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Labour migration dynamics in Libya

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DECENT WORK

Abstract: Libya has historically been a major destination country for foreign workers from across sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and Asia, who have significantly contributed to the local economy. This analysis provides an overview of the evidence regarding the integration of migrants in the Libyan labour market and its impact on economic outcomes for migrant and Libyan communities alike. It does so by drawing on preliminary findings from dedicated labour market studies on migrant workers and employers conducted by IOM in 2019–2020. This chapter includes recommendations that have emerged from these studies to increase labour market participation of migrants and Libyans alike, and to contribute to overall socioeconomic and cultural growth. It concludes with some of the latest policy developments in the country, and a discussion of the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including on the labour market.

24.1 Introduction

Libya's geographic position makes it a key location for both transit migration along the Central Mediterranean Route as well as labour migration to Libya. The country shares more than 4,000 km of borders with six countries – Egypt, the Sudan, Chad, the Niger, Algeria and Tunisia – altogether counting a population of roughly 200 million, of whom just over 6 million are in Libya, according to the last census, in 2006.

Libya has historically been a major destination country for foreign workers from across sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Notably, almost two thirds (64%) of migrants in Libya are from Libya's neighbouring countries, particularly Chad, Egypt, the Niger and the Sudan. They contribute to the local economy through important intraregional labour migration movements. In fact, migrants in Libya have diverse experiences, aspirations, migration histories and livelihood situations. Most of them are driven by labour migration opportunities. Some intend to transit to Europe, a journey that involves crossing the Mediterranean Sea and which in recent years has attracted much political and media attention. However, onward irregular migration to Europe is one small piece of a larger story of migration to Libya.

While arrivals of migrants to Europe through the Central Mediterranean Route have dropped – from 119,369 in 2017 to 23,370 and 11,471 in 2018 and 2019, respectively –

¹ IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre.

² IOM Libya.

³ IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, Libya.

large numbers of international migrants remain in Libya, with the total migrant population currently estimated by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) at over 653,800 (IOM, 2020a), both irregular and regular. Moreover, migrants continue to arrive in Libya, as the country still attracts large numbers of migrants seeking economic opportunities. Against this backdrop, understanding labour migration dynamics in Libya through dedicated data collection and research emerges as critical to informing comprehensive migration management and policy.

This analysis provides an overview of current evidence regarding the integration of migrants in the Libyan labour market and its impact on economic outcomes for migrant and host communities alike. It does so by drawing on preliminary findings from dedicated labour market studies on migrant workers and employers conducted by IOM in 2019–2020. This chapter includes recommendations that have emerged from these studies to increase labour market participation of migrants and Libyans alike, and to contribute to overall socioeconomic and cultural growth. It concludes with some of the latest policy developments in the country, and a discussion of the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including on the labour market.

24.2. Background on labour migration to Libya: trends and policy developments over time

Historically, Libya has been a key destination for labour migration in North Africa. Prior to the revolution in 2011, there were an estimated 1.35 million–2.5 million migrant workers, predominantly in the health and construction sectors, services and, to a smaller extent,⁴ also the agriculture and oil industries. The higher salaries compared with Libya's neighbouring countries played a key role in this context (ICMPD, 2010). The private sector was and still is modest, though it is growing. It accounts for only 5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) and about 14 per cent of employment (4% to 6% of employed workers, and about 8.6% of self-employed). It consists of a small number of formal private and foreign companies, mainly small and micro enterprises (a full 95% of private enterprises are small and micro-sized), and a larger number of informal activities. Informal enterprises are generally involved in labour-intensive small-scale activities, operating with limited capital and rudimentary equipment, and producing low-value products and services.

Although at least 796,915 of migrants were estimated to have left the country in 2011 (IOM, 2011), Libya's migrant population remains relatively large. More specifically, according to estimates by IOM Libya's DTM programme, there were at least 625,638 migrants in the country as of April 2020 (IOM, 2020b), from 40 different countries. The majority of migrants come from Libya's neighbouring countries – the Niger, Chad, Egypt and the Sudan – accounting for 64 per cent of Libya's migrant population. Migrants were recorded in different communities across the country, with a particular concentration in Libya's economic hubs along the Mediterranean coast and at transit points in the country's south (see Figure 24.1).⁵

