Protection Monitoring During COVID-19 Crisis - Libya
Situation in Areas of Return / Access to Information, Services and Livelihoods

Protection Sector
Libya

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INTRODUCTION

The impact of the infectious disease COVID-19 has heightened protection concerns and other needs across Libya, especially for at-risk population groups.[1] In Tripoli, a period of intense fighting in May and early June, resulted in the Government of National Accord (GNA) retaking control of the whole of the city, with the Libyan National Army (LNA) withdrawing towards the east. Following this, internally displaced persons (IDPs), originally from the south of Tripoli, who had settled elsewhere during the conflict, began returning to their homes. REACH, in collaboration with the Protection Sector and the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), established this assessment to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and related policies on access to information, services and livelihoods for at-risk populations in Tripoli. Alongside the regular data collection, which was carried out between 31 May - 2 June, this factsheet also presents the findings from data collected from a different set of KIs about the situation with returns in the city, which was done between 13-15 June.

METHODOLOGY

For the third round, data was collected by trained REACH enumerators via phone calls with Key Informants (KIs) between 31 May - 2 June 2020. Enumerators used the online digital data collection platform Kobo Collect to insert interview data.

In total, REACH enumerators interviewed 23 KIs, among whom were 15 community representatives, and 8 service providers. The former were representing Libyan non-displaced (4) and Libyan communities with IDPs (3), as well as migrant and refugee communities from West African (3), East African (3) and Middle East and North African (MENA) countries (2). Service provider KIs were sought for the following types of provider: UN agencies and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) (3), local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) (2), and health workers (3).[2] REACH adopted a data saturation model for analysis, whereby only consensus views are represented in this factsheet, unless stated otherwise.

For this round, REACH carried out an additional, separate data collection to respond to the fast-changing events in the Libyan capital and surrounding areas most impacted by recent fighting, the findings of which are also presented in this factsheet. Interviews were carried out between 13-15 June with 18 KIs, 14 of whom were displaced at the time of data collection, while the remaining 4 had already permanently returned to the neighbourhood they were displaced from. In additional, one follow up interview was carried out with a KI to explore further some of the issues that emerged from the original interviews.

The KIs for both assessments were identified through a snowballing approach. They were requested to state explicitly those communities or locations they felt they were able to speak on behalf of at the beginning of the questionnaire. Findings represent KIs' perception of the situation, and therefore, are indicative only.

> **About REACH's COVID-19 response**
> As an initiative deployed in many vulnerable and crisis-affected countries, REACH is deeply concerned by the devastating impact the COVID-19 pandemic may have on the millions of affected people we seek to serve. REACH is currently working with sectors and partners to scale up its programming in response to this pandemic, with the goal of identifying practical ways to inform humanitarian responses in the countries where we operate. Updates regarding REACH's response to COVID-19 can be found in a devoted thread on the REACH website. Contact geneva@impact-initiatives.org for further information.

INCORPORATION OF MIXED MIGRATION CENTRE (MMC) FINDINGS

In an effort to streamline the evidence base for the humanitarian response in Libya, REACH has been working closely with MMC to harmonize assessments and identify areas of complementarity in findings. During the assessment inception phase, REACH and MMC collaborated to establish shared research questions and objectives. As with the first round of data collection, during data analysis for the third round, REACH worked closely with MMC in order to triangulate findings and share analytical approaches.

Throughout this factsheet, results from MMC's survey and KI reports are referred to in order to triangulate with REACH KI data. The MMC findings incorporated here are based on telephone surveys conducted by MMC with 1023 refugees and migrants, between 6 April and 1 June.[3]

KEY FINDINGS

SAFETY CONCERNS FACED BY RETURNEES

Systematic looting, widespread damage, the absence of basic services such as water and electricity, and the presence of mines/Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), appears to be making returns to certain retaken areas of Tripoli very dangerous - as residents reportedly face ongoing threats to their lives and property.

