MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES

FORTRESS IN THE SAND

EU EXTERNALISATION POLICIES AND TRANS-SAHARAN MIGRATION ROUTES

SEPTEMBER 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4

RECOMMENDATIONS 5

INTRODUCTION 6

I. FIGURING THE "FLOWS" 8

II. DEADLOCK IN TUNISIA 12

III. OUT OF LIBYA OR OUT OF LAW? 16

IV. TWO GOVERNMENTS, ONE EU POLICY 20

V. EGYPT ON THE CORNER 21

VI. SUDDENLY, SUDAN 22

VII. LOOKING AT NIGER'S TRACK RECORD 27

CONCLUSION 29

LIST OF ACRONYMS 30

BIBLIOGRAPHY 31

Cover photo: Guinean migrant in a "ghetto" (a clandestine house for migrants waiting for a smuggler) on the Niger-Libya road, 2019.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the aim of curbing migrant flows to Europe, the European Union has increasingly committed to "externalisation policies", in particular through partnerships with authorities in countries of origin or transit. Such policies date back at least to the 2008 "Friendship Deal" between Berlusconi's Italy and Gaddafi's Libya.[1] Similar agreements multiplied more recently, notably since the so-called "migrant crisis" in 2015, when one million, mostly Syrian, refugees arrived in Europe, leading the European Union (EU) to strike a €6 billion deal with Turkey in exchange for blocking next crossings.

Overall, the EU appears satisfied with the results of its externalisation policies, and repeats that it intends to continue engaging with old and new external "partners". The main justification for this is that those policies, systematically evaluated in terms of migrant arrivals in Europe, are considered to have successfully reduced some flows. Indeed, partnerships with Libya and Niger, as well as the organized reduction and blockages of European sea rescue efforts in the Central Mediterranean, had an immediate impact on arrivals from Libya in Europe, dropping from their peak at 165,000 in 2016 to 7,000 in 2019. Since then, arrivals from Libya gradually increased again but remained limited: about 52,000 in 2023, 42,000 in 2024. However, in 2023, 157,000 migrants arrived in Italy, a figure nearing the 2016 peak, explained by the shift of departures from Libya to Tunisia.[2] It is an illustration of a frequently observed dynamic, that blockades on some routes lead to the opening or reopening of others, such as recently the particularly risky Atlantic crossing to the Canary Islands.[3] In the meantime, global or local rises in flows, and changes in routes, have been yet another justification for the EU to continue its externalisation policies unabated, and complete its blockade of North Africa.

Focusing on numbers and flows, the EU has overshadowed other effects and side-effects of old and recent externalisation policies south of the Mediterranean. Of the likely underestimated nearly 28,000 deaths counted in the last decade (between 2015 and 2024) in the Mediterranean, over 21,000 were recorded in the Central Mediterranean. More crucially, while the rate of interceptions by the Libyan Coast Guard sharply rose from 12 to 50% in the crucial years between 2017 and 2019, the death rate at sea rose from 2 to 7%, contradicting the EU claim that its policies are saving lives. Similarly, in Niger, migrants' deaths multiplied by five between 2016 and 2017, when an EU-inspired law criminalizing the transport of migrants was enforced.

European reactions to new flows were extremely quick, for instance in Tunisia, where the EU concluded an agreement in 2023 amid massive violence against sub-Saharan migrants, which actually pushed more of them to take the sea. The EU Commission oddly labelled that deal a "blueprint", and signed a similar one with Egypt, while in fact those agreements are rather copies of past partnerships, some described as models as well but whose results were no less questionable.

The partnership established since 2017 with then Libya's internationally recognized government in Tripoli has remained precarious, because the country has no unified state institutions and forces yet, obliging the EU to engage as well with authorities in Eastern Libya, from where departures recently rose up. Meanwhile, the acknowledged lack of safety for migrants in Libya is making illegal sea crossings the almost unique way out of the country, in the context where legal and safe pathways, despite being praised by the EU and member states, are increasingly limited.

Further South, in Sudan, a ten-year-old partnership had been criticized for its damaging side-effect of contributing to legitimize the former military-Islamist regime. In yet another illustration of the counter-productivity of Europe's migration policies, the regular and paramilitary forces which were supposed to act as Europe's border guards are now fighting each other, causing what has been labelled the world's worst displacement crisis. Nevertheless, the EU failed to build a coordinated protection response for Sudanese refugees, like it had done earlier for the Ukraine.

In Niger, migration policies agreed with the EU were widely unpopular and fragilized the elected government before it was eventually ousted in a military coup. The new authorities swiftly repealed the partnership. The EU's immediate regret of that change showed Europe has yet to pay attention to the damage made by its migration policies south of the Mediterranean, systematically focusing on flows while overlooking crucial humanitarian, political and security consequences. Such effects should be cautiously weighed and eventually lead to halting existing partnerships, and to refraining from conclude others without clear human rights conditions.

1 Rodier, 2008.
2 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/infographics/migration-flows-to-europe/
3 Mixed Migration Centre, 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To the European Union and member states:

i. Urgently review – and if needed suspend or terminate – existing cooperation agreements, programmes and activities in support of migration management and border control in third countries, as soon as they do not ensure sufficient due diligence, respect of human rights and protection of all migrants, regardless of their legal status. EU and member states' agreements on migration with non-EU countries should be strictly conditional to the respect of human rights, international humanitarian law, refugee law including the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the rights of migrant workers.

ii. Set up enhanced mechanisms for regular, financially independent, transparent and binding monitoring and evaluation of these agreements, programmes and activities, to ensure compliance with the above-mentioned international human rights legal framework. Any breach of international law or risk of it should lead to the suspension or termination of activities, programmes or agreements. Monitoring reports, and strict criteria on which the termination of agreements should be based, should be fully accessible to the public and not classified or redacted.

iii. Include in all EU-funded programmes easily accessible and effective complaint mechanisms for external stakeholders and people affected by the programme. Any indication, complaint or report (through such or other mechanisms) that member states are in breach of EU or international laws should be carefully investigated by an independent judicial authority and accounted for. EU and member states officials suspected to be responsible for abuses or complicit must be accountable, and justice and compensation provided to the victims. Whereby the European Commission deems that a member state has failed to fulfil an obligation under EU law, the Commission may initiate an infringement procedure.

iv. Encourage third countries, in particular in North Africa, to fully abide with their international obligations toward migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This could include support, where needed, to the adoption of international conventions or treaties, as well as of new or reformed national legal frameworks on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, abolishing laws criminalizing the entry, stay or exit of migrants. This should lead to the end of arbitrary detention practices, release of detained migrants, regularization measures of migrant workers, access to rights and services including healthcare, and full recognition of the UN refugee agency (UNHCR)'s mandate, allowing the agency to focus on protection goals and to take distance from EU externalisation policies.

v. Refocus member states and EU's foreign policy on respect of human rights and rule of law, long term peace and state-building, rather than migration management and border control.

vi. End political, financial and material support to the system of forcible returns from international waters in the Central Mediterranean Sea to Libya and Tunisia, neither of which are currently safe places for the purpose of disembarkation of people rescued at sea. NGO's dedicated Search and Rescue operations should stop being criminalized and an EU Search and Rescue operation in the Central Mediterranean should be set up.

2. To the EU and United Nations (UN) institutions and agencies:

vii. Publicly acknowledge the lack of safe third country and safe port for the disembarkation of migrants on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. This would involve UNHCR acknowledging the lack of "durable solutions" within Libya.

viii. Clearly and publicly condemn the arbitrary detention of all migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (regardless of legal status and country of origin), in particular in Libya. This would involve acknowledging the only "alternative to detention" is to end any detention of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with no other legal basis than the Libyan Law No 19 of 2010, whose first article criminalizes entry, stay and exit of non-Libyans, and which should be urgently reformed.

3. To "third countries of asylum" in Europe and North America:

ix. Increase options of safe and legal pathways, in particular for migrants trapped in Libya. Vulnerable migrants, refugees and asylum seekers exposed to imminent life-threatening risks, including in detention centres and other places of captivity across Libya, should have access to safe and legal pathways out of Libya. A significant increase in the number of slots for resettlement to third countries of asylum should be promoted, humanitarian evacuation and resettlement flights should be scaled up and the relevant processes speeded up, including quicker and smoother transit processes through facilities in Rwanda. Complementary pathways should be expanded under an enlarged UNHCR process and parallel to it, involving other relevant international organisations. Models providing for rapid humanitarian evacuations for critical protection cases, including life-threatening medical needs, should supplement existing UNHCR mechanisms. Such models could include and merge positive experiences with humanitarian and medical visas, humanitarian corridors, community or private sponsorship and follow-up support, particularly where specialised care is required for survivors of torture and trafficking.

Moving forward from Adré transit camp for Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad, near the Sudanese border. 2023.

INTRODUCTION

This report is an analysis of European policies commonly known as "externalisation policies," which the European Union calls the "external dimension of asylum and immigration." Those policies have three dimensions.[4]

The first aims at externalising, subcontracting or delocalizing the processing of asylum claims (as has been partly done through UNHCR's emergency transit mechanisms or ETMs in Niger or Rwanda, or the more recent and overt plans by the United Kingdom, Denmark and Austria to remove to Rwanda asylum seekers).

The second dimension aims at forcibly returning or deporting irregular migrants or rejected asylum seekers to third countries other than their country of nationality, as currently pursued by the EU Commission's proposed Return Regulation, on the model of the 2025 Italy-Albania agreement.[5]

The third and already well established dimension of externalization, on which this report focuses, aims at blocking migrants as far upstream as possible by providing financial support (or making financial support conditional) to governments or armed forces in countries of origin or transit. This amounts to paying authorities to stop migrants and conditioning European engagement or support on local efforts against migration – financing border and migration management in non-European countries and at sea in international waters, that prioritises European interests. In essence, externalisation aims to address an internal European problem – decreasing flows in the hope of preventing the far right to win elections – as far south of Europe's borders as possible.

In recent years, the European Commission has demonstrated a consistent intent to pursue its externalisation policies. For instance, the conclusions of the European Council of 9 February 2023 state that "EU and Member States' engagement with countries of origin and transit will be intensified in a coordinated manner, including through high-level contacts, with the objective of strengthening their capacity for border management, preventing irregular flows, breaking the business model of smugglers, including through strategic information campaigns, and increasing returns."[6]

More recently, an October 2024 letter by EU commission president Ursula von der Leyen stated that the EU will "continue building comprehensive partnerships with key third countries" and that "continued work with Tunisia and Libya, as well as sustained engagement with key partners such as Egypt, Morocco and Algeria, remain a high priority, always in full compliance with our principles and values."[7]

The EU does not appear to be deterred by the fact that, south of the Mediterranean, it is partnering with countries that are authoritarian or at war, or both, and regimes and armed forces that are the very triggers behind the decision of so many people to embark on the unimaginably arduous, dangerous and costly trek to Europe.

4 Council of Europe, 2025.
5 European Commission, 2025.
6 European Council, 2023.
7 Von der Leyen, 2024.

The countries of the Khartoum Process, set up by the EU in 2014 to counter migration in the Horn of Africa, are a case in point.[8] Beyond Sudan, the Khartoum process partners include Ethiopia, where the EU's External Action Service (EEAS) has pursued a dialogue on migration despite the government's mass atrocities in the Tigray region; and Eritrea, Africa's "North Korea", which the EU re-engaged following its reconciliation with Ethiopia, despite the disastrous human rights situation – a key reason why so many young Eritreans leave for Europe.

No country in the Horn or North Africa can, at the time of writing, be considered as safe for the return of nationals or as a safe third country for the return of non-nationals, including for the disembarkation of migrants rescued or intercepted at sea.[9] The EU has nevertheless consistently extended its migration cooperation with these countries, redefining "safe third countries" to allow the return of migrants, for instance during the negotiations for the EU Pact on migration and asylum.[10]

In 2023, the EU Commission encouraged member states to strike "informal and confidential" deals with such countries as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Nigeria, and announced reinforcing cooperation with Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Niger. A June 2023 letter by Ursula von der Leyen, based on the same Council's conclusions, reiterated the priority given to "Reinforced regional cooperation in the Mediterranean to strengthen coordination of search and rescue capacities and border surveillance at sea and land borders of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, [including] increased support for equipment and training (...) [and] work with North African countries and IOM [International Organization for Migration] to return people with no right to stay."[11]

Tunisia, in particular, was cited as a new model for externalisation partnerships.[12] This was surprising, not only because violence against migrants increased in the country during the negotiations with the EU, but also because Tunisia is in fact a latecomer to the EU network of partnerships south of the Mediterranean, which includes Libya, Egypt, Morocco, Niger, Chad, Sudan and Ethiopia.

A historical matrix for externalisation was the 2008 "Friendship Deal" between then Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. It aimed to facilitate deportations from Italy to Libya, as well as the detention of migrants in Libya and their subsequent deportation from Libya. The benefits for Libya were not only financial, but also political: international reintegration for a former rogue state, sponsor of terrorism. The 2008 Friendship Deal showed a pattern often repeated in Europe's migration deals – an inversion of the relation between the weak and the strong. Instead of Europe pressing Gaddafi for political change, Gaddafi was able to blackmail European governments for whom migration was a political liability in the face of rising anti-migration sentiment on the far right – at least until 2011, when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) put migration considerations aside and toppled the Libyan dictator.

A second wave of externalisation occurred in 2015, when a million mostly Syrian refugees flowed into Europe. This led the EU to sign in 2016 a six billion euro deal with Turkey, modelled on the Gaddafi-Berlusconi deal, to keep migrants and refugees in Turkey — and return them to Turkey from Greece. The same year, that Syrian crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean became a Central Mediterranean crisis , with much smaller numbers, but still a peak on that route, of 180,000 migrants crossing the Central Mediterranean, including 165,000 from Libya. The EU had both anticipated that rise and reacted to the spike with a series of similar deals with Niger, Sudan (through the regional Khartoum process) and Libya between 2014 and 2017 – modelled on the Gaddafi-Berlusconi and EU-Turkey deals.

Overall, those policies have led to a reduction in specific flows, in particular between Libya and Italy and between Niger and Libya. But they have had little effect on other flows, for example between Sudan and Libya. They have also led smugglers and migrants to recast their routes to adapt to obstacles inside and outside Libya, in particular with the reopening of West African routes through Mali, Algeria, Morocco, Western Sahara and Mauritania to end up in Spain, including the Canary Islands.[13]

This report will explore in greater detail the various effects and side-effects of around a decade of externalisation policies, including key moments when their implementation began, and some of their most recent developments in several countries south of the Mediterranean.[14]

8 Khartoum Process, https://www.khartoumprocess.net/about
9 OHCHR, 2023; UNSC, 2024; OMCT, 2024.
10 European Council, 2025.
11 Von der Leyen, 2023.
12 *Ibid*.
13 OMCT, 2024.
14 This report is based on field observations in European countries acting both as destination and transit countries (including in Calais in northern France), in the Mediterranean, and in North African countries acting both as transit and origin countries (Tunisia, Libya, Chad and Sudan), between 2022 and 2024. It was written by Jérôme Tubiana, with support of Steve Purbrick, Félix Guillou, Leila El Hayek and Luna Zedjaoui. Photographs are by J. Tubiana/MSF and infographics and design are by Sarah Imani/MSF.

