



# HUNGER AND COVID-19 IN LIBYA

*A joint approach examining the food security situation of migrants*

July 2021

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**Photo (cover page):** IOM and WFP have partnered together to help improve the food security situation among migrants, which has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Libya.

In May 2021, IOM's Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) mobile teams started the distribution of ready-to-eat kits to vulnerable migrants in Zwara, Bani Waleed and Sebha. © IOM 2021 / Moayad Zaghdani



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# HIGHLIGHTS

*Food insecurity in Libya remains a challenge for migrants and has been further exacerbated by the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, which include job loss. The use of coping mechanisms to mitigate food shortages remains extensive among migrants and is intensified by a lack of access to social safety nets. This also indicates that many migrants are facing stress and insecurity as their budgets for food and other essential needs are stretched, which may impair their future ability to provide for themselves and deal with potential shocks.*

## Food insecurity



Up to

# 1 in 5

migrants interviewed is food insecure\* while more than half are considered marginally food secure.

\* food security status was determined using key indicators including food consumption, economic vulnerability and asset depletion.

## Unemployment

# 69%

of migrants interviewed face-to-face reported that it had been difficult to find work in the last seven days at the time of survey. While mobility restrictions have eased, the economic situation in Libya remains heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Use of coping strategies



The use of crisis or emergency livelihood coping strategies, such as reducing essential expenditure on health care or education, or engaging in high risk jobs or activities to mitigate food consumption challenges increased compared to May 2020. This might signal that some migrants are further eroding their capacity to deal with future shocks, thereby increasing their vulnerability to food insecurity.

## Livelihoods



# 3 in 4

migrants interviewed face-to-face reported that their income had been affected negatively since the start of the pandemic, particularly among daily wage workers.

## Factors of vulnerability



Migrants who are younger, unemployed or daily wage workers, those with low levels of education and those who have arrived recently, and most specifically those who have been in Libya for less than six months, were particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. A greater proportion of single migrants had inadequate food consumption levels than those with a partner.

## Remittances



Web surveys highlighted that a third of migrants (34%) were sending less money home or had stopped sending remittances altogether since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. A decrease in remittance may affect migrants' families who rely on this support that is an economic lifeline to many disadvantaged households.



**Photo:** IOM and WFP have partnered together to help improve the food security situation of migrants affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Libya.

In May 2021, IOM's Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) mobile teams started the distribution of ready-to-eat kits to vulnerable migrants in Zwara, Bani Waleed and Sebha.

# BACKGROUND

Nearly 10 years after the start of hostilities in Libya, the security situation has [improved](#)<sup>1</sup> following a ceasefire agreed in October 2020 between the warring parties. However, years of fighting – recently aggravated by COVID-19 restrictions – have further contributed to the [deterioration](#)<sup>2</sup> of the already weakened economic situation, with a negative impact on the population’s purchasing power and their ability to fulfil their basic needs. The humanitarian situation has also been impacted by the protracted conflict, including frequent power and water cuts.

As a result of the economic downturn and shrinking labour opportunities, the unemployment rate among migrants presents a significant [risk factor](#)<sup>3</sup>, which can lead to increased vulnerability and humanitarian needs, such as food security. Migrants’ unemployment rate rose from 17 percent in February 2020 to 27 percent in [August 2020](#)<sup>4</sup>. The cumulative impact of COVID-19 mobility restrictions has affected the [food security levels](#)<sup>5</sup> of a large number of the more than [574,000 migrants](#)<sup>6</sup> in Libya, particularly those relying on casual work found on a daily basis. In addition, the general security situation in Libya, despite having improved following the truce that was signed in [October](#)<sup>7</sup> continues to be volatile.

In this context, this joint study by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) explores the impacts of COVID-19 and related restrictions on the food security situation of migrants in Libya.



## 574,176

migrants of over 43 nationalities were identified by IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) to be currently present in Libya as of October 2020.