Despite the ongoing conflict in parts of the country and the related economic challenges (Box 24.1), the higher salaries offered by Libyan employers compared with those offered in neighbouring countries, as well as the persistent demand for migrant labour in Libya's labour market, continue to make it an attractive destination for migrants. Flow Monitoring Surveys conducted by IOM DTM with over 13,000 migrants between January and August 2019 revealed that economic motives remain the primary driver of migration to Libya, with 84 per cent of surveyed migrants citing different economic reasons for migration to the country, such as limited employment opportunities and lower income levels in countries of origin (IOM, 2019). Similarly, among the migrant population present in Libya surveyed by IOM in 2019, the main reason encouraging respondents to stay was the possibility of finding employment in the country, enabling them to send remittances to their families. Most migrants in Libya are the main income earners of the recipient household. In most cases, migrants' households in the countries of origin heavily depend on remittances.

⁴ These two sectors employ only 10 per cent of the Libyan labour force.

⁵ During the reporting period (January–February 2020), DTM Libya's 41 flow monitoring points monitored migration flows at key transit points covering 15 municipalities in 10 regions (manatik) of Libya. Flow monitoring points are set up at key transit locations along major migration routes within Libya where migrants are observed arriving and departing. Given the high mobility of migrants within Libya, it is possible that, during the reporting period, a small proportion of migrants may have been counted at more than one flow monitoring points; therefore, the aggregated arrivals and departures should be broadly considered as indicative of the general mobility trends observed in the different parts of the country.

The Libyan labour market is now shaped by growing unemployment for nationals on one side, and substantial numbers of foreign migrant workers on the other side: a paradoxical situation arising from a combination of skills mismatch, public sector dominance of the labour market and distaste for manual labour among Libyans. The profile of labour migrants in Libya reflects such mixed nature of arrivals, resulting in a population with heterogeneous backgrounds, profiles and conditions of stay and employment in Libya, and in overlapping migrant categories and statuses, such as migrant workers (both regular and irregular), migrants in transit, asylum seekers, refugees, long-term migrants (both regular and irregular), smuggled migrants and potential victims of trafficking in person, and migrants in detention.



Box 24.1. Economic fallout post-2011

The reduction in Libya's oil revenues that took place after the outbreak of the 2014 civil war has exacerbated the country's pre-existing budget deficit, which resulted in a profound liquidity crisis, still rife in the current context (Altai Consulting and Istishari, 2019). The crisis of confidence in the Libyan dinar led to an important currency depreciation, which strongly affected the country's economy. The crisis has both further reduced access to finance, and affected the value of imported inputs, therefore increasing the price of starting a business in the country. In addition, factors such as the continuous outbreak of violence and proliferation of armed groups, sporadic waves of displacement, a near breakdown of the rule of law, the deteriorating humanitarian situation and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (see Box 24.2) contribute to a weakening of the economy and the Libyan currency, resulting in a worsening of the already strained situation for migrants in Libya. Despite these challenges, however, it is interesting to note that, among surveyed migrants who struggled to find employment in Libya, the most commonly cited barrier was "limited job availability" (50%), followed by "insufficient skills" (37%). The "unstable security situation" was cited only in third place (35%).

Box 24.2. COVID-19 impact in Libya

The Libyan economy was further negatively impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, severely affecting migrant workers in Libya, particularly those relying on daily labour. Rapid assessments conducted by IOM Libya in April and May 2020 revealed that the economic slowdown, partially triggered by measures implemented to curb the spread of the virus, resulted in a decrease of available job opportunities for migrant workers across Libyan municipalities. Mobility restrictions and the related reduction in employment opportunities appear to have significantly exacerbated migrants' vulnerabilities.* The detrimental impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on global oil prices poses additional risks for Libya's economic model, where oil revenue constitutes the bulk of both government revenue and GDP. Declines in remittances sent by migrants in Libya are also expected due to COVID-19.

Apart from these economic ramifications, crowded accommodation arrangements, such as shared rooms for migrant workers, often pose severe challenges to performing social distancing, and limited health risk awareness is also of concern. Poor access to health care (where available) for migrants, including for victims of trafficking, may add to the adverse impact for this particularly vulnerable population group, as well as delayed access to justice and judicial remedies. Overcrowding in detention facilities undermines hygiene, health, safety and human dignity, and constitutes a serious obstacle to preventing, preparing for or effectively responding to COVID-19 (UNODC, WHO, UNAIDS and OHCHR, 2020). Lastly, there is a potentially higher risk of xenophobia and manifestation of intolerance towards migrants, who may mistakenly be perceived as responsible for spreading the virus.