Arrival of displaced civilians from besieged El-Fasher in the camp of Tawila Omda, North Darfur, Sudan, 2025.

I. FIGURING THE "FLOWS"

It is first necessary to understand migratory routes to Europe and how they have evolved over the past decade, and especially 2023-2024. New routes are constantly emerging to sidestep obstacles put in place by the EU and its local partners. At the same time, old routes – sometimes very old – endure and some routes that appear to be new are in fact a resurgence of old routes. The EU measures the success of its policies, essentially quantitatively, by a drop in flows – regardless of the humanitarian, political or security costs. This paper explores what available figures reveal about the primary and secondary effects of EU policies to manage migrant flows.

When analysing migration, MSF has consistently struggled with data and figures. Figures are used or even manipulated by many actors. European policy-makers use figures to sound the alarm, claim success or mask failure. Authorities in origin and transit countries use figures to pressure the EU or to claim success, sometimes both at once. Figures are often unreliable, varying considerably depending on the source. A few years ago, to make sense of the flows, we started compiling and analysing available figures more systematically.

According to UNHCR and IOM data, Europe recorded 267,000 arrivals in 2023, an increase that began in 2020. This required some perspective: these figures are below the 374,000 arrivals of 2016, and well below the million of 2015 - the year of the so-called "migration crisis", with largely Syrian flows mainly between Turkey and Greece. In 2024, arrivals actually decreased to 209,000.[15]

In 2023, 97% of arrivals, and 91% in 2024, were by sea, apart from a few overland crossings between Turkey and Greece and between Morocco and the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the North African coast.

In 2023, 60% of the crossings (157,000) took place in the central Mediterranean, i.e., from Libya and Tunisia to Italy – to be discussed in more detail below.[16] In the wake of these rising figures, the Italian government acknowledged its failure to stem the crisis, which was one of its main election arguments. Central Mediterranean crossings decreased to 67,000 in 2024 but remain the highest for all sea routes.

On the other hand, sea crossings in the eastern Mediterranean, between Turkey and Greece, and towards Spain, have been increasing again: around 55,000 each in 2023 and 61,000 each in 2024. Crossings to Spain include the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands, which are the majority : 39,000 in 2023 and 47,000 in 2024, two successive records.[17]

What follows is a closer examination of the central Mediterranean, the route used by most of the patients consulted in our projects (in Libya as well as France) and where MSF's search and rescue vessel *Geo Barents* operates.[18] The particularity of 2023 was that most departures took place from Tunisia, not Libya. This has triggered urgent reactions from the EU. In 2024, departures from Tunisia again dipped below those from Libya, as migrants diverted toward Spain.[19]

15 https://dtm.iom.int/europe/arrivals ; see also Bobin, 2024.

16 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/infographics/migration-flows-to-europe/

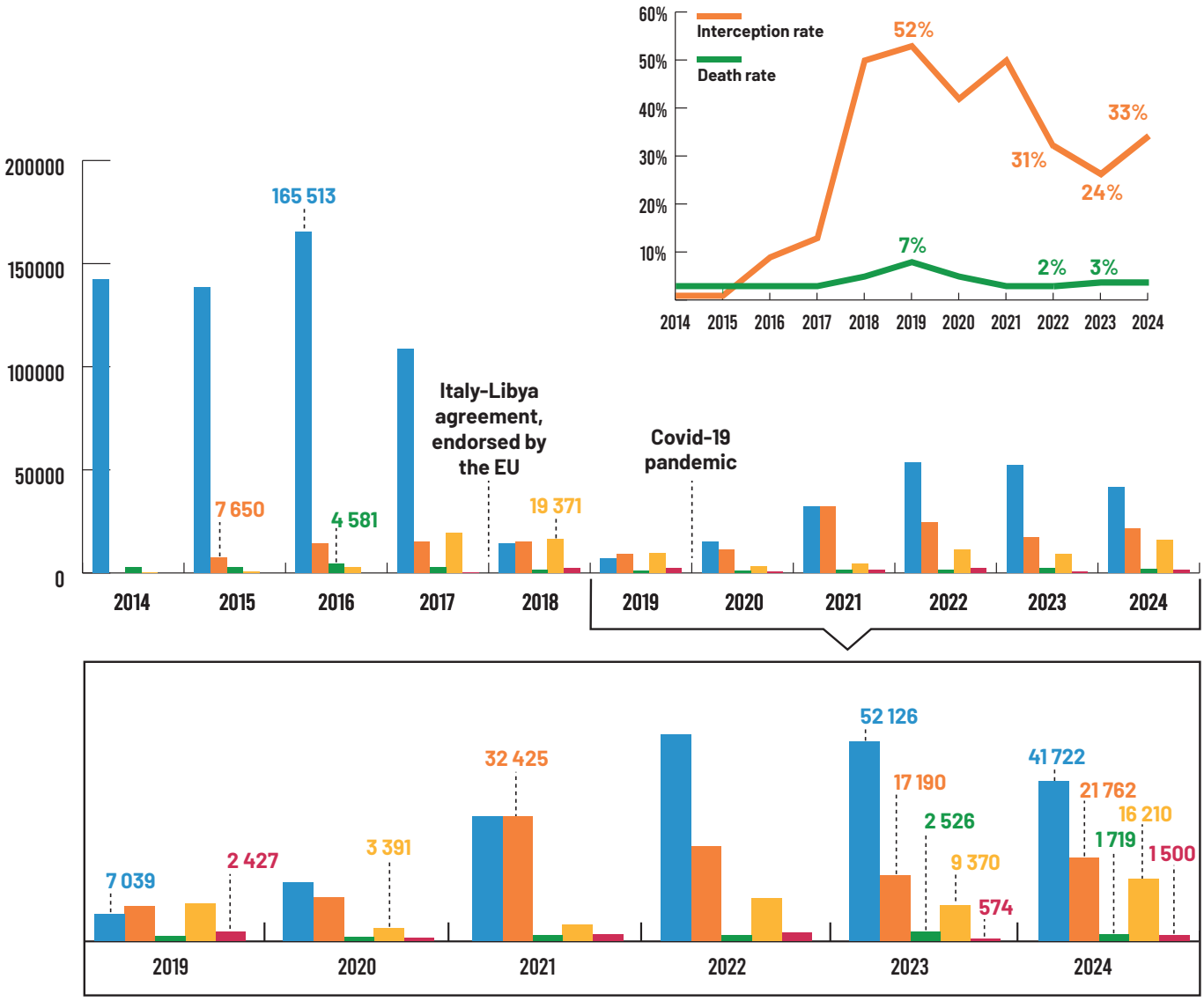
17 https://dtm.iom.int/europe/arrivals

18 MSF, 2025.

19 OMCT, 2024.

This table compiles figures for the Central Mediterranean, including departures and arrivals from Libya (not Tunisia) over the last decade.

WAYS OUT OF LIBYA
2014 - 2024



Boat arrivals in Europe

Arrivals in Italy from Libya and arrivals in Malta. UNHCR Malta does not report the embarkation country, though nationality data of arrivals indicates there is a low likelihood that boats are arriving in Malta from other north African countries (e.g. Tunisia, Egypt).

Libyan Coastguard (LCG) interception

Source: UNHCR, IOM. NB: People intercepted may be counted several times: the same year, one may try to cross and be intercepted several times. There may also be some overlap between all five categories: for example, the same year, someone may try to cross and be intercepted one or several times, then succeed crossing, or die at sea (or even opt for 'voluntary return' or be selected for a UNHCR flight).

Deaths/missing at sea

Conservative data: actual numbers are likely to be much higher. Data is for Central Mediterranean route as a whole.

IOM Voluntary returns

UNHCR departures

UNHCR evacuations commenced Nov 2017. Figures prior to 2019 do not include resettlements. There are some discrepancies between UNHCR's reporting for annual and cumulative departures.

Arrivals from Libya to Europe (Italy and to a lesser extent Malta) peaked at 165,000 in 2016. In response, the EU enacted a number of policies. They moved to block the Niger-Libya route, a partnership the new Niger junta then suspended in 2023. They also increased support to the Libyan coastguard (LCG) and progressively stymied European sea rescue efforts, whether with military, commercial or NGO vessels.[20] This yield real impact: arrivals dropped to 7,000 in 2019. Arrivals have since gradually increased but remain limited: 53,743 in 2022, 52,126 in 2023, and 41,722[21] in 2024.

However, for the first time in 2023, Tunisia replaced Libya as the primary departure country, counting for 97,000 arrivals in Europe, against 15,000 during the 2016 arrivals peak.[22] The 2023 increase in arrivals was primarily from Tunisia, not Libya. Arrivals from Tunisia include a large share of Tunisians themselves (11% of Central Mediterranean crossings in 2023, 12% in 2024, the second and third nationality respectively). The West African share was higher in 2023 (with Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire making for 12% and 10% respectively), but much lower in 2024. The anti-migrant violence in Tunisia in 2023 may have pushed migrants to leave the country in 2023 and subsequently avoid Tunisia.[23] (Arrivals from Tunisia decreased to 19,000 in 2024, but the share of Tunisian migrants increased.) In Libya, waves of arrests in both the west (including over 2,000 migrants of different nationalities in the first half of 2023)[24] and east of the country, as well as pushback from the east and the south toward neighbouring countries also likely encouraged migrants who were not arrested or pushed back, to cross the Mediterranean.

Interceptions by the LCG, which the EU's Operation Sophia began training in October 2016, clearly reduced departures from Libya: interceptions grew from zero in 2014 to 7,000 in 2015, 14,000 in 2016 and 32,000 in 2021. Numbers dipped to 25,000 in 2022 and 17,000 in 2023, before increasing again to 22,000 in 2024. That slight drop probably does not reflect the fact that it is no longer just the LCG making interceptions. The main departure hubs on the coast west of Tripoli have seen the emergence of the SSA (Stability Support Apparatus), a coalition of militias under the presidential council of the Tripoli-based, UN-recognized, Government of National Unity (GNU). These militias have their own fleet and carried out many interceptions in 2022, which are unlikely to have been all counted. In 2023, a part of the SSA fleet was destroyed by GNU drones following internal disagreements, which may also explain the decrease in interceptions that year.

Analysing the impact of interceptions requires an examination of the rate of interceptions in relation to attempted departures. That rate increased from 12% in 2017 to 50% on average between 2018 and 2021, before a relative drop to 30% in 2022 and 24% in 2023, followed by an increase to 33% in 2024. This of course only takes into account Libyan interceptions, not those by the Tunisian coastguard, who were particularly active in 2023, with over 80,000 interceptions.[25] In June 2024, the International Maritime Organization recognized a new Tunisian Search and Rescue region (as it had done for Libya in 2017) that overlapped with Libya's. This led to migrants departing from Libya being returned to Tunisia.[26] The EU's self-described success in decreasing flows since 2017 was largely due to interceptions which involved refoulement to Libya and more recently to Tunisia – countries that are not safe for migrants given the systematic violence they are exposed to, notably after interceptions at sea. The "success" is thus based on violations of international law.

Deaths at sea are another collateral effect of the EU-backed shift from European Search and Rescue (SAR) mechanisms to empowering the LCG in the Libyan SAR zone. Of the roughly 28,000 deaths tallied in the last ten years (between 2015 and 2024) in the Mediterranean, over 21,000 were recorded in the Central Mediterranean.[27] Yearly death figures peaked at 4,500 in 2016, stabilized at around 1,500 a year until2022 (1,377), only to increase again to 2,526 in 2023 and 1,719 in 2024.

These mortality figures are without doubt an undercount. Still, assuming a constant methodology for collecting them over the decade, it is interesting to look at the rate of deaths in relation to attempted crossings. That rate rose from an average of 2% between 2013 and 2017 to a sudden 7% spike in 2019. The deadly rise is clearly the effect of European policies gradually empowering the LCG, the declaration of the Libyan SAR zone in 2017 and the withdrawal of Sophia's maritime operations in 2019. Since then, the ratio of deaths to attempted crossings stabilized again between 2 and 3%, proving the falseness of the EU argument that continued support to the LCG is saving lives. Given that, as mentioned above, about two thirds of arrivals in 2023 originated in Tunisia, deaths in the Central Mediterranean that same year were not only coming from Libya, and it is estimated that roughly more than half of them departed from Tunisia.[28] This shows that sea crossings from Tunisia are slightly less deadly than from Libya.[29]

20 MSF, 2025.
21 47,000 including unusual arrivals to Greece.
22 https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107239
23 https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/113474
24 MSF, 2024.
25 https://ftdes.net/en/statistiques-les-migrants-interceptes-sur-les-cotes-tunisiennes/
26 Civil MRCC, 2024.
27 https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean
28 *Jeune Afrique*, 2024.
29 https://ftdes.net/en/statistiques-les-migrants-interceptes-sur-les-cotes-tunisiennes/

NO LEGAL WAY OUT OF LIBYA

Simon's capsizing dinghy shortly before its rescue by MSF vessel Geo Barents, 2022.

Like a lot of people on the move, Simon was trapped for several years in Libya, trying to leave the country by any means.

Simon, who belongs to Cameroon's anglophone minority, fled armed conflict in 2017, when he was 21 years old. He paid smugglers in Niger to be driven to Algeria but was sold to Libyan traffickers, then detained and tortured for ransom in Sebha in southern Libya then Beni Walid in the North. In Sebha, he was eventually resold as a slave worker and had to work as a welder for six months without payment, until his "debt" was reimbursed. In Beni Walid, he bought his freedom and succeeded reaching Tripoli.

Discouraged, Simon went to the IOM office and asked to be repatriated to Cameroon. "I waited in vain for IOM to call me back for almost one year, until late 2019, when I decided to cross [the Mediterranean Sea] for the first time."

After three unsuccessful crossing attempts, in 2020, Simon went back to the IOM, "but they were not sending Cameroonians, only Nigerians." He tried to cross again, but he kept being intercepted at sea and jailed in detention centres. In April 2022, he was also arrested on the coast by a militia who pretended to have intercepted him at sea, and locked in a Tripoli detention centre.