1 ECHO (2021).  
2 WFP (2021).  
3 IOM (2019d).  
4 IOM (2020e).  
5 IOM (2020d).  
6 IOM (2020f).  
7 UNSMIL (2020).



## PURPOSE

In light of recent [findings](#)<sup>8</sup> that have highlighted the precarious food security situation of migrants in Libya, and building on previous assessments ([WFP/IOM Hunger, displacement and migration](#)<sup>9</sup>), IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) and WFP’s Vulnerability Analysis and Monitoring (VAM) teams conducted a food security assessment with the aim to:

1. Provide an update on the food security situation of migrants, and identify the most vulnerable groups;
2. Assess the impact of COVID-19 related measures on migrants’ food security and livelihoods;
3. Inform development and humanitarian actors of the scale, duration and type of assistance required by migrants.

## METHODOLOGY

In 2019, web-based and face-to-face surveys were used by WFP and IOM in a joint publication to explore the food security situation of migrants and host communities in Libya. As both methods used different types of questions and allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive picture of the current situation of migrants in Libya. These same tools were used for the purpose of this assessment: WFP’s web-based Migration Pulse and IOM’s in-person Migrant Survey.

	 Migrant survey	 Migration Pulse
<b>WHO?</b>	<b>1,903 migrants</b> from 31 countries	<b>1,266 migrants</b> from 30 countries
<b>WHERE?</b>	<b>39 municipalities</b> across all 22 regions	<b>22 regions</b>
<b>HOW?</b>	<b>Face-to-face surveys</b>	<b>Web surveys</b>
<b>WHEN?</b>	<b>05 Oct - 04 Dec</b> (8 weeks)	<b>02 Nov - 08 Dec</b> (4 weeks)

Note: Interviews were conducted while maintaining physical distancing and complying to WHO guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

8 IOM (2020d).  
9 IOM & WFP (2019).

## Limitations

The stratum for each region assessed was designed based on migrant stock figures identified through IOM's [Mobility Tracking](#)<sup>10</sup> that provides data on migrant presence in Libya. The data collected in each location can therefore be considered to reflect the proportional distribution of migrant population at these locations. However it is a snapshot of a highly heterogeneous group of people on the move in a quickly evolving context, particularly with the COVID-19 pandemic and its significant impact on socio-economic conditions.

### Migration Pulse

WFP's Migration Pulse captures the voices of affected populations using anonymous web-based surveys. It collects sex- and age-disaggregated data on the drivers of migration, movement intentions, challenges faced, needs and food security status of displaced populations in sensitive and hard-to-reach environments.

### Migrant survey

IOM's migrant survey is the assessment tool through which DTM conducts face-to-face interviews with migrants at the individual level. The core questionnaire includes questions on migration dynamics, decision-making, routes and intentions. For the purpose of this assessment the Migrant survey was tailored to include additional questions on food security and health indicators as well as coping mechanisms and remittances.

The face-to-face interviews took place mainly in markets, public buildings, work recruitment points, collective accommodations and transit points along key migration routes, which means that the results of the assessment are representative of migrants who frequent these public places. Migrants who may not be able to frequent public places are less likely to have been included in the assessment. While this (purposive) sampling approach limits the assessed sample from being fully statistically representative of the demographic make-up of the entire migrant stock in Libya, it represents a large-scale assessment of migrants present in Libya.

To complement the face-to-face interview findings, web surveys - the [most economical remote data collection tool](#)<sup>11</sup> - were used to collect information rapidly from the population. However, the results of web surveys represent a relatively better-off population group compared to the general migrant population. The web survey come with some limitations related to over-representation of some population groups (e.g. male and younger people) who tend to have more access to technology in Libya, for

example. To mitigate against this, a weighting system was implemented at the analysis stage based on population stratum, disaggregated by sex of migrant groups. It is important to note that web-based methodology does not necessarily capture respondents who are transiting quickly through Libya.