*IOM, 2020c. This covers employment, rapid market assessment and public services affected by mobility restrictions.



Echoing the global fears of “a lost generation” facing permanent exclusion from labour markets as the world recovers from the pandemic, migrants, particularly young ones, risk being left behind in Libya, too. Also, conflict and existing tensions might spark social unrest, given the coincidence of a predominantly young population, large size of the informal economy and limited capacities of testing and tracing. Labour market outcomes could be particularly damaging and long term for all Libyan and migrant workers, who may have a harder time finding decent jobs, thus becoming more vulnerable (ILO, 2020).



24.3. Evolution of labour migration policies in Libya

Migration policies in Libya have played a decisive role in shaping migration trends and dynamics, attracting foreign labour to the country (IOM, 2012). These have evolved in line with domestic and foreign policy developments.

The main legal framework governing the entry of foreign nationals was adopted in the 1980s. Law No. 6 of 1987 outlines the general conditions for entry and stay in Libya applicable to foreigners. Law No. 10 of 1989 allowed nationals from Arab countries to enter Libya and reside in country, enjoying the same rights as Libyan citizens. Nationals from Arab countries were also encouraged to stay, benefitting from advantageous conditions compared with other migrant workers in the labour market, including the enjoyment of some political rights, such as participating in the General People’s Committees and holding high administrative and political roles (ICMPD, 2020).

Some important changes to the legal framework were introduced in the 1990s. Prior to the United Nations air and arms embargo (1992–2000), Gaddafi’s policy of encouraging nationals coming from Arab countries had enabled Libya to attract large numbers of Arab workers filling employment gaps (Maghur, 2010). However, the perceived lack of support from Arab countries following the United Nations sanctions caused Tripoli to shift its foreign policy towards Africa. This involved ending visa requirements for nationals of sub-Saharan African countries and opening Libya’s border to migrant workers from East and West African countries such as Nigeria, the Sudan, Chad and Mali. This increase, however, also led to the further fragmentation of the Libyan labour market, as Libyans were unwilling to fill essential positions in areas such as construction and agriculture, despite calls to nationalize the workforce.

During the 2000s, the launch of Libya–European Union cooperation to combat irregular migration to Europe changed the situation. From the early 2000s, new laws and rules were introduced with the purpose of regulating the large number of undocumented migrants residing in Libya. These measures resulted from several agreements that Gaddafi made with European country governments with the aim of fighting terrorism, drug trafficking and irregular migration, also responding to the European Union agenda’s priority to secure its southern Mediterranean border. However, these measures led to large-scale rejections at the borders and forcible repatriations of undocumented migrants throughout the decade. In 2007, new visa requirements were imposed for all foreigners, with the exception of Arab country nationals, and their status became irregular overnight (Di Bartolomeo et al., 2011). This was also accompanied by a requirement to regularize the employment of foreign nationals, who also lost free access to health, education and other public services.

Based on IOM assessments conducted in Libya in 2019, migrant workers are currently allowed to obtain work permits if they have employment contracts in Libya, according to national rules and regulations. The employers must be legally registered, and the contract must be in accordance with the terms and procedures established by national labour law. However, the procedures are not always strictly or literally applied by the authorities, and implementation differs across municipalities.

In October 2019, Libyan authorities, including the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation, started the negotiations with the Government of the Niger to conclude a bilateral labour agreement to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration between the two countries. Also, in October 2019, IOM facilitated a regional dialogue to support the Libyan authorities to engage government counterparts from 14 countries on potential avenues that could facilitate safe, orderly and regular labour migration to Libya.

24.4. Labour market assessments conducted by IOM Libya in 2019 and 2020

Several studies were conducted by IOM Libya in 2019 and 2020 to assess the Libyan labour market (see Table 1). Baseline and pre-existing literature on the Libyan labour market published before IOM started to work on the more recent and up-to-date assessment tend to focus on small- and medium-sized enterprises and the mapping of the private sector. Moreover, most of the publications and studies previously published were conducted from 2014 to 2016, and might not adequately reflect the current labour market situation in Libya. Besides being outdated, literature is mainly focused on southern Libya.

