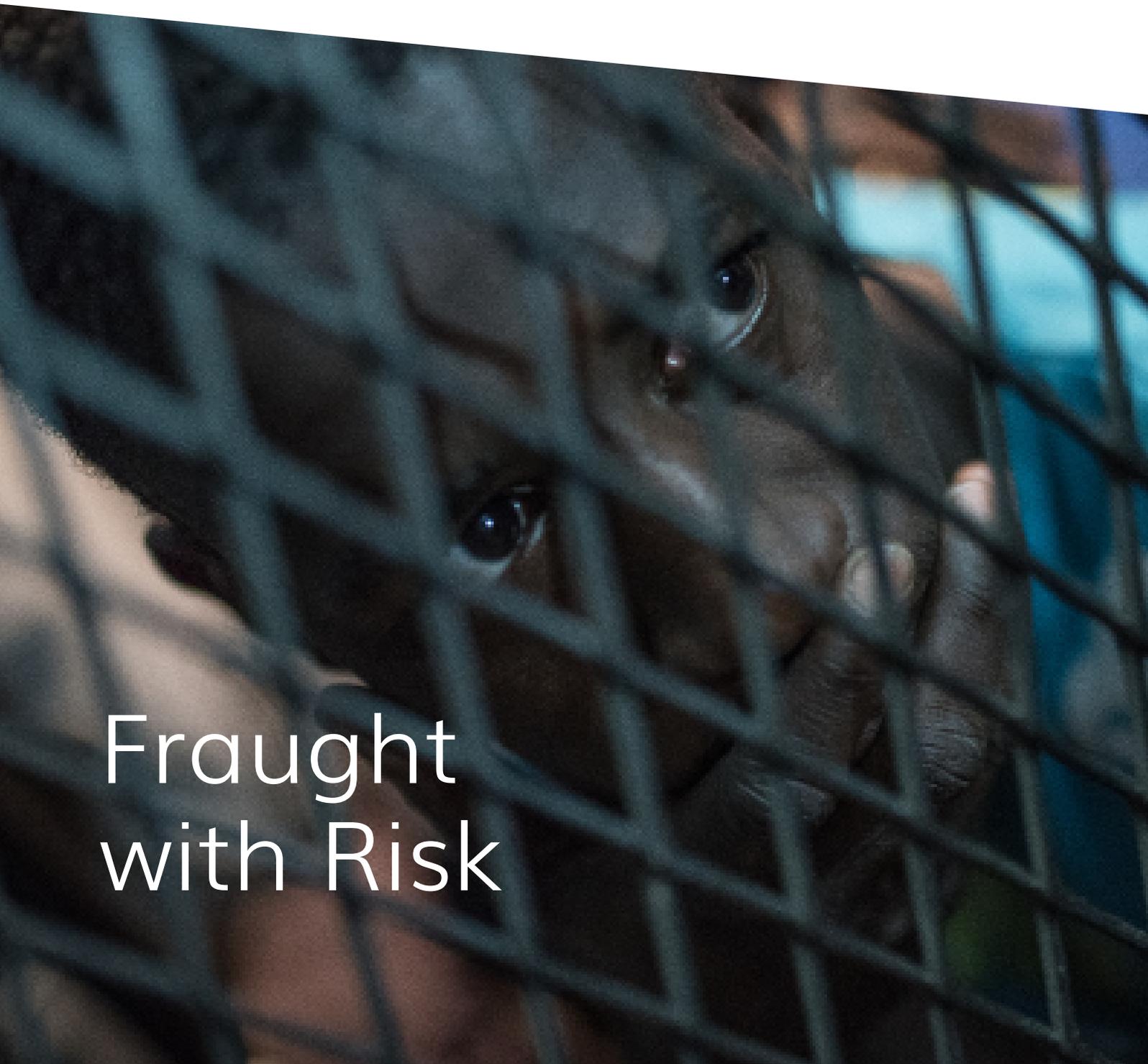




RESEARCH PAPER

# Protection concerns of people on the move across West Africa and Libya

MAY 2018



Fraught  
with Risk

# Quick Facts

*"Everything in life is about luck. Some people suffered heavily during this journey. Some didn't suffer much, while others didn't suffer at all. Everything in life is a matter of destiny. Something that works for one person may not work for another, so it's all about luck."*

39-year-old man from Nigeria interviewed in Libya

- A total 2,941 refugees and migrants were interviewed by 4Mi in Libya, Niger and Mali between 1 June 2017 and 7 February 2018.
- 68% of respondents encountered one or more protection incidents during this time.
- A total 1,117 protection incidents occurred in Libya, accounting for 44% of all incidents reported to 4Mi.
- Women are at greater risk of sexual violence. A total of 148 women encountered abuses including rape, indecent touching and verbal harassment.
- A majority of men reported multiple physical abuses including torture, beatings, flogging and sleep or food deprivation.
- Enduring multiple hardships, including dehydration, starvation and ill-treatment, at least 1,600 refugees and migrants died on the journey to Libya, of which 518 perished in desert areas of Sudan, Egypt, Niger and Libya.
- As protection violations along migration routes continue to increase, protection assistance is insufficient and inaccessible to most.

# Introduction

Every month, hundreds of men, women and children undertake the treacherous journey across East and West Africa towards Libya seeking safety from armed conflict, political oppression and hoping for better a future.

This research paper provides an updated snapshot of the protection risks faced by people on the move along these routes between 1 June 2017 and 7 February 2018.<sup>1</sup> The paper looks at the type, scale and geographic distribution of protection risks, focusing on specific abuses and security concerns including:

- Having directly witnessed or experienced sexual and/or physical abuse,
- Having experienced kidnapping, robberies and detention
- Having witnessed the death of fellow refugees and migrants.

Finally, the briefing paper attempts to both map key high-risk locations and the coverage of humanitarian protection assistance and programming.

The paper complements and corroborates findings from previous research from the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi),<sup>2</sup> presenting an analysis of over 2,900 in-depth structured interviews with refugees and migrants of which 64% (1,868) with men and 36% (1,073) with women.<sup>3</sup> Interviews were conducted in Mali and Niger with refugees and migrants *en route* to the Sahara Desert as well as in Libya. The focus of this paper is on mixed migration flows (as defined in the footnote)<sup>4</sup>. The term 'refugees and migrants' is used

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1 All of the data reported in this briefing paper refers exclusively to the time-period between 1 June 2017 and 7 February 2018 unless otherwise stated. All quotes have been collected by 4Mi monitors. For ease of reading in some cases the flow of text has been slightly altered, while leaving the meaning of the quote intact and staying as close as possible to the authentic sentence.

2 For past research on this topic please refer to the 4Mi website available at this link: <http://northafrica.mixedmigration.org/reports/>

3 The briefing paper is based on data collected by 4Mi from 1 June 2017 to 7 February 2018 in Libya, Mali and Niger. The data set is composed of 2,941 in-depth interviews conducted in Niger, Mali and Libya: 1073 respondents are women against 1868 men.

4 Mixed migration refers to cross-border movements of people including refugees fleeing persecution and conflict, victims of trafficking and people seeking better lives and opportunities. Motivated to move by a multiplicity of factors, people in mixed flows have different legal statuses as well as a variety of vulnerabilities. Although entitled to protection under international human rights law, they are exposed to multiple rights violations along their journey. Those in mixed migration flows travel along similar routes, using similar means of travel - often travelling irregularly and wholly or partially assisted by migrant smugglers – Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) 'Understanding of Mixed Migration, May 2018.

when referring to all those in mixed migration flows, unless referring to a particular group of people with a defined status within these flows.

Accurately documenting the scale, nature and distribution of risks and abuses along the migration routes is difficult. Challenges include the clandestine and irregular nature of the population movements, the sensitivity of information shared by refugees and migrants and the post-traumatic stress experienced by some of the interviewees. 4Mi is a qualitative data collection tool that supports protection monitoring. 4Mi is based on a non-randomized sampling of the migrant and refugee population and as such cannot be considered statistically representative of all people based or transiting in Libya.<sup>5</sup> Still, the significant number of interviews provide important insights on the severity, extent and frequency of human rights violations and the profile of vulnerable groups.