RETURN TRENDS IN TRIPOLI AND SURROUNDING AREAS

KIs from southern neighbourhoods of the city, such as Ain Zara and Salah al Din, reported that people are returning in large numbers. However, KIs from other areas, especially those along Airport Road, south of the city, reported that only very small numbers of individuals were returning permanently, with most only carrying out "go and see" visits.

LIVELIHOOD DISRUPTIONS AND ABILITY TO COVER BASIC NEEDS

Policies and restrictions related to COVID-19 continue to impact people's ability access livelihoods and earn money. This is leading to growing concerns about communities' ability to cover basic needs and pay rent in Tripoli.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR ASSISTANCE

Provision of food and health commodities, alongside support with paying rent, were highlighted by KIs as the main priority areas for assistance at the time of data collection.

ACCESS TO SERVICES - Healthcare

Healthcare workers reported that there is shortage of staff, equipment and medicines resulting in many facilities being closed or operating at significantly reduced capacity.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

For this round, health professionals were selected as the actor who most needed to provide more information to communities in Tripoli about the virus and available services, as opposed to international NGOs in the previous round.

AREAS OF RETURN FINDINGS (13 - 15 JUNE 2020)

Following the cessation of fighting in southern Tripoli and surrounding areas, displaced residents began to return or carry out "go and see" visits to check on their property. Numerous reports revealed that they faced several safety concerns upon returning, including the presence of mines and ERW that have killed a number of civilians and de-mining personnel.[4] In order to better understand the general return trends and motivations, and the security situation in areas of return, REACH conducted 18 KI interviews and one follow up interview, the findings of which are presented below. Whenever neighbourhoods are mentioned in the findings it refers to the area people displaced from and are now returning to, either to return permanently, or for a single, or multiple, "go and see" visits.

GENERAL RETURN TRENDS

- **All KIs interviewed reported that people are returning to their neighbourhoods, but the overall numbers and the nature of returns varied considerably.** KIs from Ain Zara, Salah al Din, Khallat al Furjan, reported that returns were happening in large numbers, with several thousand reportedly returning, both as individuals and families. Out of these three neighbourhoods, Khallat al Furjan is one of the areas in Tripoli that saw the most acute fighting and has the highest suspected level of mine/ERW contamination.[5] The neighbourhood with the greatest number of returns reported was Ain Zara. (Please refer to Map1 in the annex for a visualisation of the areas of return referenced by the KIs)

- However, KIs from other neighbourhoods, especially those south of the city around Airport Road, reported that only very small numbers of individuals were returning permanently, with most people temporarily visiting to check on or protect property.

- One KI from Khalatat noted that they and their neighbours had set up a neighbourhood watch rota system, whereby a group of them would return to the area each night to guard property, in order to prevent further looting and damage.

- **KIs from areas surrounding Airport Road and al Mashrou al Hadba also noted that there is an almost complete absence of basic services, such as electricity and water, in the area, and that many homes were damaged during the fighting and have now been looted** - indicating that there might be little for them to return to.

- A follow up interview also revealed that there is very little economic activity in the area, with few shops or other businesses operating. **The KI, who displaced from a town near Airport Road, noted that it would be many months before they felt they would be able to return permanently, due to the extent of the damage**.

- In terms of how long returns (both "go and see" visits and permanent returns) have been happening, the vast majority of KIs reported that these have only been taking place in the week prior to data collection. However, all three KIs from Khallat al Furjan noted that people have been returning since two weeks prior to data collection.

MOTIVATION FOR RETURN AND INFORMATION USED

- On 8 June the **Ministry of the Interior urged residents not to return to their neighbourhoods in southern Tripoli due to the presence of mines/ERW,** referencing recent deaths in Salah al Din and Ain Zara neighbourhoods.[6]

- **The main reasons why displaced persons were returning was to check on property, which was reported by all KIs.** The next most reported reason was the absence of conflict or violence in the area of return (16/18) and to be with friends and family (5/18).

- Although this was not included as an option, **three KIs provided an additional reason, which was to guard property from theft and further damage.** This was reported by KIs from Mashrou al Hadba, Khalatat, and al Ahya al Bariya.

