building techniques and mechanics. Other advantages of migrant workers, according to interviewees, are *"dedication to work"*, *"obedience"*, or *"capacity and willingness to take on physically challenging work."* For KIs, Libyan employers often prefer to hire migrants rather than looking for a Libyan able to do the job. At the same time, there are also very few Libyans who are willing or able to work manual jobs.

Migrant workers are generally looked down upon by Libyans and often treated badly,¹²⁴ but respondents overwhelmingly said that migrants are *"welcome"* as long as they work hard and *"don't make any trouble."*

3.4.3. RELEASE FOR WORK SCHEMES

As mentioned in previous section, it is not uncommon for migrants to be bailed out of detention by employers (or smugglers). But only some detention centres have taken steps to formalize such arrangements. **In Sabratha and Janzur, detention centres have put in place a system for conditional release, in cooperation with their Municipal Councils.** Under this scheme, a migrant is released on the condition that his identity is established and that an employer vouches for him. Beneficiaries are given ID cards that in principle allow free movement in the respective town, provided that local brigades and police recognize these IDs.

¹²⁴ See for instance *Libya is Full of Cruelty: Stories of Abductions, Sexual Violence and Abuse from Migrants and Refugees*, Amnesty International, 2015, available online at this [link](#).

Sabratha

A local registration system to distinguish between different types of migrants/refugees¹²⁵ and to identify those with skills needed on the local job market has existed in the Sabratha area since 2013. It was introduced by local DCIM officer Colonel Bassem Al-Gharabli, who was the time managing a detention centre near Mellitah, west of Sabratha. Colonel Al-Gharabli spoke about the system at a December 2016 workshop on alternatives to detention, held under the auspices of the Mixed Migration Working Group (MMWG)¹²⁶ with support from the Danish Refugee Council, the International Detention Coalition and IOM. According to the workshop report:¹²⁷ *“Detainees are registered upon arrival to the centre and issued an electronic ID card regardless if they have a regular status in Libya or not. On the ID card their specific employment skills are stated and this information is also recorded by the detention centre management. When there is a request from a local employer to find workers for his/her company, factory or farm, the detainees with relevant skills are released upon finalization of an employment agreement between the detainee and the employer.”* It is not clear which centre the report is referring to, as the facility near Mellitah had already closed down in December 2016. According to Bassem Al-Gharabli, the system has been expanded to other detention centres in the area (Surman and Al-Zawiya), however this could not be verified. Outside detention, irregular migrants can theoretically register voluntarily to find a job, as the database is managed by the Municipal Council of Sabratha. There are reports that the number of people registered on the database has declined significantly over the past year, and that now the large majority of them are citizens of neighbouring countries (Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), whose work visas have expired.

The fieldwork for this report did not yield any additional information on the initiative, as all of the local stakeholders ruled out the possibility of migrants being released and did not mention the existence of “release for work” schemes, including interlocutors at the Surman and Al-Zawiya detention centres.

Janzur

In Janzur, the manager of the detention centre, who is from the Knights of Janzur Brigade, explained the release-for-work system put in place as follows: migrants arrested during rescues, at checkpoints and through raids on migrant residences and workplaces are registered once they arrive at the detention centre (1,500 migrants are currently registered according to him). Release for work is possible if certain conditions are met, the main ones being: a) the individual’s identity is confirmed and b) a Libyan vouches for him/her. In order to confirm their identity, migrants must either provide papers (passport, ID, birth certificate certified by their embassy) or request them from their embassy.¹²⁸ This release for work scheme is only supposed to apply to migrants who intend to remain in Libya as opposed to taking a boat to Europe. In practice, migrants who can benefit from the scheme are those who were arrested while living/working in coastal cities or at checkpoints. Migrants who were caught during a smuggling operation (while boarding a boat for instance) cannot be considered.

The detention centre staff creates individual files and gives the migrants who meet the conditions for release special ID cards that allow them to work in the area. Migrants who intended to go to Europe and who were caught during a smuggling operation, on the other hand, are put on another list for the

¹²⁵ Migrants/refugees are given IDs of different colours, depending on whether they have a valid passport, are required to leave the country within a certain time frame, or are to be deported immediately (such as in the case of contagious disease).

¹²⁶ Key members of the MMWG are: UNHCR, IOM, International Medical Corps (IMC), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Consiglio Italiano Per I Rifugiati (CIR).

¹²⁷ Report on the workshop “Alternatives to Detention in Libya,” 14-15 December 2016, available at this [link](#).

¹²⁸ On this aspect, the Janzur system seems to differ from the one implemented in Sabratha, where migrants without papers can also obtain a local ID.

purpose of expulsion or transfer to other collection centres.¹²⁹ A migrant who was given a card by the centre but is then captured trying to cross to Europe can no longer benefit from the system. His guarantor is also held responsible and “*will be prosecuted,*” according to the detention centre manager.

The system protects migrant workers in Janzur from arbitrary arrest, giving them “*almost legal status,*” according to the detention centre manager. He added that this is done in cooperation with the Municipal Council, but more importantly with the security agencies that work in the area. Now, the manager said, migrants are only arrested when they try to cross the sea or when they do not hold the centre’s ID cards. According to him, the system “*Helps with the registration of foreigners and migrant workers and prevents the abuse of migrants.*”

Based on the research it seems that the DCIM’s leadership is somewhat reluctant to endorse release-for-work because it is technically against the law to release migrants unless they have a valid work visa. Thus, the system could only be expanded to all DCIM-run or supervised centres if there was approval and pressure from the relevant ministries. The Janzur detention centre manager said that he presented his system to the DCIM for approval and implementation across the region, but that there had not been any response. Others confirmed the impression that the DCIM does not categorically object to the idea but is also not taking any steps towards implementation.

Release-for-work is in principle beneficial to all sides, but can only work if local armed groups respect it. The detention centre manager in Janzur claimed that all armed groups in the area respect the ID cards provided by the centre. This is not implausible, especially because the Knights of Janzur, which run the centre, are the most powerful brigade in the municipality. Whether this works in Sabratha, where there are more armed groups competing for power is a different question. A migrant from Gambia interviewed in a metal workshop of Sabratha described how he was held in a detention centre, released against a fee by his employer, then recaptured again from the same workplace: “*I was detained in Zawiya but my employer came and had me released by giving his guarantee and paying. An armed group came to the workshop taunting me, and then they took me to a detention place in Zawiya. The owner of the workshop paid 150 Libyan dinars per person for me and other migrant workers to get us out of detention.*”

The scheme can also easily be exploited. Employers can easily force migrants to work for free and threaten them to return them to detention if they do not obey. There have been reports of people abusing this system for forced labour.¹³⁰ The system requires oversight and follow-up in the form of a third party migrants could turn to in case of non-payment or abuse.

The December 2016 workshop on alternatives to detention mentioned above included discussions on how to expand and improve existing release-for-work schemes. Participants suggested that the idea be forwarded for review and wider implementation to relevant national authorities such as the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Health, noting that it could also benefit from technical support

¹²⁹ The head of the detention centre interviewed distinguished between migrants arrested while trying to cross the sea and migrants arrested in the city, at checkpoints and during patrols in certain neighbourhoods (which includes construction sites in Janzur, Serraj and Injila where migrants work).

¹³⁰ See for instance “A European Deal with Libya Could Leave Migrants Facing Beatings, Rape and Slavery”, The Washington Post, 25 April 2017, available at this [link](#). One 35-year-old Eritrean woman quoted in the press report tells that after months in detention at a centre near Sabratha (presumably Surman), she was released on the condition of working at a Libyan household for free, or – as the article puts it – “*Sold to a Libyan family as a house cleaner.*” The witness is quoted as saying “*I rose at 5 a.m. and worked until midnight [...] I had no pay. They beat me. The woman of the house complained that she had paid too much for me. So I shouldn’t be allowed to take breaks.*” Furthermore, this woman’s account supports the claim that migrants are traded as goods (see IOM’s Press Release from 11 April 2017, available at this [link](#)). The family that “bailed” her out of the detention centre later “sold” her on to another family.

and guidance by the international community.¹³¹ There has not been any external assessment of either of the two local initiatives so far, but partners of the MMWG working on the issue. It needs to be assessed whether there are any mechanisms for the protection of beneficiaries once they are employed, and whether Municipal Councils are following-up or willing to do so.

3.4.4. ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

Youth unemployment is a key factor fuelling organized crime and militarization. Areas and cities that are more developed and have more economic alternatives to offer seem to be less vulnerable to criminal activity. Young men are left with little options other than joining armed groups and criminal gangs, several KIs claimed. Creating more work and educational opportunities is key to reduce the attractiveness of fast money derived from smuggling and trafficking, and of empowerment derived from joining armed groups. Given the current political and economic context in Libya, however, neither the state nor the private sector can absorb much new workforce.

“*Misrata’s infrastructure made the city an economic power, so there are alternatives to irregular types of work. Moreover, Misrata has a firm grip on security, combatting smuggling and corruption or deviant behaviour.*”

DCIM official – Tripoli

A commonly quoted estimate for unemployment in the cities of focus is 30%,¹³² although several KIs noted that this does not mean that those who fall under this category do not work. One respondent explained, “*In Libya, you are considered unemployed if you don’t have a public sector job.*”

Generally speaking, the public sector employs up to 70% of the Libyan workforce.¹³³ Some interviewees therefore thought that opening up more public sector jobs could be a partial solution to the smuggling problem. Due to Libya’s economic and financial crisis, however, the public sector cannot currently absorb any significant amount of job seekers. Moreover, major state-owned companies in the coastal area, such as the oil and gas export and refining facilities, are ailing or not operating at all. Publicly financed infrastructure projects, such as the Zuwara port expansion (see chapter on Zuwara), would reinvigorate the job market, but are unlikely to resume in the near future. The current security and political environment is highly unfavourable to the execution of large-scale projects, especially if foreign companies are involved.

In the short term, only the private sector can offer opportunities. The conclusions from the field research are not very encouraging, however. The financial crisis and the prevailing instability heavily curtail private business and business creation.¹³⁴ Only few KIs said that they had noticed any recent emergence of small and medium-sized enterprises in their areas. Examples given were supply of construction materials and machinery, and transportation of consumer goods. Traditionally, coastal cities also have small-scale agricultural production and fishing.

¹³¹ Report on the workshop “Alternatives to Detention in Libya,” 14-15 December 2016, available at this [link](#).

¹³² “*Unofficial estimates indicate that unemployment affects at least 30% of the total working age population, being particularly high among the young where it shows a trend toward increase. Data from the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation suggest there are 290 000 unemployed jobseekers among the 400 000 registered jobseekers. When allowing for margins of errors in figures for the unemployed and the total labour market, this gives an estimated unemployment rate of 33% ± 6%, which closely reflects Libyan Central Bank data for 2012.*” Source: *Labour Market and Employment Policy in Libya*, European Training Foundation, 2014, page 8, available at this [link](#).

¹³³ *Labour Market and Employment Policy in Libya*, European Training Foundation, 2014, available at this [link](#).

¹³⁴ The main problem being that most people do not have access to money in order to invest. For existing businesses, it has become difficult to import any goods through legal channels because Libyan banks can no longer deliver payment guarantees.

KIs said they were not aware of any programs to promote private sector development. However, initiatives (state led and CSO-led) exist to promote the private sector and SME creation. For instance, the **National SME program, also known as Libya Enterprise**, which is under the Ministry of Economy.¹³⁵ The program includes workshops organized jointly with international organisations, business networks and NGOs such as OECD, Expertise France and Dutch NGO SPARK. Some of these activities have taken place in municipalities of focus for this study. In April, Libya Enterprise and OECD organized a consultative session at Al-Zawiya University with local stakeholders to discuss the implementation of a short-term program for private sector promotion.¹³⁶ Given the stated potential for agricultural development in the coastal areas, Libya Enterprises' Incubator for Agricultural and Livestock Technology might be an interesting interlocutor for future programming. The EU-funded program **SLEIDSE (Support to Libya for Economic Integration, Diversification and Sustainable Development)**¹³⁷, which is being implemented by Expertise France in all regions of Libya, aims at creating employment and livelihoods by supporting local entrepreneurship, with a special focus on youth and women. Its objectives include to improve access to finance in cooperation with Libyan institutions, and to strengthen the capacities of business support organizations, including Libya Enterprise. It also offers a platform for business development with free online courses.

KIs across the board **dismissed the idea that more technical vocational training could reduce unemployment in the short-term**. Unlike in southern Libya, where state-run technical training institutes are seen as a viable career path and alternative to university, such institutes do not seem to play any role in the coastal cities. In fact – KIs argued – few lines of work are perceived as attractive and suitable by local residents. For people who do not have the required credentials for public service administrative jobs or liberal professions, or are unable to find more qualified work, the preferred options were said to be transportation of people and goods and other types of commercial activities.¹³⁸ The long-term potential of vocational training however requires further study. Responses on this issue were likely simplistic because of KIs perceiving it as irrelevant to the smuggling problem.

“ There is not really any way to offer alternatives. Some smugglers make millions per year, what alternative can there be?”

Local academic – Sabratha

There was a consensus among all KIs that **offering smugglers economic alternatives would be difficult, given that no legitimate business is as lucrative**.

There are different motivations for smugglers to become involved in the business or remain involved. The tremendous profits are an obvious incentive, especially given the general lack of job opportunities and the deepening financial crisis in Libya since 2014. However, while smuggling evidently exerts a substantial financial attraction, this is not the only factor that determines a smuggler's decision to stay

¹³⁵ Libya Enterprise was originally set up in 2007 but underwent restructuring since. In 2011, the Program was transferred to the Ministry of the Economy, which in 2013 introduced new priorities, such as Islamic banking. The Program's declared objectives are: Cooperate with educational institutions and other relevant authorities to spread the culture of economic leadership and initiative; Establish a network of incubators and business centres, and other start-up support structures; Support entrepreneurs through training and technical and economic consulting; Link entrepreneurs to financial institutions and proposing new sources and mechanisms for project funding; Propose and develop relevant legislation; Train and rehabilitate national cadres working in the field of entrepreneurship and management of incubators and business centres; Provide material and moral incentives to encourage entrepreneurs, and award outstanding projects; Knowledge and technology transfer by connecting the academic world to the business world and seeking the experiences of other countries. Contacts and information on Libya Enterprise's activities can be found on its [website](#) and official [Facebook page](#).

¹³⁶ More information about this event can be found at this [link](#).

¹³⁷ SLEIDSE [website](#) and Facebook [page](#).

¹³⁸ Note that respondents were not taking into account professions that might be well perceived but require high levels of qualification (such as liberal professions) and therefore might not be accessible to the majority of smuggling actors.

or quit. Some smugglers believe that they are doing a good thing by helping people to migrate.¹³⁹ Others reportedly decide to quit for family reasons or because they no longer see the profit as being worth the risk. Hence, facilitating market entry to some industries or providing other business incentives might encourage some individuals to reconsider their line of work. A former smuggler interviewed in Zuwara, for instance, claimed: “*A good fishing boat fully equipped for high seas would be my dream. And, of course, a good market to sell the fish in.*”

¹³⁹ See *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Saviour*, Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano, 2016. However, it is worth noting that while the argument of doing a good deed was easier to defend in the past, the amount of human rights abuses that migrants now face in Libya at all stages of their journey makes it harder for smugglers to justify their actions. On human rights abuses against migrants, see *Detained and Dehumanised: Report on Human Rights Abuses Against Migrants in Libya*, UNSMIL, December 2016, available at this [link](#).

3.5. CIVIL SOCIETY MOBILIZATION AND SOCIAL PRESSURE

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Demonstrations and public information campaigns have taken place in some cities outside Zuwara, but with no tangible results.
- Tribal elders often speak out against smugglers in the main current cities of departure, but ultimately hold little sway against high-level smugglers and armed groups.
- Willingness to act against local smugglers is usually conditioned on reciprocity in neighbouring cities.
- Social control is nevertheless an important mechanism in the fight against smugglers and human traffickers (“*honour over money*”, religious discourse).
- It is necessary to tackle smuggling from several angles; punishments, economic incentives and social pressure not enough on their own.

Outside Zuwara, there has been no large-scale public mobilization against smugglers. Demonstrations have taken place in Sabratha and Al-Zawiya, for instance, but resulted in no further action according to KIs. In some cities, including Sabratha and Surman, tribal elders have gathered to discuss ways to stop the smugglers, but their willingness to step in is conditioned on reciprocity in neighbouring towns, and there has been no region-wide mobilization.

Existing CSOs focus on humanitarian work and workshops on migration management, although there have been some awareness-raising campaigns for the general public. **Generally, CSOs are not seen as playing a major role in the fight against smugglers.** However, KIs did mostly think that awareness-raising campaigns on the dangers of smuggling have a positive effect, especially on youth who are not yet firmly involved in armed groups and criminal gangs.

Social control is an important mechanism in the fight against smugglers that can be reinforced. Some believe that, if chances for redemption are given to smugglers, part of them will chose honour over money. In Sabratha and Al-Zawiya, several KIs emphasized the importance of using “*the language of religion*” to socially criminalize smuggling. In fact, some smugglers invoke religious *fatwas* to legitimize their business. In Sabratha, smuggling kingpin Al-Ammu made the effort of seeking religious approval in Saudi Arabia.

I insist on the idea of using religious discourse because most smuggling bosses rely on the fatwa of one Saudi sheikh who allowed human smuggling based on the idea that migration is halal since the prophet migrated from Mekka to Medina. Hence, they think that migrating and helping someone to migrate is legitimate.

Security official – Sabratha

Despite the evident brutality of the smuggling industry, social norms and reputation do count for Libyan smugglers, especially in conservative, tightly-knit communities. A civil society activist reported that “*In Zuwara, at one point a smuggler sent out a poorly equipped boat and all passengers drowned. It was his negligence that caused the accident and he was stigmatized in the community for this reason. People were calling him a monster and it damaged his business. I am convinced that social pressure can be used against smugglers all over Libya.*”

If the international community shows true commitment to develop affected communities, some smugglers will jump on the train. Pride and honour are powerful tools to fight crime. Smugglers will see a benefit in doing things that make them look good and raise their profile within their community.

Local researcher – Zuwara

For social control to happen, however, **community leaders must be convinced that their actions will be acknowledged and not be to the disadvantage of their community**. West Libyan towns are in competition with each other, and there is a widespread perception that a balance of power must be maintained to protect one's community in the context of the civil war. Smuggling of whichever type is a source of income that can be used to stock up on weapons and bolster local armed groups. Zuwaran stakeholders interviewed, for instance, argued that there is little incentive to act against local fuel smugglers if other towns along the coast continue the business, as this would tilt the balance to Zuwara's disadvantage. Respondents in Sabratha also said that local elders had convened meetings with smugglers to pressure them to curb their business, but that the willingness to practice restraint was tied to commitment from smugglers in neighbouring towns.

Sometimes smugglers decide by themselves to quit the business for social or moral reasons. While this may be relatively rare given the financial benefits, we did come across several examples. Two of the smugglers interviewed had quit, although one is not yet entirely disconnected from the business. The ex-smuggler met in Garabulli is a typical example of an "old-style" smuggler put off by the new actors and practices.

I decided to quit smuggling for an array of reasons. The main one was that I got married and had children and I didn't want to raise them with "haram" money. The second main reason was that I was subject to an assassination attempt. In 2013 one of the new smugglers refused to pay me the agreed upon fee and shot me. This convinced me that the work had become dangerous for people like me who don't belong to armed groups.

Ex-smuggler – Garabulli

We also asked other key informants whether they knew any smugglers who had chosen to take up a legitimate type of job. Most did not, or chose to say they did not know any smugglers, but a few KIs mentioned smugglers who now work in legal types of trade and transportation. A smuggler in Zuwara, for instance, reported "*I know a lot of ex-smugglers who turned legit. I work as a civil servant in the government. A lot of others changed to diesel smuggling. A lot of them bought trucks, bulldozers and some have normal shops, like supermarkets. But most just changed to subsidies trade, which is not legitimate.*"

The smuggling problem must be tackled from different angles, as neither economic incentives nor social pressure will likely be enough on their own. According to a former smuggler interviewed in Garabulli, "*To keep youth away from smuggling the first thing to do is to offer jobs, in particular government jobs. Youth must also be pulled out from armed groups and gangs. Lastly, youth must be made aware that smuggling is a crime by law and haram according to Sharia.*"

In the best-case scenario, sustainable projects implemented by local actors and supported by the international community could create a snowball effect and prompt smugglers to suspend their activities in exchange for employment and social promotion.

4. CASE STUDIES

4.1. ZUWARA

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In 2015, local stakeholders launched a campaign of arrests, local trials & civil mobilization.
- The crackdown was possible because of:
 - Local residents' anger about the negative impact of smuggling (dead bodies, rise of violence, fear of diseases, bad reputation of the city)
 - Efficient law enforcement
 - The relative cohesiveness of the local community (strong local identity)
 - A greater degree of self-reliance than other cities (in terms of governance, economy and security)
 - The active civil society
- The crackdown succeeded in stopping boat departures from Zuwara almost entirely to this day.
- However, it did not shatter smuggling networks, and many local smugglers relocated to other departure areas (Sabratha, mostly) or switched to fuel smuggling.
- Holding trials outside the judicial system caused problems with authorities in Tripoli.
- The local economy in Zuwara has potential (fishing, minerals extraction and trade for instance) but little has been done to develop it.
- Local authorities encourage private business and are trying to reactivate infrastructure and industrial projects.

4.1.1. POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONTEXT

Zuwara, whose population numbers around 55,000, differs from other coastal cities due to its **strong local identity and greater degree of self-reliance in political and economic terms**. As only coastal city with an Amazigh (Berber) majority, many of its inhabitants perceive themselves as being different to Arab Libyans. Local authorities seem to be more active and better respected than in many other Libyan cities. **There is an active civil society** in Zuwara and what appears to be a **relatively high level of civic awareness and engagement**. Residents demonstrated this in the April 2014 municipal elections (60% turnout, despite prior calls for boycott due to controversies regarding minority rights in the Constitution) as well as in the August 2015 election of

“Zuwara could theoretically be self-sufficient economically but other Libyans look at us with distrust; they don't want Amazigh people to have their say. There is latent racism between Zuwara and its Arab neighbours.”