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<sup>5</sup> Main limitations of the dataset are based on the possibility of double counting (with different populations reporting the same incident twice) and inaccurate reporting, as there is no system in place to verify the incidents reported along the migratory routes. Additionally, the number and gender of monitors varied in different locations, possibly resulting in a wider collection of data highlighting certain countries, or higher access to female refugees and migrants in others. Finally, and due to the nature of the study, the setting of interviews varied between countries, and its role on refugees and migrants' testimonies is unknown.

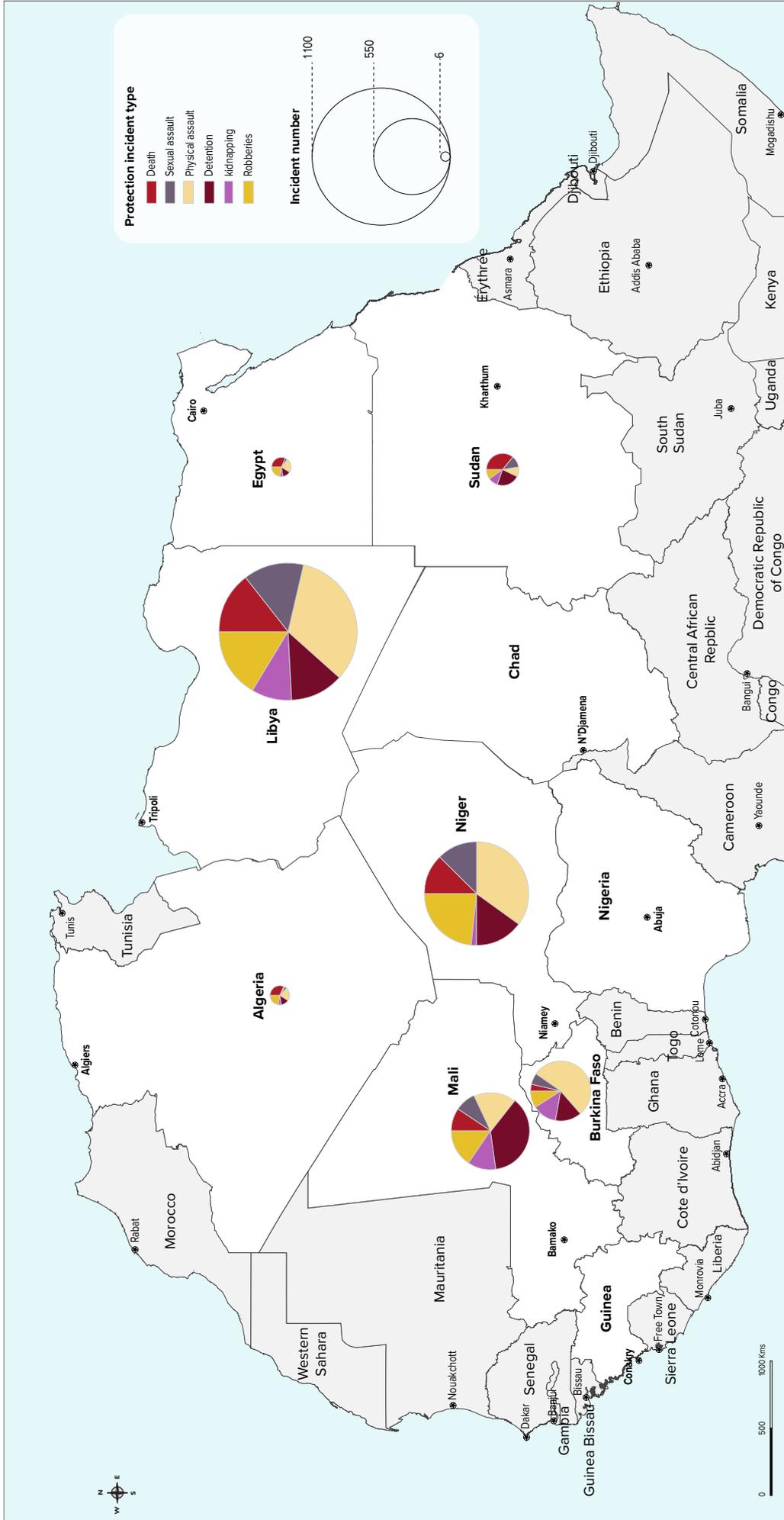


Figure 1 : Protection incidents per key countries

# Refugees and migrants on the move face widespread risks...

*"Other nationalities were tortured, humiliated and even sold. This is against human ethic."*

32-year-old man from Niger interviewed in Libya

Refugees and migrants face protection risks throughout their journey, regardless of their destination. The inhospitable terrain of the desert, the presence of armed groups, criminal and smuggling networks mean that many often fall victim of extortion, ill-treatment and unlawful arrest. Many end up being subject to trafficking, forced labour, sexual violence and exploitation. **Out of the 2, 941 respondents interviewed, 68% report witnessing or experiencing one or more protection incidents.**

Refugees and migrants face the greatest dangers when traversing the Libyan territory, where corruption is rampant, human smuggling operations are proliferating and state security and rule of law, if existent, relies on warring militias. Out of the 2,562 incidents reported by the respondents, an overwhelming 1,117 incidents (44%) happened in Libya, followed by 632 (25%) in Niger, 212 (8%) in Burkina Faso and 359 (14%) in Mali. Another 212 incidents, accounting for 8% of the total incidents, were reported in other locations including Algeria, Sudan and Egypt amongst others.

Combining 4Mi data from Libya and West Africa, it is estimated that over 3,800 people were affected by protection incidents at the time of this report, including death, sexual and physical abuse, kidnapping, robberies and/or detention. 4Mi respondents interviewed in Libya, estimate seeing at least 2,179 people subjected to protection violations during the journey while respondents interviewed in West Africa reported an additional 1, 654 victims.

The greatest dangers are clustered at major transit hubs<sup>6</sup> along national borders or geographical frontier areas. Traversing the desert is the most perilous part of the journey. According to respondents interviewed in Libya, 35% of incidents occurred in the desert, a majority of which in the Libyan desert while several additional cases were reported in desert areas of Niger, Sudan and Egypt. Although such figures do not represent the scope of the total protection incidents occurring in the Sahara at any given time, 481 cases have been reported to 4Mi during the last 300 days. 92% of these incidents include sexual and physical abuse (294 cases) and death (148 cases). These statistics are indicative of an increased risk when refugees and migrants leave main towns and cities. For instance, approximately one fourth of deaths reported by refugees and migrants in Niger occurred in the desert. Similarly, 66% of deaths reported by refugees and migrants in Libya occurred in the desert.