- KIs were asked what information led to people deciding to return. **The main sources cited were media reports (including print, TV and online) covering recent developments in the city**, followed by information provided by other community members or neighbours (7/18).

KIs from near Airport Road reported that widespread damage to houses and theft of property, along with a lack of basic services, made it difficult for people to return to these areas.

SAFETY CONCERNS AND SECURITY INCIDENTS

- **According to KIs, the main safety and security concerns faced by those returning were mines/ERW (16/18) and robberies or theft of property (14/18).**

- Although the option was not included in the tool, **three KIs elaborated to say that they wanted to prevent their property from being burnt down, which has reportedly been done to other houses in their neighbourhood.** KIs elaborated to say that, after being looted, some houses are being torched. A follow up interview indicated that, in some cases, this practice is targeted at certain households that are perceivably involved in the conflict, but that in many cases, no clear motive was apparent.

- Indeed, when asked if any particular population group held these security concerns, all KIs reported that they were shared by everyone returning, due to the indiscriminate nature of mines/ERW and how widespread theft, looting and damage to property were in areas that have seen conflict and violence in recent weeks.

- **Most KIs (14/18) reported that they knew of or had experienced specific security incidents.**

The presence of mines/ERW was the greatest security concern held by those returning or visting their neighbourhoods in the days prior to data collection, according to KIs.

- **Mines/ERW were the most frequently mentioned security incidents, especially in neighbourhoods closer to the city, such as Ain Zara, Khallat Al Furjan, Mashrou al Hadba and Salah al Din, which has also been widely reported in the media.**[7] Robberies and theft (of property) were the next most frequently mentioned, especially in Salah al Din and areas surrounding Airport Road.
- **When discussing robberies, KIs noted that many homes had been stripped of possessions and that they feared this will continue for as long as houses remain unoccupied; checking on property, likely due to these reports of looting and damage, appears to be a key motivation for many to return either permanently or for "go and see" visits.**
- Additionally, looting appears to be continuing. **One KI reported having visited their property at the beginning of the week prior to data collection to find evidence of armed groups squatting and theft of valuable items. When they returned again a few days later, the windows and doors had been taken.**
- The extent of the theft across neighbourhoods that saw fighting in recent weeks has been documented elsewhere. A recent article by Middle East Eye described the prevalence of systematic looting. The article reported that one resident returned to their home to find televisions in their garden, and later discovered that their house had been used as a gathering point for TVs stolen in the area. Another returned to find that their property had been used as a collection point for electricity generators. In the article, widespread infrastructural theft was also reported, with some areas having been stripped of electricity cables.[8]

This systematic looting, combined with the lack of services, damage sustained during the recent fighting, and the presence of mines/ERW, appears to be making returns to retaken areas of Tripoli very dangerous, as residents reportedly face ongoing threats to their lives and property.

When discussing robberies, KIs noted that many homes had been stripped of possessions and that they feared this will continue for as long as houses remain unoccupied; due to this concern, checking on property appears to be a key motivation for many to go back.

The remainder of this factsheet presents findings from the regular protection monitoring conducted with a network of KIs in Tripoli. The findings presented here are based on an **entirely seperate** data collection to the one concerning returns in the city.