There "MSF and IOM always came. [UN staff] gave pillows, blankets, toothbrushes, shoes. But when MSF came to the prison, the guards removed those of us injured by bullets and showed MSF only the healthy ones." When UNHCR visited too, MSF flagged him to the UN agency, who interviewed him. UNHCR officers told him he could be registered due to the numerous detentions he had faced, even if he did not belong to one of the nine nationalities (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen) the UNHCR is theoretically allowed to register in Libya. Eventually he was released alongside ten Eritreans and Sudanese, all registered by UNHCR. They first refused to leave the prison, as they thought if they were free the UNHCR would not evacuate them from Libya. But the guards threatened them with guns and forced them to go away.

While hoping for UNHCR resettlement, Simon applied two more times for voluntary humanitarian return with the IOM. "The IOM comes to the detention centres, without getting inside. If the IOM worked normally, I would be back to Cameroon. I was not planning to cross again."

Still, in August 2022, he tried to cross the sea a last time. After several hours at sea, while his dinghy with 79 passengers was about to sink, they were rescued by MSF vessel Geo Barents.

All in all, Simon made seven crossing attempts and had twelve stays in eight different detention centres. "Some lost hope in me, they don't think that one day I can make it. Some I left in Cameroon flew to Europe while I was in Libya and told me [to] go back to Cameroon."

After landing in Italy, Simon was relocated to Germany but his asylum claim was rejected in that country. He is now living as an irregular migrant, somewhere in Europe.

Simon concludes: "Europe has the right not to want migrants. But I have the right to tell Europe it's not good in my country and I need help, safety, and protection."

An Italian Coastguard boat on watch of a disembarkation of migrants rescued by MSF vessel Geo Barents in Taranto, southern Italy, 2022.

II. DEADLOCK IN TUNISIA

In 2023, for the first time, arrivals in Italy from Tunisia were clearly higher than from Libya by a ratio of two to one: 97,000 out of 157,000 from Tunisia and 52,000 from Libya.[30] Together, the 2023 arrivals from Tunisia and Libya are close to the peaks in crossings of the central Mediterranean between 2014 and 2017 (the absolute peak being 180,000 in 2016), though this remains low compared to the peak in crossings from the eastern Mediterranean in 2015 (one million).[31]

Arrivals from Tunisia have increased since 2019, slightly overtaking Libya in 2020, but these were generally low years in terms of arrivals. In 2024, arrivals from Tunisia decreased to 19,000, notably due to interceptions (33,000), though various other factors may play a role, including anti-migrant violence within Tunisia and at land borders.[32]

By mid-2023, 50 to 100 migrants arrived in Tunisia each day from both Libya and Algeria, according to the Tunisian Red Crescent. Arrivals from Libya – from different points, but mostly the hinterland behind the Ras Jdir / Ben Gardane border crossing, not far from the coast – are not new but may have increased due to violence in Libya, and because migrants who embark from Libya have been repeatedly intercepted by the LCG and other armed forces, and forcibly returned to Libya, systematically to detention centres.

In addition to the land border crossing, migrants taking a boat from western Libya toward Italy have been increasingly intercepted by the Tunisian coast guard or the Garde nationale maritime and brought to Tunisia against their will, increasing the number of migrants in Tunisia.

Because of Tunisian pushbacks to Libya at the border, migrants trying to travel from Libya to Tunisia often first went from Libya to Algeria (from Ghadames to Deb-Deb) before entering Tunisia from Algeria.

Those migrants, and others who had never been to Libya but went directly through Algeria (mostly West Africans), entered Tunisia in the areas of Hazoua/Nefta, Chebika, Om Al Arais/Gafsa, Darnayah/Kasserine, Haidra/Thala, Le Kef and Jendouba.[33] They also reportedly included migrants traveling up from southern Algeria who were pushed into Tunisia by Algerian forces. The latter are known to be violent with migrants, with numerous reports of robbery and sexual violence on women. Increasing flows toward Tunisia may also be explained by the relatively lower violence in Tunisia compared with Libya and Algeria, at least until 2023.

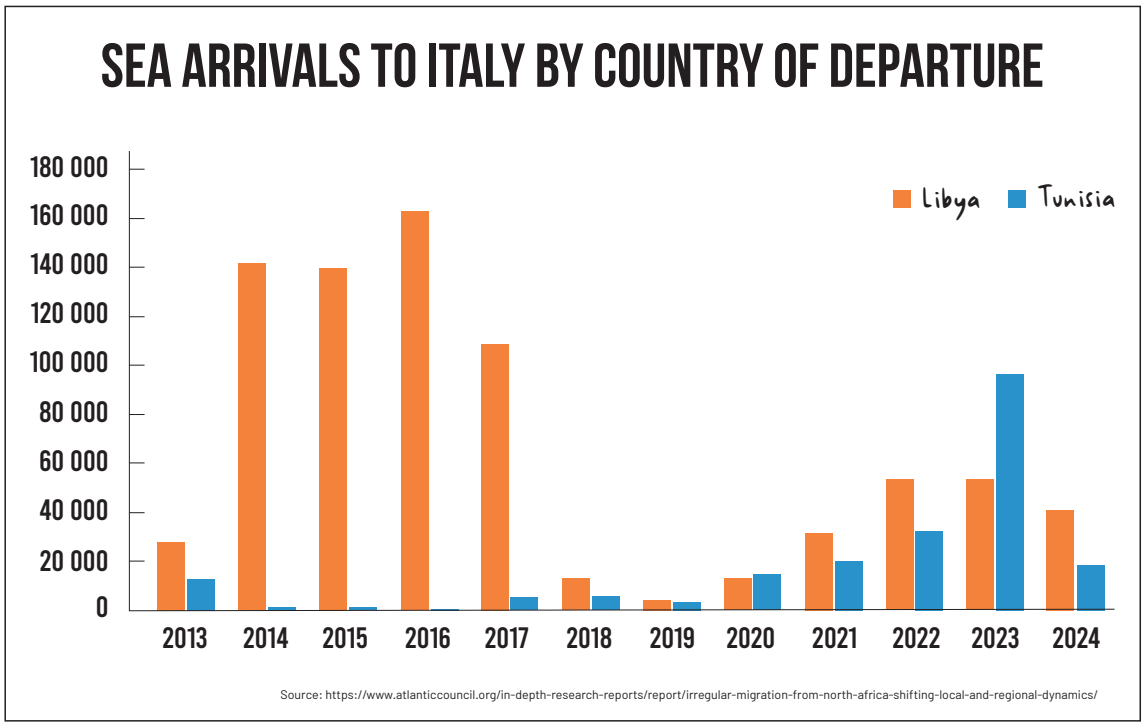
Migrants also increasingly come to Tunisia to cross the sea. Departures from Tunisia have increased, mostly from Sfax, Tunisia's second city that is only 150 km from the small Italian island of Lampedusa, as well as the coast north of it (departures from the Kerkennah Islands seem to have abated, under pressure from the authorities). Departures from Tunisia increasingly took place on crude metal boats, with cheaper rates that in Libya (commonly

30 https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107239; https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/infographics/migration-flows-to-europe/

31 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/infographics/migration-flows-to-europe/

32 https://ftdes.net/en/statistiques-les-migrants-interceptes-sur-les-cotes-tunisiennes/; State trafficking, 2024.

33 OMCT, 2023.



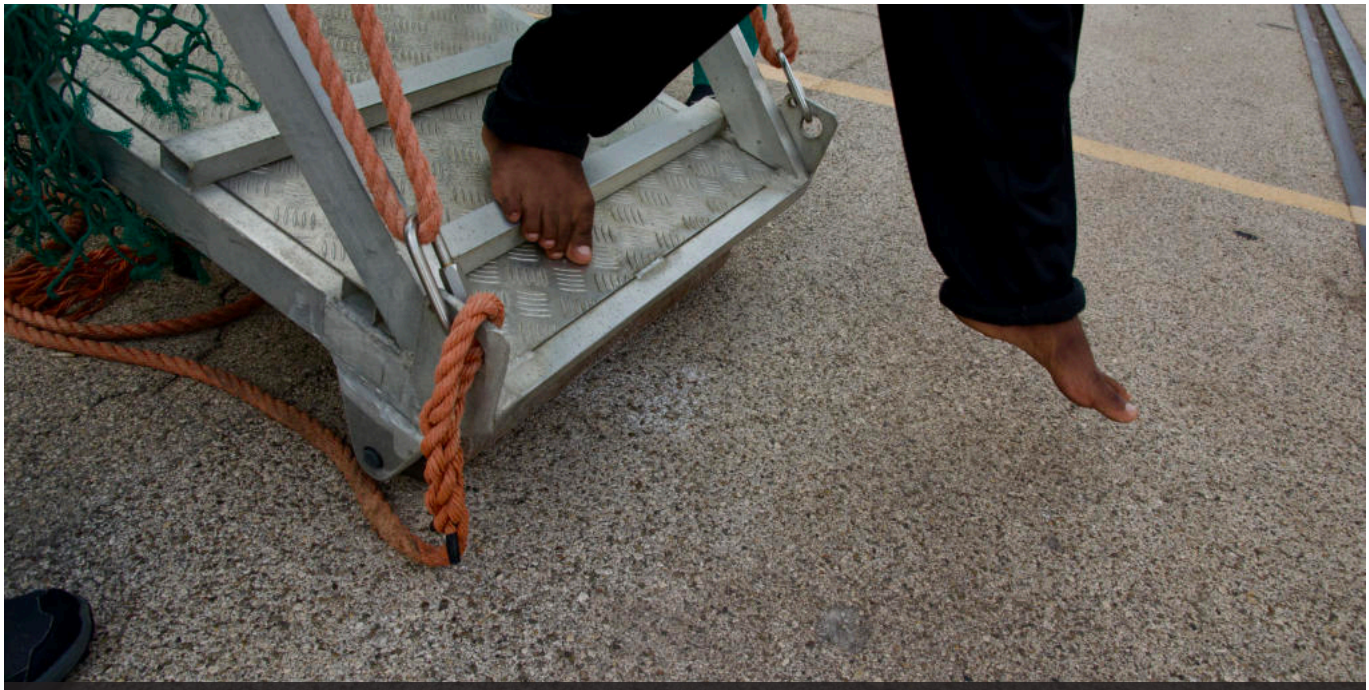
TND 1,500 per person, about €450).[34] In addition, unlike in Libya, interceptions or rescues at sea are less often followed by lengthy detention, but rather by deportations to Libya and Algeria.[35] Interceptions also can be violent, less because of beatings as in Libya, but because of the reported theft by Tunisian coast guards and fishermen of boat engines, before abandoning the migrants' boats, which likely caused several deadly shipwrecks.[36] Nationalities departing from Tunisia (if the arrivals in Italy reflect the departures) include in particular francophone West Africans (Côte d'Ivoire, Guinée), as well as Tunisians themselves – who remain constantly present among the main nationalities of sea arrivals in Italy.[37]

Some asylum seekers, including Sudanese, appear to hope to be resettled from Tunisia to third countries in Europe and North America, despite this has rarely happened – in fact evacuations and resettlement from Tunisia are slower and less frequent than from Libya. It is unclear whether this favoured option is related to recent policy changes in Europe, granting quick protection to Sudanese since the April 2023 war. However, UNHCR Tunisia prioritizes "solutions in Tunisia," in spite of the lack of safety in the country. UNHCR registration documents of asylum seekers or refugees have no more value than in Libya in terms of access to services, legal work, housing or transport, and are often destroyed by security forces.[38] As in Libya, many cross the sea after giving up their resettlement hopes. Further, the registration of asylum seekers and refugees by UNHCR was suspended in June 2024.[39]

Among the main reasons sub-Saharan migrants have increasingly been leaving from Tunisia is violence against them in Libya as well as in Algeria, which pushed more migrants towards Tunisia, while waves of violence in Tunisia itself against sub-Saharan migrants pushed more of them to leave (whether they were in the country for long or not).[40] In February 2023, racist and xenophobic outbursts in Tunisian political and popular circles, not least from the Tunisian President himself, fed fears of violence among Black African communities, including some long settled in the country.[41] Violence broke out in various locations in February.[42] In addition, since then, many sub-Saharan Africans lost their jobs and housing, as employers and landlords feared being criminalized themselves, and buses and taxis often stopped taking them.[43]

Reports of a local criminal incident allegedly involving the murder of a Tunisian by a sub-Saharan African in Sfax on July 3 triggered another round of mass violence.[44] Local mobs rounded up Black Africans, in an attempt to expel them from the town.[45] The police intervened but, while pretending to protect Black Africans, they loaded more than 1,200 onto vehicles to the applause of the local population, deporting them to the Libyan and Algerian borders.[46] The operation involved mass beatings by the police, who also confiscated and destroyed migrants' property including money, legal documents and phones.[47] Those arrested and deported included individuals legally present in Tunisia who had come by plane with visas, including students and patients allowed in for medical

34 Speakman Cordall, 2023c.
35 OMCT, 2023.
36 OMCT, 2024; State trafficking, 2024; Alarm Phone, 2024.
37 https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/113474 ; see also Bobin, 2024.
38 Bajec, 2023.
39 OMCT, 2024; State trafficking, 2024.
40 Bajec, 2023.
41 ANSA, 2023a; OMCT, 2024.
42 OMCT, 2023.
43 *Ibid.*
44 *Ibid.*
45 *Ibid.*
46 Human Rights Watch, 2023.
47 OMCT, 2023; State trafficking, 2024.



Disembarkation of migrants rescued by MSF vessel Geo Barents in Taranto, southern Italy, 2022.

treatment.[48] They also included registered asylum seekers and refugees.[49] At the Libyan border on the coast, several thousand migrants were stranded for a week in the no man's land between Tunisian and Libyan forces, and some for over a month (more than 1,500 were later taken to Libya).[50] Since Libyan border guards did not allow them in, a deadlock developed with Tunisian and Libyan forces batting the migrants to and fro. Migrants attempting to return to Tunisia met with beatings and tear gas by Tunisian forces. Nearly 30 deaths were reported, including from violence and thirst – at first, the only water available was seawater.[51]

Libyan forces refused the migrants entry and also used violence, but, realizing the deadlock, posited themselves as rescuers. First, they let small groups of stranded migrants access water points near the border, then brought them water and food in the presence of TV crews. Tunisia then decided to allow the migrants to return, and brought them to empty schools (this was during holiday recess) in places such as Tameghza (near Algeria) and Kebili. The migrants received relief from the Tunisian Red Crescent, but were actually detained by security forces.[52] After about two weeks, those people were released to IOM and UNHCR facilities from where they were free to move. On August 9, the Tunisian government and Libya's GNU made a deal to share migrants at the border.[53] In principle, only those who had crossed the border to Tunisia from Libya would be returned to Libya, but the deal was not respected – migrants arrested in Sfax, some of whom had never been to Libya, were reportedly taken to Libya, which also occasioned family separations. Libya visibly took more people (at least 1,500) than Tunisia, continuing its communication strategy to appear more generous than Tunisia – however, the migrants taken to Libya were systematically brought to detention centres, which was not the case in Tunisia.