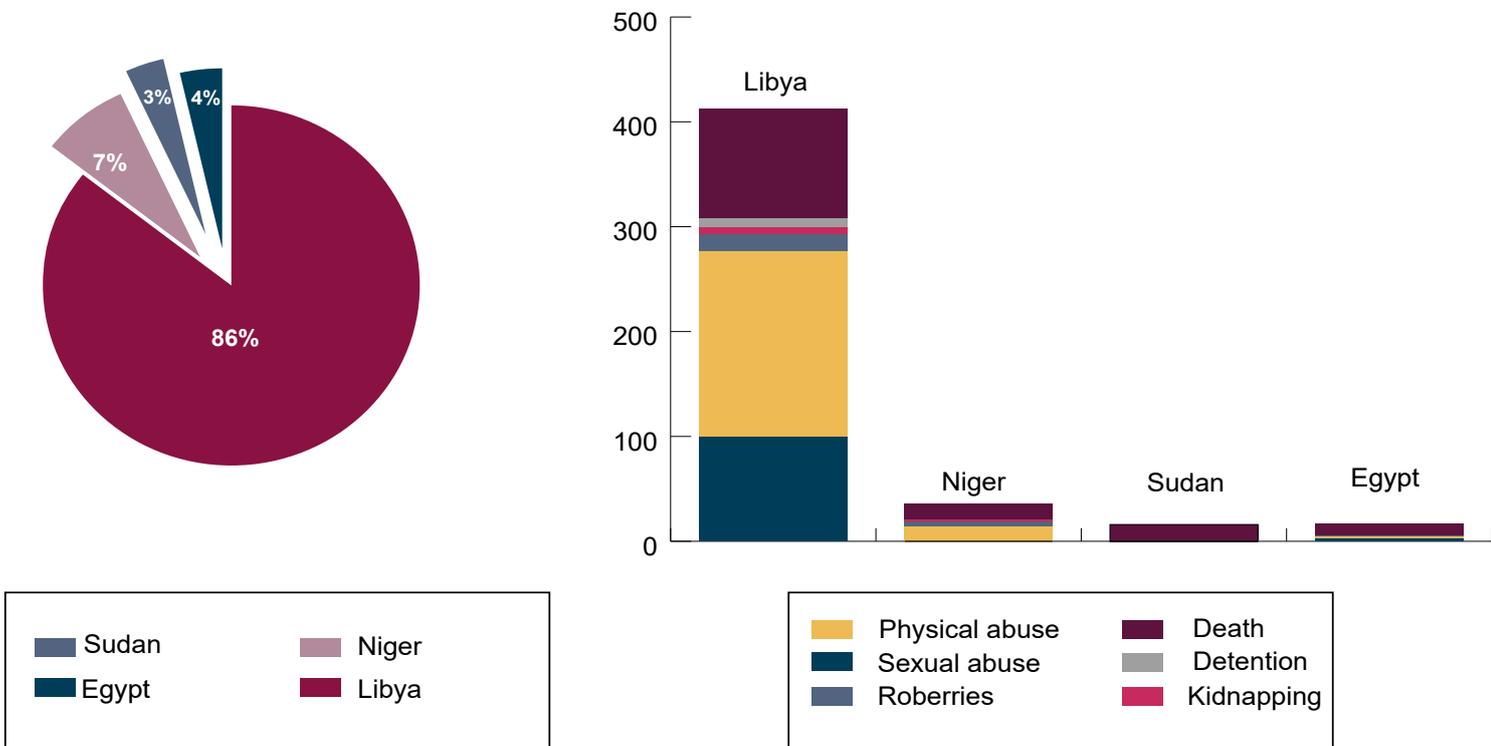


Figure 2: Protection incidents in the desert (number of cases)

<sup>6</sup> Transit hubs are defined as key locations in areas of West and East Africa and Libya that serve as main crossing points/ junctures on the journey towards refugees and migrants' final destinations. The following locations are a non-exhaustive list of transit hubs: **Niger**: Niamey, Agadez, Tillabery, Tahoua, Madama, Dosso, Zinder, Seguedine; **Mali**: Bamako, Gao, Timbuktu, Sikasso, Kayes, Segoua; **Chad**: N'Djamena, Mao, Faya-Largeau, Tibesi; **Algeria**: Tamanrasset, Debdeb; **Libya**: Qatrun, Sabha, Murzuq, Ajdebiyah, Benghazi, Tripoli, Sabratha.

# ... travelling dangerous routes, many are beaten, harassed or raped...

Physical and sexual abuse<sup>7</sup> are the most prevalent risks faced by refugees and migrants on the move, accounting for 46% of the total 1,392 cases recorded for Libya by 4Mi.

*"I was raped by the driver when we arrived in Sabha because my smuggler did not settle the bribe in time. She (my smuggler) left us with the driver and his group and went to Tripoli in order to arrange the bribe's payment. Until her return, they raped us almost every day"*

28-year-old woman from Nigeria interviewed in Libya

Migrants and refugees interviewed by 4Mi in Libya, report having encountered 81% of all physical and sexual assault incidents on the Libyan territory.<sup>8</sup>

Of the total 638 physical and sexual abuse cases reported to 4Mi, 516 (81%) are located in Libya while 91 (14%) in Mali and Niger and 31 (5%) in a several other countries including Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and Algeria.

A disquieting trend is emerging from these statistics. Libya alone accounts for 86% and 80% of all sexual and physical abuse incidents respectively, including at least 44% (276) of incidents that took place in the Libyan desert.

Based on all incidents reported to 4Mi in Libya and West Africa, Niger is the second most dangerous location, accounting for 27% of sexual and physical abuse cases (305).<sup>9</sup>

4Mi data shows that women and girls are generally more vulnerable and exposed to sexual abuse and exploitation: 60% of the 246 refugees and migrants who report on sexual abuse are women. In Libya, 49% of the 156 interviewees who reported on sexual abuse were women while in West Africa women were 80% of the 90 interviewees reporting the incident.

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7 **Physical abuse** refers to different forms and degrees of physical harm including slapping, beating punching, whipping, burning, gunshot wounds, torture, verbal abuse, stone throwing, confinement, forced labour, sleep deprivation, denial of food and water. **Sexual abuse** refers to verbal harassment of sexual nature, indecent touching and rape.

8 These percentages are calculated against the total number of sexual and physical abuse cases (638) recorded for the 4Mi Libya dataset.

9 These percentages refer to **all** of the sexual and physical abuse incidents that occurred in Niger, including both the 4Mi Libya and West Africa dataset. A total of 305 cases were reported including (79 sexual abuse cases and 223 physical abuse cases), Considering both datasets, this figure compares against an overall total of 1,120 sexual and physical abuse cases.

An analysis of the 4Mi Libya and West Africa datasets combined, show that over 43% of sexual abuse cases (83) involving women were in Libya and 39% (74) of cases occurred in Niger. The remaining 34 (18%) cases were in Burkina Faso, Mali and other countries.

In key transit hubs such as Niamey and Agadez in Niger, where prostitution is a flourishing business, a main age group of women subjected and exposed to sexual assault is between 15-20 years old.

*“When I noticed that they were harassing the girls and touching them, I walked to them and explained that these women are somebody’s wife. My wife was also among them. I was seriously beaten and helpless. Other migrants told me to stop because the smuggler may decide to dump us in the desert and drive away.”*

33-year-old man from Nigeria interviewed in Libya

Young women may be directly enticed by traffickers offering a “complete package” for circumventing the stringent European immigration restrictions inclusive of transportation, fake documentation and supporting services.<sup>10</sup> Many, however, are deceived or threatened into trafficking networks by presumed male “protectors” such as husbands, family or community members. An alternative common practice of traffickers is to use female facilitators, called “Madam”, to lure young girls and reassure their family. Either way, the victims end up deeply indebted, and forced into prostitution or domestic servitude to repay the costs of the journey.

When women interviewed by 4Mi are asked whom encouraged them to migrate, most cite a combination of family, friends or smugglers. Specifically, interviewees cite the family 573 times, friends 395 times, the spouse 92 times and smugglers 191 times amongst others.<sup>11</sup>

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10 Skilbrei, M. and Tveit, M. (2007) Facing Return: Perceptions of Repatriation among Nigerian Women in Prostitution in Norway. FAFO, p. 27. Available at: [https://www.udi.no/globalassets/global/forskning-fou\\_i/retur/facing-return---perceptions-of-repatriation-among-nigerian-women-in-prostitution-in-norway.pdf](https://www.udi.no/globalassets/global/forskning-fou_i/retur/facing-return---perceptions-of-repatriation-among-nigerian-women-in-prostitution-in-norway.pdf); Cherti, M., Pennington, J. and Grant, P. (2013) Beyond Borders: Human Trafficking from Nigeria to the UK. London: Institute for Public Policy Research, p. 39. Available at: [https://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2013/01/nigeria-trafficking\\_Jan2013\\_10189.pdf](https://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2013/01/nigeria-trafficking_Jan2013_10189.pdf) (Accessed: 15 June 2017)

11 The text refers to the number of **times** a respondent mentioned a specific actor, this does not correspond to the number of **cases or instances** in which the respondent cited that same actor. For any given case, a respondent may cite multiple sources of encouragement (for instance smuggler, may be mentioned alongside family, friends and others).



