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Implications and Risks of Irregular Migration for Security, Stability, and Development in Libya

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Abstract

This article examines the implications of irregular migration for security, societal stability, and development in Libya, with particular attention to the country's position as a country of origin, transit, and destination along Mediterranean migration routes. The analysis draws on a qualitative documentary review of historical scholarship, Libyan legal literature, institutional reports, and international policy materials, with particular emphasis on developments following the political and security crisis of 2011. It considers the economic, social, demographic, health, and governance dimensions of migration; the risks created by migrant-smuggling and trafficking networks; and the consequences of fragmented border administration and prolonged institutional instability. The discussion distinguishes irregular migration from migrant smuggling and human trafficking, recognizing the legal obligations associated with refugee protection and the rights of migrants. It also examines Libyan legis-

lation, regional cooperation with European and African states, and United Nations recommendations regarding arbitrary detention, return procedures, and access to protection. The review indicates that border enforcement alone cannot adequately address the interdependent pressures of conflict, economic inequality, labor mobility, institutional fragmentation, and organized criminal exploitation. It argues for coordinated approaches combining accountable border management, access to lawful migration and asylum procedures, protection against exploitation, economic development, and international cooperation. Because the study is documentary rather than an original empirical investigation, its findings are interpretive and depend on the scope, historical context, and reliability of the sources consulted.

Keywords: irregular migration; Libya; migration governance; border security; human rights; migrant smuggling; development; Mediterranean migration

1. INTRODUCTION

Human mobility has been a feature of social life since the earliest periods of human history. Migration has shaped the formation of communities by bringing cultures and societies into contact, facilitating exchanges of knowledge, labor, practices, and traditions, and contributing to the diversity of cultural heritage over time.

Migration has diverse causes but often overlapping motivations, whether movements are long-distance or short-distance and whether journeys occur individually or collectively. Some people move permanently, while others migrate temporarily, circulate between locations, or seek protection before making decisions about settlement. Economic opportunities, family and social networks, political pressures, insecurity, and geographical or environmental conditions are recurrent influences on these movements.

Explanations of irregular migration differ across disciplinary and policy perspectives. It is necessary, however, to distinguish the movement of people outside regular administrative procedures from the criminal activities of networks engaged in migrant smuggling or human trafficking. In Libya, migration governance has become more difficult because of developments in transportation and communication, fragmentation of security institutions, the limited reach of border authorities, and economic and political instability, especially since 2011 [1].

Accordingly, this article examines the causes and motivations underlying migration through Libya toward Europe and considers the associated challenges for security policy, human protection, governance, and development. The discussion seeks to clarify what existing documentary evidence can establish and to identify practical, lawful, and cooperative approaches to managing these challenges.

Migration remains a longstanding feature of human societies and takes place for many different reasons. Freedom of movement, including the right to leave any country, is recognized in international human rights law, while states regulate entry, residence, and administrative procedures subject to their international obligations. Movement described as irregular generally occurs outside the applicable regulatory framework; it does not, by itself, establish that an individual has participated in migrant smuggling or trafficking. Domestic legal approaches differ, and the relevant distinction between regular and irregular migration must also be considered alongside protection obligations toward refugees, asylum seekers, and trafficking survivors [2, p.2] [1].

North African states, and Libya in particular, have given considerable attention to irregular migration because the region connects multiple countries of origin with transit corridors toward Europe, while Libya itself has also been a country of employment, settlement, and departure for migrants [3, p.100].

Migration is an old geographical phenomenon that appeared with the existence of man. This phenomenon occurs within a geographical space according to economic, social, and political frameworks. It is one of the vital features of human societies due to the effects it leaves on urban, social, economic, and demographic transformations in sending and receiving countries [4].

Opinions and ideas about the causes of irregular migration have varied, as a result of the multiplicity of motives driving it. Economists view it from a purely economic perspective, sociologists focus on the social dimension, while political scientists have their political opinions, and geographers focus on harsh environmental conditions such as heat, drought, desertification, natural disasters, floods, volcanoes, and earthquakes [5, pp.109–110].

The relationship between migration and economic development is complex, reflecting structural change, labor-market opportunities, institutional conditions, and the sustainability of development policies. The direction and scale of these relationships vary according to local circumstances, the availability of resources, and the outcomes being evaluated. Migrants play an increasing role in mobilizing human, social, and financial resources to enhance development in their countries of origin.