Deportations of several hundred migrants also took place at the Algerian border, but no deal was struck between Tunisia and Algeria. Instead Algeria pushed back the migrants to Tunisia, where they scattered.[54] They suffered violence from the security forces of both countries.[55]

Arrests in Tunisia followed by refoulement to the Libyan and Algerian borders continued in 2024.[56] The agreement between the Tunisian government and the Libyan GNU continued, allowing the deportation from Tunisia to Libya of over 13,000 migrants between mid-2023 and May 2024 (including over 5,000 in the second half of 2023 and another 5,000 in the first half of 2024), according to UN sources; roughly 7,000 people were reportedly deported to Libya in 2024.[57] Further, in May 2024, hundreds of refugees and migrants camping or protesting in front of UN offices in downtown Tunis, mostly Sudanese, were rounded up and reportedly deported to the Algerian border.[58] In 2024, over 9,000 migrants were reportedly deported to Algeria, exceeding those deported to Libya.[59]

The Tunisian authorities reportedly put pressure on the migrants to ask for voluntary return through IOM in order to be relocated from the borderlands. IOM resisted taking part in this blackmailing, and migrants did not

48 State trafficking, 2024.
49 *Ibid.*
50 *Al Jazeera*, 2023; InfoMigrants, 2024.
51 According to IOM-Libya, "28 dead bodies have been retrieved [in the border area] since June [so not only following the arrests in Sfax], while over 80 individuals are reported missing, according to testimonies gathered from those rescued"; other sources mentioned at least 27 deaths since the arrests in Sfax). Also see InfoMigrants, 2024.
52 OMCT, 2023.
53 *Ibid.*
54 Human Rights Watch, 2023.
55 *Ibid.*
56 *Al Jazeera*,2024; Boukhayatia, 2024.
57 OMCT, 2024.
58 *Al Jazeera*, 2024; Boukhayatia, 2024.
59 OMCT, 2024.

report pressure from IOM for them to return.[60] Nevertheless, after the border pushbacks, more migrants appeared to volunteer to return home through IOM.[61] Fears, actual violence and hardship triggered some voluntary returns.[62] Violence in Tunisia is also likely to have encouraged migrants to leave the country to, or back to, Libya or Algeria.[63]

More crucially, it appeared that more migrants, including some who initially had no intention to do so, decided to cross to Europe – even though it meant many had to return to Sfax, despite their violent experiences there.[64]

Noteworthy in 2023 was the extremely rapid reaction of the EU, which spotted early the budding increase in departures from Tunisia and began to put in place a policy to block them. In early July 2023, precisely between the violence and racist speeches of the beginning of the year and the mass violence in Sfax, the EU Commission (its President Ursula Von der Leyen herself) and the prime ministers of two member states (Italy and the Netherlands), presenting themselves as "Team Europe", appear to have put a lot of weight into striking a cooperation deal with Tunisia, eventually signed on 16 July, including a migration component described as a model for future deals.[65] It revolved around paying Tunisia €105 million to prevent migrants from embarking for Europe and accepting the return of their nationals (Tunisians constituted 11% of arrivals in Italy in 2023).[66] The EU's original thinking went further and aimed at making Tunisia (like Albania today) a country that would accept non-Tunisians who had arrived in Italy by sea, whether they left from Tunisia or Libya. Tunisia, however, in the name of national sovereignty, ostensibly refused such arrangements. At the same time, Italy increased pressure on NGO vessels to disembark rescued migrants in Tunisia rather than Italy. The paradox is that for disembarkations, returns or deportations to Tunisia to become widespread, Tunisia would have to be considered a safe country, which is clearly not the case, given the new violence there.[67] What's more, Tunisian authorities intend to have their own policy on migration management, and not simply be subcontractors to Europe.[68]

The agreement with Tunisia is therefore precarious, and has been criticized by the European Parliament, Germany and the EU Ombudsman for the opaque nature of the negotiations and because Tunisia is not a safe country.[69]

Paradoxically, the EU needs Tunisia to be a "safe third country", yet the most violent episode took place in the middle of negotiations with the EU and was not condemned by or in the EU, with the exception of Germany.[70] There were allegations of collusion between the Tunisian coastguard and the smugglers, particularly during the episode of 10,000 people arriving in Lampedusa in a few days in September.[71] However, at the same time, the Tunisian coastguard is said to have intercepted over 80,000 migrants at sea in 2023, a considerable figure when compared with the 97,000 not intercepted - an interception rate of 45%.[72] It may be in the interests of Italy and Europe to accuse Tunisia of instrumentalising or weaponizing migrants – a fashionable concept according to which migrants are no longer people but weapons in what has been called "a hybrid war".[73] This questionable wording appeared in the European Pact on Asylum and Migration adopted in 2023, in order to allow member states to derogate from legal obligations on asylum (and in particular to detain all arrivals), in such cases as well as in crisis situations — another vague term, but there is no doubt that the arrival of 10,000 people, a small number but a large one for Lampedusa, would easily be considered a crisis.[74]

Despite the violence, Von der Leyen described this agreement with Tunisia as a model for other partnerships – in a letter on migration, dated 25 June 2023, after a visit to Tunis, she expressed the wish for "our current initiative with Tunisia to act as a blueprint for similar partnerships in the future".[75] Yet, the EU has already established partnerships with a number of countries south of the Mediterranean.[76] Those deals have also been presented as models, but their results are, to say the least, questionable.[77] Next sections of this report will examine a few of them.

60 *Al Jazeera*, 2024; Boukhayatia, 2024.
61 OMCT, 2023.
62 *Le Monde*, 2024b.
63 OMCT, 2023.
64 Speakman Cordall, 2023c.
65 European Commission, 2023.
66 European Commission, 2023; Statewatch, 2024a; Pronczuk, 2023.
67 OMCT, 2024.
68 State trafficking, 2024.
69 European Ombudsman, 2024; Statewatch, 2024b; Nielsen, 2024; Speakman Cordall, 2023a.
70 Baczynska, 2023.
71 Refugees International, 2023; Boitiaux, 2023; Dumont, 2023.
72 https://ftdes.net/en/statistiques-les-migrants-interceptes-sur-les-cotes-tunisiennes/; see also AFP, 2023.
73 EU, 2024e ; Von der Leyen, 2024.
74 European Commission, 2024d.
75 Von der Leyen, 2023 and 2024; DW, 2023; Monroy, 2023.
76 Including with Libya, Egypt, Morocco, Niger, Chad, Sudan and Ethiopia, among others. In 2023, the EU commission encouraged member states to strike "informal and confidential" deals with countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Nigeria, and announced reinforcing cooperation with Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Niger. See Sparks, 2023.
77 Geddie, 2023.

Sabratha detention center at a time it was emptied, Libya, 2020

III. OUT OF LIBYA OR OUT OF LAW?

On the migration contexts discussed in this report, Libya is the country on which MSF worked on the most, as well as the country where violence against migrants has been most intense and systematic, and where the EU has most clearly been complicit in crimes. Since 2021, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has described the violence against migrants in Libya as "crimes against humanity", and referred to possible international complicity.[78] A 2023 follow-up report referred specifically to the EU, stating that "crimes against humanity were committed against migrants in places of detention under the actual or nominal control of … entities [which] received technical, logistical and monetary support from the European Union and its member States for, inter alia, the interception and return of migrants."[79] There has been no adequate response from the EU and its member states to this qualification.

Europe largely saw the migration issue as too urgent to wait for the rebuilding of a unified Libyan state that would allow not only Libyans to live safely but also migrants to work in Libya itself, and decided to engage, directly and indirectly, with divided actors. Formed under the aegis of the UN in 2015, the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) had barely set foot in Tripoli, when, in February 2017, it signed an agreement with Italy, endorsed by the EU, that channelled €90 million to curb migration in Libya, including the donation or maintenance of 17 speedboats (€14 million) to the LCG.[80] That policy had continued unabated since. In November 2022, members of the European Parliament expressed concerns about the reportedly planned delivery of five boats by Italy to Libya, funded by the EU's SIBMMIL (Support for Integrated Border and Migration Management in Libya) program.[81] The vessels were nevertheless delivered between February and August 2023.[82] Meanwhile, a draft action file on Libya by the EU's Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration (MOCADEM), dated 11 January 2023, asked the Commission to "continue implementing the EUR 59 million EUTF [Trust Fund] programme 'Support for Integrated Border and Migration Management in Libya (SIBMMIL)', implemented by the Italian Ministry of Interior."

EU officials justified the continuation of the policy by the argument that it reduced the deaths at sea. In his answer to questions by the Parliamentarians mentioned above, still in November 2021, the EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, claimed "casualties in the Mediterranean … would dramatically increase without the EU's support [to Libya]". However, as mentioned above, figures show that the death rate in the Central Mediterranean sharply increased after that policy was enforced.

78 Human Right Council, 2021.
79 Human Right Council, 2023.
80 Bagnolli and Papetti, 2022.
81 See https://trust-fund-for-africa.europa.eu/our-programmes/support-integrated-border-and-migration-management-libya-second-phase_en?prefLang=fr
82 Nova news, 2023; Cantiere Navale Vittoria, 2023; Nielsen, 2023; InfoMigrants, 2023; Vasques, 2023; Itamilradar, 2023.

Nevertheless the Commission repeatedly stated, including to the European Court of Auditors (ECA), that "it would suspend support in the event of a direct link between EUspending and an allegation of human rights violations".[83] However the Court found "no clear or documented examples, nor practical guidance, on what actions may trigger an EU decision to suspend an activity", and no inclusion of that principle as a clause in EU contracts, as well as insufficient implementation of mitigation measures.[84]

The EU also repeatedly evacuated the European Parliament's and others' questions on conditionalities to EU support in terms of human rights. Commissioner Várhelyi stated that "The Commission conducts regular monitoring and, since 2019, has put in place a third-party and Human Rights monitoring of operations in Libya under the EU Trust Fund for Africa, which pays particular attention to the respect of the 'do no harm' principle", but the EU refused to disclose the relevant reports to members of the European Parliament, member states or the general public – the ECA also noted they were not shared with donors (member states) or project implementers.[85] Beyond that opacity, it should be noted that the "third-party monitoring" only began two years after the initial agreement was signed and did not cover most of 2023.[86] The process is not financially independent from the EU. The ECA, who had access to at least some of the reports, noted that "the scope of monitoring … does not include close scrutiny of the human rights impact of all outputs and activities" but that at least one situation which should have led to a suspension of activities was reported, as were "the conduct of search and rescue operations at sea in a manner that potentially infringes international law" and " misappropriation of material assistance".[87] Yet this information was not followed up, presumably, according to the ECA, since "the Commission did not set up a process to follow up on the information included in these reports" and since "Commission staff cannot assess whether EU funded equipment is being used as intended and in line with the do-no-harm principle [and] were not fully familiar with the details or location of EUTF [European Union Trust Fund] activities in Libya."[88] The ECA also found that EU support to "improve conditions in detention centres" may have "benefitted criminal organisations" and "facilitated the transfer of migrants to detention centres".[89]

EU policies have not impacted positively neither the deaths at sea nor the persistent violence on the ground, including following interceptions at sea.[90] Kidnapping and torture for ransom have become systematic across Libya since about a decade, and while efforts from some Libyan forces, autonomous from EU policies, to rein in criminal activities in some key trafficking hubs were recently noticed, violence is still widespread - and ransom practices even spread to other countries, including Algeria, Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan and Egypt. Sexual and gender-based violence is also widespread.

Those abuses can be perpetrated by traffickers, by forces nominally affiliated to specific authorities (some supported directly or indirectly by the EU), or more often by actors who are at the intersection of the official and the unofficial. While it is important to distinguish between trafficking centres and detention centres, it is artificial to limit "official" centres, as the EU and EU-funded UN agencies have been attempting to, in order to justify cooperation with some actors and not others, to those listed on the often-changing list of the Department to Combat Illegal Migration (DCIM) of the GNA then GNU's Interior Ministry. Extortion practices, with or without violence, arbitrary and indefinite confinement, overcrowding, lack of food and water, and health problems (including epidemics such as tuberculosis), have been observed at very different degrees, in different places, and evolving over times, regardless of the status of the centre in the view of international actors.[91] Yet, most do not dispute that migrants detention is arbitrary because it is based on a Libyan law inherited from Gaddafi, making it a criminal offence for undocumented foreigners to enter, stay or attempt to leave the country (including by sea), punishable by indefinite imprisonment and forced labour.[92] For instance, the MOCADEM file quoted above also mentions the need to "engage Libyan authorities on putting an end to the overall detention system". There seems however to be little international pressure for legal reform.

Further, the fact the EU is not sufficiently vocal in its condemnations of detention and its defence of human rights, sent various Libyan actors the tacit message that migrants, in particular those ostensibly aiming at Europe, are legitimate targets for detention as a way to discourage them and others still in countries of origin to try to cross the Central Mediterranean; and that the EU and member-states are ready to support actors who can contribute to curb the flows, turning a blind eye on violence. As an illustration of that collateral damage, armed actors who had not received European support have purchased their own vessels, intercepted migrants at sea and detained them in detention facilities opened on purpose, in order to attract the attention and obtain political, material and financial support of international organizations.[93]

Since 2017, MSF's interventions in Libya focused on migrants and refugees in north-western Libya, where the majority of them live. We provided medical consultations in Tripoli, along the coast between Misrata and the Tunisian border, and in the hinterland around Tripoli southwards to Beni Walid. We intervened both in detention centres, and outside, understanding our migrant patients' vulnerabilities and needs were no lesser outside

83 ECA, 2024.
84 *Ibid*.
85 See https://trust-fund-for-africa.europa.eu/our-programmes/support-integrated-border-and-migration-management-libya-second-phase_en?prefLang=fr ; Nielsen, 2025; ECA, 2024.
86 ECA, 2024.
87 *Ibid*.
88 *Ibid*.
89 *Ibid*.
90 Human Rights Council, 2023.
91 Eaton, 2024.
92 Foreign embassies noted the particular difficulty of releasing migrants and even registered refugees intercepted at sea.
93 Eaton, 2024.