Therefore, both methodologies complement each other in that they capture different sub-populations and together provide a clear picture of the situation of migrants in Libya. However, this exercise does not capture migrants living in detention centres and does not distinguish between migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees.

Despite these limitations, the assessment is aimed at providing an accurate picture of the situation of migrants in the assessed locations.

### Vulnerability & Humanitarian Needs

This assessment uses IOM's Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability (DoMV) [model](#) as an analytical framework, which articulates vulnerability around risk and protective factors. Risk factors contribute to vulnerability, while protective factors improve capabilities to avoid, cope with, or recover from harm. The model considers risk and protective factors at different levels: individual, household, community and structural as well as the interactions between them. In this framework, vulnerability is therefore considered to be the net impact of the interaction of these factors at different levels.

Moreover, some factors may be considered risk or protective factors depending on the context. For example, being a member of a particular racialized group may be a protective factor in a context where the group is dominant or privileged, or a risk factor if the group is discriminated against or persecuted. Other factors are considered to always be risk or protective factors. For instance, literacy is in most contexts considered a protective factor while illiteracy would generally be considered a risk factor.

Humanitarian needs are understood as gaps between the assessed conditions of migrants with regards to their vulnerabilities (at individual, household/family, and community levels) and the acceptable conditions which would enable them to effectively enjoy their human rights.

10 IOM (2020e)  
11 WFP (2017).

## SECTION 1: MIGRANT DEMOGRAPHICS

### Nationality

Migrants originating from 31 countries within West, East and North Africa, the Middle East as well as South Asia were interviewed face-to-face by DTM. The bulk of interviews were conducted with migrants from Niger (27%), Sudan (20%), Egypt (20%), Chad (10%) and Nigeria (8%), in line with the proportions of migrants from these countries identified by [DTM Libya](#)<sup>12</sup>.

WFP, through its web-based surveys, interviewed migrants from 30 countries in West, East and North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. The bulk of interviews were conducted with migrants from Sudan (16%), Egypt (12%), Nigeria (9%), Chad (8%), Syria (7%) and Niger (6%).

### Sex and age

The majority of both face-to-face and web surveys were conducted among male migrants (89% and 69%, respectively) while a minority of respondents were female (11% and 31%, respectively). The face-to-face survey ratio is on par with recent [DTM Libya migrant sex breakdown figures](#)<sup>13</sup>.

Fig 2: Percentage of respondents by age group

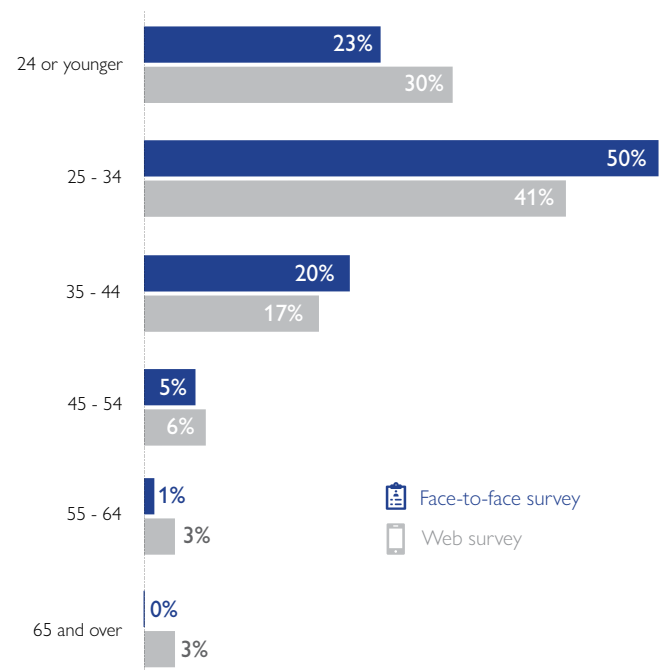


Fig 1: Number of respondents by region of origin

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