These countries have strengthened their relations with their nationals abroad in several ways, including: (enhancing their political participation – encouraging their contribution to trade and investment – providing legal assistance and training – harnessing migrants' capabilities in the field of entrepreneurship). Through economic analysis of migration and its policy, three facts emerge: first, migration usually corresponds with the larger economy; second, migrants are the main beneficiaries of economic migration; third, host countries spend part of tax revenues to control migration [6].

2. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This article employs a qualitative, descriptive documentary approach to investigate irregular migration and its implications for Libya. The analysis draws on the historical and legal studies cited throughout the text, reports from the United Nations and international migration institutions, and published accounts of migration routes and cooperation arrangements. Rather than collecting interviews, conducting a survey, or generating a new statistical dataset, it compares and interprets existing documentary evidence relating to migration drivers, security concerns, social and economic consequences, legal regulation, institutional capacity, and protection obligations. Historical events, estimates, and reported allegations are identified with their original time periods whenever those details can be established.

The documentary sources cover different periods and use different definitions of migrants, refugees, irregular migration, and migrant smuggling. Consequently, numerical estimates from separate years should not be treated as interchangeable or as measurements of the same population. Similarly, accounts published by governments, humanitarian organizations, and news media may reflect different observational methods, mandates, and perspectives. The analysis therefore distinguishes independently documented institutional findings from attributed opinions and reported claims. Its conclusions are interpretive rather than causal; they do not establish that migration itself produces specific crime rates, unemployment levels, or public-health outcomes without appropriate comparative evidence.

3. IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION FOR THE STATE AND SOCIETY

Although cross-border mobility is a long-established social phenomenon, irregular routes may expose people to dangerous journeys, exploitative intermediaries, and inconsistent administrative practices. The associated policy challenges have international dimensions because origin, transit, and destination countries face differing responsibilities, including border administration, protection of vulnerable people, and investigations of organized criminal networks. Irregular migration itself should not be conflated with organized crime; the consequences discussed below concern conditions surrounding particular migration routes, institutions, and forms of exploitation rather than an intrinsic characteristic of migrants:

First: Security dimension. Smuggling routes may be exploited by organized criminal networks that extort payments, subject migrants to violence or forced labor, or engage in other illicit activities. Such conduct should be attributed to perpetrators and networks rather than assumed to characterize migrants as a group [7, p.39] [1].

Second: Economic dimension. Governments may incur costs for registration, emergency healthcare, shelter, legal procedures, and enforcement, while migrants may contribute labor, consumption, skills, and economic activity. The net effect on wages, employment, or public budgets cannot be assumed without comparative economic evidence. Informal employment and illicit financial transfers also require analysis of employers and criminal intermediaries, not only migrant status.

Third: Health dimension. People traveling along dangerous routes may encounter injuries, interrupted treatment, inadequate sanitation, overcrowding, and limited access to health insurance or essential healthcare. Public-health planning should address these structural vulnerabilities through preventive services, screening where clinically indicated, and equitable access to care, rather than attributing disease transmission to migration status [7, p.41].

Fourth: Social dimension. Dangerous sea crossings have resulted in loss of life, family separation, displacement, and barriers to social integration. In arrival communities, the social and institutional implications may include the following challenges, which vary among places and should be evaluated rather than presumed:

- Pressure on housing, sanitation, and public services where local infrastructure is inadequate, alongside heightened risks of exploitation and unsafe living conditions.
- Negotiation of cultural identity, language barriers, and challenges associated with inclusion, belonging, and social cohesion.
- Entrenchment of inferior values, manual labor among the citizens of the receiving country.
- Family separation, prolonged uncertainty, and psychological stress, particularly for people exposed to violence or detention [7, pp.41–42].

4. WHY IRREGULAR MIGRATION ROUTES TO EUROPE PASS THROUGH LIBYA

Libya's extensive Mediterranean coastline and land borders with Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria, and Tunisia make it a geographically significant location in regional migration systems. Its relative proximity to southern Europe, established trans-Saharan movement routes, historical labor-market connections, and coastal departure points have made it both a destination for work and a transit country for journeys toward Europe. People traveling through Libya come from diverse African, Middle Eastern, and other backgrounds, and their motivations cannot be reduced to a single aspiration or route. While irregular migration has become a major concern for the international community and for Europe, migrants remain vulnerable to becoming victims of it in most stages of their migration [8].