The recreation yard of Zliten detention center, Libya, 2022.

detention. Over the years, we realized that our patients' medical needs, including mental health, were largely due to the violence they had suffered in the country and before entering it, and the lack of proper access to health care but also proper protection services. Trying to respond more comprehensively to the most crucial needs, we complemented our medical and psychological assistance with the gradual development of protection activities. We also realized that Libya's precarious security context gave little hope that our most vulnerable patients would soon get access to proper medical care and protection options within Libya, notably due to the limitations in the UNHCR's role, in a country that is not signatory to the Geneva Convention.[94] For most of our patients, the main solution is to leave Libya. This is why we referred cases for evacuation or resettlement, mostly to UNHCR, although safe and legal pathways to seek protection out of Libya are extremely limited and difficult to access.[95]

Looking more closely at the table on "ways out of Libya" above, beside the figures, it is also showing that the almost unique route to Europe is the clandestine crossing of the Mediterranean. The only legal route is resettlement or evacuation pathways by UNHCR, but this only concerns a very small, and increasingly smaller, number of people. Between 2017 (when resettlement from Libya began) and 2024, UNHCR has managed to evacuate or resettle about 12,000 registered "Persons of Concern" (PoCs), an average 1,500 a year, mostly through Emergency Transit Mechanisms (ETMs) in Niger and Rwanda.[96] Slots given by third countries to gradually shrunk, while the list of PoCs registered by UNHCR increased, rising up from about 40,000 between 2017 and 2023, to nearly 93,000 by June 2025.[97] Further, in July 2023, a military coup in Niger questioned the survival of UNHCR's ETM in that country. The new Nigerien authorities questioned a whole set of agreements made by the former government with international institutions, while some third countries in Europe were now unable or unwilling to give resettlement slots through Niger – some of them then shifted to Rwanda.

MSF has been advocating for several years for reception countries to increase their number of slots from Libya, and for the opening of new evacuation routes for the most vulnerable.[98] Beside UNHCR, we referred cases to embassies who could grant humanitarian visas, and to a humanitarian corridor opened by the Italian government in partnership with UNHCR and Italian charities. Given the shrinking context in terms of other pathways, the Italian corridor is becoming the main safe and legal pathway out of Libya. We advocated for the opening of similar corridors, particularly in France.[99]

The table also shows another way out of Libya, namely the return to the country of origin under the aegis of the IOM, but the voluntary nature of this return is questionable, particularly when it is the only way out of Libya, and sometimes even the only way out of detention.[100] For those (in small numbers) who appeared truly voluntary to return, we still referred them, often successfully, to the IOM. For others, regardless of their nationality, who were not willing to return to their origin country, and whose life or health could be considered at risk in case of return (voluntary or not) as well as in case of prolonged stay in Libya, we tried to refer them to the few other existing pathways out of Libya described above.

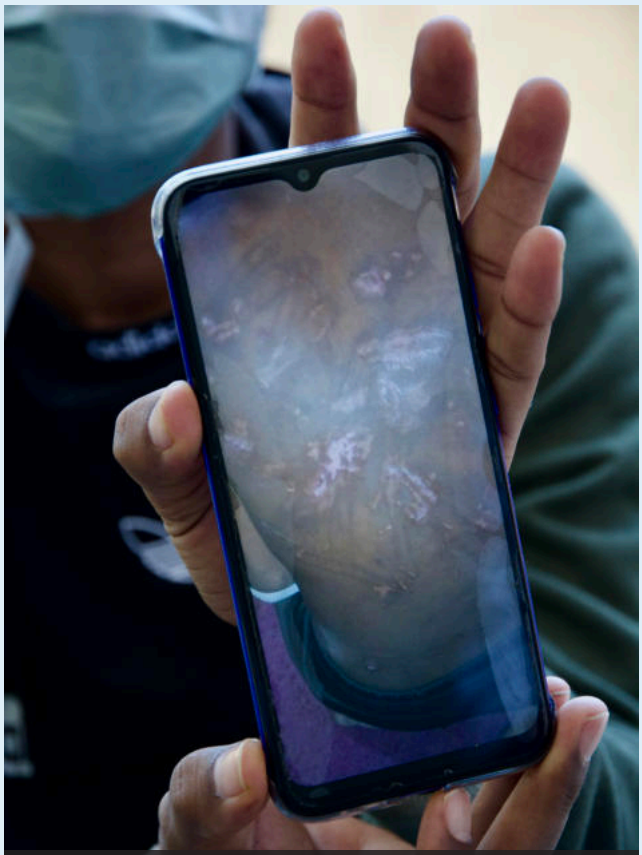
94 MSF, 2022.
95 *Ibid.*
96 UNHCR, 2024.
97 UNHCR, 2025.
98 MSF, 2022.
99 *Ibid.*
100 OHCHR, 2022. On figures, see https://libya.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl931/files/documents/2024-11/vhr-snapshot-2024.pdf

NO SAFE COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN

Ahmed[101] is a Sudanese in his fifties, from the (non-Arab) Zaghawa tribe in Darfur. Like many Zaghawa localities, his village was attacked by the Sudanese army and its janjawid Arab militias at the beginning of the Darfur war in 2003, and the population displaced. One of his five children was captured by the janjawid and not seen since.

In 2016, Ahmed travelled from Darfur to Benghazi in eastern Libya where he could not be registered by the UNHCR. He then travelled to Tripoli where he was registered. While waiting for resettlement, he worked for a year washing cars in Tripoli. His UNHCR document did not prevent him from being arrested by a Tripoli militia in 2017, at a crossroad where sub-Saharan migrants used to wait for employers in need of workers. "In Libya, that UNHCR paper is meaningless. When you show your paper, they tear it to pieces".

He was sent to a military base where hundreds of Sudanese, Ethiopian, and Eritrean migrants were detained, and asked for a $200 ransom - the amount asked for from all Sudanese, under the threat of being transferred to an "official" detention centre. Ahmed explained: "They beat me for a month and half, but because I had no money and no one to call, they stopped beating me and forced me to work. I washed their cars and clothes, cleaned rooms and toilets, collected garbage, loaded and unloaded military equipment, and sometimes they sent me to farms or to their houses to clean. I was never paid, not even one dinar. If you don't work, they'll beat you up. The UNHCR never visited. It's a militia place; no one can go there."



Asylum seeker showing photos of marks of torture on his back - traffickers sent his family those photos to extract money from them. Libya, 2022.

Ahmed was released after ten months and could then renew his UNHCR registration. But later, in January 2020, he was again arrested by a militia and taken to a military base in Tripoli's Abu Salim neighbourhood, where he was again forced to wash cars, clean toilets, and collect garbage. This time he was released after three days. Again, because his UNHCR document had been destroyed, he had to renew it.

In May 2020, he was again arrested by a militia and jailed in Abu Salim detention centre. "Some guards proposed me to pay money to get released. Many detainees paid and got out, many others escaped, but neither was an option for me. UNHCR visited me, I gave them my registration number, and they advocated for my release, but the director refused. After 7 months, the director took pity and released me."

Since 2021, Ahmed wondered whether he should try to bring his wife and children from Darfur to Libya, in spite of the risks for them on the road and in Libya, since it seemed to him that "families are given priority by the UNHCR". But he was concerned about the risks for them: "I remember the prison – what if they're jailed too?..."

One of the criteria to be given one of the limited slots for resettlement or evacuation in third countries is "vulnerability", yet the length of the stay in Libya in uncertain conditions is not considered, and appears even to be seen as evidence that the person is not at risk in Libya. However, according to psychologists specialized in refugees in Europe, it gradually erodes the patient's resilience and negatively impacts their mental health. The ongoing Italian humanitarian corridor has among its criteria "confirmed presence in Libyan territory prior to 30 June 2023", suggesting priority should be given to earlier arrived among the UNHCR cohort of mostly Sudanese refugees who entered Libya after the beginning of the new war in Sudan in April 2023. This however does not seem to be implemented.

"Living in Libya, I didn't find any peace, mentally," Ahmed says. "I don't know when the next arrest will be. I can't sleep at night. I worry for my four [remaining] children in Sudan, with their mother. I never tried to cross [the sea]: I'm registered with UNHCR and waiting for my luck [to be resettled]. I've been registered since 2017 and surprised that some, registered in 2021, got evacuated. Whenever I contacted UNHCR, they told me: We'll get back to you."

In October 2024, in spite of being registered with UNHCR, Ahmed was arrested once again in Tripoli and, this time, deported to Kufra in south-eastern Libya (under control of the parallel East Libya government), then to the "triangle" (the tri-border between Libya, Sudan and Egypt). Since months, he has been trying to work on a desert market whose control shifted from forces allied to the Sudanese army to the rival Rapid Support Forces, hoping to earn enough money to return to Tripoli.

101 His name has been changed.

A boat transporting Bangladeshi migrants who left from eastern Libya and spent five days at sea before being rescued by MSF vessel Geo Barents, 2022.

IV. TWO GOVERNMENTS, ONE EU POLICY

Another recent trend, since 2021 and even more since the second half of 2022, is the increase in departures from Eastern Libya, in particular of Bangladeshi and Egyptian migrants as well as Syrians and Pakistanis – those four nationalities were among the six first nationalities arrived in Italy by the sea in 2024.[102] In 2022-23, at least a quarter of migrants (a rather speculative figure as Italy is not providing such a breakdown) successfully crossing the Mediterranean from Libya reportedly boarded boats on the part of the coast that is not under control of the internationally recognized government.[103] Further, in 2024-25, the rise of sea arrivals in Greece was also attributed to departures from Eastern Libya to Crete, notably of Syrians and Egyptians.[104] Those departures are particularly risky since the distance to European coasts (in particular continental Greece) is larger, involving much longer journeys - often several days at sea before possibly being rescued. The June 2023 shipwreck off Greece of over 700 migrants, of whom only 104 survived, involved a boat (fishing vessel *Adriadne*) which had departed from Eastern Libya.[105] The trend is linked to the possibility for migrants (especially Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Syrians) to legally fly to Eastern Libya, but also to the higher rate of interceptions of boats leaving from the West as well as arrests on land in the West.

Those new flows have been encouraging the EU and member states to rapidly engage with Eastern Libya's government and try to replicate the cooperation it has with the GNU, to close the entire Central Mediterranean route.[106] As a sign of good will, over 14,000 Egyptians were reportedly arrested in Eastern Libya in May 2023 (the same month Meloni met Eastern Libya's strongman Khalifa Haftar in Rome), and 4,000 reportedly returned to Egypt in June; there were also deportations from the East to Sudan, Chad and Niger.[107] After Haftar's visit to Rome, departures from Eastern Libya appeared to head to Greece rather than Italy, so that Athens began engaging with Haftar and training Eastern Libya's coastguard.[108] (However in July 2025, a EU delegation was rebuffed by Haftar, apparently unsatisfied with the level of recognition granted to his parallel government.)[109]

The EU has also implied, via the media, that departures were organized by authorities in the East to blackmail Europe or to make money in entries and possibly exits. It was alleged that Russian forces present in the East were instrumentalising flows to destabilize Europe.[110] While those allegations could complicate further the relations between the EU and Eastern Libya, they also allow the EU to consider itself victim of an "instrumentalisation" or "weaponization" of migrants. This illustrates how EU policies in one part of Libya have been encouraging new routes in another part of the country. It also reveals another quick European reaction to new flows, with the EU and member states seeking partnership with authorities other than the internationally recognized government.

102 InfoMigrants, 2021; Libya Update, 2023.
103 Bobin, 2024.
104 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/infographics/migration-flows-to-europe/#0
105 France 24, 2023.
106 ANSA, 2023b.
107 Gasteli and Zerrouky, 2023;
108 Nedos, 2025 ; Souliotis, 2025.
109 Ross et al., 2025.
110 Barigazzi et al., 2025.

Egyptian migrant in Zliten detention center, Libya, 2022.

V. EGYPT ON THE CORNER

Further East, the EU also attempted to complete its blockade of the Mediterranean by signing with Egypt a similar agreement to that it made with Libya and others. A first €80 million agreement against illegal migration was signed in October 2022.[111] In March 2024, with an increase of both arrivals from Sudan and Palestine, and sea crossings from Egypt, the EU agreed with a comprehensive cooperation deal on the model of the agreement it had already signed with Tunisia in July 2023.[112] Of the €7.4 billion package, at least €200 million will be used for strengthening border control and interceptions at sea.

Egypt is yet another country where, according to the testimonies we have collected from migrants arriving in our projects further in the migration route, the safety of the migrants returned can't be guaranteed.

The new war in Sudan brought half up to 1.5 million of refugees to Egypt (although less than half of those are registered, in a context where a new law transferred registration processes from UNHCR to the authorities), joining an already huge Sudanese diaspora estimated at 4 million.[113]

However the border has been increasingly closed. In June 2023, despite a 2004 "Four Freedoms" agreement including free movement, Egyptian authorities reversed their visa exemption policy first for Sudanese males between 16 and 50, then for everyone (including children, women and people over the age of 50).[114] Further, Egypt has detained and deported Sudanese, including since the new war in Sudan[115].

111 Lewis, 2022; Libya Review, 2022.
112 Schwarz, 2024.
113 Abdelaziz and Eltahir, 2022; Van Brunnersum, 2025.
114 Ayin et al., 2023; AfricaNews, 2024b.
115 Amnesty International, 2024; Statewatch, 2024c; Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 2024.

Arrival of displaced civilians from besieged El-Fasher at the checkpoint at the entrance of Tawila, North Darfur, Sudan, 2024.

VI. SUDDENLY, SUDAN

The Sudanese crisis has been called the world's worst displacement crisis and is also a main refugee crisis: since April 2023, about 12 million Sudanese were forcibly displaced, including over 3 million refugees.[116] Of the latter, nearly 900,000 went to Chad, adding to 400,000 already present in the country since twenty years. As could have been expected, very quickly, some did not want to stay for years in very poor refugee camps on borders, like their predecessors twenty years before.

It is often difficult to imagine that the refugee camp at the border is not the final destination of all these new refugees. For decades, MSF has provided aid to these displaced populations and refugees, without necessarily considering them as people still on the move. However, in our interventions in Sudan or in refugee camps in Chad, we realize that we are present in both places of departure and transit with populations that we then meet in our interventions in Libya, Tunisia, or France. Humanitarian operations in Sudan and at Sudan's borders offer a privileged observation post on the way a displacement crisis fuels what the EU sees as a migration crisis, and on the paradoxes of European reactions and policies.[117]

We do not have reliable figures on how many Sudanese, since April 2023, took the roads to the Mediterranean and Europe, but we know it is only a small share of the Sudanese displaced and refugees. Still, several hundred thousand crossed to Libya, or through Chad, then Niger, then Algeria, then Tunisia. Some even went as far as Morocco to cross to Spain, and as far as Turkey to cross to Greece.[118] New routes opened (and old routes reactivated) across the Sahara, with gold mines in borderlands acting as hubs. Since 15 April, continuous flows and rapid journeys were observed in particular between Sudan and Libya (directly or through Chad) and toward Tunisia (from Libya, or through Niger then Algeria) and the Mediterranean. Sudanese refugees were travelling more quickly than ever before, many reaching Europe (Italy, France, Calais on the way toward the United Kingdom) between one or three months after having left Sudan, rather than, as in the past, in many months or years.[119] In Libya, Tunisia and Calais, Sudanese became the first nationality of our patients, as well as of the refugee populations registered by UNHCR in Libya and Tunisia.