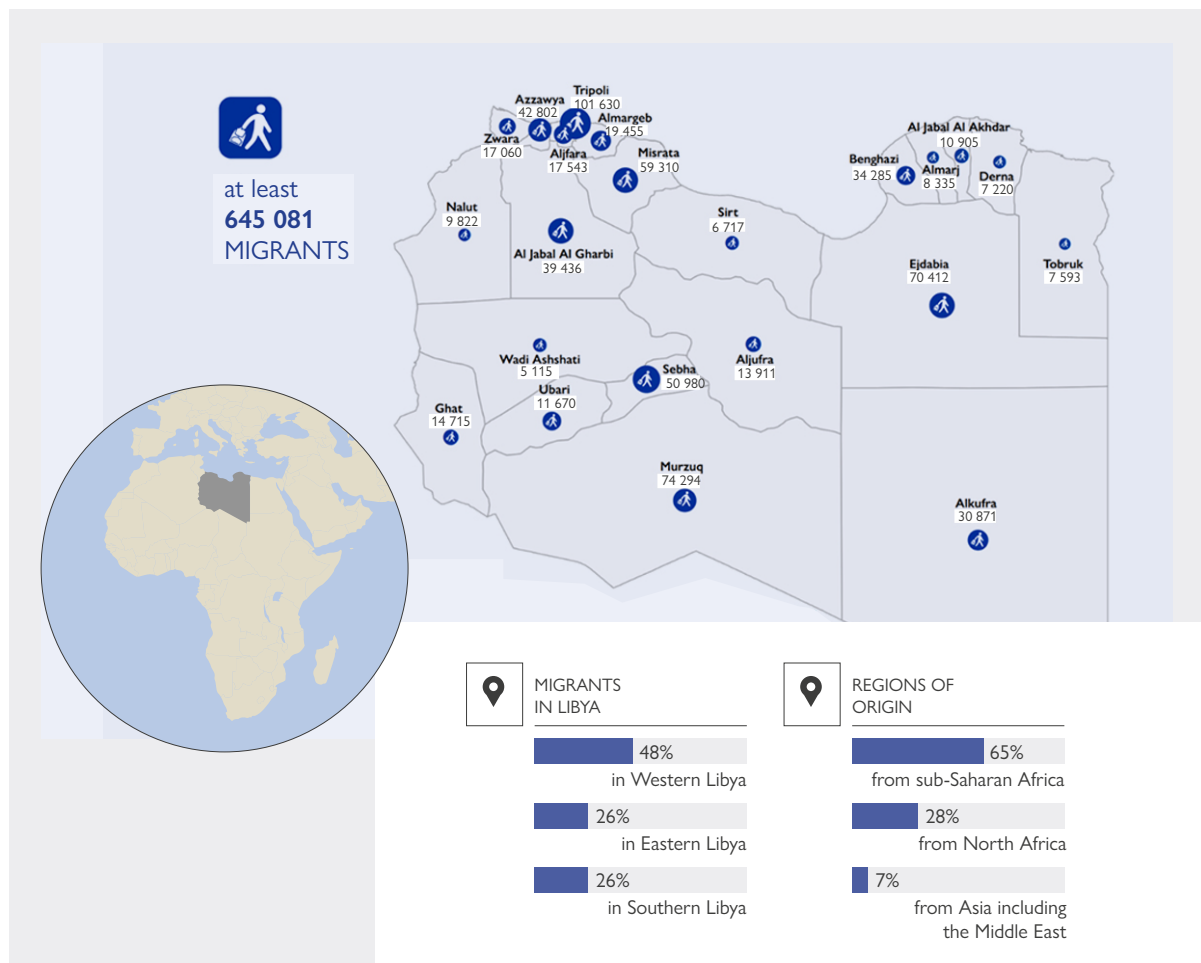
The studies conducted so far by IOM point to three main trends affecting the country's labour market: a bloated public sector (still employing 70% of salaried employees), an anaemic private sector, and a poorly planned education system. These trends, coupled with a hostile regulatory and financial environment, have led to discrepancies in expectations regarding employment, and to the importance of the informal private sector. The following section presents the main findings and recommendations emerging from IOM assessments conducted so far.