Libya is considered an attraction area for migrants from neighboring African countries and others, due to the lack of enforcement of Libyan deterrent laws against migrants in irregular situations, and the difficulty of monitoring its land and sea borders. For a dated comparison, the International Organization for Migration identified at least 654,081 migrants from 40 countries of origin during October–December 2019. This estimate described migrants identified in Libya, not a verified count of people lacking legal residence status, and it should not be represented as 30% of the total Libyan population [9].

Libya's lengthy land frontiers and Mediterranean coast complicate border monitoring, particularly where state institutions exercise limited control. Earlier studies describe different border sectors and their approximate lengths; these figures depend on the method of measurement and should be confirmed against official geographical references before use in quantitative comparisons. Finally, the deterioration of economic and security conditions, especially after the Arab Spring events in Libya, which led to the security collapse and lack of border control with neighboring Arab and African countries, all contributed to choosing Libya as a transit country from Africa to Europe, and to the flourishing of irregular migration in and through it [10, pp.3–4].

5. AMONG THE REASONS FOR MIGRANTS CHOOSING LIBYA AS A TRANSIT COUNTRY TO EUROPE

One reason why some people pass through Libya en route to Europe is the disparity in employment prospects, income, safety, and access to essential services between places of origin and prospective destinations. These perceived differences interact with insecurity, family responsibilities, social connections, and information about possible migration pathways. There are also some elements who benefit materially, such as influential figures and smugglers of displaced persons and newcomers, in exchange for money or by forming a pressure force on some European countries or through political bargaining with them [11, p.81].

Legal and political approaches to irregular migration have often differed. Some emphasize humanitarian protection and the vulnerabilities of people in transit; others concentrate on border enforcement, regulatory compliance, and criminal penalties for particular conduct. These approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but their implementation should distinguish administrative immigration status from criminal exploitation by smugglers or traffickers. National laws may penalize particular forms of unauthorized entry or residence, while international law also establishes obligations concerning asylum, non-refoulement, due process, and fundamental human rights. Libyan legislation has criminalized specified forms of unauthorized entry and stay, an approach that raises questions about proportionality, individual protection needs, and safeguards against arbitrary detention [2, p.4].

It must be noted here that irregular migration to Europe was not only linked to the state of instability in Libya. Even during the days of the former Libyan regime, migrant smuggling gangs were active on the western Libyan coast without the coast guard or local police being able to limit them. Historical reports have described deadly boat incidents and substantial maritime arrivals during the period preceding 2011. However, the precise casualty and arrival totals quoted in some secondary accounts require confirmation against contemporaneous maritime and official records before they are presented as verified statistics. During the upheaval associated with the February 2011 uprising, the former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi exploited the migration file to threaten Europe with the danger that would come if his regime fell, through his speeches, including his statement to a French newspaper: *"Thousands of people will invade Europe from Libya, and no one will be able to stop them."* [8].

Governments assess irregular migration through different political and institutional perspectives, including humanitarian protection, labor mobility, national security, development cooperation, and relations with neighboring states. It may be a tool of political pressure on the destination country or a means of politically exposing it before the international community. In this regard, Libya has made great and intensive efforts to limit this phenomenon and has repeatedly warned that irregular migration is a global phenomenon not limited to Africa alone. Accordingly, African countries must first resolve their political disputes and tribal conflicts, put an end to their civil wars, and promote social peace throughout the African continent [11, p.68].

6. CHALLENGES AND REPERCUSSIONS ASSOCIATED WITH IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Irregular migration has negative impacts and repercussions on several aspects in most transit and receiving countries, and Libya is one of these countries. Among these impacts we mention:

1. **Security implications:** Weak border administration and the presence of armed groups can facilitate migrant smuggling, trafficking, extortion, document fraud, and other organized criminal activity. The original literature discusses these security concerns, but its general claims about migrants' propensity to commit crime cannot be established without comparative evidence. Security measures should prioritize perpetrators, organized networks, and protection of those exposed to coercion [12, p.72] [2, p.7].
2. **Health implications:** Long journeys, detention, poverty, and restricted access to preventive or emergency care can create health risks for migrants and surrounding communities. These conditions may make the timely identification and treatment of communicable and noncommunicable diseases more difficult. Migration status itself is not evidence of disease or transmission risk; interventions should prioritize access to appropriate healthcare and adequate living conditions [12, p.72].