Figures in Libya are unreliable, with discrepancies within UN official counts. By December 2024, the IOM counted 240,000 Sudanese living in Libya, meaning that year they had risen from the third to the first migrant nationality, now before Niger and Egypt, accounting for 29% of the total migrant population in Libya.[120] By June 2025, UNHCR gave a figure of 313,000 Sudanese in Libya, but for the new arrivals only.[121] Other sources suggest even larger numbers. By July 2025, other UN agencies estimated 1.2 million Sudanese entered Libya in a year, including one million through Kufra, based on local authorities' sources. Sudanese embassy and community sources have also been going up to over a million. In mid-2024, the mayor of Kufra in south-eastern Libya gave a

116 See https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sudansituation
117 Tubiana, 2024a.
118 Forin and Frouws, 2022.
119 Tubiana, 2024b.
120 IOM, 2024.
121 https://reporting.unhcr.org/libya-sudanese-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-situation-core-10325

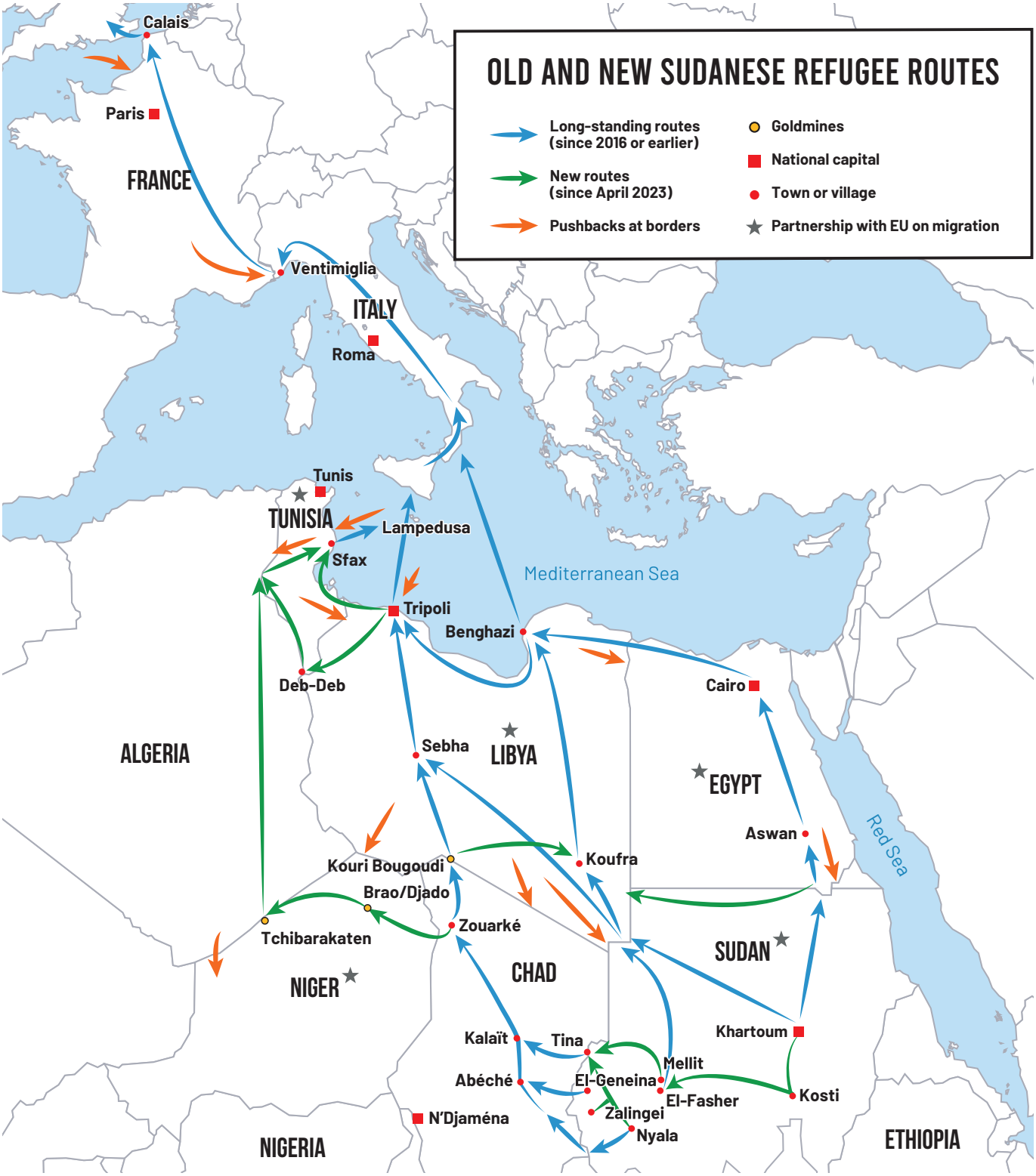


figure of 250,000, likely counting only those who entered through direct Sudan-Libya routes. At the same period, after intense conflict engulfed North Darfur's capital city El-Fasher, figures of 250 to 1,200 daily arrivals in Kufra were cited.[122] By July 2025, authorities in Kufra had issued health certificates for over 160,000 Sudanese new arrivals, only covering a share of that population.[123]

Yet by December 2023, the IOM estimated that a slight majority of the Sudanese who had entered Libya since 15 April 2023 made it through Chad, meaning there may be large unrecorded numbers of Sudanese in the south-west and the west of Libya.[124]

122 IMC, 2024a and 2024b; European Commission, 2024a.
123 UNHCR, 2025.

124 IOM, 2023; Van Moorsel and Bonfiglio, 2023.

Sudan's Rapid Support Forces vehicle patrolling on the road to Libya, North Darfur, 2020.

While there were some welcoming declarations, including in Libya, showing that North African countries had noticed that Sudanese had good reasons to leave their country, new Sudanese refugees kept experiencing hardship along their journeys, including, as mentioned above, rejections at borders and deportations from Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. According to the UN, Sudanese (registered or not) are still among the main nationalities both intercepted at sea and detained in Libya.[125]

On over 93,000 asylum-seekers and refugees registered by UNHCR in Libya by June 2025, 78% are Sudanese, of which over two thirds reportedly arrived since the new war.[126] But UNHCR only registers in Tripoli, and not all Sudanese are able, or care of, registering, given it does not give them much actual protection. For instance in November 2023, more than 200 mostly Sudanese refugees were reportedly arrested near UNHCR facilities in Tripoli, from which they were hoping to get protection, and jailed in three detention centres.[127] The World Organisation Against Torture noted that "this event not only highlights the persisting vulnerabilities of these individuals, but also puts into question the role of the UNHCR and other relevant agencies in addressing the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly Sudanese individuals, who have fled the conflict in their country seeking a safer destination... First, registration is not translated into protection for these people. Holding a refugee status in Libya is not recognized by authorities as a legitimate prerequisite for security, with many of those holding a legal status living under the constant fear of being arbitrarily arrested and detained... Such testimonies pinpoint several deficiencies in UNHCR's support mechanisms, triggering significant concerns regarding the agency's ability to fulfil its mandate in Libya. Moreover, its limited responsiveness to the recurring mass arrests and detention of refugees and asylum seekers over the years raises questions over their high-level discussions with the Libyan Government. This is amplified by the fact that the situation has not improved over the years, that the UNHCR is unable to communicate challenges encountered to the public and the refugee community, as well as by the fact that many UN-registered refugees continue to be subjected to arrests."[128]

Historically, most Sudanese in Libya would stay to work and send remittances home, but a recent UN survey found that 75% now intend to cross the Mediterranean. Similarly, Sudanese newcomers in Tunisia have no intention to stay in a country where risks of arrest and violence remain high, and wages lower than in Libya.[129] The number of Sudanese refugees registered by UNHCR in Tunisia has multiplied by 15 since the new war in Sudan and June 2024, then reaching nearly 8,000 and making them the first nationality (43%) of registered refugees and asylum seekers in the country.[130] According to UNHCR, 84% of Sudanese who crossed to Italy in 2023 embarked in Tunisia, while in 2022, 98% had left from Libya. In 2023, nearly 6,000 Sudanese reached Italy, making them the ninth nationality among migrants who succeeded crossing (but less than 4% of all arrivals); in 2024 their numbers had decreased to 2,000 but they were the seventh nationality (yet less than 3% of all arrivals).

While agreeing with UN agencies, including UNHCR, on the need for aid for refugees in the camps in Chad and other countries neighbouring Sudan, we also see the UN more embarrassingly playing on the EU's migration fears to obtain more funding, as well as presenting themselves as a player in the refugees' "encampment" near their origin country and the control of flows, *de facto* aligning themselves with the EU's positions. In February 2024,

125 Forin and Frouws, 2022; Mixed Migration Centre, 2024.
126 UNHCR, 2025.
127 OMCT et al., 2023.
128 *Ibid*.
129 Speakman Cordall, 2023b.
130 Mixed Migration Centre, 2024.

UNHCR's head Filippo Grandi warned: "The Europeans are always so worried about people coming across the Mediterranean. Well, I have a warning for them that if they don't support more refugees coming out of Sudan, even displaced people inside Sudan, we will see onward movements of people towards Libya, Tunisia and across the Mediterranean. There is no doubt."[131] One year later in February 2025, Grandi reiterated during the Munich Security Conference: "If the humanitarian response continues to be very poor inside Sudan and outside, in terms of financial support, please, nobody should be surprised if we start seeing secondary movement of people going to North Africa... and even trying to get to Europe."[132]

UNHCR admittedly prioritizes what it calls "durable solutions" as close as possible to the country of origin, in Chad for the Sudanese refugees, but also in Libya and Tunisia for various nationalities, in contexts, as mentioned above, of restricted resettlement processes (one of the three "durable solutions") from these three countries, because of the lack of slots in Europe and North America.

Yet the lack of legal pathways is one of the factors that drives Sudanese refugees to continue their journey. They also know that asylum authorities in Europe and North America consider them to be particularly legitimate refugees, like the Ukrainians. In key countries such as France and the United States, asylum authorities were quick to notice the crisis, including granting Sudanese asylum seekers, with, at least, temporary protection status. In August 2023, the U.S. government extended its temporary protected status for Ukrainian and Sudanese nationals through 2025.[133] In France and the United Kingdom (where the success rate for Sudanese asylum seekers has reached 99%)[134], asylum authorities agreed to grant immediate protection to a large proportion of Sudanese asylum seekers, on the model of what the EU has done for Ukrainians.

Indeed, at Europe's level, immediate protection in response to mass displacement was only agreed once, in March 2022, allowing 4.5 million Ukrainians to legally enter the EU. In France and other countries, protection rates for Sudanese and Ukrainians are now similarly high. But there was no similar EU response in terms of protection of the new Sudanese refugees; on contrary, European leaders have been using the crisis as a reason to justify making new deals with Egypt and Tunisia and continuing the same policy with Libya, showing the focus was on blocking movements the most south possible.[135] A contradiction emerged between national asylum authorities, ready to grant protection to the Sudanese, and the policies of both the EU and member states along the migratory routes. No specific legal pathways were opened, and no visas were granted in Chad or elsewhere, so Sudanese asylum seekers still have to pay smugglers to cross the Sahara and the Mediterranean to obtain protection. Within Europe, Sudanese asylum seekers suffered from discordant authorities. In December 2024, France deported a Sudanese man to Port Sudan, now the country's only functional airport. Judges cancelled expulsion orders for more than 20 others, arrested in Briançon and Calais.[136] In January 2025, another expulsion was ordered.

It should also be remembered that beginning in 2014, the EU entered into a partnership with Sudan against migration, and made its the headquarters of its regional "Khartoum process" to curb migrant flows from the Horn of Africa.[137] The EU did not heed the many warnings, particularly from Sudanese civil society, that this partnership represented an unhoped-for political and financial support for the Omar al-Bashir's ruling Islamist junta.[138] The regime's forces, both regular and paramilitary, have benefited from European funding, and others have taken advantage of the situation to present themselves as Europe's auxiliaries.[139] Today, these forces that the EU has contributed to legitimize are at war with each other and causing a refugee crisis that is a striking illustration of the counter-productivity of externalisation policies.[140]

131 AfricaNews, 2024a.
132 *Middle East Monitor*, 2025.
133 Reuters, 2023.
134 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-september-2024/how-many-people-are-granted-asylum-in-the-uk
135 "Sudanese refugees are no longer stopping in Egypt but heading for Libya and from there coming to us," far-right Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni declared in February 2024. See Kington, 2024.
136 *Le Monde*, 2024a.
137 Khartoum Process, https://www.khartoumprocess.net/about
138 Baldo, 2017
139 Tubiana et al., 2018.
140 According to Sudanese government sources, including RSF officers, interviewed before the crisis, EU funding stopped shortly after the revolution, in spite of the desire of the transitional military-civilian government to pursue the cooperation established under al-Bashir, and the fact that the new authorities could have been seen as a more acceptable partner by the UE.

THE LONG ROAD FROM SUDAN

Informal refugee settlement on the Chadian side of Tina, at the border with Sudan, 2023.

Mohamed and his wife Sara[141], aged 27 and 20 respectively, left Khartoum in July 2023, three months after the Sudanese capital was engulfed by the war between the regular Sudan Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. "I never imagined emigrating – it's war…", Mohamed explains. "We realized it would last years, and that we were eating the little money we had." They decided to leave with what remained, with the goal at getting asylum in Europe.

Mohamed and Sara first travelled to Kosti south of Khartoum, where they paid SDG125,000 (€200) for a seat in a car among more than 2,400 vehicles, regrouping for a convoy to Darfur, escorted by former rebels who were presenting themselves as neutral in the conflict. According to Mohamed, most of the passengers in the convoy were aiming at Europe. Those regular convoys were crucial to the safe movements of civilians to Darfur and Chad at the beginning of the conflict, until, in late 2023, most of those armed groups escorting them declared giving up neutrality and began fighting the RSF, leading the convoys to end.

In August, a month after they left Khartoum, Mohamed and Sara reached Tina at the border with Chad. "It was still the good season to take the sea, but we had no more money to continue our journey and found ourselves stuck in Tina," said Mohamed. He began working as a day laborer, cutting grass in the bush for the livestock.

According to Mohamed, some of his fellow passengers went directly to Libya and, by October, had already reached Europe or were waiting for a boat. Others lived in Chadian refugee camps, where they were registered by the UNHCR. "I heard that refugees were registered and after some time could ask for resettlement. But we didn't try to be registered, we don't want to remain in a camp doing nothing. Even some of those registered changed their mind and are now in Libya and Tunisia."