Civil society activist – Zuwara

the Amazigh Supreme Council.¹⁴⁰ The latter elections were held in Zuwara and ten other municipalities with large Amazigh constituencies, and were organized without any financial or logistical support from the Libyan government at the time. In fact, the move was criticized by state authorities and many non-Amazigh Libyans for being a step in the direction of political secession. Calls for greater autonomy among the Amazigh community have not translated into any concrete steps, such as setting up a separate political power or territorial division, but many Libyans continue to view Amazigh politicians and activists with suspicion. The difficult relations between Libya's Amazigh and Arabs have built up resentment in Zuwara.

Security-wise, Zuwara is in a better position than the rest of the coastal areas, as **local security providers work together and face relatively little resistance from informal armed groups**. Most local security forces are part of state structures (Interior Ministry, Defence Ministry) and face the same problems as their counterparts in other parts of Libya, namely the lack of command structures, budget, equipment and follow-up. But there are also unaffiliated forces, like the Counter Crime Unit (CCU), whose contribution to security provision is described by locals as crucial.

The Counter Crime Unit (CCU) in Zuwara:

The CCU was founded in January 2013 by a group of volunteers to prevent their city from further descending into lawlessness. Their aim was to tackle petty crime, but they quickly became the leading intervention force that would later take on the migrant smugglers.

The group is also known as Special Intervention Force, Special Task Force and “The Masked Brigade” (*Al-Muqannain*) owing to the balaclavas its members wear during operations to protect themselves and their families from retaliation. Members of the group explained that people first perceived them as “*just another group of thugs*” but quickly began supporting them as they started arresting burglars and drug dealers, placing them in makeshift prisons or under house arrest (see [this Wall Street Journal article](#) for instance).

The CCU was endorsed by Zuwara's Municipal Council and, when local authorities decided to move against migrant smugglers, it was entrusted with the arrests. The group makes extensive use of social media to promote its image and interact with citizens (see the official Facebook page accessible at [this link](#)).

For a local brigade to have popular support is not a Zuwaran specificity in itself, since irregular brigades in other parts of Libya can play a positive role as well. But **Zuwaran brigades may be less prone to infighting, due to the community not being divided along tribal lines**. There are certainly disputes between individuals and families, but they do not seem to be as deeply entrenched as in other cities. Zuwara is also not divided into rival territories like Tripoli for example, and thus overall more cohesive.

Zuwaran forces are present in certain areas outside the city itself, including Abu Kammash (petrochemicals refinery) and the Ras Al-Jdir border crossing to Tunisia. Zuwaran rebel brigades integrated some of the security structures created after the revolution, such as the Border Guard. The Mellitah Complex – a major oil and gas facility run by a Libyan-Italian joint venture and departure point of a gas pipeline to Italy – was previously controlled by Zuwaran forces before it was taken over by the Dabbashi Brigade (Sabratha) in mid-2015.

¹⁴⁰ The Amazigh Supreme Council is an independent body representing the interests of the Libyan Amazigh community at the national level.

Zuwara has overall been less affected by the civil war than other coastal towns, with no armed confrontations taking place within the city. However, Zuwara has at various times since 2011 been in conflict with neighbouring villages Al-Jmeil, Rigdalin and Ziltan. At the outbreak of the civil war in the summer of 2014, Zuwaran decision-makers sided with the Libya Dawn coalition, and fought rival forces from Zintan that declared their support for Haftar's Operation Dignity. This was linked to rivalries between Amazigh towns and Zintan, but also to the head of the General National Congress (GNC), Nuri Busahmain – figurehead of the Libya Dawn coalition – who is from Zuwara and was able to mobilize support there. In a sign of escalation, Zintan deployed forces to the Zuwara area, while Zuwaran forces were present in Janzur and West Tripoli neighbourhoods. Fighting between Zintan and Zuwaran forces focused on the border zone, with border crossing Ras Al-Jdir repeatedly changing hands during this period. Zuwaran forces were also part of the National Mobile Force, a pro-Dawn group composed of fighters from across West Libya that was still present in the Tripoli area as of 2017.

As a result, Zuwara was bombed by Haftar aligned-forces on several occasions between December 2014 and March 2015, in an attempt to cut Libya Dawn's supply routes.¹⁴¹ But in the summer of 2015, Zuwara was one among several towns in West Libya that signed local ceasefire or reconciliation agreements to deescalate the conflict (with Al-Jmail, Rigdalin, Ziltan and Zintan). Zuwara's Municipal Council was also involved in the municipalities track of the peace talks led by United Nations (UN) and expressed its support for the GNA when the latter set foot in Tripoli in March 2016. Despite the continued political divide and persistent animosities between pro- and anti-LNA forces in West Libya, Zuwara has not been directly involved in any armed conflict since 2015.

However, the region can hardly be described as pacified, and Zuwarans continue to perceive neighbouring towns as a potential threat. This lack of trust has led many to believe that a certain balance of power must be maintained at all cost, even if this requires condoning illegal sources of income, such as fuel smuggling.

In terms of intra-community relations, there are also tensions under the surface. Local authorities and civil society groups have faced pressure and intimidation attempts by local "lobby groups." Two recent events are telling in this respect:

On April 7, the office of Zuwaran CSO Atwellol Movement was set on fire, presumably by individuals who oppose the group's liberal outlook and social activities. Atwellol promotes Amazigh culture and civic awareness and had over the past months organized numerous theatre and music performances with local youth. Conservatives criticize the mixing of sexes in these events and the addressing of social issues. KIs in Zuwara say there is an increasingly tangible Salafi trend in their city, which causes concern amongst some residents.

On May 3, the Coast Guard headquarters at Zuwara's commercial port were ransacked and set on fire, apparently in retaliation against Coast Guards intercepting an irregular fuel shipment departing from Zuwara a few days earlier.¹⁴² While smugglers have ceded to the pressure of their community on the issue of smuggling migrants, fuel smuggling flourishes. The incident suggests that **the fuel smuggling lobby is willing to use force to defend their interests.**

¹⁴¹ On 2 December 2014, Operation Dignity struck a food supply storage area, a fishing port, and a chemical factory, killing eight and wounding twenty-four in Zuwara (see Libya Herald articles "Airstrikes on Zuwarah Leave at Least Four Dead", available at this [link](#) and "Another LNA Raid on Zuwara: Report" available at this [link](#))

¹⁴² See for instance the press article from 7 May 2017 in Youm7, available at this [link](#).

4.1.2. LOCAL SMUGGLING INDUSTRY

Pre-Crackdown

Zuwara had been a hub for smuggling of all sorts since the 1990s, when international sanctions caused shortages of consumer goods and spurred informal cross border trade. The city's proximity to the border and access to the sea facilitated the establishment of smuggling networks. Two Zuwaran smugglers were interviewed for this report; one started in the business in 1998 and the other in 2004. Based on their account, smuggling was both a *"natural choice"* and *"easy."*

Before large-scale rescue operations on the Mediterranean began in 2013, Zuwara had the comparative advantage of being closer to Lampedusa than other coastal towns. Often, migrant boats would depart from the largely uninhabited area of Abu Kammash, east of Zuwara. Media and research reports until 2015 describe an environment of impunity, where a multitude of smuggling actors – from university drop-outs to established businessmen – would go about their business with little objection by local officials and security forces.¹⁴³ According to these reports, migrant smuggling would often go hand in hand with the smuggling of fuel, drugs and even weapons.

“Zuwara is the closest [city of departure] to Lampedusa. A boat only needs ten hours to reach Lampedusa from Zuwara, while from Tripoli it takes 16 hours.”

Smuggler – Zuwara

KIs estimated that **by 2015, there were 500 to 1,000 smugglers operating in and around Zuwara**, organized in around 50 different groups. A member of the CCU, for instance, estimated the number of people involved in smuggling prior to the crackdown to have been around 1,000, *"If we count from A to Z, including the person who would rent his house for example."* Respondents explained that there were highly professional actors (mostly from the "old generation" who entered the business in the 1990s and 2000s) but also many amateurs, who would operate distinctly.

The real professionals had the numbers of all military rescue missions and the Red Cross and they would give them to the captain with the Thuraya phone, the GPS and everything. They would get the people to Italy with almost the same accuracy as a plane. They had contacts in Turkey, Sudan, Nigeria... All over the world, basically.

CCU member – Zuwara

One of the Zuwaran smugglers interviewed worked in a team of thirteen people, who he said he knew from Zuwara, where *"We all know each other."* Many smugglers were also known to the community. According to the CCU representative interviewed, *"The big bosses were known but the little guys were not."*

KIs emphasized that the smuggling industry in Zuwara differed from other towns, in that it was less entwined with the local security structure and not linked to any specific social group. They pointed out that militias were not involved in the business like they are in other cities today, and that the structure of smuggling groups remained quite open and flexible, meaning that some individuals would work in different groups. According to a member of the CCU, *"The system here in Zuwara was different from what is happening now in the*

“Smuggling is mainly controlled by militias in the other towns now – whereas in Zuwara it was individuals.”

CSO member – Zuwara

¹⁴³ See for instance: *Illicit Trafficking and Libya's Transition: Profits and Losses*, USIP, 24 February 2014, available at this [link](#) or "Libya's People Smugglers: Inside the Trade that Sells Refugees Hopes of a Better Life", *The Guardian*, 24 April 2015, available at this [link](#).

other cities. In Zuwara, it was individuals working to make money. Now, political actors and militias are the ones controlling the smuggling and there is rivalry, of course. In Zuwara, a skilled boat driver would work with a group one day and with another group the day after. Or the big bosses would work together one day and not the day after. There was never a strong rivalry because they were no militias or political backing. Now we have heard reports that there might even be an infiltration of terrorist groups in the business.” Other KIs also thought that the smuggling industry pre-2016 was more cooperative than adversarial, with smugglers having “strong relations and collaborating” because “everybody could get a piece of the cake.”

If the smuggling industry in Zuwara was relatively little entwined with the local security structure, it was nevertheless deeply entrenched in the community. Media investigations into the Zuwaran smuggling scene prior to the crackdown suggested direct linkages with the legitimate local business community.¹⁴⁴ High-level smugglers were said to include senior members of the community, although evidence of this is scarce.

In September 2015, Libyan media reported the killing of a Zuwaran smuggler, Mohamed Salaheddin Al-Maskhut, described as “the country’s biggest people smuggler”, shot dead in Tripoli.¹⁴⁵ GNC president Nuri Abusahmain publicly said that Italian special forces had been involved in the operation, a claim the Italian government swiftly denied.¹⁴⁶ Al-Maskhut was said to have been a navy officer until 2009. His family reportedly had great influence in the area around the Mellitah oil and gas complex. However, the man believed to be the victim of the shooting spoke out to deny the reports, saying he was alive and had never been involved in migrant smuggling, but was in fact an employee at the Mechanical and Electrical Industries Company in Zuwara.¹⁴⁷ He later gave a detailed interview to clear his reputation.¹⁴⁸ Confusion persisted: it seemed that a Zuwaran smuggler had indeed been shot, but that names had been mixed up. Some claimed that there was indeed a Zuwaran man called Al-Maskhut, who was wanted in Italy on charges of human trafficking.¹⁴⁹ These reports, while unconfirmed, put Zuwara even further in the spotlight.

Post-Crackdown

The 2015 crackdown crushed Zuwara’s migrant smuggling industry and largely ended boat departures from the city and its immediate surroundings. According to Zuwaran KIs, only very few people have tried to “break the rules,” such as three smugglers who were detained in early 2016. It is rumoured that boats still occasionally depart from beaches in the wider area of Zuwara (possibly Abu Kammash), but this appears to be rare and could not be verified. The CCU has on at least two occasions (in November and December 2016) foiled boat departures near Zuwara (see more details below).

¹⁴⁴ For instance, an October 2015 article alleged that the “king of smuggling” (mainly specialized in fuel), Fahmi Slim Mousa Ben Khalifa, was also the director and shareholder of a Maltese trading company (“Why Does EU tolerate Libya’s Smuggler Kingpin as Migrants Drown?”, Asia Times, 16 October 2015, available at this [link](#)). Fahmi Slim refuted these allegations, telling Maltese media that he had “no links whatsoever with the smuggling of humans, arms or diesel” and threatening to launch legal proceedings (“Libyan Businessman Denies Links with Human Traffickers”, The Malta Independent, 14 November 2015, available at this [link](#)).

¹⁴⁵ See “Major Zuwara Human Trafficker Shot Dead in Tripoli”, Libya Herald, 25 September 2015, available at this [link](#).

¹⁴⁶ See “People Smuggler Who Transferred Thousands to Europe Killed in Shootout”, The Guardian, 26 September 2015, available at this [link](#).

¹⁴⁷ See “Salah Maskhout not Killed in Tripoli Attack; Identity Mix-up Blamed”, Libya Herald, 26 September 2015, available at this [link](#).

¹⁴⁸ See “Incidents Were Fabricated”, Correspondents.org, 9 October 2015, available at this [link](#).

¹⁴⁹ See “Did Italy Just Assassinate Libya’s Migrant Smuggling Kingpin?”, The Daily Beast, 26 September 2015, available at this [link](#).

Some smugglers however relocated their operations to other migrant hotspots along the coast, mostly to Sabratha. This applies to both Zuwaran smugglers interviewed for this report. There, they were able to operate more discreetly, as they were not known to the local community. The downside was the greater competition and having to abide by the rules of smugglers and armed groups anchored in Sabratha. Respondents also spoke of the higher level of violence in Sabratha and Al-Zawiya that apparently discouraged some Zuwaran smugglers. Operating from other areas does not necessarily imply that the smugglers themselves moved out of Zuwara. One of the smugglers interviewed claimed he did not need to leave Zuwara at all. Some smugglers continue working from Zuwara as coordinators or middlemen for Sabrathan groups.¹⁵⁰

“ My operations shrunk a little [over the past year] because there is a militia in Sabratha that offers the same service and I have to pay them to operate there.”

Smuggler – Sabratha

According to KIs, **the majority of migrant smugglers switched to smuggling fuel or subsidized food items**, mainly across the Tunisian border. A smuggler interviewed pointed out that “Zuwara’s role has changed. Now it is a fuel smuggling hub.”

Some also left the smuggling business, including one of the smugglers interviewed. Another smuggler, who spoke to several media outlets in 2015 later claimed on his personal FB account – which he had been using to advertise his services to migrants – that he had quit the smuggling business (although he could be smuggling fuel now).¹⁵¹

In the aftermath of the crackdown, there were reports of tensions and “turf wars” between smuggling groups, owing mainly to Zuwaran actors trying to gain a foothold in other departure zones. “[The crackdown] has created some tension that requires some adjustment. We may see a bit more disruption over the coming months. However, the situation seems to have settled down now,” a Sabratha source told Migrant Report at the start of 2016.¹⁵²

Zuwaran fuel smugglers also defend their territory and routes against rivals from other towns. In July 2016, a brigade from Al-Zawiya (Jamal Al-Ghaib) attempted to evict Zuwaran forces from Ras Al-Jdir border crossing, accusing the latter of complicity in cross-border smuggling.¹⁵³

4.1.3. CRACKDOWN ON MIGRANT SMUGGLING

Public Mobilization

The expansion of the local smuggling industry post-2011 and its increasingly visible impact gradually became a source of concern for Zuwarans. Smuggling had been going on for years, but by 2013-2014 it was hard for anyone to ignore. Bodies would wash up on the beach, terrifying local families.¹⁵⁴ Increasing media coverage highlighted the suffering of migrants. In its early days, smuggling had sometimes been perceived as a subtle form of self-assertion and resistance against regime oppression.

¹⁵⁰ Syrian refugees rescued in March 2017 spoke of a Zuwaran middleman who referred them to a group in Sabratha. “Catania, sbarco del 5 marzo: fermati due presunti scafisti libici”, New Sicilia, 9 march 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁵¹ His public Facebook account can be accessed at this [link](#).

¹⁵² See “Libyan Smugglers Import Rubber Boats from China”, Xchange Research on Migration, 19 February 2016 available at this [link](#).

¹⁵³ See “Tunisia-Libya Crossing Closed in Border Takeover Bid by Zawia Militia”, Libya Herald, 25 July 2016, available at this [link](#).

¹⁵⁴ According to a member of Zuwara’s Elders Council, “[What motivated people to mobilize against smugglers] was finding all the bodies on the beach. The sea is very important to Zuwara residents for fishing and vacationing on the beach.”

Now, it had become a source of shame. Many regretted the bad reputation smugglers had brought upon Zuwara and its inhabitants.¹⁵⁵

Also of concern were the potential repercussions of the migrant inflow on public health, reinforced by the outbreak of the 2013-2015 Ebola virus epidemic in West Africa. According to a Municipal Council member, “Some of the Africans had illnesses, and the bodies washed up on shore were affecting the fishing.”

“ [Our decision to mobilize against smugglers] was mostly patriotic. We didn’t want Zuwara to be seen as such an inhumane place.”

CCU member – Zuwara

Other KIs emphasized more ethical considerations. Indicative of the general state of mind in the city after a series of shipwrecks in 2015, a Zuwara resident told Libya Herald: “We are all responsible for the blood of the victims. Everybody here in Zuwara shares in this. People are renting rooms to the migrants, shop owners are selling stuff to them and taxi drivers are taking them to the places of the deadly boats. Everybody knows they are going to get on the boats.”¹⁵⁶

It was the deaths at sea of course [that motivated the campaign]. These people were being killed. It was not like before when the smugglers were actually trying to get them [to Europe]. We could not accept that people were making money of people in need, and at the same time not even giving them what they promised.

CSO member – Zuwara

A massive shipwreck in the summer of 2014 provoked a first wave of demonstrations. Local CSOs, such as Atwellol Movement¹⁵⁷ and Azref Movement organizing demonstrations. They exhibited photographs of migrants' mutilated bodies in the main squares and at checkpoints at the entrance to the city, aiming to both raise awareness among residents and scare off migrants. Local institutions and civil society actors mandated the CCU – a volunteer force to combat crime set up in 2013 (see section 5.1.1 Political and Security Context) – to act. Within weeks, the CCU arrested 700 migrants. But the campaign lost momentum as the civil war spread across West Libya, with Zuwaran forces taking part in battles and LNA warplanes targeting Zuwara on several occasions from October 2014. As related in a Washington Post article, migrant smugglers benefited from the “distraction.”¹⁵⁸ In October 2014, another 265 people drown about 10 nautical miles off the shore of Zuwara, with 30 bodies washing up on the beach.

One year later, in August 2015, three massive shipwrecks reignited the debate. On August 27, a ship sunk around ten nautical miles off Abu Kammash. The boat carried about 450 people, only 197 of which survived what was the biggest single accident within Libyan waters that year.¹⁵⁹ Residents once again took to the streets. The CCU resumed its anti-smuggler campaign, this time in a more organized manner and with the full backing of local authorities. The parties that joined forces against smugglers were the Municipal Council, the CCU, the Military Operations Room, the Elders Council (*Shura* council), the Crisis Committee and several civil society organizations. Influential members of the community gave

¹⁵⁵ A DCIM officer interviewed summarized: “The bodies on the beaches earned Zuwara a bad reputation. At the time Zuwara was the most active smuggling zone. Also, the number of deaths by shipwrecks increased in 2015. So residents pushed for the phenomenon to stop and put up resistance against the smuggling business.”

¹⁵⁶ “Suspected People-Smugglers Nabbed in Zuwara”, Libya Herald, 29 August 2015, available at this [link](#).

¹⁵⁷ See Facebook page [here](#).

¹⁵⁸ See “A Libyan Militia Confronts the World’s Migrant Crisis”, The Washington Post, 16 October 2015, available at this [link](#).

¹⁵⁹ See *The Human Conveyor Belt: Trends in Human Trafficking and Smuggling in Post-Revolution Libya*, Global Initiatives Against Transnational Organised Crime, March 2017, available at this [link](#).

“green light” to the campaign, confirming that they would not attempt to protect their relatives engaged in smuggling.

The shipwreck in August 2015 killed 180 people. We held an emergency meeting and reached an agreement to stop smuggling by force. All the active institutions would take the responsibility of this decision collectively. We could no longer bear having such atrocities happening in our city while we sat and watched.

CCU member – Zuwara

Figure 6: Protests in Zuwara against migrant smugglers in September 2015
(picture: Zuwara Media Centre)¹⁶⁰



Several KIs and reports mentioned the radio as having been an important tool to spread the message.

According to respondents, **the factors that facilitated the crackdown were the “absence of tribalism and internal political struggle,” as well as the existence of economic alternatives and strong local civil society.** Smugglers nevertheless had “social protection” through their family affiliation, and this needed to be revoked in order to arrest them.

The **main obstacle** to the implementation of the crackdown reported, on the other hand, was **social relationships**. A member of the Municipal Council claimed “*The main obstacle was that the people of*

¹⁶⁰ Picture published by the Zuwara Media Centre at this [link](#).

Zuwarans know each other well – being a minority – so some people were cooperating with the smugglers and didn't want to expose them.” The CCU mentioned: *“The main obstacles were the social connections. For example, we have families that are not talking to each other anymore because one was a smuggler and the other is a member of the counter crime unit.”*

Arresting and Prosecuting Smugglers

Until the crackdown, Zuwaran local officials and law enforcement actors had largely refrained from acting against smugglers, citing the lack of capacity and means, and sometimes playing down the importance of the city as smuggling hub.¹⁶¹

Once the decision to intervene had been made at the municipal level, **the CCU started a campaign of arrests.** Just hours after an emergency meeting of local stakeholders on 27 August 2015, the CCU raided the homes of three suspected smugglers, arresting them and a dozen accomplices. It then paraded the three men before the cameras holding up photos of drowned children.¹⁶² Some smugglers were already known. For others, according to interviews, the CCU started by looking at those who owned boats, confirmed their location and captured them very easily, as they put up little resistance. Some smugglers even surrendered themselves voluntarily under the pressure of their families, according to KIs. Overall, 45 smugglers were arrested within a few weeks.¹⁶³

“ The role of the CCU was essential for the success of the initiative.”

Municipal Council member – Zuwarans

The Municipal Council, Counter Crime Unit, Military Operations Room, Elders Council and Crisis Committee jointly formed a special committee to trial smugglers. They devised a selection mechanism that would reduce the risk of external pressure on the judges: each of the above-mentioned bodies appointed one member for the committee in secret. The members did not know each other until they convened in a closed session. The committee used Libyan law as a legal basis, although KIs did not reference to any exact provisions.

The decision to form an ad-hoc tribunal rather than using the judiciary system was controversial. Local stakeholders maintained that the courts were barely functioning and that smugglers who had been arrested in the past were released without facing trial. But for the attorney general and political authorities in Tripoli, it was a clear violation of the law.