3. **Economic implications:** The management of migration involves administrative, shelter, healthcare, and border-management expenditure, while migrant labor can also support production, trade, and household income. Impacts on unemployment, wages, and development expenditure vary according to labor-market institutions, the legal status of employment, and state capacity; the documentary evidence reviewed here does not provide an estimate of the net economic effect.
4. **Social implications:** The challenges include shortages of accommodation and essential services, disruption of family relationships, discrimination, barriers to cultural integration, and the risk of exploitation. These outcomes depend on reception conditions and public policy and should not be generalized to all migrants or receiving communities [2, pp.7–8].

7. ADDITIONAL DRIVERS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Especially among Arab, African, and Asian youth, we mention:

- Lack of sufficient job opportunities for youth, lack of encouragement for production, and high unemployment and poverty.
- Emergence of cases of rapid economic prosperity among many families when one of their members migrates, followed by fascination with individual life and freedoms that meet youth aspirations.
- Political pressures, military conflicts, and economic hardships on youth, especially in Arab and African countries.
- Fascination with European life and its attractions for youth, such as freedoms, cultural diversity, respect for laws and their application, consideration of human rights, and freedom of expression.
- Brain drain is considered one of the most dangerous types of migration, due to the lack of opportunities in their homelands that match their scientific levels, as well as the weak financial returns of their specializations.
- Environmental factors, weather conditions, geographical landscapes, and the application of laws to everyone, which are matters not available in some of their homelands [13, p.324].

8. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION

From a demographic perspective, movement across borders may alter age structures, gender distributions, household composition, and patterns of residence in sending and receiving communities. Migration can alter the population distribution and age and sex composition of origin and destination societies. Its effects on fertility and demographic growth are context-dependent; no uniform increase or decrease should be inferred without age-specific migration and population data [14, p.279].

Migration can affect social relationships in both positive and difficult ways, depending on family circumstances, the legal environment, and the availability of opportunities for integration. Migration may complicate the maintenance of social ties, particularly where separation is prolonged or communication is difficult. Nevertheless, migrants may also sustain family relationships through remittances, visits, digital contact, and transnational networks. Whether mobility weakens or strengthens social cohesion depends on household resources, legal status, available technology, and conditions in the place of residence. Employment demands, displacement, and limited communication resources can make maintaining family contact difficult, although transnational connections and remittances may also sustain relationships over time. Migrants may experience tension between their continuing ties to communities of origin and new expectations or roles within a receiving society. In addition, migrants may face discrimination, language barriers, religious exclusion, and political marginalization, all of which may contribute to isolation, social strain, and psychological distress [14, p.280].

Social and cultural integration in a new country or region is a complex and context-sensitive process that depends on language, institutions, social networks, reception conditions, and individual circumstances. The migrant lives a cultural, social, and psychological conflict. He arrives carrying cultural and social accumulations from his original culture with anxiety, and after arrival he acquires social and cultural experiences, practices, and values of the new society through his attempt to open up to the host country. This is in order to adapt and feel belonging to a new human group with which he interacts. Life circumstances in the host country compel him to be fully prepared for understanding, acceptance, and building social relations for integration into the new society [15].

Libya's location on the central Mediterranean constitutes an important geographical factor shaping regional migration routes, including connections to Italy and other European destinations. Geography, however, operates together with conditions in countries of origin, migration networks, law enforcement, and changing state institutions. In addition to breakdown of security governance, all this contributed to the growth and encouragement of migrants in irregular situations

to cross into Libya, whose borders became an uncontrolled vital passage, and then move to Europe, along with the absence of Libyan authority and the lack of application of local, regional, and international laws and regulations [11, p.33].

Irregular migration routes, particularly where associated with violence and institutional fragmentation, have created security, health, social, cultural, and economic challenges for the Libyan state, which has been suffering under difficult conditions since the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011. These overlapping pressures underscore the need for cooperation among Libyan authorities, neighboring states, international organizations, and civil society. Humanitarian responses, lawful mobility channels, and security cooperation should be designed to address the safety and rights of affected people alongside Libya's governance challenges [10, p.51].