**Figure 3: Sexual and physical violence cases - by gender**

*"I was sponsored by a smuggler, I was maltreated and forced into prostitution until someone came to my rescue and pay my debt to my sponsor."*

34-year-old woman from Nigeria, interviewed in Libya

Nigeria has historically been an important hub for the recruitment and trafficking of women and girls, acting as a provider (origin), receiver (destination) and transit point. However, recent interviews with key informants and analysis of the 4Mi dataset indicate that alongside Nigerians, other nationalities from Western and Eastern Africa are being trafficked. This corroborates the latest IOM DTM assessment on human trafficking along the central Mediterranean routes that identifies Somalis and Cameroonians as the main respondents having encountered human trafficking practices.<sup>12</sup> Although statistics are not currently available, 4Mi interviewees report on several occasions incidents of kidnappings of women and girls during the journey. In addition, 4Mi received reports of networks smuggling women and girls from Burkina Faso to Libya to serve as "cleaners" for Libyan families in Tripoli in abusive conditions. With 55% of women interviewed reporting having been intentionally misled by their smuggler when interviewed in Libya<sup>13</sup>, the number of women that have suffered from abuses and are in need of assistance and protection are expected to be very high.

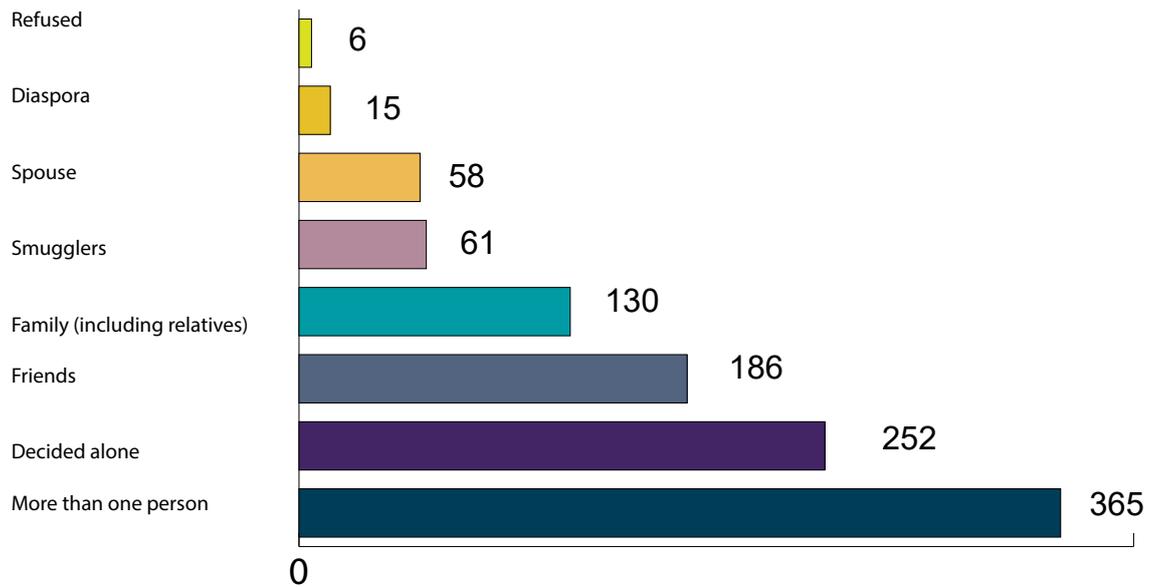
Conversely, men are the prime victims of forced labour and physical violence. Considering both the 4Mi Libya and West Africa datasets, of the 528 refugees and migrants who report on physical abuse, 67% are

<sup>12</sup> IOM DTM (2018). Flow monitoring survey: the human trafficking and other exploitative practices indication survey. Available at: [http://migration.iom.int/docs/FMS\\_CT\\_Analysis\\_male%20female\\_Central\\_Eastern\\_2017.pdf](http://migration.iom.int/docs/FMS_CT_Analysis_male%20female_Central_Eastern_2017.pdf) (Accessed: 28 April 2018)

<sup>13</sup> 4Mi (2017). Invisible Labour. Women's labour migration to Libya. Available at: [http://www.regionalmms.org/images/sector/Invisible%20Labour\\_Womens%20labour%20migration%20to%20Libya.pdf](http://www.regionalmms.org/images/sector/Invisible%20Labour_Womens%20labour%20migration%20to%20Libya.pdf) (Accessed on 28 April 2017)

men including 220 men who report abuses in Libya, 111 in Niger, 90 in Mali and 48 in Burkina Faso.

In this context, race and nationality is an important determinant of vulnerability to risk. Particularly in Libya, specific profiles that are readily identifiable by the local population and authorities (as is the case for sub-Saharan men), may become the targets of ill-treatment and abuse.<sup>14</sup> 76% of male respondents interviewed by IOM in Italy report human trafficking and exploitative practices.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 4: Who encouraged you to migrate? (Responses from women in Libya and West Africa)**

### In Libya, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso...

In most cases, refugees and migrants report being subjected to multiple forms of abuse. Only taking into account incidents reported for Libya, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, an analysis of the 4Mi data reveals that 54% of the 763 physical abuse cases involve any combination of physical violence, extreme physical violence, verbal abuse, forced labour, confinement, sleep deprivation and starvation/

<sup>14</sup> IOM DTM (2018). Flow monitoring survey: the human trafficking and other exploitative practices indication survey. Available at: [http://migration.iom.int/docs/FMS\\_CT\\_Analysis\\_male%20female\\_Central\\_Eastern\\_2017.pdf](http://migration.iom.int/docs/FMS_CT_Analysis_male%20female_Central_Eastern_2017.pdf) (Accessed: 28 April 2018)

<sup>15</sup> IOM DTM (2018). Flow monitoring survey: the human trafficking and other exploitative practices indication survey. Available at: [http://migration.iom.int/docs/FMS\\_CT\\_Analysis\\_male%20female\\_Central\\_Eastern\\_2017.pdf](http://migration.iom.int/docs/FMS_CT_Analysis_male%20female_Central_Eastern_2017.pdf) (Accessed: 28 April 2018)

dehydration.

Respondents cite extreme physical violence (including burning, gunshot wounds and torture) in 5% of cases (40) and physical violence (such as beating, whipping, punching) on 25% of cases (187). In addition, refugees and migrants interviewed in Libya, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso report 280 cases of sexual assault, representing 92% of the total 305 cases of sexual abuse. Specifically, rape was mentioned in 25% of cases, indecent touching in 51% of cases, verbal harassment accounted for 6% of cases while in 18% of cases respondents cited multiple forms of sexual abuse.

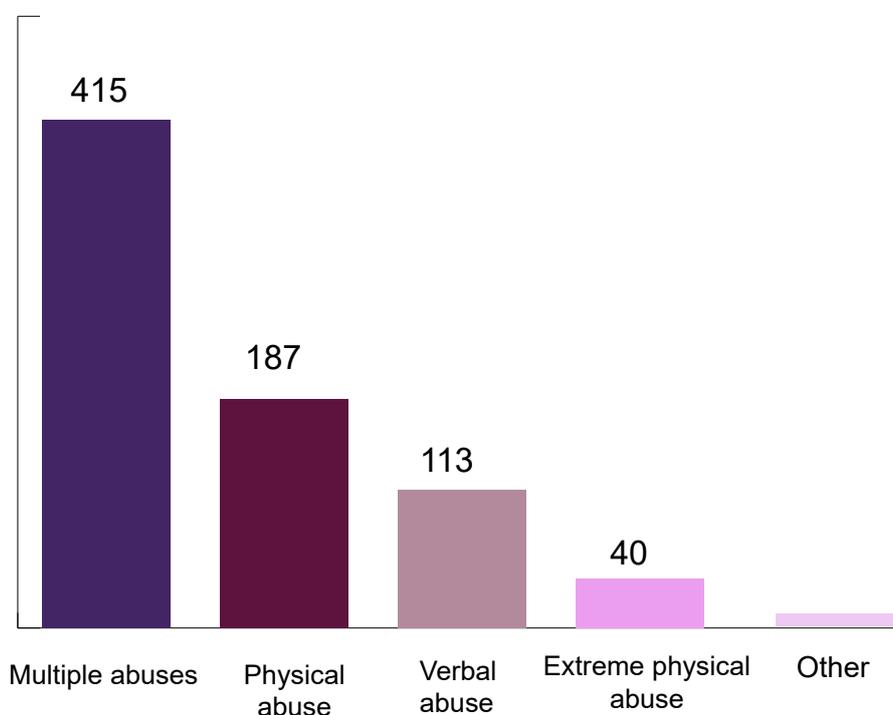


Figure 5: Physical abuse cases by category (respondents from Libya, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso)

## ... many die in the desert...

Migrants and refugees interviewed between June 2017 and May 2018 report the **death of approximately 1,600 people** on the move across West and East Africa. The highest numbers were reported in Libya, where 773 died, followed by Niger and Mali, accounting for 316 and 210 casualties respectively.