Table 24.1. Overview of labour market studies and assessments conducted in Libya

Title	Year of publication	Data collection	Partners	Location
National				
Libya post-2011: Analysing the impact of armed conflict on long-term migrants in Libya	2020	2019	IOM, Columbia University	Libya
Assessment on Existing Migrants Registration Mechanisms by Selected Libyan Municipalities	2019	2019	IOM	Libya
Assessment of Libyan Labour (Employment) Law and Training Manual on Migration Management	2020	-	IOM	Libya
Labour Market Information System for Libya	2020	2020	IOM, Voluntas Advisory	Libya
Labour Market Assessment	2020	2020	IOM, Key Aid Consultancy	Libya
Subnational				
Rapid Labour Market and Skills Assessment	2019	2019	IOM, Altai Consulting	Ubari, Qatrun
Assessment of economic opportunities for host and migrant communities in the agriculture and livestock sector in Libya	2019	2019	IOM, DIWAN Market Research, Voluntas Advisory	Kufra, Sebha, Qatrun
Labour Market Assessment in Benghazi and Kufrah	2019	2019	IOM, Altai Consulting	Benghazi and Kufra
Mapping Labour Skills of Migrants in Misrata: Challenges and Strategies for Integration into the Libyan Market	2020	2019–2020	IOM, Georgetown University	Libya
Study on the Perceptions of Host Communities, in Libya, towards Migrants	2020	2020	Diwan Market Research	Benghazi (and Tripoli)

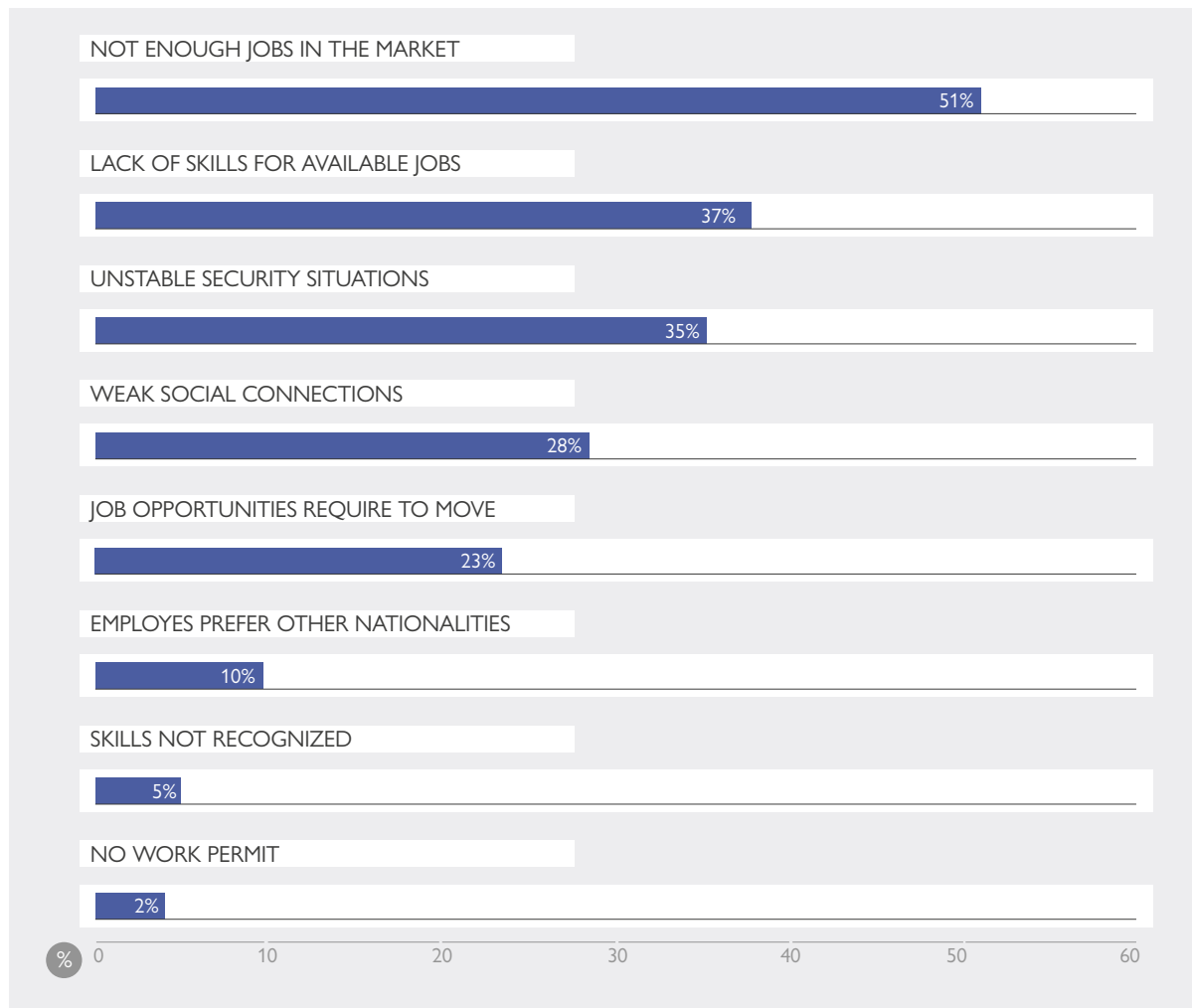
First, results indicate that the labour market may have remained sufficiently large to absorb migrant labour. The majority of respondents in these studies reported that they were working and had faced no major challenges in finding employment in Libya. Moreover, migration to Libya was found overall to have a net positive impact on the employment status of migrants interviewed, as 76 per cent of migrants reported being employed in Libya at the time of the interview, while only 52 per cent said they were employed in their countries of origin before moving to Libya (IOM, 2019). The majority reported having sent remittances back home since they arrived in Libya. On average, migrants reported to have sent back around USD 2,500 per person since their arrival in the country. Long-term migrants who send remittances report being the main breadwinners of their recipient households.