ACCESS TO LIVELIHOODS AND BASIC NEEDS

LIVELIHOOD DISRUPTIONS

- **Both REACH and MMC reveal that many people continue to be unable to access livelihoods, especially those who relied on temporary work or daily labour.**
- **In the 14 days prior to data collection, all (15/15) KIs reported that members of their community have had to stop working in their usual jobs.** This shows that work continues to be inaccessible for communities across the city as a result of measures related to COVID-19.
- **Of those who stated that community members had stopped working, all except for some KIs representing Libyan non-displaced and IDPs, stated that they had also lost income.** This confirms a trend seen in previous rounds in which only Libyan nationals are still receiving an income, despite having lost work.
- The extent to which people cannot access livelihoods and have lost work was also highlighted in MMC data. When asked "Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?" the majority of respondents (522/1023) answered "Yes." Alongside this, 177/1023 noted that they had continued to work despite Covid-19 restrictions, and 208/1023 were not previously earning an income.
- The main reasons given by Community Representative KIs to explain why people cannot access livelihoods is that their workplace is no longer operating (10/15), followed by community members having lost their jobs (7/16).
- **As a result of this loss of income all KIs representing East African communities reported to be "very concerned" that members of their community would be unable to cover basic needs. Alongside this, all KIs representing East African, MENA and Libyan IDPs, reported to be "very concerned" that members of their community would be unable to pay rent and be evicted from their accommodation.** This last concern has grown since the previous round, where KIs representing those communities mostly reported to be "somewhat concerned" about evictions.

Inabilities to cover basic needs or to pay rent, due to a loss of income, were the most common concerns KIs reported having about their community members.

ABILITY TO COVER BASIC NEEDS

- **Both REACH and MMC data revealed that the lack of income resulting from the loss of work continues to impact people's ability to cover basic needs.**

- These livelihoods disruptions were also reported by community representative KIs, according to whom **not being able to cover basic needs (12/15) or rent (10/15) were key concerns in their communities in the weeks prior to data collection.**

- Again, this is supported by MMC data. Out of the 522 who cited a loss of income, when asked what impact this loss of income had on their everyday lives, 356 refugees and migrants noted, "I am unable to afford basic goods". This was followed by increased worry and anxiety (245), and an inability to pay remittances (208).

- In the previous output, it was highlighted that migrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis due to their reliance on temporary work or daily labour. This finding was further supported by a recent report published by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), which found that one in three migrants in the country are food insecure. In the analysis, this was revealed to be closely linked to the type of work relied upon, with higher levels of low food consumption reported among those seeking daily labour (34 per cent) than for those with regular employment (11 per cent).[9]

- **For this round, there was a notable increase in KIs reporting to be concerned about the impact of conflict and violence (12/15) on communities in Tripoli.** This reflects the high intensity of fighting seen in the weeks prior to data collection.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR ASSISTANCE

As in the previous round, additional questions were asked regarding priority areas for assistance. Community representative KIs were provided with a comprehensive list of basic needs, services and commodities, and asked to select all relevant options.

- **The main priorities for assistance coincided with those identified in the previous round - with the need for food commodities (13/15), health commodities (12/15), and support with rent or housing (10/15) being the main types of assistance mentioned, due to the current situation.** Again, in this round, support with rent or housing was mentioned by all KIs representing Libyan IDPs, many of whom rely on rented accommodation in their area of displacement.

- A greater need for assistance was also found in MMC data. The majority of respondents cited being in need of extra help since the COVID-19 outbreak (775/1023). Refugees and migrants commonly cited being in need of cash (654), followed by other basic needs, such as food, water, and shelter (454), and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (235).

- Notably, for this round, only one KI mentioned a need for potable water, whereas this was reported by half of Community Representatives in the previous round. This likely reflects the renewed functionality of the Great Man-Made River, which provides water to the greater Tripoli area.[10]

- No KI reported that community members had received any kind of assistance in the two weeks prior to data collection.

ACCESS TO SERVICES - HEALTHCARE

- In this round, **Service Provider KIs continued to report that communities were facing barriers to accessing public healthcare facilities. This is reportedly due to travel restrictions designed to limit the spread of the virus and the fact that facilities are not often open.**

- Two healthcare workers elaborated to say that there is a shortage of staff, equipment and medicines, and that this is the case in the majority of public healthcare facilities in the city.

- Shortages of medical staff resulting in reduced capacity of public services has been reported by healthcare worker KIs for the past two rounds.