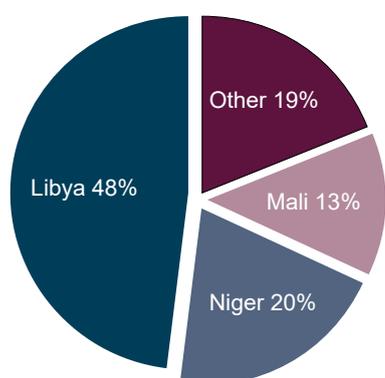
*"I traveled with my child and that of another mother who died. I have lost my children in the desert, I want to go back to the desert to find them."*

32-year-old female from Bangui, Central African Republic, interviewed in Agadez

Evidence suggests that refugees and migrants trying to reach Libya and Europe are dying in far greater numbers in the Sahara than in the Mediterranean.<sup>16</sup> Although accurate figures are hard to come by, it is likely that thousands disappear along these routes every year. Refugees and migrants often travel on precarious means, crammed on pick-up trucks with few supplies and often fall victim of robbery, extortion and abuse. Moreover, to evade military patrols, an increasing number are being abandoned by smugglers in the desert and left to fend for themselves with no food, water or assistance.

As national authorities across the Sahel, continue to crack down on the main transit routes used by trafficking operations, smugglers are forced to travel along more dangerous roads, which are lengthier and expose people to additional risks, further diminishing the chances of survival. For instance, 4Mi key informants are now reporting that the journey across the desert from Niger to Libya which normally takes 2-3 days is increasingly taking up to two weeks. The price of the journey has also increased as a result. 4Mi data suggests prices have increased four-fold over the past year, from an average of USD 400 per person in mid-2017 to USD 1,600 per person by February 2018.

As preferred routes have become mostly unviable due to the heightened presence of security patrols, smugglers are now favoring the Algeria and Chad routes, which registered a greater movement of people since the beginning of the year. Yet the journey along this way is riskier and security incidents have been on the rise since. Human Rights Watch has been reporting a surge in deportations concerning hundreds of refugees and migrants of various African nationalities over the past year. Security forces have been rounding up people on the streets or at work sites and most are being taken to Tamanrasset



**Figure 6: Refugee and migrant death by country**

<sup>16</sup> RMMS (2016). Forgotten Fatalities. Available at: <http://regionalmms.org/index.php/research-publications/feature-articles/item/18-forgotten-fatalities-the-number-of-migrant-deaths-before>

*“The worst thing is the death of a person you travel with happening in front of your eyes when there is no doctor or hospital to help. You start to regret the circumstances that led you to your migration through the desert.”*

41-year-old woman from Sudan interviewed in Libya

camp or other suburban locations before being subsequently bussed over the border into Niger or to Mali.

According to the activist group, the Algerian authorities are arresting and expelling migrants depriving them of the right to challenge their detention and possible deportation.<sup>17</sup>

Many refugees and migrants have told stories of death and abuse in the desert, although lacking official and reliable data, the magnitude of this unfolding humanitarian crisis remains unknown. Still, 4Mi reports at least **518** refugees and migrant **deaths in the Libyan, Egyptian and Sudanese deserts**, corresponding to approximately 32% of the total deaths recorded by 4Mi.

The highest numbers are in Libya where almost 64% of reported death cases are located in the desert, corresponding to at least 351 casualties.

Respondents cite a combination of dehydration, starvation, lack of access to medication, harsh weather conditions and vehicle accidents as the main causes of the deaths.

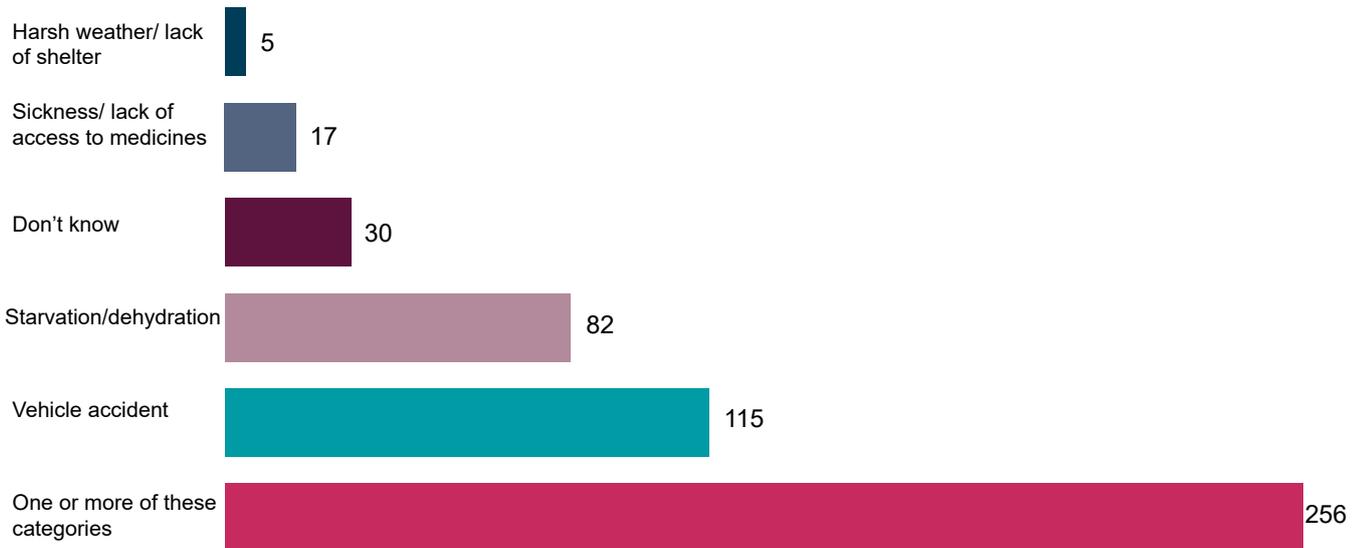


Figure 7: Number of people dying in the desert (data from Libya, Niger, Sudan and Egypt)

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch (2018). Algeria: A new wave of deportations. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/27/algeria-new-wave-deportations>

## ...or are arbitrarily detained and abused...

*"The arrest of innocent migrants by the Libyan security forces has become unbearable. Friends came to our house to felicitate my wife who just gave birth to our baby. Our neighbours noticed the coming and going on the street and called the police to arrest our visitors. Despite seeing the new born baby, the police still went ahead and arrested our friends."*

35-year-old man from Nigeria, interviewed in Libya

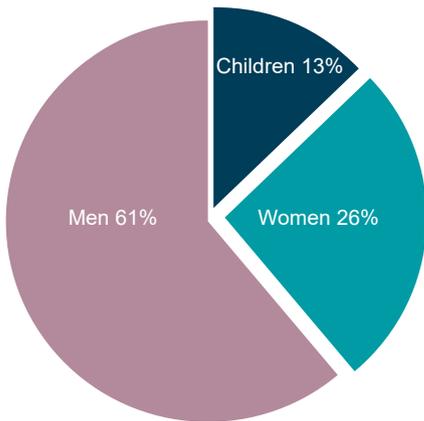
The threat of being arbitrarily arrested and detained is ever-present along migratory routes. People on the move can be stopped, ambushed and arrested by smugglers, traffickers, the local police, security officers and armed groups.<sup>18</sup> A wide range of reports have detailed the inhumane and substandard conditions in detention centers where refugees and migrants are held for long periods without trial and subjected to grave human rights violations including torture, sexual abuse, beating, solitary confinement and food, water or sleep deprivation.<sup>19</sup> In addition to people being detained in official detention centers, there are unknown thousands being held captive in "unofficial" makeshift prisons, in appalling and overcrowded conditions.