At the end of November, Mohamed and Sara, who was three months pregnant, left Tina in a convoy of three cars led by a local smuggler, entering Libya through goldmines straddling the border with Chad. They reached Tripoli on 15 December. Two days later, Mohamed was registered as an asylum seeker by the UNHCR. He quickly realized that "the UNHCR paper doesn't protect you, it's useless, the police can tear it up. I don't even show it when I'm arrested…"

Mohamed was often arrested, jailed for ransom under threats of being transferred to a worst prison, or forced to work without payment for days. His goal is still to reach Europe with his family (Sara gave birth in May 2024). "To save money for the sea, we only eat one meal a day". Mohamed said that from day one, he knew the risks: "I know that at sea, it's between life and death, but we have no other solution. In Libya, there are prisons where they call your parents so that they pay a ransom. In Tunisia, there's not much work and the authorities became harsh [with migrants], but you can cross the sea for a low price. I have friends from Khartoum who left me in Tina and arrived in France and Great Britain. UNHCR resettlement is safer than the sea, but it takes time, and it's also possible that nothing will happen."

141 Names have been changed.

Migrant vehicles on the official Niger-Libya road, travelling in a weekly convoy escorted by the army, 2017.

VII. LOOKING AT NIGER'S TRACK RECORD

Niger offers another example of a partnership that is just as counterproductive, and all the more striking because, eight years before Tunisia was branded as a "blueprint", it was considered to be a model too.

If Niger was the good student in terms of cooperation with the EU on migration, it is notably because, unlike for instance with Sudan, it was a partnership with a democratically elected government - no matter how fragile that government was or what the consequences of that partnership were. Like in Sudan, the EU turned a deaf ear to warnings about the risks of its policy for the very stability of the country. And indeed, as feared, in July 2023, the government was toppled in a coup.

One of the first announcements made by the new junta was its intention to put an end to Niger's partnership with the EU on migration, financed by the EU Trust Fund for Africa. It began with revoking the 2015 law against the smuggling of migrants that the elected government had adopted.[142] Confusing "smugglers" and traffickers, Law No. 2015-036 made it possible to arrest any carrier of non-Nigeriens north of the town of Agadez, which is itself in the center of Niger, 1,000 kms from the Libyan border. In fact, it hindered freedom of movement within the ECOWAS space (Economic Community of West African States, a 15-member-state zone allowing its 350,000 million residents to move freely without visas across its borders), from where most migrants crossing from Libya to Niger came.[143] As a result, Law 2015-036 was largely considered illegal by lawyers in Niger, an argument repeated by the new authorities.

The law was a Nigerien initiative, but was reportedly drafted at the instigation of, and under pressure from, the EU. It made it possible to obtain EU money to combat migration, while the EU made its vital development aid conditional on the fight against migration.[144] Law 2015-036 obviously satisfied the interests of the EU more than of Niger.[145]

The European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, immediately "regretted" the repeal of the law, expressing concern about the resumption of flows between Niger and Libya – acknowledging that Law 2015-036 was more in the interests of the EU than of Niger.[146] She also claimed that the EU's primary concern was "the saving of lives", that thanks to the law the number of deaths in the desert had substantially decreased, and that there was "a huge risk that [the law's revocation] will cause new deaths in the desert".[147]

142 See Tubiana, 2017.

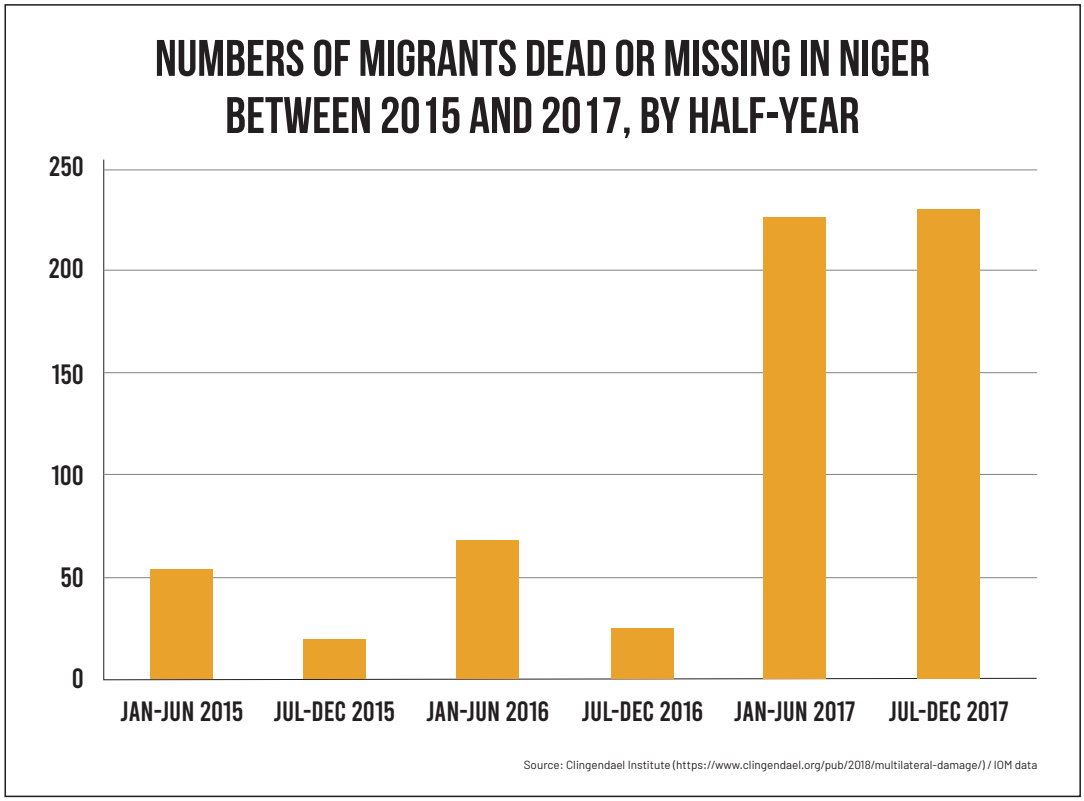
143 Nigeriens were themselves exempt, as it was argued they were simply going to Libya with no intention of crossing the Mediterranean, which partly explained the persistence of important flows of Nigeriens travelling from Agadez to Libya on the official road. Djibo et al., 2024.

144 The EU earmarked €600 million for development aid in Niger between 2016 and 2020. Nearly €1 billion were reportedly spent between 2014 and 2024. European Commission, 2016; Peltier, 2024.

145 The new government slammed the law as having been "voted under the influence of some foreign powers", against "the interests of Niger and of its citizens". See Le Cam and Bobin, 2023.

146 According to UN data from Libya, flows increased by 26% between 2023 and 2024; the reality of the surge was disputed. Djibo et al., 2024.

147 RFI, 2023.



These claims and arguments are not backed by the available data. According to IOM data compiled in 2018 and published by the Clingendael Institute, migrants' deaths sharply increased (multiplying by five) between 2016 and 2017, precisely from the moment Law 2015-036 was enforced.[148]

This is coming at no surprise: previously, the transport of migrants was legal in Niger, with a military escort on the main desert road to Libya. It was thus relatively safe and few deaths were reported. With the law, transport became illegal and clandestine, on more difficult and dangerous routes.[149]

As for the flows, about 400,000 migrants reportedly travelled from Niger to Libya in 2016, the same year the Central Mediterranean crossings peaked at 180,000.[150] The next year, as Law 2015-036's was enforced, outgoing migrant flows fell by 79%, according to UN data.[151] It likely contributed to the reduction of sea crossings, but it is difficult to say to what extent: as mentioned above, interceptions by the LCG also contributed; and later on new increases, including recently in Tunisia, took place despite the Nigerien law still being enforced.[152]

Another effect of Law 2015-036 was rising tensions in northern Niger. The transport of migrants was the main livelihood of desert communities (Tubu and Tuareg), and its criminalization increased tensions between them and the army. It resurrected the threat of the former rebellion by these communities against the state, in particular because the peace agreement that had solved the conflict provided for the reconversion of former rebels into (legal) transporters of migrants. As that provision was invalidated by the new law, the army went from escorting to repressing again, arresting and sentencing to prison nearly 300 drivers, and confiscating over 300 vehicles.

However, there was discontent within the army itself, as the military had to implement a policy which made their relations with northern Niger's communities, already tense, even more complicated. Law 2015-036 was also unpopular among the population in general. Niger's public opinion appeared to be rather pro-migrant, not least because the national economy benefits from the passage of migrants from other countries as well as remittances sent by Nigerien workers in North Africa. The national pride was also hurt by the partnership with the EU, dubbed as the "EU diktat". Then Interior Minister Mohamed Bazoum had been a key architect of the partnership and of the law, implemented by the "Bazoum" plan. In 2018, Bazoum however warned Europe, declaring that "the fight against clandestine migration is not winnable."[153] Yet after being elected president in 2021, he kept being described by his opponents as a puppet of Europe. EU migration policies can be seen as one of the factors fragilizing the elected government before it was ousted in a military coup. By focusing on migration in Niger in a short-termist way, the EU has contradicted its objectives in terms of democracy, security and stability in Niger and the Sahel in general. The EU's migration policy in the Sahel is all the more counterproductive in that the proliferation of military coups (Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea), including in countries already facing armed conflict and terrorist attacks, is an additional reason for asylum seekers to leave for Europe.

148 Tubiana et al., 2018. It is difficult to extrapolate a death rate with certainty, but given that flows decreased significantly while deaths increased, the death rate likely multiplied by more than 20.
149 See also Border Forensics, 2023.
150 UNHCR et al., 2017.
151 Djibo et al., 2024.
152 Bobin, 2024.
153 Penney, 2018.

CONCLUSION

We only looked at a few examples of countries where the EU has attempted, sometimes recently and sometimes for decades, what is known as 'externalisation' policies, which the EU calls the 'external dimension of asylum and immigration'. We questioned the realities of the EU's claims that the flows were either decreasing (proof of their policies' successes), or increasing (often to ask for more support for the same policies, rather than questioning their failure). We also questioned the EU's claims that their policies had positive effects in terms of decreasing migrants' deaths or even "saving lives". And we looked at important effects, in fragile countries with histories of authoritarian rules and armed conflict, on human rights, rule of law, peace, security, stability and state-building.

Over the years various research works have raised the alarm on the fact that "European states' foreign policy tools designed to reduce flows of irregular migration are often at odds with policies to support transitions to peace and accountable governance," to quote a recent Chatham House study. Focusing on Libya, that report concluded that European policies, "at best, poorly aligned with stated political objectives to achieve accountable and sustainable governance" and rightly seen by local communities as "more concerned with Europe's interests than they are with Libya's stability and security", had empowered armed actors, "shielded them from accountability", "contributed towards entrenching conflict dynamics in Libya" and "undermin[ed] state-building efforts". Chatham House concluded: "The challenge therefore is to explore how European policymakers can harmonize their approaches towards conflict resolution and stabilization with their attempts to reduce irregular migration. A start here would be to accept that credible reports of human rights violations should result in a halt to provision of funding to the perpetrators' armed factions."[154]

Migration policies appear to be changing rapidly, as migration routes keep evolving and sometimes adapting to EU policies, while in the meantime, EU policies react very quickly to new flows. But we also see a lot of continuity: continuity of crises that motivate departures, and of EU policies that react swiftly to crises and to the evolution of routes. All indicates that the EU wants to continue at all costs, despite disturbing realities, as well as occasional acknowledgements, by both European decision-makers and their "partners" or counterparts outside of Europe, that those policies are doomed to fail in the long term, and have counter-productive or damaging side-effects.

The extension of Europe's border control further and further south, including attempts to redefine "safe" countries less and less rigorously, is clearly reflected in the EU's new Pact and Migration and Asylum, adopted in May 2024.[155] One the pact's provisions allows replacing "solidarity" in relocations of migrants between European states with financial contributions to partnerships with "third countries", thus entrenching further externalization logics.[156] Similarly, one of its main measures, the "border procedure", provides for accelerated return to the country of origin, or to "third countries" considered safe, in the event of rejection. It also provides for a sorting of asylum seekers by nationality, in contradiction to the Geneva Convention, with nationalities having less than 20% of successful asylum applications in the EU systematically detained at Europe's external borders before being admitted or rejected.[157] This could concern nationalities such as Moroccans (49% of arrivals in mainland Spain in 2023, 16% in the Canary Islands), Senegalese (13% of arrivals in the Canary Islands), Algerians (36% of arrivals in Spain), Tunisians, Guineans, Ivorians (each making up around 10% of arrivals in Italy), Bangladeshis (7%), Pakistanis, Egyptians, Albanians, Burkinabe, and so on. But this can be extended to nationalities with higher asylum rates (between 20 and 50%) in the event of "crisis" or "instrumentalisation" - a concept put forward following the sending of refugees from Belarus to Poland, or from Russia to Finland, but which we fear could be extended to situations such as rescue at sea.[158] Over the last two years, we have again seen governments, notably Italy, abuse the law to hinder or criminalize those who come to the aid of migrants: in particular by obliging NGO boats to return to port after each rescue and by assigning them increasingly distant ports.[159]

While discussing European responsibilities, we must not forget those of countries of origin and transit beyond the EU. In North Africa, the damaging effects of EU policies have been aggravated by internal politics of countries that want to be partners of the EU (for political and financial gains) but do not want to be seen as subcontractors, and by the use of violence against migrants both for purely national reasons and in the belief that the EU is in favour of violence that will reduce the flows.

154 Eaton and Yousef, 2025.
155 European Commission, 2024b and 2024c.
156 EU, 2024c; De Leo and Milazzo, 2024; De Bruycker, 2024.
157 EU, 2024a and 2024b; Tsourdi, 2024.
158 EU, 2024d; Neidhardt, 2024.
159 MSF, 2025.

Arrival of displaced civilians from besieged El-Fasher at the checkpoint at the entrance of Tawila, North Darfur, Sudan, 2024.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

DCIM	Department to Combat Illegal Migration
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ETM	Emergency Transit Mechanism
EU	European Union
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
GNA	Government of National Accord
GNU	Government of National Unity
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGG	Libyan Coastguard
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MOCADEM	Operational Coordination Mechanism for the External Dimension of Migration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PoC	Persons of Concern
RSF	Rapid Support Forces
SAR	Search and Rescue
SDG	Sudanese Pounds
SIBMMIL	Support for Integrated Border and Migration Management in Libya
SSA	Stability Support Apparatus
TND	Tunisian Dinars
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

30

A woman waving goodbye to relatives leaving toward Chad. Tawila, North Darfur, 2025.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abdelaziz, Khalid and Eltahir, Nafisa, 2022. 'Sudanese head north to Egypt seeking brighter future', Reuters, 26 September.