Figure 24.1. Migrants identified in Libya, by region



Note: These maps are for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the International Organization for Migration.

Furthermore, the results show a strong correlation between finding employment and length of stay in Libya. Eighty per cent of migrants who have been in Libya for more than a year report currently being involved in income-generating activities, compared with 50 per cent of those who have been in Libya between one and three months and 35 per cent of those present in the country for less than two weeks (see Tassilo, Cottone and Rossi, Chapter 5 of this volume). Migrants reported being primarily employed in the construction, water supply, electricity and gas sectors, followed by agriculture, pastoralism, the food industry field and manual craft. Among surveyed migrants who struggled to find employment, limited job availability was the most commonly cited barrier, followed by insufficient skills for the jobs available (Figure 24.2).

Figure 24.2. Obstacles to finding employment

Source: IOM, 2020d.

Furthermore, studies have pointed out that migrants are not perceived by the local community as competing with Libyan citizens in the job market, as they are often hired for jobs that Libyans are generally not willing to do.⁶ For example, the deteriorating economic situation post-2011 has resulted in the proliferation of entrepreneurial efforts at the local level, ranging from construction activities to smaller-scale farming and light industries. These kinds of enterprises all depend to a significant degree on migrant labour (Clingendael Institute, 2019). Moreover, migrants often represent a source of income for the local community, which makes a profit from providing services to them (IOM Libya and Altai Consulting and Istishari, 2019). As noted in a recent study on migration governance in Libya: “From an economic point of view, migrants have historically contributed substantially to the Libyan economy and attempts to improve their position would be likely to result in economic gains for migrant and host communities alike” (Clingendael Institute, 2019). In short, Libya continues to be a country of destination for migrant workers, despite the many challenges the country is facing, and migrants continue to contribute to filling gaps in the Libyan labour market.

⁶ According to one Libyan researcher, who formerly owned a construction business in the East of Libya, finding Libyans willing to work in construction was difficult, even at a time when private sector construction jobs paid higher wages than public sector employment. He stated that employing Libyans was doubly difficult because many lacked the technical skills needed and the desire to perform jobs requiring physical labour.

24.5. Preliminary recommendations for labour market interventions based on IOM's findings

24.5.1. Invest in key sectors with potential for migrant workers

Migrants interviewed across the studies listed were very likely to occupy positions ranging from waiting tables or washing cars to transportation of goods, construction, mechanical repair and agriculture. Based on an analysis of firms' perspectives, a study found that agriculture, infrastructure and manufacturing are some of the sectors that are expected to create the most jobs in the short-to-medium term. The strength of the construction sector may also be reflected in the preferences of some of the study participants, the most highly educated of whom often cited engineering and construction companies as their main career targets. Overall, the studies suggested that there is a potential to target the agriculture, local manufacture and construction sectors as potential sources for further employment opportunities for the migrant population.