The lack of support from the attorney general and the other law enforcement institutions [was a challenge]. We were shocked that instead of supporting us, they issued arrest warrants against the Counter Crime Unit, the municipality and everybody that was part of the crackdown. I am not saying that we did not do mistakes in our procedures. But if they [attorney general, etc.] were actually working, then why did they not come to us before, to see how we could solve this problem together? Why did they not come to [assess] our needs to help us do things in a right way?

CCU member – Zuwarans

Some families affected by the arrests used this controversy in their favour. According to a local CSO interviewed, *“Friends and families of the smugglers [argued] that the way their children were arrested was outside the law, and pressured the people involved [by appealing to] the attorney general.”*

¹⁶¹ “Zuwarans: The Smuggling Hub Where No One Gets Caught”, Xchange, 18 June 2015, available at this [link](#).

¹⁶² See “Suspected People-Smugglers Nabbed in Zuwarans”, Libya Herald, 29 August 2015, available at this [link](#).

¹⁶³ According to the CCU. Some sources put the number at 60, but this might include people who were later acquitted.

Smugglers were sentenced to prison terms and fines based on their level of involvement. Fines ranged between 4,000 and 150,000 Libyan dinars; prison terms from three to six months only, according to KIs. By the time of research, all of them had paid their fines and completed their sentences.

The Committee used the money collected (around 1 million Libyan dinars overall, according to respondents) mostly to cover the expenses of the smugglers' imprisonment, as well as for migrant burials and to maintain the PPD's detention centre. Some money is still left and KIs said that there are ongoing discussions between the Committee and the Municipal Council over who is to administer the remaining funds.

The crackdown was completed by the end of 2015. At the start of 2016, a few individuals tried to resume their activities, but were quickly caught. This time, Zuwaran stakeholders chose to hand over responsibilities to Tripoli. The CCU explained: *"It was two separate cases and they were both caught on the shore red handed. We transferred their cases to the attorney general in Tripoli."*

The Municipal Council representative interviewed specified that one Zuwaran smuggler would now stand trial in Tripoli. Another KI added that Zuwaran smugglers were held by the Special Deterrence Force at the Mitiga prison. Two Zuwarans were also detained at Tripoli's Triq Al-Sikka detention centre when one of our field researchers visited it at the start of 2017 (although they may have been captured outside Zuwara). Among the smugglers arrested in 2016 were also two Sabrathans, according to one KI.

4.1.4. SECURITY ACTORS AND CHALLENGES AT PRESENT

After the crackdown, law enforcement has largely consisted of maintaining order in general, as well as migration management. Zuwara is still a major disembarkation point for migrant boats departing from further east.

In 2017, there has been a push across west Libya for security agencies in the different cities to take assertive and coordinated action against fuel smugglers. As a result, illegal fuel shipments are also more frequently intercepted off the coast of Zuwara.

Continued Anti-Smuggling Efforts

Although the local smuggling industry was largely crushed, there appear to have been occasional departures and departure attempts in recent months. In November 2016, the CCU caught 120 migrants and their smugglers prior to departure from a beach in the Zuwara municipality (location not specified).¹⁶⁴ According to the CCU, this was the first breach of the smuggling ban since the crackdown (with the exception of the three smugglers captured in early 2016). A similar incident occurred in December 2016, also on a beach within Zuwara municipality (location again not specified).¹⁶⁵ To intercept smugglers, the CCU relies not only on information from residents but also on more advanced surveillance, such as intercepting mobile phone signals. There are rumours that a small number of departures have effectively taken place in 2017, but the research team has no evidence for this.

"I think they knew [about planned operations] and let them reach the shore so they could get them red handed."

CSO member – Zuwara

¹⁶⁴ See public post and pictures from 17 November 2016 on their official Facebook page, available at this [link](#).

¹⁶⁵ See public post and pictures from 10 December 2016 on their official Facebook page, available at this [link](#).

It seems unlikely that migrant smuggling within Zuwara would resume at a larger scale in the near future, however it may not be evitable in the long run. Most Zuwaran KIs were of the opinion that as long as the CCU is operating and social pressure is maintained, smuggling will not resume. According to a member of the Zuwara Municipal Council, *“What is maintaining the ban is the fact that residents closed ranks against the smugglers and the presence of the Counter Crime Unit as task force.”* Meanwhile, the CCU member interviewed was less optimistic: *“Migrant smuggling might resume. The reason is the lack of resources to keep our efforts going. We are supported neither by the central government nor by the international community. And if the economic situation gets worse and there are no more alternatives, people might start to resist [us] strongly.”* The Coast Guard officer also worried that *“If this situation of no money in the banks persists, people will get tired eventually.”*

“As long as there is a deterring force like the Masked brigade [Counter Crime Unit], migrant smuggling will not resume.”

Elders Council member – Zuwara

Continued preventive measures are therefore considered important. The Municipal Council and local CSOs continue raising awareness of the inherent dangers and brutality of migrant smuggling. The council supports law enforcement agencies in their efforts, but has little concrete assistance to offer: *“In Zuwara we don’t suffer from a lack of security, we suffer from a lack of budget.”* The Zuwara Media Centre regularly posts photos of shipwrecked migrants and boats that taken to the shores of Zuwara by currents.¹⁶⁶

Counter-Smuggling and Migration Management Actors

As mentioned above, **the CCU is the main policing body in Zuwara.** Official security bodies, such as the different police departments, are active, but patrols and raids seem to be conducted primarily by the CCU. The CCU sees itself as a special force to counter and prevent organized crime.

In terms of migrant management, the Coast Guard and the PPD are the main actors, as the former carries out rescue operations, while the latter detains migrants until they are transferred to other cities. The CCU member summarized: *“We take care of prevention, while the Passport Police Department deals with the migrants.”* The Zuwaran PPD official spoken to said that their role was to arrest and transfer to the district attorney any person holding counterfeit or expired papers. This normally applies to migrants who have already spent some time in Libya – often Sudanese nationals, according to KIs. As mentioned in section 4.2.2 Law Enforcement Agencies, the PPD does not regard itself as being mandated to deal with the bulk of undocumented migrants who are merely transiting Libya.

The DCIM does not operate in Zuwara. KIs reported that it was perceived as corrupt and *“never activated.”* The member of the CCU interviewed, however, believed that the DCIM should play a role in the future, because human smuggling *“is its specialty and mandate.”*

Combatting migrant smugglers] should not be the responsibility of a single force. For example, we started to counter migration on the basis that it was organized crime. But we should not be dealing also with migrants and refugees. The DCIM cannot work without Coast Guard and so on.

CCU member – Zuwara

¹⁶⁶ See for example [this Facebook post](#), dated 20 June 2017.

The **Coast Guard and Coast Security are both present and their roles are not clearly distinguished**. The Coast Guard is based at the commercial port and the Coast Security is based at the fishing port. The Coast Security is supplemented by a “support force.”¹⁶⁷ Maritime operations, such as interception of fuel smugglers, or migrant rescues, are usually carried out by the Coast Guard due to the Coast Security being even less well equipped. The Coast Guard does not intercept smugglers at sea, according to the Coast Guard officer interviewed. It only contributes to the work of the CCU and PPD by sharing information on the migrant boats they intercept, as well as handing over the confiscated equipment. The Coast Guard officer reported: *“[After we rescue the migrants] we burn the boat and give the engine to the Passport Police Department for them to open a case. But most of the times we find the boats without engines.”*

As elsewhere in Libya, budgets are small and salaries are delayed. Salaries of security forces affiliated with a ministry – such as the PPD and the Coast Guard – are in theory paid from Tripoli, although the Coast Guard representative interviewed pointed out the difficulty for civil servants to access their salaries.¹⁶⁸ **Most of the budget for counter-smuggling and migration management**, however, **comes from local authorities**, according to KIs. The Municipal Council and the Crisis Committee provide administrative and material support to law enforcement agencies. Representatives of the PPD, Coast Guard and CCU lamented the lack of equipment and budget, emphasizing the local efforts made to maintain security and carry on rescue operations.¹⁶⁹

According to a Coast Guard official: *“The fuel [for sea patrols and rescue operations] is given to us by the Zuwara Crisis Committee. We don’t receive anything from the central government.”* A local CSO member interviewed concurred: *“[Security forces] are funded by the municipality and from local contributions. This cannot go on forever. There has to be a fixed monthly budget at least for the CCU and PPD.”*

““ The Coast Security does not really have boats to use. They coordinate with fishermen, but borrowing private property is not always possible. Mostly [operations] are carried out with our boat, because it is fast.”

Coast Guard official – Zuwara

The Coast Guard has received some local training by MSF on search and rescue and first aid. It is also included in the Operation Sophia training program. However, Zuwaran Coast Guard members have not yet benefited from the program. According to one KI, the local Coast Guard chief refused to attend the first training course because *“none of his men were on the list,”* but agreed to join his staff for the second training course.

Migrant Interception and Rescue

The Coast Guard intervenes when migrant boats are in difficulty off the coast. Boats leaving from areas east of Zuwara (typically around Sabratha) sometimes drift off course, with currents taking them in a southwest direction. Usually, the boats drift because the engine breaks down or is stolen by “engine fishers.” A key informant tells: *“Some migrants rescued near Zuwara told me that a fisherman spotted them drifting in the water after their engine broke. He told them ‘give me the engine and I will tow you to the shore’. But when they handed over the engine to him, he took off. I have heard this on several occasions.”*

¹⁶⁷ Facebook page of the support force (*sirriyat isnad*) is available at this [link](#).

¹⁶⁸ It is unclear whether the CCU is on the pay list, given its informal nature.

¹⁶⁹ The PPD reported: *“We lack everything – security, budget, human resources, etc.”*, while the CCU said: *“The Counter Crime Unit doesn’t have speed boats or [adequate] communication devices. We also lack human resources because of the lack of salaries.”*

Zuwarā's Coast Guard patrols the coastline “almost daily” during the summer (high season for departures given the calmer waters), according to the official interviewed. It is mostly fishermen who alert them about migrant boats in distress. **During the high season, as many as five to ten rescue missions take place every month**, according to local respondents. A Zuwaran Coast Guard official said that seven rescue missions took place since the beginning of 2017. In 2016, 1,500 to 2,000 migrants were rescued in Zuawara, with at least twenty dead. The year of 2017 “*Has been busy from the start*” – according to the Coast Guard official interviewed, with the number of rescued migrants already exceeding 1,000. “*The number of boats arriving off the coast has doubled,*” reported to the official. He expects the numbers to rise further this summer. In the latest such operation, on 5 May 2017, the Coast Guard rescued 373 migrants from three boats that had been launched from the Sabratha area. According to the PPD, the Coast Guard has recently become more active in terms of rescues.

Migrant Detention

Once rescued, migrants are handed over to the PPD, which has set up a makeshift detention centre at its local headquarters. Some in Zuwarā refuse to call the PPD facility a detention centre. There are 40 people working at the centre, five of whom are administrative staff. As explained above, the PPD consider that holding “*paperless migrants*” constitutes a stretch of their mandate, which is essentially to arrest foreigners holding counterfeit and expired papers. Hence, they try to transfer migrants to DCIM-run centres as quickly as possible.

We transfer all migrants [to DCIM centres], except for those who fall within our mandate [those who held counterfeit papers]. Sometimes migrants arrested possessed papers but they just did not have them on them at the time of their arrest. Over the past year, we have transferred 2,000 migrants [to DCIM centres]. The women are mostly transferred to Surman and the men to Sabratha, Al-Zawiya and Tripoli. And recently we transferred people to the Alhamra detention centre in Gharian as well.

PPD official – Zuwarā

The number of migrants at the PPD centre varies considerably, depending on recent rescues and transfers. Overall the number of migrants arriving at the centre has been increasing since 2015, the PPD official interviewed said. In March, the centre received 450 migrants. In April 2017 no rescues took place, and transfers were arranged. By early May, there were only three people left, according to the PPD official: one Egyptian and two Sudanese with counterfeit papers. But on 5 May 2017, a rescue operation resulted in 373 new migrants arriving at the centre, including 93 women and 7 children. All were West Africans, according to the PPD. At the end of May, 285 migrants were transferred to Gharian and 58 to Surman.¹⁷⁰

The official said his department is overwhelmed, because often they cannot transfer migrants immediately, adding: “*If it was up to me I would not keep them for more than a day. But the DCIM centres are sometimes full. Also, transporting migrants to Sabratha or Tripoli costs a lot and is dangerous for the bus driver, because each city is controlled by different factions that do not recognize the central government.*”

Rescued migrants are often in bad medical conditions, which the PPD is not equipped to deal with. In an attempt to call attention and obtain more support, the PPD on one occasion took some migrants with severe burns (caused by fuel mixed with salt water), to the Municipal Council, a KI reported.

¹⁷⁰ See [this post](#) (including photos) on the Facebook page of Zuwarā Media Centre, dated 31 May 2017.

Since it is not part of the DCIM system, the centre receives no funding from Tripoli. According to the PPD official interviewed, international organizations rarely visit the centre, but local CSOs and the Red Crescent bring food and clothes. He added that authorities in Tripoli “*try to send NGOs.*”

Many migrant workers reside in Zuwara,¹⁷¹ although they are not generally protected from arrests and exploitation. A migrant interviewed claimed that he had been detained in

Zuwara earlier this year, for example (although he reportedly obtained his release by paying 700 Libyan dinars). Local CSO Azref reportedly tried to set up a special ID system to provide migrants with some degree of protection within the municipality but abandoned the idea due to legal concerns.¹⁷² As mentioned above, similar initiatives already exist in other areas but are only partially implemented.

“*The building is not designed for a detention centre; it is not even a decent prison. We do not have enough human resources to work with. And we do not have health insurance or a permanent doctor with us.*”

PPD official – Zuwara

4.1.5. ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Unemployment and lack of opportunities certainly played a role in the growth of the smuggling industry. One of the Zuwaran smugglers interviewed argued that most people get involved in the smuggling industry “*because there are few alternatives.*” The economic slowdown after the revolution led to layoffs at the Abu Kammash petrochemicals plant, a key employer in the area.¹⁷³ To make matters worse, the plant was prey to local armed groups and is no longer operating, according to KIs. A local researcher explained: “*The factory is very old and needs refurbishing. The Abubakr Al-Sadiq brigade from Zuwara, which is based in Abu Kammash, took advantage of the government's weakness to occupy the facility and sell all the machinery on the black market.*”

Zuwara’s long history of smuggling has certainly shaped its economy. Some KIs thought that informal trade (of all sorts of goods across the Tunisian border) and smuggling (fuel, subsidized food items, etc.) were the main source of income. One KI even estimated that migrant smuggling used to account for 20% of the economy before the crackdown. A CSO member interviewed believed: “*I would say that the unemployment rate is very low, maybe 3 percent. But most jobs are not really legal.*” However, the actual, “official” unemployment rate might be much higher, probably around 30% according to respondents. Indeed, many people may be working yet consider themselves unemployed (as mentioned above, some Libyans tend to register themselves as unemployed if they do not have a public sector job) or would be considered unemployed as they do not have legal work.

Smuggling money primarily benefited the smugglers, of course, but a part of it was also injected into the local economy. For instance, some respondents noted that smugglers boosted the private construction sector and the market for cars. However, KIs observed direct negative consequences of smuggling on the local economy as well. They mentioned that smuggling led to an increase of real estate and housing prices. The significant rise of fuel (benzene and diesel) smuggling since 2015 also increased the prices for regular consumers.¹⁷⁴

The Zuwaran economy has potential, but little has been done to strengthen viable sectors. Fishing has a special place in Zuwara, seemingly more so than in other coastal cities. Contrary to most other manual jobs, it appears to be seen as a respectable job, although not highly income-generating.

¹⁷¹ Estimates varied between KIs, with numbers mentioned ranging from 5,000 to 20,000.

¹⁷² “Zuwara, The Libyan city Working to Stop Migrant Smuggling”, AL-Monitor, 5 July 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁷³ “Libya’s ‘Masked Men’ Hunt Human Smugglers”, The Wall Street Journal, 12 October 2015, available at this [link](#).

¹⁷⁴ If fuel smuggling is generally seen as a “lesser evil” by respondents, it is considered a problem nevertheless.

Many young men acquire fishing and boat handling skills as a hobby. The skills that benefit the smuggling industry could also be used for fishing and legal marine transportation. It has been noted by KIs that some legitimate fishermen are in parallel involved in fuel smuggling, which makes it more difficult to assess how profitable fishing is.

Despite the fuel smuggling setback, there are some encouraging signs of smugglers turning to legal work and possible alternative opportunities that could be developed in Zuwara. KIs noted

that a minority of former migrant smugglers have taken up legal jobs, using their savings as start-up capital. According to a local civil society organisation: *“Some changed to fishing, opened shops or traded car parts. A few have bought heavy duty trucks and bulldozers.”*

“ Fishing is the first [economic alternative]. Also, because of our location, trade. But our beach should be used for tourism, at least internal tourism.”

Coast Guard official – Zuwara

Local authorities promote the local small-scale fishing industry in media, although it does not seem that they provide any financial assistance to fishermen. At the start of May 2017, the Zuwara Media Centre reported about a new fish shop, which was opened at the fishing port, in cooperation between the Fishermen Union, the Zuwara Crisis Committee, the Military Operations Room, the Fuel & Gas Crisis Committee, the Chamber of Commerce and the Border Crossing Committee for Ras Al-Jdir.¹⁷⁵ The involvement of the Fuel & Gas Crisis Committee suggests that this is part of the city’s efforts to increase incentives to engage in legal activities rather than smuggling. Local authorities also try to promote transparency and fair pricing by posting fish prices online. While such small initiatives are well received, some residents criticise the Municipal Council for not doing enough. None of the KIs knew of any programs to promote small business and most said there had not been any noticeable private sector development in recent years. The Zuwara General Market – a half-finished complex intended to host food stalls – has been lying idle for several years, despite repeated pledges by municipal authorities.¹⁷⁶

Short-term measures such as opening this market and other shops would primarily serve to alleviate shortages and improve residents’ access to consumer goods. **Creating a substantial number of**

employment alternatives to smuggling would require greater investment and industrial or infrastructure development. Respondents agree that **the Zuwara area has great potential for industrial development.** There are mineral resources (non-oil) that have not been exploited so far. Salt could be collected at an industrial scale. In terms of infrastructure development, the expansion of Zuwara’s

“ If the commercial port was expanded this would create a lot of opportunities. We also need more training in the basic skills of IT and administration.”

CSO member – Zuwara

commercial port is described by KIs as the most pressing matter. Zuwara features the only operating commercial port west of Tripoli and, according to respondents, could become a major trading hub.¹⁷⁷ Currently, the port is used mainly to import vehicles.

Italian company Piacentini was contracted several years ago to expand the port and dig a deeper basin, but the project has been on hold since 2014. In addition to administrative problems and payment issues (due to the political crisis), three Italian employees were kidnapped in mid-2014. Two were released almost immediately, but the third only after several months and in exchange for a ransom, according to media reports.¹⁷⁸ However, Zuwarans interviewed think that the project can resume despite this incident: *“Some of the Italians are still here, they want to resume the work.”* The Zuwara Municipal Council is

¹⁷⁵ See public album from 8 May 2017 on the official Facebook page of the Zuwara media centre, available at this [link](#).

¹⁷⁶ See public album from 28 May 2018 on the official Facebook page of the Zuwara media centre, available at this [link](#).

¹⁷⁷ Prior to the revolution, there was a plan to create a free zone on the Tunisian border, comprising Zuwara’s port.

¹⁷⁸ “Transport Ministry Looks to Reactivation of Zuwara Port Expansion”, Libya Herald, 4 March 2017, available at this [link](#).

following up with the project closely, and one of its members has been working on the file for several years. In March 2017, the GNA's Transport Minister, Zuwara's mayor and a Piacentini delegation met in Tripoli to discuss the reactivation.¹⁷⁹ However, KIs also expressed fears that stakeholders in Tripoli and Misrata may be trying to sabotage the project in order to protect their ports.

In 2015 and 2016, the Municipal Council was said to be working with a Tripoli-based consulting and management group called Umbrella Group, which in February 2016 presented a 5-year strategic plan for the municipality.¹⁸⁰ According to the consultancy, the Municipal Council signed an MoU with Italy for joint projects between the port of Zuwara and an Italian port. Projects would include fishing trainings of job seekers, maintenance of fishing boats, and facilitating the purchase in Zuwara of fishing equipment.¹⁸¹ However, no recent references to this plan could be found.

At the moment, only one ship can dock at a time, keeping the shipping volume minimal. If several ships could dock at the same time, the port could create a lot of jobs. When car shipments arrive, young locals are hired to drive the car from the ship to the container or distributor. They get ten dinars for the ride, so they can easily make 100 dinars a day. It is a popular job.

Local researcher – Zuwara

¹⁷⁹ See "Transport Ministry Looks to Reactivation of Zuwara Port Expansion", Libya Herald, 4 March 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁸⁰ The official Facebook page of Umbrella Group is available at this [link](#).

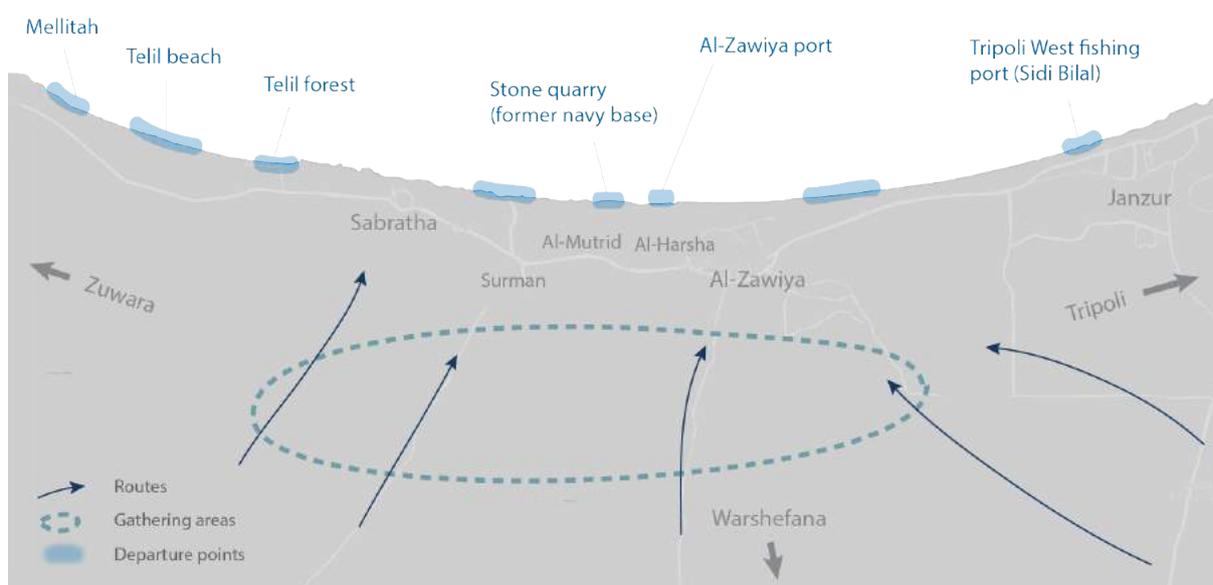
¹⁸¹ See [this statement](#) from 23 February 2016 on the Umbrella Group's official Facebook page.