- These reported concerns are reflected in recent news reports from Libya, which have highlighted that, due to concerns over COVID-19 and a lack of PPE, many public healthcare workers do not go to work to protect themselves and their families. This trend is likely compounded by fears related to a spate of targeted attacks on healthcare facilities that took place during the last year and the fact that many staff are not receiving their salaries on a regular basis.[11]

- In terms of private healthcare facilities, the majority of Service Provider KIs (6/8) reported that the population had faced access barriers in the past 14 days. All healthcare workers noted that private facilities are expensive and that this prevents people from being able to access them. Although the affordability of private healthcare facilities is not related to COVID-19, the reduced capacity of public healthcare may mean that a greater number of people have to rely on private healthcare.

- Recent MMC data also highlighted a prevalence of access barriers, particularly for migrants and refugees. In their findings, the most frequently cited barriers to healthcare included not knowing where to go (385/1023), followed by fear of being reported to the authorities, arrest or deportations (265/1023), an inability to afford health services (250/1023), and discrimination practices (242/1023).

ACCESS TO SERVICES - EDUCATION

- Schools remain closed across Libya. **As in the previous round, all community representative KIs representing all population groups reported that members of their community are no longer receiving education in any form.**

- In this round, some service provider KIs reported that children were receiving an education at home. They elaborated to say that due to an expectation that the schools would re-open after the Eid holiday, some parents and caregivers were reviewing certain modules with their children in order to prepare them for re-starting school. However, due to the recent spike in COVID-19 cases seen in the country, the decision was reportedly made not to re-open schools until at least mid-July.

- Alongside this, KIs were asked whether households had access to remote means of education. Similarly to the previous round, KIs reported that education was more commonly accessible through television and telephone than via the internet. Community representatives from all population groups (including all KIs representing East African communities) noted that only some members of their community were able to access the internet. This included all KIs representing East African communities.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

LEVEL OF AWARENESS

- As in all previous rounds, both REACH and MMC findings suggest that most people are aware of the COVID-19 virus, but that less people know what to do or where to go if they contract the disease.

- In the past 14 days, when asked what measures members of their communities were taking in response to the COVID-19 outbreak all community representative KIs reported that they were staying at home and isolating from others. Alongside this, a greater number than in the previous round reported that community members were washing their hands/using alcohol based gels (14/15) and reported that community members have purchased/made masks (7/15).

- **For this round, KIs (8/15) also reported that community members were avoiding crowded places, such as markets, which was not widely reported in the previous round.** This extra precautionary measure may be connected to a recent surge in COVID-19 cases seen in the country since late May, increasing popular concerns connected to the disease.[12]

- These reports of people following measures are also reflected in MMC data. When asked "What are you currently doing to protect yourself against coronavirus?" refugees and migrants highlighted "washing my hands more often" (787/1023), followed by "wearing a mask" (508/1023), and "avoiding crowded spaces" (428/1023).

WAYS OF ACCESSING INFORMATION

- Facebook and online research continued to be the main reported means through which communities were accessing information, followed by conversations (including over the telephone) with other community members. These three means were also cited as communities' preferred means of communication. Alongside this, in this round, there was a notable increase in community representative KIs citing calls to the Tawasul hotline[13] (9/15) as a preferred means of communication among communities, which suggests that the hotline is an increasingly favoured means of accessing information on COVID-19 and related issues.