The construction sector has traditionally faced considerable problems, including the lack of access to capital and the shortages in skills and equipment. This could partly be explained by the disconnect between Libyan youth's most desired jobs and aspirations, and local demand, which creates challenges for employers. Farmers, for example, find it difficult to obtain the workforce required for production, mainly due to the need for technical expertise and the unwillingness among Libyans to engage in physical labour. Today, employment in industry (largely the oil sector) and agriculture accounts for only 10 per cent of the labour force, representing only 20 per cent of the level seen nearly 30 years ago. An analysis of challenges, opportunities and needs in the agriculture and livestock sectors showed that the agriculture sector contributes approximately 3 per cent to Libya's GDP, much less than in the other countries in North Africa. The agriculture sector is largely composed of small-scale farms with only a limited number of employees. More investments in this sector would increase employment opportunities for migrants and contribute to development in Libya, as well as improved incomes for migrants and families in countries of origin. Understanding how these sectors could grow and which investments in human resources and capital are needed for that to happen is key.

24.5.2. Improve the business environment to unlock the economic activity potential of small enterprises

Migrants cited the relative dynamism of some private sector companies, typically in the water bottling or information technology sectors, and the importance of smaller businesses operating in the area of services, as important sectors for upholding a relatively vibrant labour market. Supporting microenterprises should also be prioritized to minimize informality. When asked which type of businesses had traditionally been successful, respondents cited small businesses (clothing shops), the food services industry (café, restaurants, home-based catering businesses and similar), and the automotive sector (mechanics workshops, importing cars or auto parts and similar enterprises).

At the individual level, the need to have a strong personal network and the lack of technical and vocational skills (generally related to specific work fields, such as culinary skills or auto mechanics) were cited as a barrier to employment. The latter accounts for the interviewees' upholding the importance of vocational training programmes to support livelihoods in the area (most felt that technical and artisanal hard skills were more important than education for employment in the private sector).

Moreover, some cultural and social barriers proved to make it more difficult for migrants and women to access some types of jobs. The lack of finance and the low access to imported goods also continue to constitute impediments to the launching and development of small enterprises. The difficulty of accessing finance, which is the main obstacle to starting or expanding a business, affects migrants to a higher extent than it does Libyans. All individuals interviewed in one survey had either relied on their personal earnings or on loans from friends and family to establish their businesses. None of them had resorted to a bank, a microfinance institution or a private lender.

24.5.3. Increase the competitiveness of the private sector

The public sector is perceived as very attractive for young Libyan workers.⁷ Data collected from interviews revealed that the government sector has represented a steady source of employment in recent years, especially for women, as some social considerations and traditions tend to restrict their ability to work in other fields. Overall, the public sector employs up to 70 per cent of the Libyan workforce, or 85 per cent of the active Libyan workforce, a high rate even by regional standards. The rate for women is even higher (93%). The reliance on public sector jobs varies regionally, however, with access to public sector employment opportunities being limited in some regions (Altai Consulting and Istishari, 2019). Despite the crisis and the difficulty for public sector employees to withdraw their salaries from banks for long periods due to the liquidity crisis, the general trend is that fresh graduates still prefer public sector employment.

Meanwhile, Libyan jobseekers cite a lack of employees' rights, low salaries in some fields and a lack of social security mechanisms in comparison with the public sector among the reasons why they do not seek jobs in the private sector. One key policy to increase the relative attractiveness of private sector jobs would therefore be to reduce the dichotomy between the public and private sectors by streamlining working conditions between the sectors and offering comparable benefits for both sectors. To this end, policymakers should focus on how to support local enterprises to establish robust safety nets, perceived as fair and equitable by both owners of such enterprises and workers in search of opportunities in the private sector, with a view to promoting the development of private economic initiatives. Another focus could be the promotion of public–private partnerships as key reform elements. Furthermore, it has been suggested that a dynamic private sector cannot be created without a comprehensive reform of the current public administration system.

24.5.4. Invest in quality education and training that is relevant for the Libyan labour market

Official statistics indicate a large increase in the number of higher education institutions in Libya since independence. But the evidence in the literature suggests that this increase has considerably exceeded the actual needs and demands of the country. Moreover, Libya has repeatedly been ranked among the poorest performing countries in the world when it comes to quality of public schools, quality of the education system, and availability of trained scientists and engineers. Bilateral agreements and targeted programmes for scholarships and overseas training could be an option to turn Libya's education sector into a productive asset for the country.

When asked about the main reasons why it was difficult to find employment, “insufficient skills” was the second most reported obstacle raised by surveyed migrants, potentially indicating a mismatch between the migrants' skillset and the demand in the Libyan labour market. Highly educated Libyans might lack practice in their field of study, making launching a profitable business riskier. Some studies suggested that migrants would benefit from Arabic language courses, as learning the language would facilitate their relations and interactions with Libyans, especially in the service industry. It was also highlighted that it would be important to invest in trainings to develop agricultural skills to increase productivity in that sector.