4.2. SABRATHA

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Territory and power is divided along tribal lines, with a small number of influential families controlling key positions in the security apparatus.
- Religious extremism is apparent, as evidenced by a short-lived IS presence in 2016.
- Official security bodies rely on – or have integrated – local brigades, which yield considerable power.
- Lines are blurred between security provision and organized crime: some of the brigades are involved in migrant smuggling (but also respected for fighting IS militants).
- Smaller smugglers and groups from other cities that use departure spots near Sabratha must pay the big players protection money.
- There is no official detention centre in Sabratha; arrested migrants are directly transferred to Surman or Zawiya.
- Smugglers exert pressure on the DCIM, limiting its capacity to act.
- Respondents believe that young men have few options other than smuggling or joining armed groups.

Figure 7: Departure points and migrant gathering areas to the West of Tripoli



4.2.1. POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONTEXT

Sabratha presents a particularly challenging security environment. Societal tensions are reflected within the security sector, as **the city's main armed forces are affiliated with specific families or clans.** Greater Sabratha is divided into several tribal zones of influence. According to one KI, the division is roughly as follows: Gharabliya and Dabbabsha dominate to the west, Alalga and Shwiyat in the centre and south, and Dababsha to the east.

The Gharabla are well represented in the security apparatus. Positions held by members of the clan include the Head of the Army's West Libya Operations Room, the director of the Sabratha migrant detention centre, and the head of the Security Support Forces. The Al-Gharabliya Martyrs Brigade is one of the main military support units in the city.

The Dabbabsha also have a strong position in the city, but their reputation is somewhat tarnished by some of their members' affiliation with IS. Smuggling kingpin Ahmed Al-Dabbashi commands the Anas Al-Dabbashi brigade, which is one of Sabratha's main security forces. The Dabbashi brigade also controls some areas outside the city, such as the Mellitah Oil & Gas Complex, for which the brigade has a formal protection mandate since 2015.

Like Al-Zawiya, **Sabratha steered towards religious extremism following the revolution.** The city's historic links with the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG)¹⁸² provided fertile ground for radicalization. Several IS operatives were from the Dabbashi clan, including Abdallah Dabbashi, the IS "caliph" of Sabratha (also nicknamed Abu Maria). He allegedly had ties to hard-line militia commander Abu Obeida Al-Zawi in Al-Zawiya (see section 5.3 on Al-Zawiya). Sabratha's mayor – who until 2016 denied that IS had a presence in Sabratha – accused the Dabbashi clan of having concealed the presence of IS members within their ranks.

In February 2016, the US air force bombed¹⁸³ an IS safe house in the outskirts of Sabratha, killing dozens of IS militants – predominantly Tunisians, as well as two hostages. Just a few days later, IS went to the offensive, storming local administrations to take over Sabratha by surprise.¹⁸⁴ Local security brigades succeeded in fighting off the attackers, with the help of forces from Al-Zawiya, Janzur and Tripoli. IS' attempted takeover and the fighting that ensued had a strong impact on the city.¹⁸⁵

Abdallah Al-Dabbashi was reportedly killed in April 2017 by the Al-Uruba Brigade.¹⁸⁶ In June 2017, Sabratha's Municipal Council reported the renewed (or persistent) presence of IS militants within the municipality.¹⁸⁷

Sabratha has been suffering from **poor security**, with an **increasing number of kidnappings and smuggling gang clashes.** To give only one example, the head of the Jumhuriya Bank branch at the Sabratha archaeological site (from the Shwiyat family), was kidnapped for two months and released in April 2016 in exchange for a two-million-dinar ransom.

¹⁸² The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group was formed in 1995 to establish an Islamic state in Libya and to depose Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's regime. Its name was changed to Libyan Islamic Movement in 2011. The brother of the current mayor of Sabratha was the head of the LIFG. The owner of the IS Sabratha safe house bombed by the US in February 2016 (see next paragraph) had also been an LIFG member in the past.

¹⁸³ See "US Admits Early Morning Sabratha Airstrikes", *Libya Herald*, 19 February 2016, available at this [link](#).

¹⁸⁴ See Al-Bawabh News article from 24 February 2016, available at this [link](#).

¹⁸⁵ The head of the Security Directorate, Colonel Abdessalam Mabruk Shwiyat, for instance, lost several family members in the fight against IS in February 2016, including one of his sons.

¹⁸⁶ "مقتل عبدالله الدباشي" حقتّر "على يد" لواء العروبة "في صبراتة.. تعرف على", Al-Marsad, 24 April 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁸⁷ See statement of the Municipal Council [here](#).

The main security actors present in Sabratha are listed below.

The Security Directorate: The Security Directorate oversees a number of police units and departments, including the Criminal Investigations Department. The head of the Sabratha Security Directorate is Colonel Abdessalam Mabruk Shwiya. The Security Directorate has been trying to boost its capacities through active recruitment, and several batches of cadets graduated in 2016 and 2017. A total of 340 new policemen were officially appointed in October 2016 and attributed military ID. But for the time being, the Security Directorate still relies on auxiliary forces, including the Dabbashi Brigade. The auxiliary forces are mainly used for the protection of strategic assets such as banks (for instance the Jumhuriya Bank branch found at the Sabratha archaeological site) and cash transfers from the Central Bank to commercial banks in Sabratha. The fact of using auxiliary forces has been criticized on social networks.¹⁸⁸

Central Security Agency – Sabratha Office (also: Central Support Agency):¹⁸⁹ The Central Security Agency is part of the Interior Ministry's General Administration for Central Security. The around 220-men strong Sabrathan unit is headed by Major Anwar Al-Gharabli. It is not limited to Sabratha but includes policemen from neighbouring areas. It is in charge of protecting vital infrastructure, including main roads, access to the city, gas stations, banks, educational institutions, hospitals. As elsewhere in West Libya, the Central Security Agency's intervention force in Sabratha is called the First Division.¹⁹⁰ The first divisions are part of the revolutionary apparatus, meaning they are former rebel fighters integrated into the Ministry of Interior through police units formed after 2012.

Military Forces: Military forces are organized under different command structures – the Military Council, the Field Operations Room and the Operations Room to Combat Daesh in Sabratha. The latter was set up in 2016 to coordinate the fight against IS, and in October 2016 it set out to register foreigners and displaced people from other parts of Libya present in Sabratha.¹⁹¹ Like in other Libyan cities, the Military Council is essentially a command structure for revolutionary brigades.

Auxiliary Forces: Some revolutionary brigades have retained their structure and complement the formal security apparatus. The main ones are the Sabratha City Brigade¹⁹² and the Anas Al-Dabbashi Martyrs Brigade.¹⁹³ The Al-Gharabliya Martyrs Brigade 045¹⁹⁴ is affiliated with the Military Council.

4.2.2. LOCAL SMUGGLING INDUSTRY

Most KIs agreed that Sabratha is now the biggest smuggling hub on the coast. Most departures take place between Surman and Al-Wadi area. The local smuggling industry was boosted by the Zuwara crackdown, as it redirected migrant flows. “*We took Zuwara's place*”, said the local DCIM officer interviewed. KIs **described the local smuggling industry as violent.** Migrants are often held against their will, extorted and abused. On 20 March 2017, for instance, the Red Crescent found a migrant who

¹⁸⁸ See comments on the public post of the official Sabratha Security Directorate Facebook page, dated 2 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

¹⁸⁹ Official name in Arabic: (Al-Amn Al-Markazi) مكتب الأمن المركزي صبراتة or (Al-Daam Al-Markazi) مكتب الدعم المركزي صبراتة

¹⁹⁰ Official name in Arabic: الفرقة الأولى

¹⁹¹ See message announcing the decision of the operation room to set up a committee to register foreigners posted on 3 October 2016 on the official Facebook page of the Sabratha Security Directorate, available at this [link](#).

¹⁹² Official name in Arabic: (Sariyat Sabratha Al-Madina) سرية صبراتة المدينة

¹⁹³ Official name in Arabic: Sariya Al-Shahid Anas Al-Dabbashi) سرية الشهيد انس الدباشي (see official Facebook page at this [link](#)).

¹⁹⁴ Official name in Arabic: (Katibat Shuhada Al-Gharabliya) شهداء الغرابلية

had visibly been tortured, shot, and left on the side of the road.¹⁹⁵

Smugglers were described as mostly professional and having connections to networks in the south of Libya. Some are also said to be working closely with networks in certain countries of origin and even Europe. According to media reports, one major local smuggler, Musab Abu Grein, has contacts to the Italian mafia and has teamed up with Ethiopian “smuggling kingpin” Ermias Ghermay, who allegedly lives in Sabratha.¹⁹⁶ Interviews did not yield any additional information on this issue, although KIs in Tripoli mentioned Ghermay.

“Smugglers became more and more professional over the years as the smuggling industry grew.”

DCIM official – Sabratha

It is another individual – **Ahmed Al-Dabbashi, nicknamed Al-Ammu (“The Uncle”)** – who is now **widely considered to be Libya’s most powerful migrant smuggler**. Al-Dabbashi is in his early 30s and worked his way up the social ladder. “*He was once a ‘wheelbarrow guy’ – one of those transporting goods on the market. People still call him that to mock him,*” one KI said. Some claim that he was a known drug dealer before 2011. Subsequently, he built up a powerful force, the Anas Al-Dabbashi Martyrs Brigade, named after one of his cousins who died during the revolution. He is said to run not only migrant smuggling operations but also fuel smuggling from Mellitah Oil & Gas Complex. This is an extreme manifestation of the smuggler-armed groups nexus, as the “Al-Ammu Group” is both a local security provider and a criminal enterprise.

As the example of Al-Dabbashi illustrates, **armed groups are directly implicated in the business. They divide the territory between them**, mainly based on tribal zones of influence. A former Zuwaran smuggler, who operated in Sabratha, described the arrangement as follows: “*The west side of Sabratha is divided between the Dabbabsha (Al-Ammu) and Al-Gharabla family, and the east side between the Al-Wadi group and the ‘Madkhali’ Salafis. They have fought many times, but it never escalated too out of control.*” Al-Ammu mainly operates in the Telil area west of Sabratha. Additionally, a Zuwaran KI spoke of reports on the involvement of “terrorist groups” in the Sabrathan smuggling industry.

The armed groups in Sabratha offer smugglers protection against rivals, in exchange for a fixed fee or percentage. “*The protection of the militias of Al-Wadi and Al-Ammu helps to do the work without needing to watch your back,*” one smuggler operating in Sabratha said. This service is costly. According to smugglers interviewed, they must pay armed groups between 1,000 Libyan dinars and 1,000 dollars for a single boat departure. The service is not optional: whoever refuses to pay the armed groups cannot access the beaches and puts his group at risk.

“Now in Sabratha we are forced to cooperate with the militias of Al-Ammu. It is impossible to launch a boat without his approval.”

Smuggler – Sabratha

The Zuwara crackdown brought Zuwaran smugglers – competitors – to Sabratha. Surprisingly, this trend was accompanied by relatively little violence. KIs thought that – although turf wars occur – smugglers mostly try to get along because “*there is enough for everyone.*” **Zuwaran newcomers either integrated existing groups**, for example offering their services as boat specialists like one of the

¹⁹⁵ See [this Facebook post](#), dated 20 March 2017, on the official page of the Libya Red Crescent.

¹⁹⁶ Musab Abu Grein is a 33-year-old businessman and owner of the largest beach club in Sabratha. A former accomplice of his, who is now cooperating with the authorities, claims that Abu Grein smuggled 45,000 people to Europe in 2015 alone, which is almost a third of all irregular immigrants who made it to Italy that year (see “Following the Money”, Der Spiegel, 26 September 2016, available at this [link](#)). Abu Grein is believed to have teamed up with Ethiopian smuggler Ermias Ghermay in 2016. Ghermay, who is wanted in Europe and Libya alike, allegedly manages the eastern “supply chain” for Abu Grein, bringing migrants from the Horn of Africa.

smugglers interviewed, **or preserved their original group structure but forged alliances with Sabrathan groups.**

There have nevertheless been some fighting incidents in Sabratha between smugglers from Zuwara and Al-Zawiya. In July 2016, fighters from Zuwara and Al-Zawiya clashed on the outskirts of Sabratha. According to Libyan CSO Migrace,¹⁹⁷ the trigger was an auction for migrants in Sabratha that descended into chaos. Reportedly, Zawiyan smugglers were accusing Zuwaran smugglers of driving the prices for migrants down, in order to cut Al-Zawiya's supply of migrants to Sabratha traffickers.¹⁹⁸ In October 2016, Zuwaran and Zawiyan smugglers clashed once again in Sabratha.

Assassinations have also taken place. Two of Ahmed Dabbashi's aides and relatives were killed on 1 September 2016 on a beach near Sabratha.¹⁹⁹ Attacks on migrant boats by rival smuggling groups have reportedly led Sabrathan smugglers to offer "escort services" to better paying migrants, meaning that they send a small boat out to sea with the migrant boat to make sure it reaches the High seas safely.

But escorts are also sometimes attacked by rival smugglers or the Coast Guard. There have even been cases of escorts being intercepted on the High seas. For instance, in March 2017, two Libyan men in their twenties – Wisam Al-Marhaq and Zahir Smida Al-Gharabli – were rescued alongside 32 migrants after the engine of the migrant boat broke down, and later arrested by the Italian authorities.²⁰⁰ The boat had left from a beach near Sabratha. One of the passengers, a Syrian national, later explained that he and a group of other Syrians living in Zuwara had arranged the trip via a Zuwaran middleman. They agreed to pay 3,300 Libyan dinars per person, half upfront and the other half upon arrival (via another Libyan intermediary).

Smugglers operating in Sabratha do not seem to make much effort to hide their operations.

Migrants are usually gathered on farms south of Sabratha, but some smuggling groups have also set up migrant camps near the beach or rent nearby houses. The location of migrant camps is known (such as in Al-Wadi), but it is difficult for outsiders to gain access. The armed groups guarding these camps present themselves as law enforcement actors. In 2016, CSO Migrace tried to enter one of the camps to distribute aid – to no avail. Migrants were allowed to move within a limited area only and they were kept guarded all the time, the CSO observed. Smugglers seem to be operating undisturbed. According to Migrace's report, "*It is worth noticing that many changes have occurred in this region (Surman to Al-Wadi) as a result of the presence of those camps, such as creating high sand dunes (up to more than 15 meters) and the building of houses and condos by the shoreline surrounded by high fences occupied by the human trafficker and those who work with them, with the nearest DCIM-run accommodation centre only a couple of kilometres away.*"²⁰¹ As in other departure areas, smugglers avoid the Coastal Road and instead use smaller roads coming from the south to bring migrants (via Bir Ghanem). According to KIs, the use of rubber boats, which do not require much water depth for launch, has significantly facilitated departures, as smugglers can now use much of the coastline.

¹⁹⁷ Migrace is an Al-Zawiya based local CSO that conducts research on migration.

¹⁹⁸ *Report on the Humanitarian Situation of Migrants in the Western Region*, Migrace, 18 February 2017.

¹⁹⁹ The two victims were Mohamed Abubakr Al-Dabbashi (nicknamed Al-Bafa) and Walid Al-Dabbashi (Al-Sahed). See Facebook posts from 2 September 2016 at this [link](#) and this [link](#).

²⁰⁰ "Catania, sbarco del 5 marzo: fermati due presunti scafisti libici", *New Sicilia*, 9 march 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁰¹ *Report on the Humanitarian Situation of Migrants in the Western Region*, Migrace, 18 February 2017.

4.2.3. COUNTER-SMUGGLING POLICIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

Law enforcement is weak owing to the power of local armed groups and their criminal linkages.

Based on the information obtained, some local stakeholders are however making efforts to improve inter-agency coordination and act against smugglers.

The DCIM has a branch in Sabratha – employing 193 staff, according to its commander, Bassem Al-Gharabli – but findings suggest that the DCIM’s influence in the city is limited. A member of the Municipal Council interviewed said that the DCIM was “*Almost absent from the city because of pressure by smugglers.*” A Sabratha businessman spoken agreed and pointed out: “*We do not see any patrols in town.*” Finally, a Sabratha security official thought that “*The DCIM’s role is to detain those who are rescued from the sea. They do not play an active role in combatting smuggling.*” KIs concurred that no smugglers have been arrested by the DCIM in Sabratha over the past. It is unclear how the Sabrathans who are detained in Tripoli (Triq Al-Sikka, Special Deterrence Force) were arrested. The DCIM official interviewed said that his staff coordinates patrols at sea with the Al-Zawiya Coast Guard unit, but added that the boats used by the latter are “*dilapidated.*”

Smugglers are rarely apprehended and boat departures occur largely undisturbed. KIs claimed that **security forces are either complicit with the smugglers, or not powerful enough to confront them.** What further complicates the matter is that several of the known smugglers were leading commanders in the uprising against Islamic State militants in the spring of 2016 and thus earned credit with the community. Ahmed Al-Dabbashi, for instance, gave interviews to the foreign press while on the frontline.²⁰² The Al-Wadi brigade was also active in the fighting.²⁰³ However, interceptions have taken place at sea. The Coast Guard unit based at the Al-Zawiya refinery and oil port (see Al-Zawiya chapter below) has apparently declared Al-Dabbashi their prime enemy and successfully intercepted his boats on several occasions since mid-2016.²⁰⁴ For local security forces it is much harder to confront smugglers like Al-Dabbashi.

Migrants and petty criminals, on the other hand, are easier to apprehend. Migrants accused of drug trafficking or robbery have been arrested by Sabrathan police.²⁰⁵ These cases are investigated by the Criminal Investigation Department (police unit).

The Municipal Council appears to be overwhelmed with the challenges. In March, mayor Hussein Al-Dhuwadi publicly stated that fuel smuggling was out of control and that the city needed outside help to tackle the issue.²⁰⁶ The DCIM official interviewed argued that “*The Municipal Council has no role in combatting migrant smugglers. Its role is only to educate people about the dangers of smuggling.*”

According to KIs, **smuggling is seen as a problem by Sabrathans, but despite occasional protests, there is no organised civil movement against smugglers.** Sabrathan respondents believed that smuggling is not an isolated crime but likely entails or leads to other illegal practices, such as “*Prostitution, drug use, murder.*”

“*Civil society actors have done awareness-raising campaigns through local media (Radio Al-Madina) and in the form of posters in public places. They have also organized workshops and conferences on the matter.*”

Businessman – Sabratha

²⁰² See for instance “Struggling to Fight Islamic State in a Fractured Libya”, *The Wall Street Journal*, Frederic Wehrey, 12 May 2016, available at this [link](#).

²⁰³ See the official Facebook page of the Al-Wadi brigade, available at this [link](#).

²⁰⁴ See [this Facebook post](#), dated 14 June 2017, on the official page of the Coast Guard unit.

²⁰⁵ See [this public post](#), dating from 28 March 2016, on the official Facebook page of the Security Directorate.

²⁰⁶ “Sabratha Mayor Says He Cannot Control Local Fuel Smugglers”, *Libya Herald*, 28 March 2017, available at this [link](#).

Tribal elders have announced the lifting of tribal protection for smugglers. According to one KI, elders are also communicating with armed groups to assist law enforcement. The mayor confirmed that CSO have organized anti-smuggling demonstrations in coordination with the Municipal Council, and that elders have declared tribal protection lifted.

He also mentioned a conference on smuggling jointly organized by the Municipal Council and the **Global Mediterranean Organization for Relief**²⁰⁷ and sponsored by German foundation Hanns Seidel Stiftung, which took place in April 2017. Participants of the conference included the Deputy Interior Minister, DCIM officials from Sabratha, Al-Zawiya and Surman, members of the Sabratha Security Directorate, Sabratha hospital staff and members of the Passport Police Department in Zuwara. The conference covered legal, human rights, security and health aspects of the migration crisis. Participants emphasized the need to form a specialized joint security room between West Libyan cities, as well as a system or database to pool information obtained by the Coast Guard, Coast Security, DCIM and Border Guard.

Some local respondents argued that in order for legitimate security agencies to step up and address smuggling, **Sabratha's tribes and families needed to reach common ground.** Initiatives to promote dialogue – such as the “peace festival” held by the municipality on 26 August 2016 – may prove beneficial in the long run.

4.2.4. MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

There is currently no official detention centre in Sabratha. There used to be a detention centre between Sabratha and Mellitah, but it shut down due to security concerns and too many smugglers working in the area. Migrants who are rescued at sea or detained at checkpoints are therefore transferred to centres in Surman, Al-Zawiya, Tripoli or Gharian – usually on the same day, according to the DCIM official interviewed. He regretted a lack of budget and equipment for the local DCIM branch, namely means of transportation to transfer migrants. The existence of unofficial detention centres, which may in fact be smuggling facilities, has been reported.

Sabratha has a release-for-work scheme for migrants that was launched at the detention centre near Mellitah back in 2013 (see section 4.3.3 Release for Work Schemes). The system allows for migrants to be released from detention if they obtain a work contract. They are registered in a database and given ID cards, which allow free movement and protect from arrest.²⁰⁸ After the closure of the detention centre, the registration system was moved to the Municipal Council, where irregular migrants who are not detained can theoretically register voluntarily. Currently, the database is said to include primarily citizens of Arab countries and it is unclear whether other nationalities can still benefit from the program. It is also unclear whether the Municipal Council assures follow-up and protects hired migrants from exploitation by their employers. There is an ongoing evaluation of the program by member organisations of the MMWG. Interviews conducted for this report did not yield any additional information on this matter.

²⁰⁷ Name in Arabic: منظمة البحر الأبيض المتوسط العالمية للإغاثة. Not to be confused with another local CSO called Almotawaset Organisation for Migration & Relief (AOMR) منظمة المتوسط للهجرة والإغاثة, Official Facebook page available at this [link](#).