AFP (Agence France Presse), 2023. '70,000 migrants intercepted by Tunisia in 2023: official'.

AfricaNews, 2024a. 'UN refugee chief warns Europe of a new influx of Sudanese migrants if Sudan's conflict continues', 13 August — 2024b. 'Egypt introduces entry visa for all Sudanese as truce ends', 13 August.

Alarm Phone, 2024. 'Interrupted sea', June.

Al Jazeera, 2023. 'Black refugees stranded in Tunisian desert witness death, misery', 14 July — 2024. 'Children, infants missing after Tunis police clear makeshift refugee camps', 3 May.

Amnesty International, 2024. 'Egypt: "Handcuffed like dangerous criminals": Arbitrary detention and forced returns of Sudanese refugees in Egypt', 19 June.

ANSA, 2023a. 'Tunisia: Saied, "measures" against sub-Saharan immigration', 22 February — 2023b. 'Libia: Meloni vede Haftar, focus sui flussi migratori verso l'Italia', 4 May.

Ayin et al., 2023. 'The Sudan Conflict Monitor', No 4, 19 June.

Baczynska, Gabriela, 2023. 'Germany's Baerbock joins chorus criticizing EU migration deal with Tunisia', *Reuters*, 22 September.

Bagnolli, Lorenzo and Papetti, Fabio, 2022. 'Come l'Italia ha costruito le forze marittime della Libia'. Irpimedia, 27 October.

Bajec, Alessandra, 2023. 'In a Tunisian migration hub, asylum seekers find little support'. The New Humanitarian, 6 November.

Baldo, Suliman, 2017. 'Border Control from Hell: How the EU's migration partnership legitimizes Sudan's "militia state", Enough, 6 April.

Barigazzi, Jacopo et al., 2025. 'Italy and Greece sound the alarm over Libya. But allies aren't rushing to help', Politico, 14 July.

Bobin, Frédéric, 2024. 'En 2023, l'Europe a fait face à un rebond migratoire venu du Sud', Le Monde, 9 January.

Boitiaux, Charlotte, 2023. '«Certains n'ont pas changé de teeshirt depuis leur arrivée» : à Lampedusa, la tension est à son comble dans le hotspot surpeuplé', InfoMigrants, 16 September.

Border Forensics, 2023. 'Mission Accomplished? The Deadly Effects Of Border Control In Niger', 8 May.

Boukhayatia, Rihab, 2024. 'Reportage au Lac 1: La Tunisie face à l'afflux des Soudanais, Nawaat, 6 February.

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 2024. 'Egyptian authorities must end arbitrary detentions and forced deportations of Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers'. 27 March.

Cantiere Navale Vittoria, 2023. 'Avvenuta la cerimonia di consegna dell'unità TS-LCG 300, alla presenza del Ministro degli Affari Esteri Antonio Tajani', 9 February.

Civil MRCC, 2024. 'From Libya to Tunisia: How the EU is extending the push-back regime by proxy in the Central Mediterranean', 21 january.

Council of Europe, 2025. Externalisation asylum and migration policies and human rights law, 4 September.

De Bruycker, Philippe, 2024. 'The new European solidarity mechanism: Towards a fair sharing of responsibility between member states?', Foundation for European Progressive studies, 5 September.

De Leo, Andreina and Milazzo, Eleonora, 2024. 'Implication of the New Pact for future EU cooperation with third countries', Foundation for European Progressive studies, 20 June.

Djibo et al., 2024. 'Despite fears in Europe, no migrant surge after Niger junta scrapped ban', Reuters, 7 June.

Dumont, Julia, 2023. 'Expulsions de Sfax : pourquoi la Tunisie, déplace-t-elle des migrants vers une zone de départ pour l'Italie ?', InfoMigrants, 22 September.

DW (Deutsche Welle), 2023. 'Italy hosts conference to address irregular migration', 23 July.

ECA (European Court of Auditors), 2024. The EU trust fund for Africa - Despite new approaches, support remained unfocused. Special report 17/2024, 25 September.

Eaton, Tim, 2024. 'Security actors in Misrata, Zawiya and Zintan since 2011', Chatham House, 30 January.

Eaton, Tim and Yousef, Lubna, 2025. 'How migrant smuggling has fueled conflict in Libya'. February.

EU (European Union), 2024a. 'Regulation (EU) 2024/1348 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 establishing a common procedure for international protection in the Union and repealing Directive 2013/32/EU', 14 May
— 2024b. 'Regulation (EU) 2024/1349 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 establishing a return border procedure, and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1148', 14 May
— 2024c. 'Regulation (EU) 2024/1351 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on asylum and migration management, amending Regulations (EU) 2021/1147 and (EU) 2021/1060 and repealing Regulation (EU)'. No 604/2013, 14 May
— 2024d. 'Regulation (EU) 2024/1359 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 addressing situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum and amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1147', 14 May
— 2024e. 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on countering hybrid threats from the weaponisation of migration and strengthening security at the EU's external borders', 11 December.

European Commission, 2016. 'European Union steps up its support for Niger to the tune of EUR 609.9 million', 15 December
— 2023. 'Memorandum of Understanding on a strategic and global partnership between the European Union and Tunisia', 16 July
— 2024a. 'ECHO Daily Flash', 07 May — 2024b. 'Explanatory memo on the Pact on Migration and Asylum', 14 May
— 2024c. 'Pact on Migration and Asylum: Legislative files in a nutshell,' 4 June — 2024d. 'Questions and answers on the Pact on Migration and Asylum,' 11 October
— 2025. 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a common system for the return of third-country nationals staying illegally in the Union, and repealing Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and the Council, Council Directive 2001/40/EC and Council Decision 2004/191/EC', 11 March.

European Council, 2023. 'Special meeting of the European Council – Conclusions', 9 February
— 2025. 'European Council conclusions on competitiveness, European defence and security and migration', 20 March.

European Ombudsman, 2024. 'Decision on how the European Commission intends to guarantee respect for human rights in the context of the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding (OI/2/2024/MHZ)', 21 October.

Forin, Roberto and Frouws, Bram, 2022. 'What's new? Analysing the latest trends on the Central Mediterranean mixed migration route to Italy', Mixed Migration Centre, 9 February.

France 24, 2023. 'Naufrage en Grèce : neuf personnes arrêtées, soupçonnées d'être des passeurs', 15 June.

Gasteli, Nissim and Zerrouky, Madjid, 2023. 'En Libye, les travailleurs étrangers rescapés « sont parmi les plus détruits psychologiquement par la catastrophe » de Derna', Le Monde, 23 September.

Geddie, Eve, 2023. 'En Tunisie, l'UE refait la même erreur, toujours aussi dangereuse', Politico, 21 September.

Human Rights Council, 2021. 'Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya', 29 November
— 2023. 'Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya', 3 March.

Human Rights Watch, 2023. 'Tunisia: No Safe Haven for Black African Migrants, Refugees', 19 July.

InfoMigrants, 2021. 'Italy: Sharp increase in new migrant route to Calabria', 22 November
— 2023. 'Italy hands over patrol boat to Libyan government', 8 February — 2024. 'Méditerranée : en 2023, près de la moitié des morts en mer sont partis de Tunisie', 14 February.

IMC (International Medical Corps), 2024a. 'Kufra Response Situation Report #2', 26 June
— 2024b. 'Kufra Response Situation Report #6', 15 August.

IOM (International Organization for Migration), 2023. 'Regional Sudan Response Situation update', 12 December
— 2024. 'Migrant report Round 55', November-December.

Itamilradar, 2023. 'A Libyan (Italian donated) patrol boat open fire on NGO rescue vessels', 9 July.

Jeune Afrique, 2024. 'En 2023, plus de 1 300 migrants partis de Tunisie ont péri en mer', 13 February.

Kington, Tom, 2024. 'Sudan war fuelling new migrant crisis says Giorgia Meloni'. The Times, 16 February.

Le Cam, Morgane and Bobin, Frédéric, 2023. 'Le Niger défie l'Europe sur la question migratoire', Le Monde. 28 November.

Le Monde, 2024a. 'Il faut protéger sans exception tous les demandeurs d'asile soudanais', 3 April
— 2024b. 'Dans l'impasse en Tunisie, de plus en plus de migrants rapatriés dans leur pays d'origine', 27 June.

Lewis, Aidan, 2022. 'EU funds border control deal in Egypt with migration via Libya on rise', Reuters. 31 October.

Libya Review, 2022. 'EU Funds Egypt-Libya Border Control Project', 1 November.

Libya Update, 2023. 'New migration route from Libya to Italian Calabrian coast', 29 March.

Middle East Monitor, 2025. '"Biggest humanitarian catastrophe": UN refugee chief warns of worsening Sudan crisis'. 14 February.

Mixed Migration Centre, 2024. 'Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: North Africa', Quarter 1 2024 — 2025. 'Beyond restrictions: how migration and smuggling adapt to changing policies across the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the English Channel', March.

Monroy, Matthias, 2023. 'Fewer boat crossings, visit to Frontex: EU and Tunisia implement migration pact', 1 November.

MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières), 2022. 'Out of Libya: Opening safe pathways for migrants stuck in Libya', 20 June — 2024. 'Death, despair and destitution: The human costs of the EU's migration policies', 20 February
— 2025. 'Deadly manoeuvres: obstruction and violence in the Central Mediterranean', March.

Neidhardt, Alberto-Horst, 2024. 'The Crisis and Force Majeure Regulation: Towards future-proof crisis management and responses?', Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 13 June.

Nedos, Vassilis, 2025. 'Deeper engagement with eastern Libya', Ekathimerini, 23 July.

Nielsen, Nikolaj, 2023. 'EU hands Libya coast guard boats ahead of migration summit'. EUobserver, 6 February
— 2024. 'MEPs blast EU commission over Tunisia migrant deal', EUobserver. 5 November. — 2025. 'Shadow cast over EU commission's 'do-no-harm' principle in Libya', EUobserver. 20 January.

Nova news, 2023. 'Italy delivers the first patrol boat to Libya to fight against the smuggling of migrants', 6 February.

OHCHR (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), 2022. 'Nowhere but back: Assisted return, reintegration and the human rights protection of migrants in Libya', 11 October
— 2023. 'Italy: Proposed new sea rescue law puts more lives at risk – Türk', 16 February.

OMCT (World Organization Against Torture), 2023. 'Torture Roads: Mapping of violations suffered by people on the move in Tunisia', 18 December
— 2024. 'Torture Roads vol. 3: The shrinking of civic space and its impact on people on the move in Tunisia', May-October 2024.

OMCT et al., 2023. 'Libya: Rising concerns regarding UNHCR response and refugee well-being in wake of recent mass arrest in Tripoli'.

Peltier, Elian, 2024. 'Remote African Hub Reopens for Migrants Headed Toward Europe', New York Times, 23 January.

Penney, Joe, 2018. 'Niger Migration Crisis', New York Times, 25 August.

Pronczuk, Monika, 2023. 'EU – Tunisia migrant deal', New York Times, 17 July.

Refugees International, 2023. 'Abuse, Corruption, and Accountability: Time to Reassess EU & U.S. Migration Cooperation with Tunisia', 16 November.

Reuters, 2023. 'US extends temporary protected status for Ukraine, Sudan nationals', 18 August.

RFI (Radio France Internationale), 2023. 'Niger: l'UE s'inquiète des conséquences de l'abrogation de la loi sur le trafic de migrants', 28 November.

Rodier, Claire, 2008. 'Externalisation du contrôle des flux migratoires : comment et avec qui l'Europe repousse ses frontières', Migrations Société, No 116.

Ross, Tim et al., 2025. 'The great Benghazi blunder: How a Libyan warlord humiliated Brussels', Politico, 12 July.

Schwarz, Anna, 2024. 'Migration agreement with Egypt: EU backing the wrong horse', Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 22 March.

Souliotis, Yiannis, 2025. 'Libyan coast guard officers complete training on Crete', Ekathimerini, 20 August.

Sparks, Riley, 2023. 'Is the EU doubling down on a deadly, failed migration strategy?', The New Humanitarian, 19 October.

Speakman Cordall, Simon, 2023a. 'Analysis: Concerns raised in Brussels over EU-Tunisia migration pact'. Al Jazeera, 16 September
— 2023b. 'In a Tunisian town, Sudanese refugees wait in fear for UN protection'. Al Jazeera,8 November
— 2023c. 'Near Sfax, refugees scramble after violent clashes with Tunisia police'. Al Jazeera, 3 December.

State trafficking, 2024. 'State trafficking: Expulsions and sale of migrants from Tunisia to Libya', December.

Statewatch, 2024a. '"Action file" on Tunisia outlines EU's externalisation plans', 15 March
— 2024b. 'Parliamentary lawyers: democratic oversight needed for EU-Tunisia migration agreement', 15 March
— 2024c. 'Joint Statement: Egyptian authorities must end arbitrary detentions and forced deportations of Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers', 27 March.

Tsourdi, Evangelia, 2024. 'The new Screening and Border Procedures: Towards a seamless migration process?', Foundation for European Progressive studies, 04 June.

Tubiana, Jérôme, 2017. 'Europe's "Migrant Hunters", Letter From Agadez', Foreign Affairs, 31 August
— 2024a. 'Europe Is Making Sudan's Refugee Crisis Worse', Foreign Policy, 8 January
— 2024b. 'Refugee chronicles: The long and lonely road from Sudan to France', 22 September.

Tubiana, Jérôme, Warin, Clotilde, and Saeneen, Gaffar Mohammud, 2018. 'Multilateral Damage: The impact of EU migration policies on central Saharan routes', Clingendael, September.

UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency), 2024. 'Flash Update: Emergency Transit Mechanism', February
— 2025. 'Libya Operational Update', 30 June.

UNHCR et al., 2017. 'Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges'.

UNSC (United Nations Security Council), 2024. 'Implementation of Security Council resolution 2698 (2023), Report of the Secretary-General' S/2024/642, 30 August.

Van Brunnersum, Sou-Jie, 2024. 'Egypt enacts first asylum law sparking concerns over migrant rights', Infomigrants, 20 December.

Van Moorsel, Jim and Bonfiglio, Ayla, 2023. 'Mixed migration consequences of Sudan's conflict – Round 2'. Mixed Migration Centre, 22 June.

Vasques, Eleonora, 2023. 'EU delivers new patrol boats to Libya despite militia links', Euractiv, 23 June.

Von der Leyen, Ursula, 2023. Letter dated 25 June 2023.
—, 2024. Letter dated 14 October 2024.


MEDECINS
SANS FRONTIERES