⁷ Based on 40 in-depth interviews conducted in Kufra with youth and migrant respondents – including 15 women – to obtain a deeper social insight into their experience with seeking employment or starting their own businesses, three trends affecting formal activities were highlighted: (a) the prevalence of the public sector, which is perceived as very attractive for young workers; (b) the relative dynamism of some private sector companies, typically in the water bottling or information technology sectors; and (c) the importance of smaller businesses operating in the area of services.

24.5.5. Conduct analysis on how to improve the legal framework governing migrants' access to work

The fragmented legislative framework poses a further challenge, as many laws issued in the 1970s and 1980s have become outdated and irrelevant but are still in force. Studies have suggested that a full review of Libya's labour laws, labour rights and labour organizations should be performed to provide a better overview and identify needs and gaps. Other factors influencing the labour market are the weakness of labour unions and the absence of laws regulating the relationship between workers and employers, the need for clear strategies to develop the labour market and the instability of labour market institutions.

Since foreigners continue to be absorbed into Libya's labour markets, more knowledge and actions are needed to fight against exploitative situations.⁸ Migrants are potentially more vulnerable than host communities to the violation of their human rights and to exploitation. Exploitative situations might arise whenever no official documents, written contracts or regular payments for their work are ensured. Other studies have noted that there is insufficient formal migration governance efforts – both at the national and the local level in Libya – that seek to improve the situation of migrants in Libya with the final objective of their normalization or integration in society (as opposed to detention and deportation). Given poor governance in this area, technical support for local governments in Libya without improved legislative and governance structures would not automatically result in improvements in migrants' situations (Clingendael Institute, 2019).

As pointed out, Libyan authorities both at local and central levels took some actions to counter the risks of irregular migration and possibly create regular pathways. These include informal registration mechanisms at the municipal level and the negotiations at the central level with the Government of the Niger to establish a bilateral labour agreement to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration between the two countries. However, more knowledge and actions are needed to fight against exploitative situations.

24.5.6. Future data collection and analysis

To provide further guidance and develop the broad set of recommendations highlighted in this chapter, a few suggestions for future research and data collection have been identified:

- Research should begin by complementing existing labour market assessments in Libya, both in terms of geographies and sectors. Our analysis suggested that most existing studies have focused on small and medium-sized enterprises and the mapping of the private sector, and that these have been mainly concentrated in the country's south. However, given the relatively high concentration of migrants in the northern shores of the country, along with the fact that these are areas with high concentrations of smuggling activities, assessments should focus on these areas as well. Complementary research should also include the specific challenges and opportunities of female migrant workers in Libya.
- Further understanding is needed of the potential of investments in competitive wage-earning opportunities among migrants and Libyan youth to undermine the attractiveness of the smuggling business and informal activities. For this, more data are needed on the profiles of smugglers and their incentives to engage in the business, as well as on their role in their respective communities, building on the existing but limited evidence currently available.

⁸ To support stakeholders and the Libyan authorities, including the Ministry of Justice, in improving relevant existing policies and designing evidence-based ones, IOM started a Study on Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Persons in Libya and the Influence of Transnational Organized Groups with Connections to Intermediaries in the Major Countries of Origin, Transit and Destination of Migrants, which will be completed by the end of 2020.

24.6. Conclusions

Libya has always been a major destination country for foreign workers from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. The vast majority of migrants in Libya come from neighbouring countries and make important contributions to both the local economy and to their countries of origin through remittances. In fact, migrants in Libya have diverse experiences, aspirations, migration histories and livelihood situations. Considering the decrease in arrivals through the Central Mediterranean Route to Europe, understanding labour migration dynamics in Libya through dedicated data collection and research emerges as a critical need to inform comprehensive, evidence-based migration management and policy, and enhance safe and regular migration to the country.

The analysis conducted in this chapter shows that there have been recent policy developments with the active engagement of Libyan authorities to explore possible options to register migrants in the country, counter exploitative situations and improve international – bilateral and regional – cooperation on migration.

The challenges that both migrants in Libya and government authorities have been facing over the past years in the context of the protracted conflict in Libya have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on migrant workers and host communities. More evidence and actions are needed to allow foreigners to participate actively in Libya's labour markets, and to support the Libyan authorities, including the Ministry of Justice, in improving existing labour migration policy frameworks for the benefit of all.

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