FROM WHICH ACTORS DO COMMUNITIES NEED MORE INFORMATION?
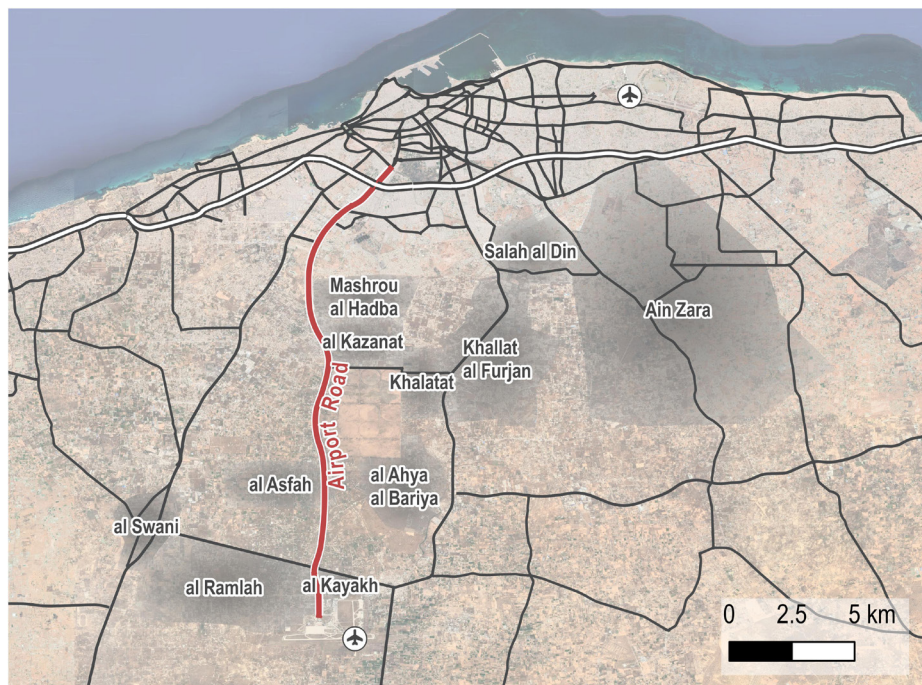
- As in the previous round, Community Representatives were asked from which actors (if any) their communities needed to receive more information about what to do in case of infection. The response revealed that communities are lacking in sufficient guidance from both health actors and the humanitarian community.

- Health workers were selected most frequently by KIs (9/16) as the actor that needed to provide more information. This was reported by all West African, MENA, and IDP Community Representatives. Other widely reported actors were the National Centre For Disease Control (7/15) and International NGOs (6/15). Notably, this last actor was mentioned by a lower number of KIs than in the previous round.

- The reported lack of information from healthcare actors is also reflected in recent MMC data. When asked about barriers to healthcare, respondents noted that "the advice for testing and treating coronavirus is unclear" (183/1023) and that "they did not know where to go for healthcare" (385/1023).

- Moreover, in this round, no KI reported that their community has sufficient information on what to do if they contract the virus, which is lower in the previous round, indicating a potentially increasing lack of medical guidance related to the COVID-19 outbreak.

- Once again, this represents a marked contrast to information on the preventative measures introduced by the authorities to help limit the spread of the virus, which was reported to be sufficient by the majority of community representatives (11/15).

Annex

Map 1: Areas of return referenced by KIs

Endnotes

1. Protection Sector Libya, "Protection Sector Guidance on the Criticality of Protection Activities During the COVID-19 Situation", March 2020. Protection Monitoring During COVID-19 Crisis - Libya: Access to Information, Services and Livelihoods Round One 4-9 April.

2. For consistency between data collection rounds, REACH field teams kept KI contacts consistent where possible; in a minority of cases respondents were unavailable, which may lead to some inconsistencies.

3. Mixed Migration Centre, COVID SNAPSHOT, June 2020

4. Human Rights Watch, Landmine Left After Armed Group Withdraws, 2 June 2020.

5. The Halo Trust, Tripoli Crisis ERW Contamination and Response Planning Tool, online portal.

6. Libyan Oberver, Ministry Urges Residents Not to Return Just Yet, 08 June 2020.

7. Los Angeles Times, "For Tripoli residents, a grim homecoming to booby-trapped neighborhoods", 12 June 2020.

8. Middle East Eye, "Libyans navigate Haftar's landmines as they return to Tripoli homes", 12 June 2020.

9. IOM, Migrant Emergency Food Security Report, June 2020.

10. Libya Herald, Water expected to return to Tripoli within 48 hours, April 2020.

11. The New Humanitarian, "Libyan doctors battle on two dangerous fronts: COVID-19 and war", 10 June 2020.

12. Reuters, "Libya surge in cases after reptatriations", 9 June 2020.

13. The Tawasul hotline is part of the Common Feedback Mechanism set up to provide information to conflict-affected populations in Libya. WFP, Libya: Country Brief, 2020.