

UNICEF Libya Flash Update 2

Migrant raids and detention

13 October 2021

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Humanitarian Situation Overview

Following widespread security operations by Libyan authorities in Tripoli over the first week of October, more than 5,000 migrants, including at least 255 children and 751 women, were arrested and brought to detention centers managed by the Directorate of Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM) of the Ministry of Interior (MOI).

On 08 October 2021, reported riots followed by a mass escape of hundreds of detainees from the Mabani detention center led to open shots being fired in the center, causing the death of 6 detainees and the injuring of another 24. Up to 150 escapees were reportedly re-arrested and detained, with no women and children being re-arrested. Prior to the escape, the center hosted over 5,000 people - four times its official capacity - including an estimated 300 women and at least 100 children, of whom 30 were infants.

On 10 October 2021, the government transferred the remaining migrants from the Mabani detention center to other locations. Information available indicates that most transfers were to the Ain Zara detention center in Tripoli. Approximately 1,772 people are currently detained in the center, including an estimated 106 women and 43 children. Five of the women are pregnant.

Migrants and refugees in Libya, especially children, are highly vulnerable to protection risks, including arbitrary detention and human rights violations. Inside detention centres run by the DCIM, children often share overcrowded cells with adults, exposing them to protection risks such as violence, ill-treatment, forced labour, acute malnutrition, disease infection, and the lack of access to basic services. Currently, there are an estimated 3,974 people in detention centers in Tripoli, including 206 children and 688 women.

More than 1,000 migrant and refugee children in Libya out of an estimated 597,611 migrants¹ are unaccompanied. Figures show that 25,285 migrants attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea between January and September 2021, surpassing the total number of migrants intercepted in entire 2020. Since the beginning of the year, 917 children (283 girls, 634 boys) were intercepted at sea and returned to Libya, where most of them were subject to arbitrary detention.

UNICEF's Emergency Response

In line with the Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs), UNICEF's response to the ongoing situation is dedicated to the provision of immediate life-saving protection, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and nutrition support for the affected population, with a focus on children and women.

UNICEF's ongoing response includes ensuring functioning, safe, and clean water and sanitation facilities in the Ain Zara and Shara al Zawya detention center through emergency repairs following rapid technical assessments and the emptying of septic tanks. Adequate and safe drinking water for the detainees in the centers is also being through water trucking and the installation of water bladders. Last 06 October 2021, UNICEF also provided drinking water and high energy biscuits outside the Community Day Center of UNHCR in Tripoli, benefitting over 500 people. Women and children in need in Shara al Zawya and Tarik Al Sika detention centers also benefitted from basic protection monitoring and nutrition screening. Those suffering from malnutrition were provided with nutrition supplies. The two centers host approximately 1,477 people, including around 163 children and 582 women.

UNICEF, UNHCR, and IOM are coordinating closely and will be working together for triage in the detention centers, prioritizing children and women for the provision of life-saving support.



At least
3,974
people affected



At least
206 children
688 women



UNICEF's response is reaching the affected population with emergency child protection, WASH, and nutrition services

¹ IOM Migrant Report 37 (May to June 2021)

Following a request from UNICEF for an emergency coordination meeting, UNICEF, together with IOM, UNHCR, and health partners such as Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Rescue Committee and the Libyan Society met with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the National Center of Disease Control (NCDC) on 11 October 2021. The NCDC offered to provide mobile teams for detention centers to address tuberculosis and other infectious diseases. UNICEF requested that the MOH and NCDC support advocacy efforts towards DCIM on critical health interventions in detention centers, highlighting the impact this could have on national health. UNICEF is also closely collaborating with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) to identify alternative arrangements for children in detention.

UNICEF, as part of the Humanitarian Country Team, is supporting the overall emergency response coordination, and leads the WASH sector and the child protection sub-sector.

For more information contact:

Sherif Jenan
Emergency Officer, UNICEF Libya
sjenan@unicef.org
+218 913252060

Barbara Pellegrini
Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Libya
bpelligrini@unicef.org
+218 910027737 / +216 53360749

Suad Al Marani
Communications Specialist, UNICEF Libya
salmarani@unicef.org
+218 912508648 / +216 99070815