4Mi recorded a total of 447 detention cases between June 2017 and February 2018, representing almost a fifth of all reported protection incidents. Of these, 32% (141) of incidents were in Libya, particularly in Sabha, Azzawya, Ajdabiya and Kufra, 30% of cases (134) occurred in Mali and 21% (96) in Niger. Although indicative, these figures are a conservative estimate of those who are actually detained. 4Mi does not conduct interviews in detention centers and thus incidents of detention reported to 4Mi only concern persons that have been released.

Regardless, the data that could be gathered reveals that the majority of people are detained for illegally entering or exiting the country while a significant number is not aware of the reasons for the arrest. For instance, comparing 4Mi data from Niger, Mali and Libya, on 35 occasions respondents were not told the reasons of the arrest, while in another 248 cases respondents cite arrest for irregular immigration.

<sup>18</sup> MSF (2017) Libya: The arbitrary and inhumane detention of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, available at: <http://www.msf.org/en/article/libya-arbitrary-detention-refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants-must-stop>

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR (2018). Abuse behind bars: Arbitrary and unlawful detention in Libya. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/libya/abuse-behind-bars-arbitrary-and-unlawful-detention-libya-april-2018-enar>



**Figure 8: Refugees and Migrants detained**

*“The first smuggler held me captive in a house in Sabha. He was telling his associates that he brought me on credit. He instructed them to collect a certain amount of money from me and he left me there. I met many people that have been detained for so long in this house. They used to give us one meal every two days. In fact many people have turned to skeleton due to malnutrition. They are unable to pay for the ransom.”*

27-year-old man from Nigeria, interviewed in Libya

Of growing concern are the conditions of more vulnerable groups of detainees such as women and children. 4Mi respondents cite the arbitrary detention of women and children (under 18 years) on 116 and 59 occasions respectively, representing 39% of all detention cases reported to 4Mi during this period. Although significantly fewer than men, these groups are disproportionately affected by abuse and ill-treatment. Women face a high risk of being sexually abused and often do not have access to medical and reproductive care. Instances have been recounted of women having to give birth in detention centers without the presence of a medical attendant. Children may also be subjected to abuse and ill treatment while appalling conditions of the detention centers such as lack of hygiene, overcrowding, inadequate food and medical care, results in a greater risk of infections and malnutrition.

## LIBYA IN FOCUS

Libya presents unique dangers for refugees and migrants. Compounding the risk of death, kidnapping, robbery and abuse in the desert, for many having an irregular status means they live under the constant threat of arbitrary arrest and repatriation by authorities. In Libyan cities, many refugees and migrants encounter discrimination and exploitation by the local population. There are instances of people being denied treatment in hospitals and private clinics or being forced to wait longer than other patients because of their background and appearance. Yet irregular migrants cannot denounce to the authorities these abuses nor access key services (including formal employment, health care and education) for fear of being arrested.

Some locations in Libya are more dangerous than others. An analysis of the 4Mi data shows that 34% of the total incidents in Libya occurred in Sabha, Kufra and Beni Walid, albeit the type of protection risks encountered varied from location to location. As such, interviewees in Sabha and Beni Walid reported a higher number of physical and sexual abuse cases, detention was most frequently reported in Kufra, death in Beni Walid, while robbery and kidnapping in Sabha. With regards to death incidents in Kufra, Sabha and Beni Walid, in most cases respondents cited death due to a combination of causes. The majority mention sickness and lack of access to medicines (cited 18 times), extreme physical abuse (14 times) and starvation (18 times) while several cases (5) of shooting or stabbing were reported mainly in Sabha.

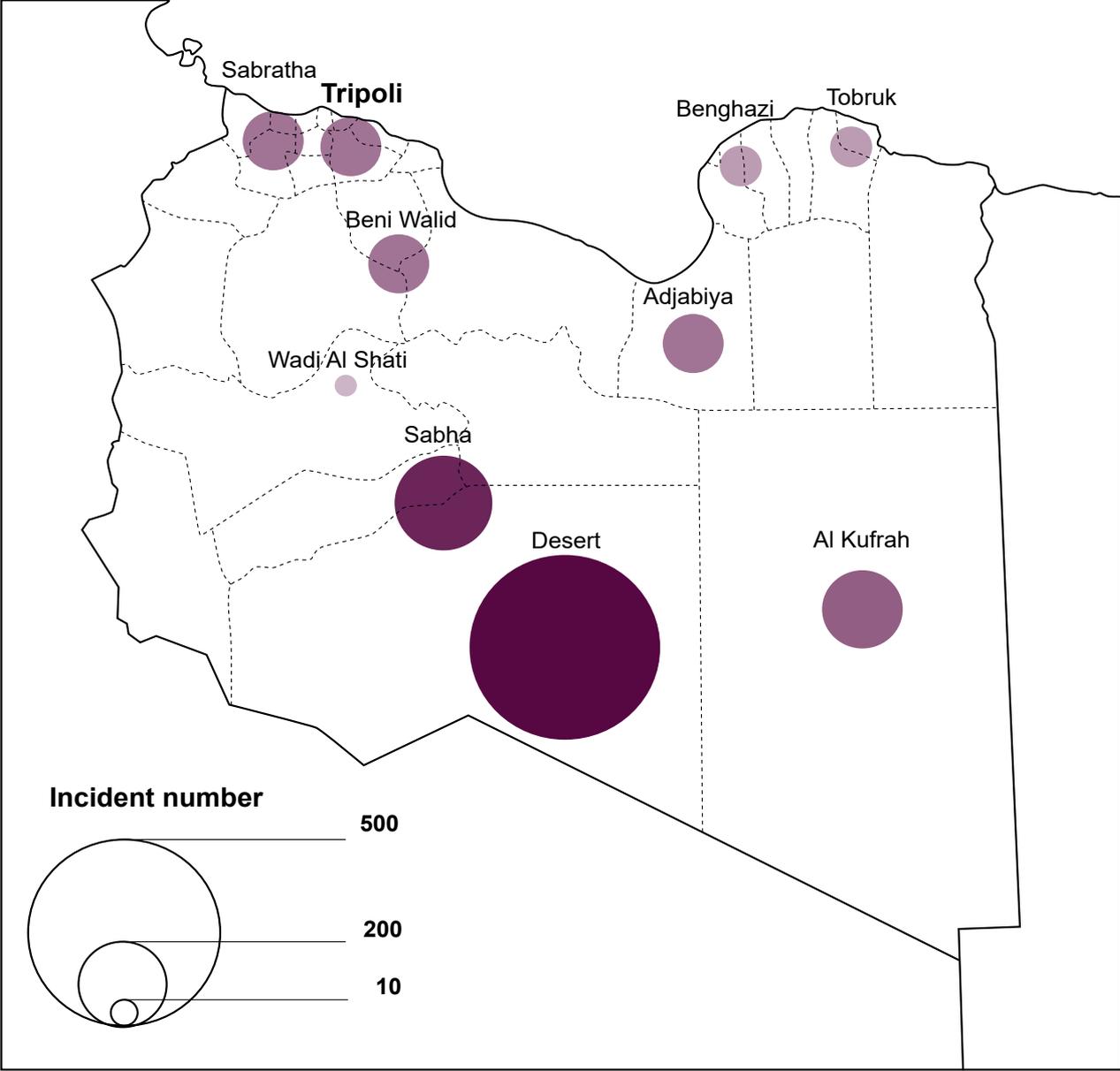


Figure 9: Protection incidents in Libya by location

## ...and must rely on dubious means for self-protection.

*"I see my smuggler as a good person because he didn't engage me in prostitution."*

30-year-old woman from Nigeria, interviewed in Libya

Providing humanitarian protection and assistance to people in mixed migration flows presents unique challenges. Refugees and migrants will travel together and may have different or similar immediate needs or fall under different protection frameworks. In addition, volatile security conditions, particularly in sensitive areas such as Libya, Mali and Niger and the clandestine and mobile nature of the population flows renders them difficult to trace and largely 'invisible' to humanitarian agencies. Evidence shows there is a glaring gap in protection programming for people in mixed migration flow particularly where women and girls are concerned.