²⁰⁸ The information provided by DCIM official Basem Al-Gharabli, who used to run this detention centre and presented the project at an “Alternatives to Detention” workshop in December 2016, is the following: “The idea is to match detainees with labour market needs. Migrants are registered upon arrival and issued an electronic ID regardless whether they have a residency permit in Libya or not. Theirs specific skills are also included in their profiles, enabling local employers to quickly find suitable candidates. Detainees are released once they have signed a work agreement. The municipality set up a special committee to oversee the initiative and inform neighbouring municipalities about the IDs to ensure that the individuals holding those cards can move freely within a certain area. The ID is not recognised in other regions of Libya. The relevant embassies assist with medical checks and checking criminal records of the migrants before they are matched with an employer. If a migrant wants to return to his/her country of origin, he/she is encouraged to contact IOM to facilitate the return.” Report on the workshop “Alternatives to Detention in Libya,” 14-15 December 2016, available at this [link](#).

A similar scheme exists at a detention centre in Janzur (run by a local brigade), but the system has not been adopted by the DCIM for other centres. Releasing migrants without residency and official work permits is technically illegal and the system has not been endorsed at the national level.

In terms of migration management, CSOs play an important role. The local Red Crescent branch provides medical assistance after sea rescues and for migrants in detention, as well as recovering dead bodies.²⁰⁹ At least two other Sabratha-based CSOs work on migration: The Global Mediterranean Organization for Relief²¹⁰ and AOMR.²¹¹ Among their recent activities were a workshop on migration management with local stakeholders²¹² and a workshop on dealing with corpses at the Medical Technology Faculty in Surman (part of Sabratha University) on 4 April 2017.²¹³ Critics have pointed out that there might be a conflict of interest, as individuals in charge of the two CSOs include the head of the detention centre and local DCIM branch, as well as other security officials.

4.2.5. ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Respondents interviewed in Sabratha all considered that the unemployment rate was “*very high*” and that **young men had few options other than “*joining a militia or a smuggling gang.*”** According to the mayor, 20 to 22% of the workforce is unemployed.

Like other cities, **Sabratha is highly dependent on state employment, but there have also been a few limited private sector developments.** KIs mentioned transportation companies, private construction, agricultural production, poultry farms, and retail trade (clothes stores, electric appliances, household appliances, etc.). According to the Municipal Council representative interviewed, the sectors that have potential are fishing, tourism and health, but nothing has been done in recent years to promote these. It is worth noting that tourism used to be a source of income for local residents (albeit small), owing to the Roman city of Sabratha. KIs described migrant labour as essential for the local economy. They put the number of resident migrants at 25,000 to 30,000, adding that they mostly live in the Tellil area and southwest of the city.

²⁰⁹ See posts and pictures of activities on their official Facebook page, available at this [link](#).

²¹⁰ Official name in Arabic: منظمة البحر الأبيض المتوسط العالمية للإغاثة

²¹¹ Almotawaset Organisation for Migration & Relief, official name in Arabic: منظمة المتوسط للهجرة والإغاثة

²¹² Workshop organised on 6 April 2017, see Facebook post and pictures at this [link](#).

²¹³ Workshop organised on 4 April 2017, see Facebook post and pictures this [link](#).

4.4. AL-ZAWIYA

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Al-Zawiya is plagued with protracted internal and external conflicts as well as administrative divisions (there are two Municipal Councils for West and South Al-Zawiya, and no representation in central Zawiya).
- Tribal divisions undermine the security sector and criminal groups obstruct law enforcement.
- The local smuggling scene is large and consists of many small groups, often from one single family.
- The suburb of Al-Mutrid has emerged as key departure zone and base for many small-level smugglers, forming a continuum with Al-Zawiya's smuggling industry.
- Leading smugglers in Sabratha and Al-Zawiya rival for influence and sometimes clash.
- The line between smuggling and law enforcement appears to be particularly thin.
- The role of the Al-Zawiya Coast Guard unit is unclear: on the one hand, it frequently carries out rescue operations and intercepts smugglers at sea, on the other hand it faces allegations of involvement in the smuggling industry.
- There are two known detention centres, nominally under DCIM authority, but at least one of them (Al-Nasr centre) is effectively run by a local armed group.
- Local CSO STACO assists migrants in detention facilities across West Libya.
- Incidents of mistreatment of migrants have been reported from Al-Zawiya, by the hands of both the Coast Guard and detention centre staff.
- Al-Zawiya's private sector is relatively developed, with strong ties to Tripoli, but was weakened by clashes and the closure of the coastal road. State-owned companies are the main employers (refinery, port, power plant).

4.4.1. POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONTEXT

Al-Zawiya is a conflict-ridden city. Ideological and political divisions add to tribal and family feuds. As a result of the divisions, the city does not have a Municipal Council. The municipal elections organised by the Libyan electoral commission (HNEC) in 2014 could not be completed in Al-Zawiya, although there are attempts to resume the process. The city is currently fragmented into three administrative zones: West, South and Centre. West and South Al-Zawiya both have elected councils, but Central Al-Zawiya does not. Instead, the previous local council is still operating. The West Al-Zawiya municipality²¹⁴ also includes the neighbouring villages of Al-Harsha, Abu Aissa and Al-Mutrid.

²¹⁴ See the official Facebook page of the West Zawiya Municipality, available at this [link](#).

Tribal rivalries play into the conflict. Among the numerous tribes present in the area,²¹⁵ the Abu Hmira and the Awlad Saqr are often described as those who currently yield most power. A major feud involves the Al-Hnish family, which is part of the Abu Hamira tribe, and members of the Awlad Saqr tribe.

Ideological differences within the city have been evident since the early days of the GNC, which included several Islamist members from Al-Zawiya. The GNC's hard line faction around Nuri Abusahmain empowered "revolutionary" armed groups, including in Al-Zawiya, using them against their opponents. One Zawiyan commander became particularly influential: Shaaban Hadiya, also known as Abu Obeida Al-Zawi. He headed the powerful Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room (LROR), a vast coalition of brigades across West and Central Libya that was later disbanded. Hadiya is believed to have supported Sabrathan IS leader Abdallah Al-Gharabli. Zawiyan groups also played a key role in the Libya Dawn coalition starting in 2014.

Al-Zawiya's external relations have been marked by conflict, with relations with the Warshefana tribe being particularly problematic. After the revolution, armed groups from both sides began fighting over territory and outstanding accounts, with tit-for-tat kidnappings and killings. Warshefana was labelled "Gaddafi-loyalist" and "reactionary," while the mainstream in Al-Zawiya considered itself "revolutionary." The conflict escalated in 2014, when a coalition of "revolutionary" forces launched a large-scale attack on Warshefana, and continued through 2015 and 2016 with varying degrees of intensity. Tribal mediation attempts did not achieve lasting peace. The conflict played into the unfolding political crisis, as Warshefana forces aligned themselves with the LNA, while Al-Zawiya largely supported Libya Dawn. The Libyan Political Dialogue reinforced internal divisions in Al-Zawiya. The city's political and military scene split into anti-Dialogue hardliners and proponents of the UN plan.

One of the focal points of the Al-Zawiya-Warshefana clashes was army base 27, on the coastal road halfway between Al-Zawiya and Tripoli, which has now been destroyed. As a result, the coastal road would open and close depending on events in this area. The longest closure occurred between October 2015 and April 2017 (with a brief reopening in August 2016). Travelers en route to West Libya would have to take a several-hour detour via the problematic Warshefana area, or try to get on a flight.

Infighting between local groups has further aggravated the situation in Al-Zawiya since mid-2016. An ongoing conflict opposes rival forces that are affiliated with the Abu Hmira tribe and the Awlad Saqr tribe respectively. The main combat groups are the Abu Hmira tribe's Shuhada Al-Nasr Brigade and a group led by Ibrahim Al-Hnish, who are fighting against the Awlad Saqr's Al-Khadrawi brigade.²¹⁶ The Shuhada Al-Nasr brigade is led by influential commander Mohamed Kushlaf²¹⁷ – nicknamed Al-Qsab.²¹⁸ Extremist forces loyal to Shaaban Hadiya are said to be backing the Al-Hnish side in the conflict. Battles sometimes take place in middle of the city, forcing the evacuation of entire neighbourhoods. In October 2016, the killing of a commander triggered several days of clashes.²¹⁹ Fighting reignited on 4

²¹⁵ Tribes include the Al-Blaaza (tribal confederation), Qawaghliya or Karaghliya (families of Ottoman origins), Awlad Abu Hmira, Awlad Saqr, Awlad Jarbua, Al-Shaalil, Al-Hararat, Al-Gamamda, Awlad Hmad, Awlad Musa, Bin Maryam and Al-Ramih, among others.

²¹⁶ Another name mentioned in the Awlad Saqr "coalition" is Othman Al-Lahab, who was injured on a civil war frontline in 2014 and returned to Al-Zawiya in 2016.

²¹⁷ Also spelled Kashlaf or Koshlaf.

²¹⁸ His name is also transliterated as "Al-Qasseb."

²¹⁹ See "New Zawia Ceasefire Agreed As Three Die in Fresh Fighting; Grand Mufti Claims Pro-Hafter Forces Present", Libya Herald, 31 October 2016, available at this [link](#).

June 2017, again triggered by a killing.²²⁰ In the subsequent fighting, Ibrahim Al-Hnish was killed, further deepening the divide and stirring fears of further revenge killings.²²¹

The origins of this tribal feud are not entirely clear, and the conflict is evidently fuelled by tit-for-tat violence. However, **competition in the smuggling industry is also believed to have contributed to the escalation**, as some of the above-mentioned groups are said to be key smuggling actors. The control of the Al-Zawiya refinery is a major point of contention. Since 2012, the facility has been guarded by the Shuhada Al-Nasr Brigade – also known as the Al-Zawiya Support Unit for the Petroleum Facilities Guard – West.²²² A journalist who investigated the matter wrote that brigade commander Mohamed Kushlaf had “*total control over the refinery and the port.*”²²³ His position has been challenged by rival armed groups from the Awlad Saqr tribe (Al-Khadrawi group among others), which have stolen fuel trucks or tried to seize the facility by force, for instance in September 2016.²²⁴ In January 2017, the National Oil Corporation accused Kushlaf of being complicit in fuel smuggling from the refinery and ordered the departure of the Al-Nasr Brigade.²²⁵ This move is to be analysed in the context of the wide-ranging campaign that was launched at the start of the year against fuel smugglers across West Libya and that is spearheaded by the Fuel & Gas Crisis Committee. It was also preceded by tribal meetings in Al-Zawiya that called for the removal of “all militias” from the premises of the refinery.²²⁶ Whether the Al-Nasr brigade has effectively withdrawn and who has been designated to take over the refinery could not be established.

The commander of the Coast Guard’s branch in Al-Zawiya - Abderrahman Milad, nicknamed Al-Bidja²²⁷ – is also from the Abu Hmira tribe and said to be Mohamed Kushlaf’s “protégé.” Milad was a cadet at the Naval Academy in Tripoli in 2011 but then joined the revolution and was injured. After he returned from medical treatment in Germany in 2015, he and fellow revolutionaries took control of the Al-Zawiya oil port, replacing the previous Coast Guard unit stationed there. Depending on the source, he either seized the port by force or was officially appointed to do so (Milad claims to have graduated as First Lieutenant). The latest report by the UN Panel of Experts on Libya states that Milad obtained his position thanks to the leverage that Mohamed Kushlaf and his relative Walid Kushlaf have over the Coast Guard hierarchy.²²⁸ He and many of his crew of 37 men are in their 20s or early 30s.

4.4.2. SMUGGLING INDUSTRY

Al-Zawiya has been dubbed by investigative journalists the “*Headquarters of human and oil trafficking.*”²²⁹ The Zawiyan CSO Migrace, however, claims the opposite: “*The city of Az-Zawiya is considered the least active when it comes to immigrants trafficking activities, nonetheless there are some smuggling detention centres located in the south of the city [...].*” KIs all agreed that **Al-Zawiya**

²²⁰ See “Zawia Assassination Triggers Fighting in Town”, Libya Herald, 4 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

²²¹ See “Clashes Reignite in Zawia As Both Sides Reinforce”, Libya Herald, 6 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

²²² The unit is a typical case of a revolutionary brigade officialised through affiliation with a national security body.

²²³ “The Kingpin of Libya’s Human Trafficking Mafia”, TNT World, 22 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

²²⁴ See Mermaid News Agency article from 5 September 2016, available at this [link](#).

²²⁵ “Western Division Nasr Brigade Withdraws from Zawia Refinery After Sanalla Public Accusation of Fuel Smuggling Collusion”, Libya Herald, 5 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

²²⁶ “شيوخ وأعيان الزاوية يناقشون التحديات الأمنية بالمدينة”, Akhbar Libya, 6 September 2016, available at this [link](#).

²²⁷ Also transcribed as Al-Bija.

²²⁸ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, page 133, available at this [link](#).

²²⁹ *Smuggling Networks in Libya*, Nancy Porsia, March 2015, available at this [link](#).

is a still major smuggling hub, although not the most prominent along the coast at the time of research (that would be Sabratha).

KIs in Al-Zawiya believed local smugglers to be “well organized” and having connections to African countries and Europe. Smugglers do not operate openly, they said, but most are known to the community and reside in the area. **There seems to be a large smuggling scene in Al-Mutrid, composed of tens of individuals and small groups**, often several people from one single family.²³⁰ **Al-Mutrid and Al-Zawiya constitute one connected smuggling zone.**

A Zawiyan security official interviewed claimed that smuggling had visibly declined since April 2017 after a shootout between the Coast Guard and a group of smugglers he referred to as the “Sons of Aswad.” The incident, which occurred off

“We know some of the smugglers by name, others not because they use code names. They are locals and protected by local militias.” Coast Guard official – Al-Zawiya

the coast of Al-Mutrid on 5 April 2017, was also reported in the press and on social media. Smugglers escorting a migrant boat opened fire on the Al-Zawiya Coast Guard, resulting in a shootout. Yasin and Salem Al-Aswad, alleged smugglers from Al-Mutrid, were killed, and four other men injured.²³¹ Some sources described the incident as a successful law enforcement operation and part of “Mediterranean Storm,” a regional anti-smuggling campaign launched by the Fuel & Gas Committee in March.²³² For others, the incident was an example of rival smugglers settling scores.²³³ The following day (6 April 2017), gunmen blockaded the Coastal Road at Al-Mutrid, allegedly in retaliation. Other members of the Al-Aswad family are also suspected of migrant smuggling, for instance a man nicknamed Al-Majrub, who was previously detained by the Special Deterrence Force in Tripoli. Social media posts portray him as ruthless human trafficker, who has allegedly shot migrants and forced women into prostitution.²³⁴

Coast Guard commander Abderrahman Milad (Al-Bidja) and his men have themselves been accused of protecting certain smugglers or even of running smuggling operations (migrants and fuel) from their base at Al-Zawiya oil port. According to a journalist investigation conducted in February 2017, the Coast Guard is “rogue” and Milad himself is “*the kingpin of the local trade in human beings.*”²³⁵ Several other reports corroborate this claim. According to the UN Panel of Experts, Mohamed Kushlaf is a “*main facilitator*” for migrant smuggling and trafficking,²³⁶ and Milad “*an important collaborator of Kushlaf.*”²³⁷ Milad, on his part, denies these allegations, calling them “*lies... spread by traffickers.*” In a media interview from June 2017, he described his mission as follows: “*Rescue refugees from distress at sea, find human traffickers and, if necessary, kill them,*” adding that smuggler clans “*earn millions, buy modern weapons, bulletproof vehicles, tanks.*”²³⁸

²³⁰ A list of 42 alleged smugglers is circulating on Facebook. See for instance [this post](#), dated 12 June 2017.

²³¹ See article on Mermaid News Agency, 13 April 2017, available at this [link](#)

²³² See [this post](#), dated 6 April 2017 on a Facebook page that denounces smugglers and human traffickers, focusing on Al-Zawiya and Al-Mutrid.

²³³ Article on Mermaid News Agency, 13 April 2017, available at this [link](#).

²³⁴ Facebook post dating from 18 September 2016, available at this [link](#).

²³⁵ “The Kingpin of Libya’s Human Trafficking Mafia”, TNT World, 22 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

²³⁶ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, page 63, available at this [link](#).

²³⁷ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, page 61, available at this [link](#).

²³⁸ “Can A Libyan Warlord Help Europe Solve the Migrant Crisis?”, Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 27 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

Competition between smugglers appears to be particularly violent in this area. Social media sources claim that Milad and Kushlaf demand protection money from smugglers, and sabotage the operations of those who do not pay: “*Redwan Al-Arusi, a relative of Al-Bidja, facilitates boat departures from Al-Mutrid. He informs Al-Bidja of every boat that leaves because Al-Bidja takes a share. Those who don’t want to pay have their boats captured,*” says a Facebook post from June 2017.²³⁹ The UN Panel alleges that a member of Milad’s crew “*shot at migrants’ boats at sea, causing the death of an unknown number of migrants, in an attempt to undermine the smuggling business of Kushlaf’s competitors.*”²⁴⁰ Some players in the smuggling industry reportedly resist this situation. Smugglers from the Awlad Saqr tribe tried to seize the Coast Guard unit’s only patrol boat in March 2016.²⁴¹ Sabratha’s Ahmed Al-Dabbashi (Al-Ammu) attacked Milad’s crew at sea.²⁴² The two groups are at war with each other and Milad’s crew portrays Al-Dabbashi as the most notorious smuggler in West Libya.

Despite the smuggler turf wars, KIs in Al-Zawiya said that smugglers in the area also work together “*because they have common interests.*” According to the UN Panel of Experts report, Kushlaf’s Al-Nasr brigade collaborates with an armed group in Warshefana to organize migrant smuggling.²⁴³ As explained above, the closure of the coastal road led to some smugglers in the coastal zone striking deals with groups in Warshefana to ensure the continued arrival of migrants.

In most cases, however, **smugglers bring migrants via the southern road from Bir Ghanem, avoiding the Tripoli area and Warshefana.** According to the Coast Guard official interviewed, “*Smugglers use the road from Bir Ghanem during the night when there are no security checkpoints.*”

Boats are mostly launched from Al-Mutrid (part of Al-Zawiya west municipality) and Jadaim (east of the city). In the past, the rocky coastline around Al-Zawiya was less suitable for boat departures than beaches near Sabratha. But since Libyan smugglers nowadays mostly use inflatable boats, this has become less of an obstacle.

4.4.3. COUNTER-SMUGGLING POLICIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

Like Sabratha, Al-Zawiya has a **multiplicity of armed groups with varying degrees of officiality and tribal linkages. Organized crime is rampant**, and social media reports and press articles frequently report incidents of gang fights and kidnappings. The regular police seem to be focusing on road traffic – as information published by the Al-Zawiya Security Directorate²⁴⁴ suggests – while armed groups guard strategic facilities and checkpoints. Following the latest clashes between rival armed groups at the start of June 2017, the Security Directorate oversaw the creation of a committee composed of “*revolutionaries and tribal elders*” to address the conflict, but complained about the lack of support from the GNA.²⁴⁵

In this environment, migrant smugglers operate with impunity. According to KIs, barely any measures are taken against local migrant smugglers. Respondents said that some African

²³⁹ See [this public Facebook post](#), including pictures, dated 11 June 2017.

²⁴⁰ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, page 103, available at this [link](#).

²⁴¹ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, page 103, available at this [link](#).

²⁴² “The kingpin of Libya’s human trafficking mafia”, *TNT World*, Nancy Porsia, 22 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁴³ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, page 103, available at this [link](#).

²⁴⁴ Official Facebook page of Al-Zawiya Security Directorate, available at this [link](#).

²⁴⁵ Interview with Security Directorate spokesman on Libya Al-Ahrar, 7 June 2017.

middlemen had been arrested, but no Libyan smugglers, adding that the spread of militias was the main factor obstructing law enforcement. The DCIM has little presence in the city, KIs said. In April 2017, the DCIM organized a meeting in Al-Zawiya on counter-smuggling, bringing together representatives of west Libyan municipalities, detention centres and Red Crescent branches.²⁴⁶

The confusing security scene and the vested smuggling interests make it difficult to discern law enforcement actors from “rogue” armed groups. The role of the local Coast Guard unit – an official force – poses the greatest problem for the analysis. The accusations mentioned above (involvement in migrant and fuel smuggling, mistreatment) do not speak in its favour. However, there have also been counter-claims. The local security official interviewed for this report was positive about the Coast Guard, calling it the only active force. Others noted that Milad’s men have done a good job at combatting smugglers, by sinking boats used by smugglers to escort migrants out of Libyan waters and confiscating their weapons.²⁴⁷ Milad’s prime target is said to be Ahmed Al-Dabbashi (Al-Ammu) from Sabratha, who his men first clashed with in July 2016.

The Coast Guard crew moreover portrays itself as a key partner in the fight against fuel smuggling. Following the official launch of Operation “Mediterranean Storm” (a joint Navy and Air Force operation to intercept smuggler boats), the crew published a videotaped statement, warning fuel smugglers and their collaborators.²⁴⁸

The security environment in Al-Zawiya is not favourable to the prosecution of smugglers. In February 2017, a local prosecutor was kidnapped in Al-Zawiya,²⁴⁹ allegedly on the orders of an influential member of the Al-Hnish family. The suspected kidnapper is reportedly linked to hardliner Abu Obeida Al-Zawi.²⁵⁰

“ There are CSOs who call for an end to smuggling, but this has no impact on the ground. The only city that organized protests against smugglers was Zuwara.”

Security official – Al-Zawiya

There have been no public demonstrations against smuggling in Al-Zawiya, according to KIs. However, residents have demonstrated against armed groups and called for the strengthening of the army and police.²⁵¹ Tribal elders usually intervene in the event of clashes, to mediate between armed groups and obtain ceasefire agreements.

Elders also mobilized against the presence of armed groups at the Al-Zawiya refinery prior to the NOC’s decision to oust the Al-Nasr brigade. This suggests that **traditional social actors still have some degree of authority, which can be used against migrant smugglers.** Since March 2017, the elder’s council of Al-Zawiya has a Facebook page on which it publishes updates on its activities.²⁵² Elders in Al-Mutrid recently reacted to the increase of boat departures from their area, denouncing migrant smuggling and declaring the withdrawal of social protection for smugglers.²⁵³

Local CSO STACO has organized debates on the dangers and negative impact of smuggling, as part of a larger training program for detention centre staff. According to an interview with one of the directors

²⁴⁶ “اجتماع موسع في الزاوية للحد من ظاهرة تهريب البشر”, Al Wasat, 27 April 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁴⁷ See this [Facebook comment](#) by a Tripoli-based observer reposted by the Coast Guard.