For instance, 2,562 protection incidents were reported by 4Mi respondents across Libya and West Africa, yet assistance from NGOs and the UN is mentioned in just 187 occasions.

*"I wish the United Nations was providing help to the people crossing the desert."*

35-year-old woman from Ghana interviewed in Libya

Primarily, refugees and migrants rely on themselves or other means of support. Smugglers are often cited as the main providers of assistance. Overall, assistance only from smugglers is mentioned in 32% (810) of cases. Smugglers therefore, simultaneously act as benefactors bestowing food, water, shelter and clothing and as perpetrators, displaying abusive behavior. In 549 cases, smugglers are reported as the sole perpetrator of abuse, accounting for 21% of all protection incidents.<sup>20</sup> These statistics however, do not capture the full extent of smugglers' involvement as perpetrators and/or benefactors. In most instances, interviewees cite smugglers in combination with other actors, such as family, friends, criminal gangs, authorities. This suggests a much more complex and pervasive interaction, whereby some degree of contact with a smuggler, is an unavoidable passage for the majority of migration cases.

These responses are indicative that smugglers have the upper hand in allowing or denying refugees and migrants access to services, particularly in the case of Libya where smugglers are considered benefactors by 73% of respondents and as abusers in 40% of cases.

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<sup>20</sup> Please note that these figures include both the West Africa and Libya datasets.

The local population, together with family and friends is also an important social safety network towards assisting refugees and migrants' immediate needs for food, shelter, cash, clothing, legal, medical and psychosocial assistance. Support from these groups is mentioned on 368 occasions, including 175 cases in Libya and 193 in West Africa. Other forms of support referred to by respondents include assistance from other refugees and migrants and the government.

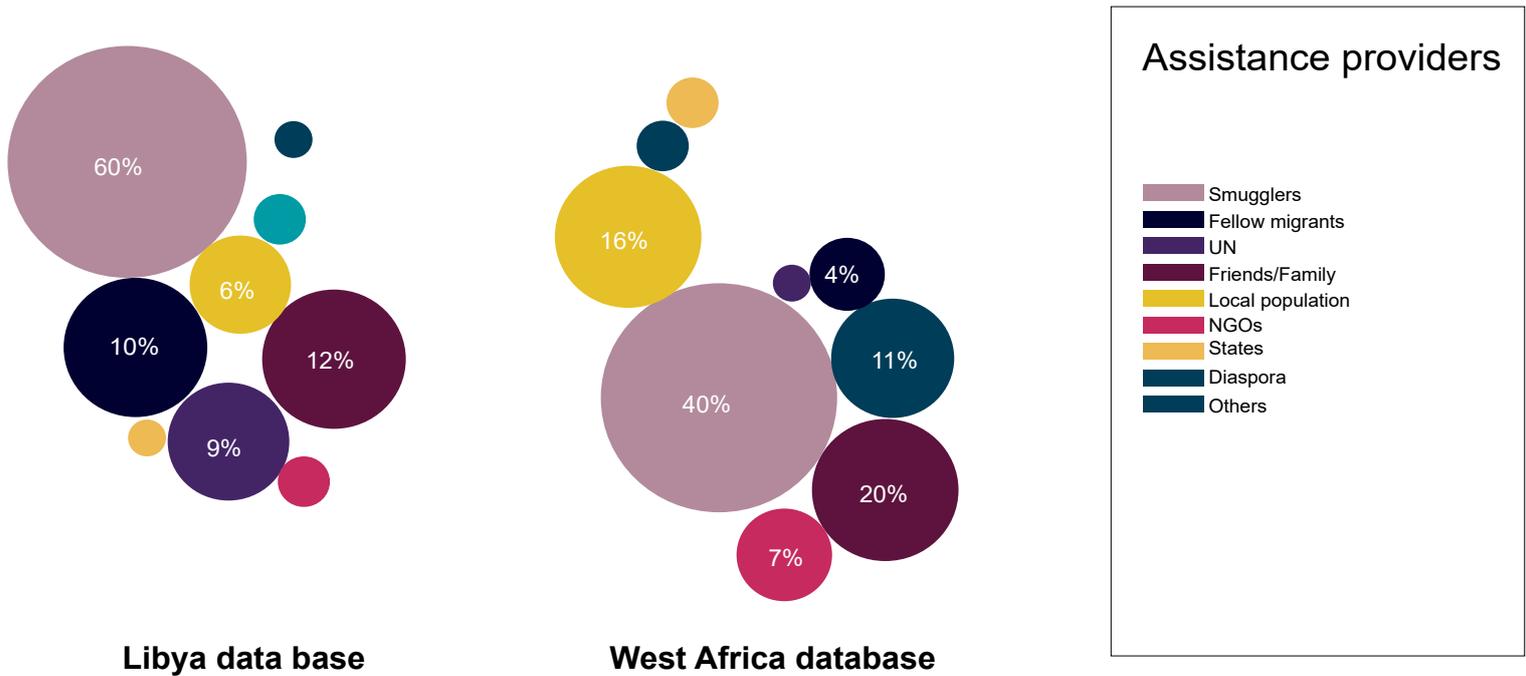


Figure 10: Assistance providers

To date, the main prevention and response to abuses perpetrated by smugglers has been the use of force as shown in Niger. However, the dismantlement of the smuggling networks in Niger by security forces has shown to be a dubious measure that led smugglers, refugees and migrants to travel on longer and more dangerous routes to reach their destination. Local authorities in Nigeria may have found an alternative solution for victims of Nigerian smugglers and traffickers. In Edo states, one of Nigeria's main trafficking hub, the traditional ruler of the kingdom of Benin has put a voodoo curse on traffickers.<sup>21</sup> Nigerian victims are usually bound by a 'juju' curse<sup>22</sup> to their trafficker.<sup>23</sup> The counter-curse conferred by the traditional ruler would serve to free the victims from this bond. Interviewees have reported to 4Mi that the fear of repercussions have stopped some traffickers from continuing their activities.

21 Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani. (2018). Voodoo curse on human traffickers. New York Times available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/24/opinion/sunday/voodoo-curse-human-traffickers.html>

22 Juju is a magic charm from the West African region.

23 Lorenzo Tondo, Annie Kelly (2017). The juju curse binds trafficked Nigerian women into sex slavery. The Guardian, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/sep/02/juju-curse-binds-trafficked-nigerian-women-sex-slavery>

*"I am very happy to hear that people of Edo and the King of the Region are taking seriously the need to tackle smuggling and trafficking activities of the youth of the region. After the King's call to the traditional priest of the region to cast a spell on anyone engaging in smuggling and trafficking activities.*

*Talking about spells might sound ridiculous or funny, but as a someone who come from the Region, I know the repercussion of these spells. That's why many parents in Edo state are calling their children abroad to stop their smuggling and trafficking activities."*