²⁴⁸ Video of the declaration available at this [link](#).

²⁴⁹ See Erem News article from 1 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁵⁰ See [this Facebook post](#), dated 11 July 2015.

²⁵¹ See [this Facebook post](#), dated 1 December 2016.

²⁵² See Facebook page available at this [link](#).

²⁵³ See video of Al-Mutrid tribal elders’ declaration, available at this [link](#).

of STACO conducted for this report, the CSO also plans to conduct an awareness-raising campaign at universities and schools in the area, as well as through local media outlets.

In July 2016, another local CSO, the Rahimun (“Merciful”) Foundation for Charity, organized a conference on migration under the slogan “Deadly Voyage,” which was sponsored by the Security Directorate and the University of Al-Zawiya.²⁵⁴ Religious scholars were among the speakers.

4.4.4. MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Migrant rescues

The Al-Zawiya Coast Guard frequently carries out rescues and sometimes intercepts smugglers. It is the only unit west of Tripoli to have an equipped patrol boat (see Figure 8 below). It has an active presence on social media, where it posts regular updates and photos from rescue operations, as well as personal stories from individual migrants.²⁵⁵ Most recently, the Coast Guard rescued 900 migrants on 16 June 2017.²⁵⁶ In May and June 2017 alone, the crew rescued almost 3,000 migrants, according to information provided on their Facebook page.

Figure 8: The Al-Zawiya Coast Guard rescues 900 migrants on 16 June 2017
(picture: official Coast Guard Facebook page)



The Coast Guard has been accused of mistreating migrants. In February 2017, for instance, The Times released an amateur video believed to show Kushlaf and Milad beating migrants on a rubber boat during a rescue operation.²⁵⁷ The UN Panel of Experts accuses the Al-Zawiya Coast Guard of

²⁵⁴ See [this Facebook post](#) including photos, dated 1 August 2016.

²⁵⁵ Official [Facebook page](#) of the Al-Zawiya Coast Guard unit.

²⁵⁶ Post on the Coast Guard’s Facebook page, available at this [link](#).

²⁵⁷ See for instance “Video Shows Libyan Coastguard Whipping Rescued Migrants”, The Times, 14 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

human rights violations, namely sinking migrant boats launched by their rivals (as stated above). Others, on the other hand, laud the Coast Guard unit for its hard work in the face of a humanitarian crisis that exceeds the capacities of local actors. Coast Guard members deny allegations of mistreatment but say that the use of force against migrants, such as beatings during rescue operations, is “*necessary to control the situation as you cannot communicate with them. Some can swim but others not.*”²⁵⁸ They also say that they are not able to do their job properly due to the lack of equipment. Commander Abderrahman Milad recently told a German reporter: “*If we are going to do Europe’s dirty work then Europe will have to pay us a boat that can hold up to 1,000 people, speed boats, spare parts, fuel and wages.*”²⁵⁹

Migrant detention

There are two known detention facilities in Al-Zawiya: the Al-Zawiya Detention Centre (Bu Aissa Centre) and the Shuhada Al-Nasr Centre. Both are **under DCIM authority, at least nominally**. In addition, Mohamed Kushlaf allegedly runs a “*rudimentary detention centre for migrants*” on the premises of the refinery.²⁶⁰ Given the above-mentioned accusations against Kushlaf, this facility might be used to gather migrants for boat departures, rather than to prevent them from departing.

Al-Zawiya Detention Centre (Bu Aissa)

The centre is located within the premises of a former factory for agricultural tools²⁶¹ to the south of the city on the road to Bu Aissa (locality west of Al-Zawiya). The researcher team visited the centre and spoke to its director, Khaled Al-Tumi, for this report. The number of staff is 80, including administration and guards. At the time of the visit (30 April 2017), there were 53 migrants (all men) at the centre. Migrants are regularly transferred to other centres in Tripoli. The official interviewed said that the centre lacks “*food, toilets, equipment and basic medical supplies.*” The DCIM in Tripoli “*no longer follows-up with what happens at the centre*”, according to the director. Local CSO Migrace also highlighted the “*lamentable state*” of the sanitary facilities at the centre.²⁶²

Shuhada Al-Nasr Centre

The Al-Nasr centre holds a larger number of migrants, both male and female. It was set up in 2014 and has nominally been under DCIM authority since March 2016, according to reports,²⁶³ although this was disputed by some KIs. Its director is Colonel Fathi Al-Far. De facto, both KIs and reports say that the centre is controlled by Mohamed Kushlaf’s Al-Nasr brigade.²⁶⁴ According to Migrace Organization, the centre is “*run by Al Naser Relief Organization with the help of some international organizations.*”²⁶⁵ It

²⁵⁸ Read what the Commander of the Al-Zawiya Coast Guard told Human Rights Watch: *EU Shifting Rescue to Libya Risks Lives*, Human Rights Watch, 19 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁵⁹ “Can A Libyan Warlord Help Europe Solve the Migrant Crisis?”, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 27 June 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁶⁰ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, page 21, available at this [link](#). Whether this facility is still open after Kushlaf’s Al-Nasr Brigade was ordered to leave the refinery is unclear.

²⁶¹ *Report on the Health Status of shelters in the Western Region*, Migrace Organization, 4 February 2017.

²⁶² *Report on the Health Status of shelters in the Western Region*, Migrace Organization, 4 February 2017.

²⁶³ “UN Libya Mission Calls for Inquiry into Zawiya Detention Centre Probe”, *Xchange Research on Migration*, 8 April 2016, available at this [link](#).

²⁶⁴ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, page 133, available at this [link](#), and “The kingpin of Libya’s human trafficking mafia”, *TNT World*, Nancy Porsia, 22 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁶⁵ *Report on the Humanitarian Situation of Migrants in the Western Region*, Migrace Organization, 18 February 2017

has also been said that migrants detained at the Al-Nasr centre faced forced labour,²⁶⁶ beatings, and were sold to smugglers and into slavery.²⁶⁷ Updates by the Red Crescent's Zawiya branch on the other hand show the centre in a more positive light.²⁶⁸ On his part, Colonel Fathi Al-Far has assured the press that his men treat the migrants humanely and “do not take up arms against them.”²⁶⁹ There have however been several **incidents of mass escape** from Al-Nasr centre, which led to fights with guards. In April 2016, four migrants were killed and 20 wounded while trying to escape, and one guard was injured.²⁷⁰ In another mass escape in August 2016, 250 migrants (out of 1,500 held at the time) managed to run away, according to Al-Far. Overall, the Colonel told the press, more than 7,000 escaped during 2016 (out of 20,000 migrants held during that year).²⁷¹ It can be assumed that this includes migrants “bought” out of detention by smugglers.

IOM (often with local partner organization STACO) and UNHCR (through partner IMC) assist both detention centres. Several KIs called STACO the most relevant humanitarian actor in Al-Zawiya, alongside the Red Crescent. In February 2017, STACO distributed non-food items to 680 migrants held at the Al-Nasr centre, and conducted a fumigation and anti-scabies treatment.²⁷² The official interviewed at the other detention centre told researchers that IOM and IMC provide medical assistance to migrants at his facility.

4.4.5. ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Al-Zawiya is more developed, economically, than other coastal towns. Numerous retail stores and different types of services can be found there. Due to its proximity to Tripoli, **the markets are quite interconnected with those of the capital, although the intermittent closure of the coastal road severely affected local businesses.** Overall, local KIs were not very optimistic regarding economic development and alternatives to smuggling, but said that some sectors have potential. One of them mentioned: “*The state stopped employing people years ago. But the private sector needs new workforce, especially in construction, trade, agriculture.*”

²⁶⁶ “The kingpin of Libya’s human trafficking mafia”, *TNT World*, Nancy Porsia, 22 February 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁶⁷ “Letter Dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council”, page 103, available at this [link](#).

²⁶⁸ See [this post](#) dated 25 May 2017 on the official Facebook page of the Red Crescent branch in Al-Zawiya.

²⁶⁹ See “Can Libya Curb the Flow?”, *Correspondents.org*, Fadwa Kamel, 6 April 2017, available at this [link](#). While this number seems high, it is plausible given the frequent transfers of migrants from one detention centre to another.

²⁷⁰ See “Libya: Four Migrants Dead, 20 Injured After Detention Centre Escape”, Xchange, 2 April 2016, available at this [link](#), and “UN Libya Mission Calls for Inquiry Into Zawiya Detention Centre Probe”, Xchange, 8 April 2016, available at this [link](#).

²⁷¹ This total number of 20,000 migrants having been held at the centre at one point or another in 2016, which may seem high, could not be verified. However, one explanation could be a high turnover rate of migrants rescued and then transferred to other centres. See “Can Libya Curb the Flow?”, *Correspondents.org*, Fadwa Kamel, 6 April 2017, available at this [link](#).

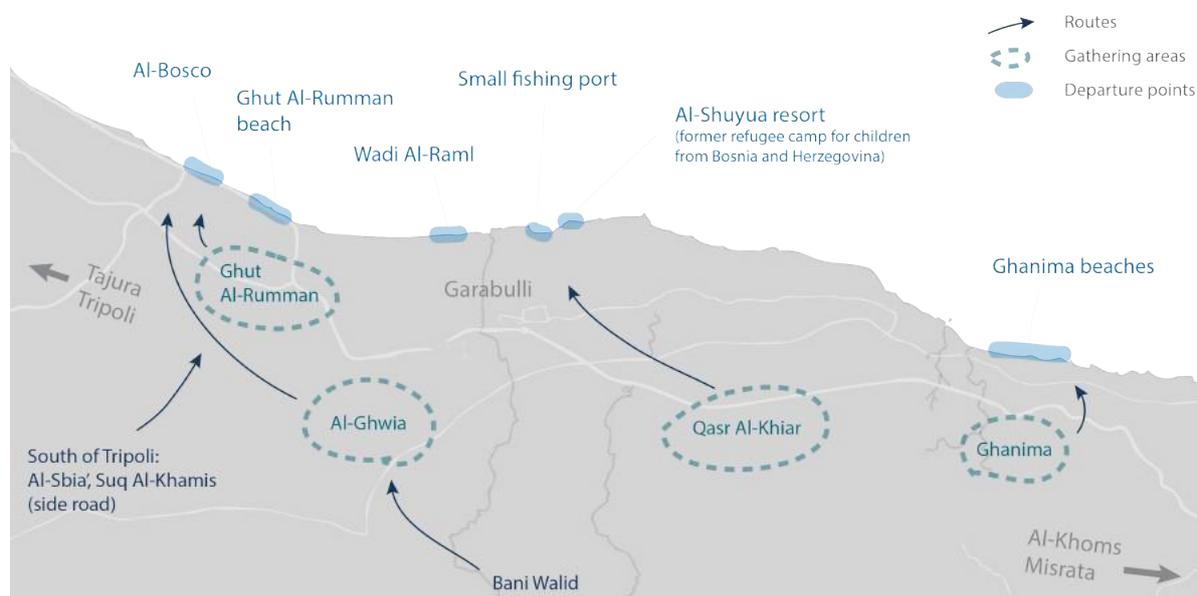
²⁷² IOM Libya Situation Report February 2017, available at this [link](#).

4.1. TAJURA

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Tajura currently suffers from internal upheaval due to the affiliation of local groups with rival civil war factions.
- Local armed groups are involved in smuggling, but so are non-professional individuals offering low-cost services.
- Local authorities and security forces are stepping up efforts to combat smuggling, although the most influential force (First Division) plays an ambiguous role.
- The local DCIM branch opened a new detention centre in April 2017 and runs it together with a local brigade.
- Previously, migrants were held by the Passport Police and quickly transferred to other areas.
- Maritime forces are based in Tajura, and the Coast Guard regularly carries out rescues.
- Tajura has a relatively developed economy (due to belonging to the Greater Tripoli).
- An extensive project to renew urban infrastructure was interrupted by the revolution

Figure 9: Departure points and migrant gathering areas to the East of Tripoli



4.1.1. POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONTEXT

In the eastern outskirts of Tripoli, the municipality of Tajura has around 40,000 inhabitants. **The area has seen a great deal of upheaval over the past few years.** Tajura is divided along political lines, with some armed groups forging alliances with Misratan forces, while others called for a takeover by

Haftar's LNA. One of Tripoli's most powerful armed groups – the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade headed by Haitham Al-Tajuri – is based in Tajura. The latter is now known as the First Division of Central Security, which is nominally part of the Interior Ministry and operates under the GNA.²⁷³

Tajura has seen **clashes between Misratan and local brigades, as well as between different local brigades**. In December 2015, Tajuri's force attacked the local Al-Kundug prison, which was controlled by the Tajura Operations Room and the Rawasid Brigade. The latter forces were at the time allied with Misratan forces and the Libya Dawn administration.²⁷⁴ Confrontations between pro-Dawn and pro-LNA forces had already occurred in April 2015. Then, the head of Tajura's 101 Brigade (pro-LNA) was allegedly executed by pro-Dawn forces, possibly Tajuri's men.²⁷⁵

4.1.2. SMUGGLING INDUSTRY

Tajura was not a main departure zone prior to the revolution but became more prominent when access was reduced to departure zones west of Tripoli in **2015 and 2016**. Moreover, the establishment of Bani Walid as transit hub directed more migrants towards Tajura and Garabulli. Local smugglers were joined by others from Bani Walid, Tarhuna and Greater Tripoli, who took advantage of the poorly monitored coastline. As of 2015, Tajura was known for its "low-cost journeys," using basic equipment and migrant navigators for only about 250 dollars.²⁷⁶ Many of the new smugglers had no prior experience and some were former prisoners, KIs said. Gradually, armed groups became more involved in the business. According to the official interviewed at the Tajura detention centre, there are five organized smuggling groups operating in Tajura, but hundreds of individual smugglers who "operate randomly."

“The smugglers are part of armed groups and have power. There are about ten known gangs, others are not known.”

Coast Guard official – Tajura

Boat departure spots used by Tajura-based smugglers are known, KIs said, but difficult to monitor. **Boats depart from Al-Bosco and Ghut Al-Ruman** beach in eastern Tajura (near checkpoint 32).²⁷⁷ Migrants are usually gathered on farms in Ghut Al-Ruman, Ain Zara, Al-Gwia, and Qasr Khiar. The smugglers avoid the coastal road, using roads from the south (such as the Ghut Al-Ruman road) and agricultural tracks instead. Migrants are usually brought from Bani Walid via Tarhuna or areas south of Tripoli. However, KIs also said that many migrants arrange the boat trip from Tajura after having worked for several months to earn their fare.

4.1.3. COUNTER-SMUGGLING POLICIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

So far, measures to counter the smuggling industry have been limited, but recently local authorities and security forces have stepped up their efforts. Over the past few months, the DCIM has increased its presence by means of a new detention centre and coordination with local

²⁷³ Tajuri's stance toward the GNA is ambiguous, and he is alleged to be eyeing a possible alliance with the LNA should the latter attempt to take over Tripoli. Previously, Tajuri had been a supporter of the Libya Dawn administration, which appointed him security chief for Tripoli.

²⁷⁴ See "Dawn Commanders Die and '400' Prisoners Escape in Tajoura Fighting: Report", Libya Herald, 14 December 2015, available at this [link](#) and "Tajoura Escaped Prisoners Recaptured Say justice Authorities in Tripoli", Libya Herald, 17 December 2015, available at this [link](#).

²⁷⁵ "Tajoura and Fashloum Fighting", Libya Herald, 15 April 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁷⁶ *Smuggling Networks in Libya*, Nancy Porsia, March 2015, available at this [link](#).

²⁷⁷ Note that Tajura smugglers also use locations near Garabulli and Ghanima, which are not part of Tajura.

stakeholders. Views on the DCIM varied between KIs. According to a local Coast Security official: “*The DCIM’s role is limited. They only capture migrants, not smugglers.*” A Municipal Council member interviewed added: “*The DCIM works in Tajura and across western Libya. They are making great efforts, day and night. But they can only provide partial security because their means are limited.*”

Smugglers were not arrested until now because they are armed, according to the local Coast Guard official interviewed. He also claimed that they have **infiltrated local security forces**.

“*I think the smugglers have helpers in all security agencies. They seem to know the timing of our patrols in advance.*”

Coast Guard official – Tajura

The Municipal Council is making efforts to improve the city’s overall security level and address the migration crisis, according to KIs. The municipal representative said that the Council regularly holds coordination meetings with relevant security agencies, but added that the security agencies need material and logistic support (“*Better equipment, boats, surveillance devices, communication devices*”). He also highlighted the **importance of region-wide efforts to address smuggling**.

There is now a region-wide campaign led by the Fuel & Gas Crisis Committee. The committee is concerned with all types of smuggling, but has so far been focusing on fuel and food smuggling because they are easier to tackle and have a more immediate effect on the economy. They have made first progress, increasing border controls and checkpoints, and the hope is that this will give them momentum to also tackle the more complicated human smuggling problem. Addressing human smuggling requires experience and we lack this.

Municipal Council representative – Zuwara

A DCIM officer interviewed at the Tajura detention centre (see below) said that the DCIM had recently put in place a work plan to tackle smuggling, together with the Municipal Council. The plan includes reinforcing surveillance of beaches and setting up more road checkpoints. It is supported by local security agencies and “*support brigades*” (referring to armed groups that assist the regular police), which are “*all under the Interior Ministry,*” says the DCIM officer. In terms of key actors, he mentioned the First Division (Haitham Al-Tajuri’s force) and the Sawarikh Brigade. He added that there are obstacles to implementing the work plan, but that human resources and equipment are sufficient.

4.1.4. MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Tajura’s Coast Guard and Coast Security units are both active, although the Coast Security has less equipment. While Coast Security staff is currently being trained as part of Operation Sophia, the Coast Guard has not been included in the training so far. The Coast Guard, which is stationed at the Tajura Navy Base, patrols the sea on an almost daily basis and frequently intercepts boats, according to respondents. In March 2017, the Coast Guard intercepted a boat of over 200 migrants 3 to 4 nautical miles off the coast. Migrants were disembarked at the Tajura navy base, given first aid and then handed over to the DCIM’s Tajura branch, according to its spokesman.²⁷⁸ The local Red Crescent branch recovers bodies from the beaches and distributed aid to migrants.

The DCIM opened a new detention centre in Tajura in mid-April 2017. Previously, migrants were held at the local Passport Police Department and would usually be transferred to other facilities in Tripoli. The research team visited the new centre for this report and spoke to its deputy director, who is a DCIM officer at the rank of Captain. The centre is under DCIM authority but is run with the help of a local brigade as “*support force.*” The number of staff is 120, 30 of them administrative. At the time of

²⁷⁸ See Youm article available at this [link](#).

the visit (7 May 2017), there were 250 migrants at the centre, including three women and three children. According to the DCIM official interviewed, many of them were captured during a raid conducted by the centre's arrest unit on a nearby smuggler camp, where migrants were kept inside hangars. The official said that the DCIM was following up with the centre's affairs but that the budget available was not sufficient to carry out additional works that were planned, such as installing more toilets.

4.1.5. ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Respondents concurred that **smuggling has had a major impact on the local economy**. A member of the Municipal Council reported: *“The smuggling of fuel and food items has made prices hike and the value of the dinar decline. This substantially raised the cost of living for ordinary people. Some estimate that 10 billion dinars per year of public money are lost in smuggling. Human smuggling has also affected us from an economic, security and social standpoint. Many of the African migrants are not here to work and have caused a humanitarian crisis, which the state has to deal with.”*

Migrant labour plays an important part in the local economy, according to interviews. KIs mentioned Bir Al-Usta Milad as one of the neighbourhood where migrants tend to live and work.

A part of Greater Tripoli, Tajura is home to some factories. The area is also where most **fisheries** are located, as well as popular seafront **restaurants**. Prior to the revolution, Tajura was undergoing extensive **infrastructure works** as part of a masterplan to renew water and waste-water networks as well as telephone and electricity services.²⁷⁹ The Austrian-Libyan joint venture company executing the project – Al-Hani General Construction – was an important employer in the area.

²⁷⁹ “STRABAG setzt auf langfristige Tätigkeit in Libyen”, STRABAG, 8 January 2008, available at this [link](#).

4.2. GARABULLI

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Garabulli has been affected by troubled relations with Misrata and Tarhuna.
- The area has a long history of smuggling dating back to the 1990s, with direct connections to Kufra and Sebha.
- Smuggling groups are smaller and less organised than in other cities.
- Local smugglers are frequently armed, but there is no clear connection between prominent brigades and smuggling.
- Smugglers either recruit migrants locally or bring them from Bani Walid, often using secondary roads via areas south of Tripoli.
- The Coast Guard does not currently have a presence in Garabulli and rescue operations are carried out by units based in Tajura or Tripoli.
- The DCIM is not very active in the city. A migrant detention centre was burned down by a smuggler gang in 2016.
- Garabulli's economy is largely limited to agriculture, trade of food items and construction materials, with many locals working in transportation.

4.2.1. POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONTEXT

The Garabulli area is not divided into tribal zones but inhabited by many different families. **Garabulli has had tense relations with both Tarhuna and Misrata over the past two years.** Forces from Garabulli and Tarhuna (50km south of Garabulli) have repeatedly clashed over the control of checkpoints and roads in the area.²⁸⁰ The presence of Misratan forces in Garabulli during 2014 and 2015 created resentment amongst locals and eventually led to violence.

In 2015, Misrata dispatched several brigades to Garabulli and neighbouring towns as part of the so-called Coastal Road Protection Force. In June 2016, a minor dispute escalated into clashes erupted between the Baayu Brigade and local armed groups. Within hours, armed locals attacked three Misratan camps in Garabulli. Dozens of people died on each side. The fighting caused the explosion of an ammunitions depot, further raising the death toll.²⁸¹ The events forced Misrata to withdraw its forces.

4.2.2. SMUGGLING INDUSTRY

Garabulli has a long history of smuggling, dating back to the 1990s. The Garabulli ex-smuggler interviewed for this study entered the business in 2007, transporting migrants from Al-Kufra in the southeast to either Ajdabiya in the northeast or to Garabulli. Other local smugglers, he explained, would bring migrants from Sebha. Tarhuna, south of Garabulli, became a transit hub. Smuggling was disrupted by a crackdown led by the Gaddafi regime in 2008 but soon rebuilt and boosted at the start of the revolution. According to the local smuggler spoken to, officials of the beleaguered regime would

²⁸⁰ Tarhuna is also internally divided along political lines, with several killings taking place over the past three years.

²⁸¹ "Many Die in Day-Long Garabulli Violence", Libya Herald, 21 June 2016, available at this [link](#).

come to Garabulli to directly reward smugglers, in order to increase the migrant flows and the pressure on Europe. The business continued to grow after 2011, but the ex-smuggler interviewed did not change his operating mode.

I worked in smuggling until 2013 but with the same rhythm as before the revolution, about one trip a month. I was then part of a limited smuggling network. My role was limited to receiving migrants from specific points outside Kufra city, in coordination with the biggest smuggler in the area, who was referred to as “The Wolf”, and dropping them in hangars outside Garabulli, in areas like Ghanima and Al-Gwia.

Ex-Smuggler – Garabulli

But **the smuggling scene became rougher**, according to the ex-smuggler. **Armed groups became involved** and old smugglers had to adapt by arming themselves. As in other places, KIs said that many amateurs entered the scene, often former prison inmates.

Smuggling was reduced in 2015 due to the presence of the Misrata brigades, but when they left in April 2016, local smugglers resumed their operations, KIs explained. However, smugglers still do not venture east of Ghanima (village halfway between Garabulli Al-Khoms), because the coastal road there is secured by Misratan forces. Local smugglers bring migrants from Bani Walid via Tarhuna and villages south of Tripoli, often using a road that connects Souq Al-Khamis and Al-Sbia (south of Tripoli) to Al-Gwia.

Some of the clashes that have occurred in the area between forces from Garabulli and Tarhuna are believed to be linked to smuggling. In January 2017, several Garabulli residents were killed by the hands of the Tarhuna Revolutionaries Brigade (also known as Kani Brigade) in retaliation for the killing of two of their members at a Garabulli checkpoint.²⁸² While Garabulli sources claimed that the men killed at the checkpoint had been militiamen smuggling copper, the Tarhuna Revolutionaries Brigade – backed by Tarhuna’s Municipal Council – claimed that they attacked Garabulli groups over their involvement in migrant smuggling.²⁸³

In comparison to Sabratha and Al-Zawiya, **smuggling groups are believed to be smaller and less organized.** As the ex-smuggler’s account and the troubles with the Tarhuna brigade confirm, smugglers are frequently armed, but there is no clear connection between prominent brigades and smuggling.

The town of Garabulli is not actually located on the coast, but **smugglers operate in the wider area between Tajura to the west and Ghanima to the east.** Boats are mostly launched from Al-Shuyua resort,²⁸⁴ an adjacent fishing port, Wadi Al-Raml beach, and beaches in Ghanima. Most of the departure points are not open to the road but hidden behind rows of trees or behind walls. According to the ex-smuggler interviewed, the prevailing impunity has led smugglers to launch boats from “*all beaches*,” including “*family resorts*.”²⁸⁵

Prior to departure, migrants are kept on farms (in hangars or houses), which are mostly located in Ghut Al-Rumman (just east of Tajura), Al-Gwia (farm area next to Garabulli) and Qasr Al-Khiar (east of Garabulli). KIs also mentioned the use of livestock and chicken farms, such as one known as “Al-Kabaluni,” for migrant gathering.

²⁸² “Garabulli says 8 dead in attack by Tarhouna”, Libya Herald, 29 January 2017, available at this [link](#).

²⁸³ See Akhar Libya article available at this [link](#).

²⁸⁴ “Communist resort,” named after a former refugee camp for children from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

²⁸⁵ In Libya, “resorts” usually refers to small fenced beach sections with very basic facilities. The coastline of Tajura is lined with family resorts.

4.2.3. COUNTER-SMUGGLING POLICIES AND STAKEHOLDERS

According to respondents, the main security providers are “*the police and some revolutionary brigades,*” but **security is generally poor and little is done to address the smuggling problem.** The DCIM’s presence in the city was described as “*weak.*” “*Raids occur, but rarely,*” the local businessman met said. Meanwhile, a Municipal Council member interviewed bluntly stated that “*there are no measures*” against smuggling.

We don't have the necessary support to face this sort of phenomenon, essentially due to the weakness of security agencies. Smuggling gangs must be dealt with, but this is the role of the army and police.

Municipal Council member – Garabulli

The **Coast Guard does not have an active presence in Garabulli.** “*There are patrols launched from Misrata and Tripoli, but they are not effective,*” the Municipal Council member said. According to an August 2015 press report, the Coast Guard had a local commander in Garabulli at the time, who had no equipment to his disposal and was using his family’s fishing boat for rescues.²⁸⁶

The **Misratan brigades that were stationed in Garabulli** until June 2016 appear to have played an **ambiguous role** in terms of law enforcement. Ostensibly, they contributed to securing the area, manning checkpoints and controlling access to the city. The increase of smuggling activities following their departure suggests that they **prevented smugglers from working.** However, some sources -including in Misrata – accused one of the Misratan forces, the Baayu Brigade, of being itself involved in migrant smuggling.²⁸⁷

“*The troubles last year between locals and the Misrata brigade that was securing the area were likely about smuggling.*”

Businessman – Garabulli

KIs criticised local authorities in Garabulli for not taking sufficient measures to secure the city and combat smugglers. According to a prominent local businessman, “*There sometimes are security checkpoints at the entrance to the city, but this is not enough. The Municipality is not doing much. Security forces lack capacities, but they are also not all working together to fight smuggling.*”

Local elders have spoken out against smuggling but this did not lead to any wider civil mobilization. A Garabulli local resident mentioned: “*Some of the elders tried [to rally support against smugglers] but there was not much popular response and it did not have any impact.*”

4.2.4. MIGRATION MANAGEMENT

Rescue operations take place regularly. Usually, local fishermen alert the Coast Guard, which sends a boat from Tripoli or Tajura. **The only local migrant detention centre, which was located in the area of Al-Gwia, was burnt down by a smuggling gang last year,** according to KIs. The only humanitarian

²⁸⁶ “On Libya’s Coast Refugees Are just ‘Goods’ to Be Stored and Shipped”, Middle East Eye, 28 August 2015, available at this [link](#).

²⁸⁷ “Many Die in Day-Long Garabulli Violence”, Libya Herald, 21 June 2016, available at this [link](#). The brigade is also known in Tripoli for its involvement in the 2013 “Gharghour massacre,” in which dozens of protesters were killed by Misratan armed groups stationed in the capital. As part of the Libya Dawn coalition, the brigade has also been involved in recent Tripoli clashes, fighting against Haitham Tajuri’s First Division, among others. Its leader, Mohammed Baayu, also known as “Sherikhan,” is regarded as criminal by many Tripoli residents.

actor mentioned by KIs is the Red Crescent. “Residents call them to remove the bodies,” the Municipal Council member said.

4.2.5. ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Youth unemployment is high, and many cannot find “adequate jobs,” according to KIs. There has been little industrial development. There is a plastic factory, but it does not seem to be operating at present. **The private sector consists mostly of farms, transportation, and trade.** KIs mentioned small factories for construction materials, private construction and some private clinics said to have opened recently. The Garabulli businessman reported: “Many young people like to work as truck drivers, transporting food items. There are personal initiatives. Some youth have small projects and try to succeed. But the city lacks training centres and service infrastructure.”

The ex-smuggler from Garabulli interviewed also started a legal business.

I am now a merchant for construction materials and I own many trucks for transporting goods to all parts of Libya. Many young Libyans work for me as drivers, some of them are relatives. I also own a factory for cement bricks. I also employ about 20 migrant workers on a part-time basis and 5 permanently.

Ex-smuggler – Garabulli

Interviews suggested that there is little initiative at the municipal level. A local Municipal Council member thought that “The private sector is the result of personal efforts” and does not require promotion. “We are not obstructing personal efforts,” he added.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. LESSONS LEARNT FROM ZUWARA

The 2015 crackdown against migrant smugglers in Zuwara has given the region a very encouraging example of how local communities can change the course of events and restore their tarnished reputation. Many respondents across the region mentioned the example of Zuwara, adding that **no such public mobilization had occurred anywhere else.** For Zuwaran respondents, the crackdown not only outlawed a despicable practice, but also gave locals a sense of responsibility, confidence and pride. *“The crackdown made people feel that they can influence their lives, and that their voices are heard,”* a Municipal Council member said. Public opinion has not shifted on this matter since 2015, as the benefits of eradicating migrant smuggling are evident. As a respondent within the Elders Council of Zuwara pointed out: *“Everybody has realized that smuggling is a bad phenomenon for the community.”* A member of the Zuwaran Counter Crime Unit agreed and added: *“Now there is less access to easy money, and less young men leave school and do drugs.”*

The crackdown did not come without criticism and drawbacks, however. **First**, self-administered justice outside the official framework, although an understandable choice given the failings of the judiciary, risks weakening the judiciary further. Until a strong and independent justice sector emerges, deciding how to efficiently act against smugglers will remain a dilemma.

Second, the relocation of many Zuwaran smugglers to the Sabratha area, and the booming fuel smuggling industry in Zuwara (and across west Libya) are major drawbacks that should not be forgotten when looking at Zuwara as a model for local empowerment.

Third, the battle against migrant smuggling is not “won” as long as root causes and incentives remain. Now that conditions in Zuwara are not favourable to migrant smuggling, most local smugglers have adopted a low profile or switched trades, but their networks have not been severed, and if conditions change, migrant smuggling might also resume. Zuwaran respondents had different thoughts on this, but the main point made was that the community must keep up the pressure to prevent relapse.

Fourth, the response to the crackdown (or lack thereof) from the state and neighbouring cities caused resentment in Zuwara. Residents have voiced disappointment with national authorities for taking measures against the city for vigilantism, while failing to support local authorities before the crackdown and after it succeeded. Zuwara still faces the effects of migrant smuggling in the form of shipwrecks and rescues off its coast. This angers many locals, including a respondent who said: *“We got together to stop smuggling and now we have to deal with the mess created by our neighbours [e.g. smugglers in Sabratha] and we are not even supported by the government to do this.”*

5.2. REPLICATING EFFORTS IN OTHER AREAS OF DEPARTURE

Local context matters hugely, and the Zuwaran experience cannot be easily reproduced in other cities. Sabratha and Al-Zawiya, but also Tajura, are split politically and tribally, which obstructs any collective action against smugglers. Moreover, in all major departure zones, smugglers are closely affiliated with armed groups, who use connections and weapons to protect their business (whereas, according to Zuwarans, the smuggling industry in their city was not led by armed groups). Zuwara also arguably had more economic alternatives than other cities, including informal trade and fuel smuggling. As a respondent from Zuwara summarized, *“The problem was relatively easy to tackle in Zuwara because smugglers were mostly just young guys wanting to make a bit of money to buy big cars and have fun in Tunisia. But in other towns like Sabratha and Al-Zawiya, the smuggling business is built upon pre-existing feuds between families and tribal actors. The militias doing the business are more*

organized and some have political agendas. They cannot easily be controlled. I do not think that Zuwara's experience could be transposed to any other municipality of departure. You need to address the underlying issues first, through reconciliation."

There is nevertheless **a chance for other cities of departure to mobilize in similar ways, if rival political and tribal factions in those cities put aside their differences**. Local authorities and civil society groups could then coordinate and step up anti-smuggling campaigns, both as a preventive measure and to socially marginalize smugglers. While it is certain that the empowerment of armed groups throughout Libya has weakened traditional mechanisms of social control, social ties are not severed. Community leaders must show clear commitment to increasing the pressure on smugglers.

Across the different departure cities, anger and frustration with the smugglers is tangible. The unabated tide of human misery has led to greater indifference over time, and most residents do not know – or wish to know – what happens inside migrant gathering places and detention centres. Yet washed up dead bodies and devastating media reports prevent the misery from being brushed under the carpet. **Civic values and activism are manifest and can be strengthened** by supporting those who take action and have a say within their community. Humanitarian actors who help deal with the crisis, in particular the Red Crescent, have a great deal of public support and rely on many volunteer helpers.

While tackling smugglers at the municipality level is certainly an important step, the Zuwara case also shows that durably reducing boat departures requires **region-wide mobilization**. If smugglers are only targeted in one location, they have the ability to reorganize their operations and relocate to different departure zones. Cooperation in this regard is hindered by conflicts and latent tensions between west Libyan cities, and communities perceiving each other as rivals rather than partners. As a result, local stakeholders have been reluctant to take initiative, as they condition it on reciprocity in neighbouring cities.

Assisting Libyan communities in areas of migrant transit is largely seen as Europe's duty. There are fears that the development assistance promised by the EU and member states will be implemented with a piecemeal approach and evaporate without any lasting benefits for local communities. The challenges are great, but so is the potential benefit of strengthening local authorities and enabling them to better protect and govern their communities. Local development projects that help generate income will be well received in the current context of political uncertainty and economic hardship.

It is a **challenge for international stakeholders to operate** in an environment where their intentions are widely questioned and their credibility is at stake. Many respondents say they are confused about the intentions of the EU and bilateral EU member states, which urge Libyan authorities to better protect their borders and stop boat departures, yet deplore detention conditions and rescue migrants at sea. From their perspective, the large-scale sea rescue operations are a pull factor for migrants and a reason for smugglers to use boats that are unseaworthy and cause more shipwrecks. According to KIs, many Libyans moreover believe that – if they were truly interested in curtailing migration – Western countries could stop migrant flows before they even reach Libya, given their military presence in the Sahel. Suspicions of the international community's intentions are deeply engrained in the security sector – partly a legacy of Gaddafi's discourse on migration and Western politics. Many respondents thought that the international community's security approach to the migration crisis should focus more on regional cooperation, especially with Algeria, Niger, Chad and Sudan, in order to help Libya protect its southern borders. Another challenge – or dilemma – for international stakeholders is that, in their attempt to curb migrant flow, they are reliant on Libyan security forces that are rarely held accountable for human rights abuses. Meanwhile, Libyan officials frequently complain to the press that the EU is not living up to its promises in terms of helping Libya to improve secure its land borders and coastline.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ See "Italy tries to bolster Libyan coast guard, despite humanitarian concern", Reuters, 15 May 2017, at this [link](#).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS

The recommendations offered in the following subsections focus on strengthening effective migration management and combatting smuggling along the West Libyan coast. However, at the strategic level, these initiatives alone are not sufficient to tackle the issue at hand in a sustainable and human rights-compliant manner.

The most effective way to curb smuggling is to decrease the demand of migrants for this service, as the industry will continue to thrive as long as there is a demand for irregular border crossing. Initiatives against criminal networks are much needed, but if they are not part of a wider strategy, they are likely to be ineffective and risk putting vulnerable people in even more vulnerable situations. Similarly, migration management efforts conducted in the Libyan coastal areas also need to go hand in hand with regional and global programming and policies.

This report therefore recommends the following seven strategic orientations:

1) Address the root causes of migration and forced displacement in countries of origin.

Improving opportunities and working towards the prevention and mitigation of major threats (such as civil wars, persecution, poverty and climate change) in countries of origin is one of the few real long-term solutions to the issue of irregular migration.²⁸⁹

This could be done through enhanced development assistance, investment in economic growth and job creation,²⁹⁰ and, in the case of forced displacement, through early warning, conflict resolution and prevention mechanisms. Efforts in this regard must be prioritized.²⁹¹

2) Ensure the protection of asylum seekers and refugees. Efforts to address irregular migration must not jeopardise access to asylum. Ensuring access to asylum includes early identification of those needing protection, adequate reception facilities in destination countries and durable solutions.

In Libya, the protection of asylum seekers and refugees cannot be guaranteed at the moment and it is unlikely to be comprehensive in the short term, as it would require a significant improvement of the general political and security situation in the country.

3) Provide legal opportunities to come to Europe for economic migrants who are not eligible to international protection. As mentioned above, efforts should focus on cutting the demand to dismantle the market for smugglers.²⁹² This can be done by developing more legal

Coast Guard representatives say they need more and better equipment to carry out patrols and rescues. "They want us to be Europe's policeman. At the same time, that policeman needs resources. I challenge anyone to work in these conditions," Coast Guard spokesman Ayub Qassem told Reuters.

²⁸⁹ This was already highlighted in the 2015 European Agenda on Migration. See *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A European Agenda on Migration*, European Commission, 13 May 2015, available at this [link](#).

²⁹⁰ For instance through better access to EU markets and foreign investment.

²⁹¹ For instance, the new European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) that might be approved by the European Parliament on 6 July 2017, or programming started in June 2016 through the Migration Partnership Framework (see *Migration Partnership Framework*, European Commission, available at this [link](#)).

²⁹² While trafficking is in many ways more complex, it does also often rest on supply and demand dynamics.

and credible options for migrants to travel to Europe,²⁹³ as planned in the 2015 European Agenda on Migration.²⁹⁴

Legal channels of migration must be clear, well implemented, accessible, affordable and not require unreasonable amounts of time to come through, otherwise migrants are still likely to opt for quicker irregular pathways. The development of these legal avenues must be accompanied by communication campaigns to inform migrants on existing legal alternatives and allow them to make more informed decisions.

It is interesting to note here that promoting regular migration has the potential to generate revenue streams that would divert money away from the very large economy that has been born out of irregular migration and smuggling and that would lead to migration benefiting not only migrants but also the countries involved.²⁹⁵

4) Invest in humanitarian response and in the development of opportunities in transit countries where migrants could safely settle. Research shows that a significant portion of the flow heading to Europe would be content to remain in transit countries if they had access to livelihoods and education as well as possibilities to be regularized there.

First, direct assistance to migrants in these transit countries (Libya's neighbours for instance) ought to be scaled up. Regularisation campaigns could then be encouraged, to allow migrants to enter the formal labour market. Opportunities to work legally in these countries would decrease the number of migrants at risk of being exploited and detained, while enabling them to contribute to the local economy.

In the case of Libya, which used to be a country of destination for Sub-Saharan Africans looking for work, this would require significant progress in terms of security, governance and economic development, along with the issuance of formal work permits.²⁹⁶

5) Enhance international coordination to fight smuggling and trafficking globally. A strengthened multilateral approach is essential given the transnational nature of these activities²⁹⁷ and the fact that routes regularly emerge in new regions when networks are only dismantled locally.

²⁹³ As highlighted in previous Altai reports, legal options could include the following: a) circular migration schemes that promote temporary jobs at the low-skilled and high-skilled level and in industries that demonstrate a demand for foreign labour; b) the promotion of private sponsorship schemes that could potentially target diaspora communities already in Europe; c) increased resettlement quotas with links between industrialised nations; d) greater efforts for family reunification, as many of those coming by boat are hoping to reunite with family already in Europe.

²⁹⁴ *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A European Agenda on Migration*, European Commission, 13 May 2015, available at this [link](#).

²⁹⁵ For example, revenue streams could be created in the form of visa fees, through increases in cross-border trade and in the form of increased income tax.

²⁹⁶ Given the narrow conditions to access to documentation in Libya, it is acknowledged that this is a longer-term objective. It would be worth assessing the possibility of encouraging such initiatives nevertheless, given that: a) Libyan employers would not hire irregular migrants off the streets or from jails if there was a pool of regular migrant workforce, readily available and affordable; b) work permits could be a source of revenue for the state, and allow for a closer monitoring of the number of foreigners in Libya; c) if more paths were open to enter Libya legally to work, they could become an alternative to the migration routes through the South of the country, thus keeping migrants from the dangers they now face in the Sahara and weakening smuggling networks in this region.

²⁹⁷ Smuggling is by definition transnational. While human trafficking does not necessarily happen across borders, in practice migrant trafficking networks are most often transnational.

There is a clear need to scale up efforts to disrupt the business model of transnational smuggling and trafficking networks through strong cooperation between police forces in Europe, in countries of transit and of origin. In the fight against smuggling, special attention needs to be paid to human trafficking networks, which often originate in countries of origin.

Measures to dismantle such networks could include: freezing assets;²⁹⁸ tracking financial flows, especially high-level money laundering schemes; imposing travel bans;²⁹⁹ tracking rubber boats importations to Libya,³⁰⁰ listing importers³⁰¹ and hampering importation;³⁰² naming and shaming smugglers and making sure that they are listed by the UN sanction committee.³⁰³

- 6) Develop synergies between programs along the migration routes:** Given the nature, complexity and scale of the problem, cooperation and coordination are required in programming, to take into account the totality of actors and risks and opportunities along the way, to address protection gaps in all countries along the route, and to also ensure that interventions do not simply move the flows elsewhere.

Levels of cooperation should include: Between layers of countries (as in the Khartoum process between the African Union and EU); between countries (bilateral agreements, or mechanisms at the regional level); between governments, civil society, international organisations and the private sector (as in the Global Initiative on protection at Sea for example); amongst international organisations (between IOM and UNHCR for instance); within governments (amongst the various ministries of a country, in the spirit of a “whole of government” response); at the international level.

- 7) Continue humanitarian assistance efforts for as long as they are necessary while other strategic orientations are put to effect:** None of the axes of intervention cited above can halt migrant flows in the short term. It is therefore necessary to carry on with protection at sea operations, which currently save lives in the face of strong push factors. However, a dialogue between all actors involved in search and rescue and a reflection on how to improve efficiency of operations and reduce unintended consequences (such as smugglers adapting their modus operandi) could be launched. Humanitarian missions in the desert might also need to be considered, given the presumably high number of casualties and increasing vulnerability of migrants during the crossing). Finally, support offered to the victims of trafficking networks should be enhanced.

²⁹⁸ Details of bank accounts used for smuggling are in many cases already known: with the professionalization of the industry, migrants traveling on “organised journeys”, for instance, wire transfer the money to a smuggler’s bank account.

²⁹⁹ Major smugglers and traffickers managing large transnational networks are often traveling internationally.

³⁰⁰ Since rubber boats cannot be produced in Libya, smugglers rely heavily on importation.

³⁰¹ In order to import goods through legal channels, Libyan businesses need a letter a credit (payment guarantee by a commercial bank). The attribution of letters of credits is supervised by the central bank. Due to the financial crisis and the banks’ lack of foreign currency, letters of credit are rarely attributed at present.

³⁰² For instance, strengthen the provisions of the embargo to ensure that rubber boats are not imported to Libya.

³⁰³ A number of them are already listed by the UN Panel of Experts.

6.2. COMBATTING SMUGGLING AND MANAGING MIGRATION IN NORTHWEST LIBYA

6.2.1. CONTINUE EFFORTS TO STABILIZE LIBYA

Any long-term efforts to improve migration management and combat smuggling and trafficking in Libya would require the stabilization of the country, with stronger and legitimate central and local institutions, security and economic development.