27-year-old woman from Nigeria interviewed in Libya

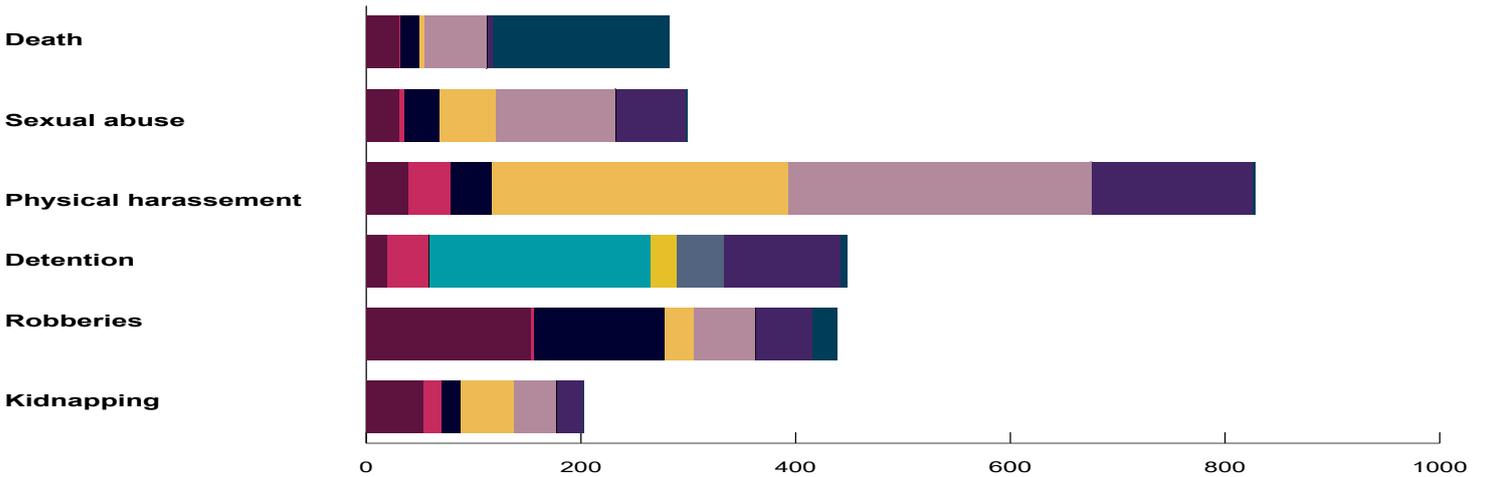
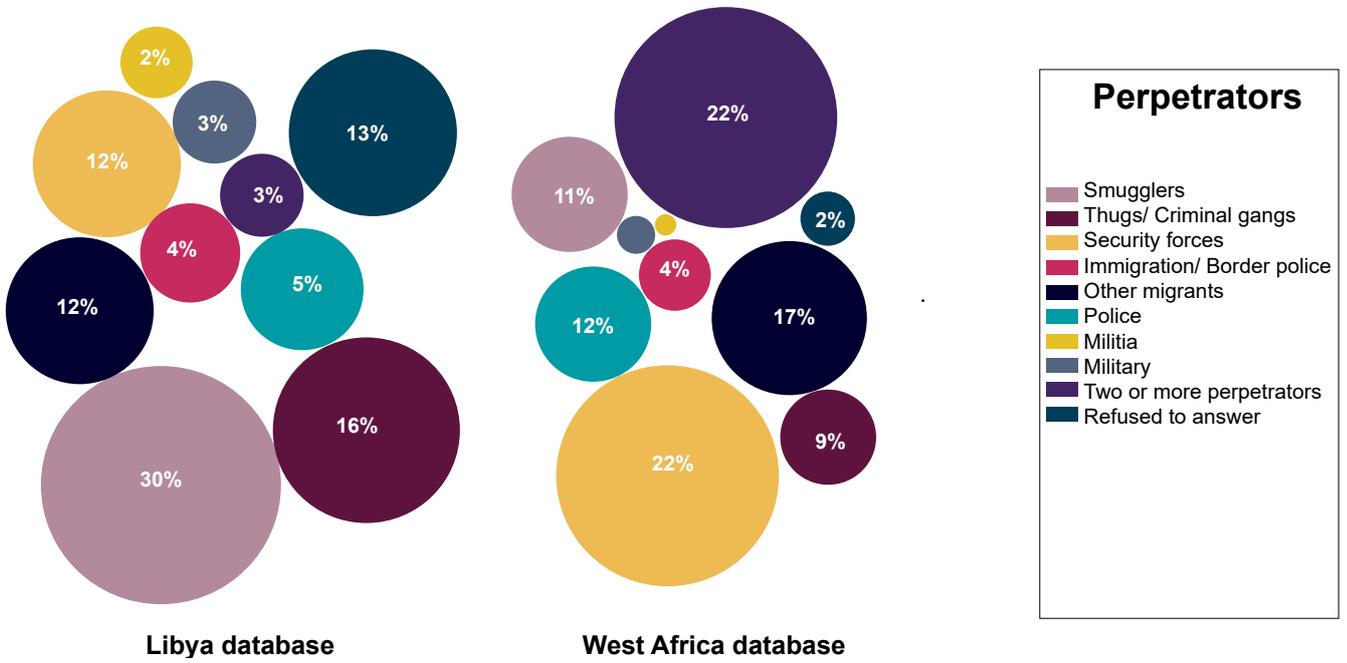


Figure 11: Perpetrators of abuse

# Faced with limited options, vulnerabilities persist...

*"I had no intention of staying in Libya but changed my mind after my experience in Sabratha. My boat trip was delayed due to security issues at sea last year. While in the Sabratha smuggler camp I was called to the shore to take the bodies of migrants who died at sea on their way to Europe. Seeing the deceased devastated my mind. I am in Libya and it's difficult due to the level of insecurity, the criminal activities and harassment from the security forces. These are the reasons why many prefer to risk their lives to reach Europe instead of staying here."*

32-year-old Nigerian man interviewed in Libya

As refugees and migrants continue to undertake the treacherous journey across West and East Africa and the Sahara, they face widespread protection risks by a multitude of actors. People interviewed in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, cited fellow refugees and migrants or security forces as the main perpetrators of abuse. Out of the total 1,170 incidents reported in these countries, 21% are inflicted by security forces, primarily physical and sexual abuse and kidnapping. In addition, 15% are inflicted by other refugees and migrants, particularly robbery, physical and sexual abuse and death. In Libya on the other hand, smugglers are responsible for 30% of the total 1,392 incidents, while thugs and other criminal gangs are responsible for another 16% of incidents and security forces for 12%.

Amid a climate of hostility and discrimination, many refugees and migrants in Libya seek ways to leave.

However, many find themselves at a dead end. Access to asylum in Libya is currently impossible as there is no national system for the registration for asylum seekers and the recognition of refugees.<sup>24</sup> Self-organized return flights are risky and costly, and many are liable to arrest upon arrival. Cases were reported by 4Mi monitors and informants of people being denounced by 'travel agents' from whom they bought their flight ticket and subsequently were arrested. In Tripoli, groups are reportedly being held in deplorable conditions by such 'travel agents' as they await a departure flight, sometimes for several weeks. Cases were reported of refugees and migrants deciding to undertake the sea-crossing to Italy in order to then purchase a return flight home.

<sup>24</sup> Sabrina Tucci (2011). Libya and International Refugee and Asylum Law: Addressing the Protection of Refugees and Migrants Displaced by the 2011 Conflict. Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration 2 (2), 50-55

*"I regret my decision to come to Libya. The economic situation in the country is not favourable for the migrants anymore. Many of us want to go back home with the IOM programme, however what we are hearing is not encouraging us to apply. We heard from people who took the flights that the Nigerian government is doing everything to deter opportunities for the returnees to travel again out of the country. They register their names at arrival."*

32-year-old man from Nigeria interviewed in Libya

In 2017, 19,370 individuals have been flown out of Libya under the IOM assisted voluntary return and repatriation programme<sup>25</sup> while 1,342 individuals have been evacuated by UNHCR between November 2017 and April 2018.<sup>26</sup> However, these numbers are only the visible part of a much harsher reality. Prospects are grim for most refugees and migrants in Libya and this growing sense of desperation is being matched by an equal desire to return home. Yet, access to repatriation and evacuation programs is limited at best and insufficient to meet a mounting demand for assistance. 4Mi data suggests that the inadequacy of the current mechanisms in place is pushing many urban populations to seek out alternative methods. In addition, key informants have reported to 4Mi the negative impacts of the humanitarian repatriation and evacuation programs.

For refugees and migrants that don't have access to repatriation and evacuation programs there are few options. Remaining in Libya at the cost of safety, health, well-being and dignity, making the treacherous journey back through the desert or undertaking the perilous crossing by boat to Italy.

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25 IOM Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration, statistics available at: <https://www.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration>

26 UNHCR Flash Update -21-27 April 2018

This research paper was jointly produced by 4Mi North Africa and 4Mi West Africa.

The Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) is an innovative approach for the collection and analysis of data along major mixed migration corridors. It responds to the need for better data on protection issues with regards to asylum seekers, refugees and other people on the move. 4Mi is a programme of the Mixed Migration Center (MMC). 4Mi seeks to help fill the knowledge gaps regarding the nature of the mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move.

4Mi data, graphics and analyses are based on the accumulated, ongoing data collection by 4Mi field monitors through direct interviews with refugees and migrants. Sample sizes are clearly indicated and represent a limited section of those on the move.