Continue dialogue and peace-building efforts, focusing on the local and regional levels. Smuggling thrives in the prevailing security vacuum and environment of impunity. At the same time, armed groups are increasingly involved in the smuggling industry, using the additional income to further their political or tribal agendas. Thus, smuggling fuels local conflict and instability. West Libya's smuggling industry cannot be thoroughly curbed unless local stakeholders overcome their differences and agree to work together against smugglers, as evidenced by the experience of Zuwara. Aware of this, many respondents suggested that the focus of external assistance ought to be on conflict resolution and mediation, both at the local and the regional level. Efforts to promote unity in internally divided communities must be encouraged. Dialogue initiatives launched between several cities in 2014 and 2015 need to be assessed and potentially reinvigorated. The international community can assist by funding local actions, training mediators, providing platforms for dialogue, and exerting pressure at the national level to promote peace.

Help stabilize local communities through direct development assistance. Continue existing community stabilization programs (led by organizations such as UNDP and IOM) and extend them to migrant departure municipalities. Such programs might include improving basic public services, rehabilitating public infrastructure and creating livelihoods (as recommended below in the section "Develop economic alternatives").

Assist the GNA and the Central Bank of Libya in addressing the financial crisis. The banks' lack of foreign currency and liquidity overall affects the economy and standard of living in multiple ways. In particular, it prevents public sector employees (who make up at least 70 percent of the workforce) from accessing their salaries, thereby reducing productivity, as well as reinforcing corruption and illegal activities. The cash crisis has made smuggling (mainly of fuel and migrants) even more appealing as it generates quick cash that is otherwise hard to obtain. Without saying that the cash crisis is responsible for the growth of the smuggling industry, it is undeniably a factor reinforcing the phenomenon.

6.2.2. SUPPORT LAW ENFORCEMENT

A legal framework on migration exists in Libya – albeit limited and flawed – and judicial structures are in place, with prosecution taking place as far as the security context allows. The main gap to better manage migration and fight smuggling is law enforcement. The international community could do more to support relevant law enforcement agencies by building their capacity (technical assistance), providing material support, as well as enhancing monitoring and controls (strengthened organisation and controls of field units, monitoring of human rights violations).

Assist relevant law enforcement agencies in strengthening their organizational structure and monitoring their components and affiliates. The Coast Guard, Coast Security and DCIM are centralized bodies, whose senior command should be able to speak on behalf of its units and implement policies across northwest Libya. However, they are fragmented and often rely on the support of local armed groups, which reduces oversight and control. Moreover, overlapping mandates reduce their efficiency. The international community must put pressure on national level decision-makers and senior

security officials to strengthen command structures within their agencies and to implement better screening and monitoring processes for individual members. The international community can support organizational capacities, for instance through training on human resource management and advising on legislative and institutional reforms.

Continue and expand capacity building for Coast Guard and Coast Security, but with a greater focus on vetting and monitoring. The ongoing training for the Coast Guard and Coast Security as part of the EU's EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia is positively perceived in Libya and should be continued. Trainees need technical skills (such as boat handling, maritime surveillance, interception of smugglers, safe search and rescue operations) as well as training on maritime law, human rights and first aid. These aspects seem to be covered. Competition between law enforcement agencies, as well as between different local stations, however compromises the objectivity of the selection and vetting process, which must therefore be closely monitored. Some interviewees criticized the selection of trainees, claiming that not all local units were benefiting from the program. Being in direct contact with commanders in the different locations may mitigate biases.

Support existing efforts to develop a comprehensive border management system. Libyan interlocutors often attribute the lack of progress in terms of land border monitoring to the international community. It is a widespread view that foreign nations could do more to stop migrants before they enter Libya, *"If they were truly committed"* – especially France and the United States, due to their military presence in the Sahel region. At the same time, international efforts to improve Libyan border management, essentially through EUBAM, were interrupted by the political escalation in 2014 and have not fully resumed due to lack of access. Training programs for border guards were not completed and are being reassessed. IOM has put forth a plan to support border management through infrastructure development, training and provision of equipment, as well as the installation of an Electronic Border Management Information System (BMIS) at points of entry. Other international stakeholders can provide additional support, in coordination with the Border Management Working Group (multilateral working group, brought back to life in 2016) and the National Team of Border Security and Management (established by the GNA in October 2016).

Continue offering material assistance to the Coast Guard and Coast Security provided that strong monitoring mechanisms can be put in place. In all migrant departure zones, maritime law enforcement agencies operate with very little and inadequate equipment (vehicles, boats, surveillance and communication devices). The patrol vessels recently delivered to Libya are insufficient, especially for rescue operations. If the EU approves Libya's request for equipment, it needs to put in place extensive mechanisms to monitor its distribution and use. The distribution of equipment could be a source of tensions and reinforce rivalries between agencies and individual units. There should be multi-actor assessment and monitoring processes, involving national-level agencies (Defence Ministry, Interior Ministry, National Team of Border Security and Management) and municipal officials and security actors, as well as external monitors.

Communicate on support provided by the international community to Libyan security agencies. The interviews revealed a lack of knowledge and misinformation regarding external assistance. For instance, Coast Guard and Coast Security officials did not seem sufficiently informed about the ongoing EU training. Moreover, the apparent lack of progress on border monitoring and reducing migration has led to the spread of conspiracy theories on the complicity of European governments and armies with international smuggling networks. It therefore seems necessary to further disseminate information on EU policies and international support to Libya within the relevant agencies, as well as conducting public information campaigns for the general population. Conducting opinion surveys in coastal communities would be helpful to better understand the local perception of programs and monitor the impact of related communication campaigns.

Promote good governance and adherence to human rights in the security sector. The international community, and in particular stakeholders who directly support Libyan security agencies, should exert more pressure on the leaderships of these agencies to ensure that human rights are respected by their members. Reported cases of mistreatment of migrants during rescue operations, and arrests in detention must be thoroughly investigated and perpetrators must be punished. Weak chains of command and lack of oversight represent an obvious challenge in this regard, but the problem also seems to be denial on the part of Libyan officials. International actors should be careful not to give legitimacy to armed groups outside the official security sector. Working with such groups, for instance those running migrant detention centres, is usually interpreted and portrayed as endorsement, and should be avoided as far as possible, or accompanied by efforts to involve official oversight.

Advocate for greater multilateral cooperation on combatting migrant smuggling and human trafficking. Libyan authorities should be encouraged to work more closely with European authorities specialized in this domain, or even to extradite Libyan and foreign smugglers arrested in Libya. Current judicial measures do not constitute enough of a deterrence – well-connected smugglers usually manage to evade arrest and trial, and prison terms for those captured are usually short. Italian prosecutors, who have taken the lead on migrant smuggling and human trafficking cases, have much information about the Libyan smuggling industry and its regional ramifications, but no access to individuals detained in Libya. Meanwhile, DCIM investigators would certainly benefit from working more closely with counterparts in neighbouring countries and EU member states, especially Italy. Similarly, the Libyan Coast Guard should be encouraged to regularly exchange with other Coast Guards in the Mediterranean, such as via the Seahorse Mediterranean Network, which is currently being implemented.

6.2.3. STRENGTHEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Much of the responsibility of managing the migrant crisis currently rests on local communities, with local actors often lacking state support, budgets and capacities. To better manage migration flows and effectively fight smuggling, it is therefore necessary to enhance local governance, which can be done by strengthening local authorities and encouraging coordination between them. The political and institutional shortcomings at the national level make it essential to further engage with municipal councils and community leaders.

Raise the capacities of municipal councils and other local stakeholders for migration management. Municipal councils have until now been reluctant to play an active role in migration management, seeing this as a moral and social responsibility rather than a mandate. This attitude has started to change. As the central state remains weak, municipal councils are increasingly solicited and see funding being directed their way. Yet, they still lack capacities and means to address the crisis appropriately.³⁰⁴ While acknowledging that the general approach of municipal actors is to prioritize their communities (“Libya First”), international actors should ensure that their capacity building programs have positive effects on migration management. A point made by respondents was that local authorities generally lack administrative capacities and that enhancing these through targeted training would benefit their communities, as well as improving migration management. Trainings could cover general administrative skills, crisis management, advocacy, public outreach, IT and accounting. In municipalities with ongoing internal conflicts, trainings could focus on peace-building and crisis management. The

³⁰⁴ Note that international and Libyan organizations have carried out trainings for local actors involved in migration management in the past, including Municipal Council staff, security officials and detention centre staff. These trainings cover mainly health issues, such as first aid, disease control and handling dead bodies, as well as legislation pertaining to migrants and refugees.

approach could also consist of helping municipal councils set up long-term training programs for their staff, as some of them do not seem to have a functioning training department.

Support migration management through direct contributions to local authorities, humanitarian and security actors. A key challenge for humanitarian and security actors is the increasing gap between the scale of the crisis and the available infrastructure and means. Detention centres are insufficiently equipped and mostly need additional facilities (sanitary installations for example) as well as strengthened medical assistance for detainees. Material support could be delivered directly to municipal councils for distribution to local security forces and CSOs. However, such mechanism would require prior assessment of the capacities and resources of each municipal council to take on this mission, as well as robust monitoring mechanisms.

Promote coordination between local actors and programming at the local level that includes municipal councils as well as local social and security actors. Municipal councils are in most cases adequate channels for action, however most municipalities along the areas of boat departures seem to lack clear mechanisms for consultation and coordination with other stakeholders. Social actors (elders and CSOs for instance) and security stakeholders also need to be involved in initiatives to fight smuggling, develop alternatives and manage migration flows. Assistance programs should therefore emphasize and promote inclusive action.

Engage with authorities at the central level and advocate for the need for enhanced inter-agency coordination. KIs stressed the importance of a more solid and cohesive national approach for addressing the migration crisis. Involving national authorities, including the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Labour, is necessary to complement initiatives with local authorities. Coordination between different ministries and institutions must be strengthened.

6.2.4. DEVELOP ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

The private sector in cities of departure remains weak and market entry barriers have increased due to the financial crisis and security situation. The stalled public sector makes it all the more important to develop a more dynamic and diversified private sector. In the long run, increased economic opportunities and perspectives will help reduce incentives for young Libyans to join armed groups and engage in illegal activities such as migrant smuggling.

Support private sector development and SME creation. Many young men and women have innovative business ideas, in fields such as design, architecture, consulting and communication, yet lack guidance and access to funding. They can be assisted through training and coaching (on management, accounting, or commercial law for instance), small loans or grants, and networking with established businesses and business support organizations. This constitutes a gap that foreign stakeholders can address jointly with municipal and national authorities, in particular with Libya Enterprise, a public agency for SME promotion. Activities should be designed to supplement existing programs, such as the EU-funded program SLEIDSE (Support to Libya for Economic Integration, Diversification and Sustainable Development), which is being implemented by Expertise France.

Conduct market studies in the main municipalities of departures to identify gaps and opportunities on the local job market. Determining sectors with potential in the coastal areas, and designing targeted programs for business promotion and job creation will require thorough market assessments and actor mappings for each city. Organizing focus groups and encouraging the creation of a data base of start-up companies and business ideas could be helpful. Traditional crafts such as fishing and agriculture are worth exploring, as Libyans are now more reliant on local produce. There

may also be room for business ideas in the field of sports and entertainment, which would have the additional benefit of creating a more positive environment for local youth.

Look into supporting vocational training facilities to broaden their offer and establish partnerships abroad. Respondents were largely uninformed about vocational training in their cities, and dismissed the type of technical education offered by state-led facilities. While there is generally little regard for technical professions, language and IT skills have more appeal to young Libyans. For such skills, young Libyans often prefer private institutes to public universities, to obtain certificates faster and learn more efficiently. In the past, many private teaching centres offered internationally recognized certificates and sometimes the possibility of studying abroad. The current logistical challenges (bank transfers, travel, security) have severely curtailed these activities. The relevance of, and need for, vocational training in the coastal areas could be studied further, through surveys, focus groups and discussions with local trainers.

Communicate on existing economic opportunities, vocational training and programs for business promotion. Interviews suggested that there is little knowledge, in municipalities of focus, of how the private sector is evolving, what vocational training facilities there are, where economic opportunities lie and what is being done to promote them. Even municipal council representatives had little to say in this regard. Yet, the private sector in the respective communities is not stagnant altogether, and there are Libyan and foreign initiatives to develop it. It therefore seems necessary to not only further expand assistance programs but to also communicate this to a larger audience.

Focus also on developing economic alternatives in Libya's southern border communities. Closer monitoring of Libya's southern borders cannot produce any lasting results unless borderland towns where both migrant smugglers and border guards are based (such as Ghat, Ubari, Murzuq, Gatrun and Kufra) are adequately supported. In these poorly developed communities, employment opportunities are particularly scarce. According to locals, even small initiatives can have a great impact because expectations among residents and job seekers are lower than in coastal communities. Moreover, the smuggling industry would be comparatively easy to contain given that there are fewer actors and greater tribal control mechanisms. Supporting these communities should entail not only hiring more locals for existing businesses (mainly oil sector) and promoting sectors that are stalled (construction, agriculture), but also encouraging entrepreneurship.

6.2.5. FOCUS ON PROTECTION AND INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS

Initiatives to support migrants already in Libya could be deployed at three levels: identification and improved referrals; protection and administrative support; inclusion in the local labour market.

Support the introduction of a comprehensive registration system for migrants, but consider carefully how information is shared. At present, migrants might be registered at boat disembarkation points (through Coast Guard) and in detention centres (DCIM and others), although this is not done systematically. IOM and UNHCR are aiming at compiling the registration information collected. IOM advocates for the installation of a Biometric Identification and Management System (BIMS) and plans to set up the required infrastructure at border entry points. Humanitarian actors (IOM, DRC, IDC) endorse a two-level registration process, with preliminary registration taking place at disembarkation points (allowing for vulnerable cases to be identified and referred to specialized actors) and proper screening taking place at detention centres by trained DCIM members, international organizations, NGOs or CSOs. The information obtained during the screening should be used for referral purposes but not be shared with all migration management actors to prevent further exploitation of migrants.

Advocate for the development of a solid referral system between the different actors that can provide support and protection for migrants: national and local authorities, international organisations, NGOs, CSOs. The two-step registration and screening system mentioned above should allow for vulnerable migrants to avoid detention but be placed in shelters or taken to medical facilities. DCIM members, as well as local humanitarian actors working on the ground, must receive further trainings to be able to identify vulnerabilities. Referral pathways (knowing which actors and facilities in the respective area can assume responsibility for vulnerable migrants) must be strengthened. There must be centralized coordination of referrals and continuous follow-up by the MMWG³⁰⁵ and Libyan partners.

Assist migrants with administrative processes. Whether they are in detention or residing irregularly in Libya, migrants have very limited access to consular support by their countries of origin. They may also be reluctant to interact with their diplomatic representation because of the risk of political oppression and persecution in their country of origin, the irregular nature of their arrival to Libya, or rumours that some official representatives collaborate with smugglers. Assistance could take the form of information (on legislation, administrative procedures), referrals to relevant administrations and coordination with diplomatic representations that are not currently present in Libya.

Encourage the development of a proper asylum system, in coordination with UNHCR. This includes early identification of people who cannot return to their home countries, adequate reception facilities, identification of durable solutions, structuration and clear definition of the roles of institutions and authorities in charge of migration. Asylum seekers use the same routes as economic migrants and no distinction is being made in Libya. The international community must continue advocating for a change in legislation (to establish an asylum system or allow for UNHCR to work legally) and for the protection of people eligible for asylum (recognition of UNHCR certificates). In addition, the international community must continue raising awareness on the legal differences between refugees, asylum seekers and migrants within Libyan authorities (such as the DCIM, Border Guard, Coast Guard), continue to challenge the detention of asylum seekers and refugees, and increase efforts to obtain their release.

Insist on, and support more thorough assessment and monitoring of migrant detention centres. Press for the shutdown of detention centres that are controlled by armed groups for the purpose of extortion and trafficking. Pressure DCIM to assert control over detention centres that are run by brigades or only nominally under DCIM supervision. Additional funding provided to the DCIM to manage detention centres should be accompanied by strong capacity building, awareness raising and M&E mechanisms. Enhance monitoring of all detention centres (detention and release conditions, management of the centres), as well as monitoring of the use of support provided. Engage with municipal authorities to verify conditions in detention centres and understand persistent problems. Strengthen coordination mechanisms between humanitarian actors who assist migrants in detention. Support existing programs, in particular efforts by IOM, UNHCR and their partners (assistance to migrants in detention; mental health and psychosocial support).

Carry out a comprehensive assessment of CSOs working with migrants. Several CSOs based in migrant departure zones provide assistance to migrants, often in partnership with international organizations. However, there seems to be a lack of oversight and coordination, and not all CSOs are active at present. Some CSOs are linked to the security apparatus, including to local armed groups that run detention centres (Sabratha, Al-Zawiya). Such affiliations must be carefully evaluated prior to endorsing or supporting CSO activities to avoid strengthening the wrong actors. Local authorities

³⁰⁵ Key members of the MMWG are: UNHCR, IOM, IMC, DRC, CIR.

interviewed had little information about CSO activities in their cities, and several local organisations could not be reached for interviews at the time of research.

Facilitate inclusion in the local labour market. Future programming could test how more and better work opportunities could be offered to migrants willing to stay in Libya, while working under the assumption that they are unlikely to be able to legalize their stay in the near future. These initiatives should be cognizant of the difficulties for the host communities themselves to access employment. Migrant labour is generally seen as essential but in need of more oversight. Promoting and formalizing the integration of migrant workers is not likely to encounter any major resistance in the municipalities of focus. However, legal obstacles need to be addressed with the relevant national authorities. Migrants should have the possibility to request and renew documentation from their embassies for the purpose of legalizing their stay in Libya.

Look into the feasibility of implementing a release-for-work program across west Libya. The pilot projects to hire migrants from detention in Sabratha and Janzur should be evaluated, to assess whether they have proven mutually beneficial or lead to the exploitation of migrant workers. If adequately monitored, the system could be a partial and temporary solution to the issues raised by migrant detention. This needs to be discussed with the DCIM, detention centre staff in the different municipalities, as well as municipal councils, who could ensure proper implementation. Feasibility also depends on whether the idea is endorsed by the government and relevant ministries, given that the practice is technically illegal. However, the existing release-for-work projects show that municipal stakeholders deem it necessary to act proactively to deal with the crisis.

Look into the establishment of an agency overseeing migrant employment at the municipal level. Along the west Libya coast, at the time of the research, only migrants in detention who were released in exchange for a work contract were registered in a database, and only in some locations. Otherwise, migrants are hired informally. This system is not only inefficient but it also does not provide migrant workers with guarantees, often exposing them to unpaid labour or abuse. A municipal “labour agency” for migrants could connect employers and job seekers, as well as offering migrant workers some degree of protection. If some employers will likely object to this idea, the system could also give them assurances about the people they hire. This could be a CSO-led project supervised by the Municipal Council. The main risk of such a project would be that no official approval could be given since such an “agency” would operate in a legal grey area, assisting migrants who do not have official work permits. A Census Committee for Workers and Migrants exists in Tripoli and Benghazi, with the mission of registering migrants and foreign workers. Its role, structure, activities and needs need to be assessed in further detail.

Monitoring of human rights violations. Support to the authorities need to go with a systematic monitoring of human rights. Information gathered by different actors and observers (International organisations and NGOs working on the ground, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, local CSOs like Migrace) must be compiled and cross-checked under the lead of the MMWG.

6.2.6. ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY LED INITIATIVES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Initiatives at the local level could be structured around two main dimensions: i) work with local stakeholders to disseminate messaging against smuggling and trafficking, and more broadly, mistreatment of migrants, and ii) engage particularly with actors who are capable of exerting direct pressure on smugglers (CSOs, local officials, elders).

Encourage local authorities, media and civil society groups to step up anti-smuggling campaigns, both as a preventive measure and to socially marginalize smugglers. Campaigns may not have much impact on smugglers themselves, but should aim to further discredit their industry and increase social pressure. They could be designed to target young men at risk of becoming involved in smuggling (highlighting the dangers of the industry and its negative impacts on the community). The approach and messages should be elaborated in consultations between different local stakeholders (municipal officials, security officials, elders, civil society members, religious figures), who often know which arguments are most efficient to use, whether they are religious, moral or based on public safety concerns. Migrants should be given a safe platform to tell a local audience about their experiences with smugglers and traffickers.³⁰⁶ Campaigns should also explain the difference between migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Local radio stations can prove useful for anti-smuggling/trafficking messaging (this was the case in Zuwara). Any efforts conducted in the past should be reviewed, and, if worthy, supported.³⁰⁷

Engage with local dignitaries (such as tribal elders, religious figureheads, influential citizens) to increase social pressure on smugglers. Despite their weapons and power, smugglers do not operate in a vacuum: as known members of the community (in most cases) and members of influential local families and tribes, they can be held accountable by society. In the cities of focus, Sabratha and Al-Zawiya in particular, smugglers are protected by their tribes and families, as well as by affiliated armed groups. Nevertheless, some elders have spoken out against smugglers and declared the withdrawal of what is known as “social protection” (meaning the defence of individuals by their tribes). Unfortunately, such measures appear to have had little impact so far. Elders who are cooperative could be brought in for information campaigns and engaged in discussions to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face and how their authority could be supported.

Give credit and support to engaged community stakeholders. The actors who organized the crackdown in Zuwara were disappointed that they were not given more support and positive feedback by national authorities and the international community. There must be more encouragement of such initiatives, especially given the challenges and risks for those involved. Likewise, volunteers working with the Red Crescent, for instance, must be given more credit for their continuous efforts.

Establish synergies between existing campaigns to fight fuel smuggling and migrant smuggling. Fuel and migrant smuggling often involve the same communities, and as such international stakeholders should show consistency by fighting smuggling generally, as opposed to one trade only. The ongoing campaign against fuel smuggling in west Libya could create momentum for participating security forces to confront also migrant smugglers. The Fuel & Gas Crisis Committee that is spearheading this campaign has broad public support, because ordinary citizens are all affected by the price hikes and fuel shortages, and the bleeding out of the Libyan economy causes much anger and anxiety. This public support could be channelled into a regional crackdown against migrant smugglers, exposing smugglers and their accomplices, as well as the vested interests.

³⁰⁶ Individual stories are often related in the Western press, but seem to be largely ignored in the Libyan debate.

³⁰⁷ There has already been a radio campaign in Sabratha. Some local CSOs like STACO in Al-Zawiya have held awareness-raising campaign at schools and the university. Municipal councils sometimes disseminate related information via their Facebook pages and other media.