It must be noted here that international intervention in Libya began under the pretext of the worsening humanitarian situation and violations against civilian demonstrators and opponents of the regime on February 15, 2011. The United Nations Security Council responded to the crisis through Resolution 1970 (2011), imposing sanctions and referring the situation to the International Criminal Court. Resolution 1973 (2011) subsequently authorized measures for civilian protection and a no-fly zone [16, 17]. The subsequent fragmentation of institutions and armed conflict contributed to insecurity, weakened border governance, and created conditions in which different armed groups and criminal networks could operate, with consequences for migration through the country [18, pp.774–775].

Chaos on the Libyan borders has led to illegal activities such as human trafficking, drug smuggling from West Africa, and smuggling of persons and goods to Europe, violating all migration laws. Libyan borders became uncontrolled, which reinforced the movement of people arriving from Niger, West Africa, Chad, Sudan, and East Africa, making Libya a stage for migrants in irregular situations to move to European countries [10, p.59].

Human trafficking and migrant smuggling are two separate crimes, although they overlap, and both often involve recruiting, transporting, and delivering migrants from a host country to a destination country. The distinction does not rest solely on consent, which may be legally irrelevant where trafficking involves prohibited means such as coercion, deception, or abuse of vulnerability. Under the international organized-crime framework, migrant smuggling generally involves facilitating unauthorized cross-border entry for financial or material benefit, whereas trafficking in persons involves acts and means undertaken for exploitation; trafficking may occur without crossing a border. Claims ranking these activities among the “largest global crime sectors” require a defined metric and independently verified evidence [1]. Migrant smuggling spread in Libya after 2011, while available studies describe changes in the intensity and geography of these networks over time. Any assertion that smuggling declined sharply from July 2017 or remained higher than in neighboring countries must be assessed against route-specific and dated monitoring evidence. Migrant smuggling is closely linked to militia groups that prevent peaceful political transition and state consolidation, using profits from this trade to finance regional control and purchase weapons. All this affects government, security, and economy in many parts of the country [19, p.11].

Interpretive caution concerning historical reports. The following itinerary and cost descriptions are drawn from media accounts published in 2014 and other earlier sources. Their figures, reported quotations, accounts of official conduct, and depictions of border practices are retained as historical source claims, not as independently confirmed or current conditions. They are included to illustrate how a contemporary source represented the dangers, intermediaries, and economic pressures involved in particular journeys. These descriptions do not constitute verified travel guidance and should not be generalized to all routes, migrants, or later periods.

9. METHODS AND COSTS OF SMUGGLING FROM AND THROUGH LIBYA TO EUROPE

One of the common routes of irregular migration to Europe (the Algeria–Libya route), which many migrants including Syrians adopt, is the route that starts from Damascus, passing through Beirut Airport, then Algeria, to Libya, then Italy, ending in one of the European countries where asylum is sought. *Economy*, one of the media networks, followed and published in the Algerian newspaper *Zaman Al-Wasl* with a well-informed source (a Syrian who preferred not to mention his name), the stages and costs of irregular migration from Damascus through Beirut, then Algeria, then Libya, and to Europe, saying:

"The beginning of the journey is by booking on Algerian Airlines, arranging a (fake) hotel reservation in Algeria for (15) days, from one of the travel offices working in this field in Damascus. Algeria requires Syrians wishing to enter it to carry a hotel reservation there, along with carrying an amount of (4000) US dollars in addition to a round-trip ticket to Algeria (600) dollars and daily accommodation in Algeria (75) dollars. The migrant pays (50) dollars for transportation from Algiers to the area of (Wadi Souf) east of Algeria, and from there they move by cars to the border area with Libya, spending a night in (Nous) Hotel at a cost of (90) dollars. From there they cross the land border with Libya at night on foot, at a cost of (300) dollars per person." [20].

Then the second stage of migration begins, and the source continues: *"Then begins the stage of moving by land from the crossing point near the Libyan–Algerian border to the area of (Zuwara) near the Mediterranean coast, costing about*

(400) dollars per person. Then in Zuwara, boat trips crowded with migrants start at a cost ranging between (800–1200) dollars per person. The boats move with migrants to a certain sea point awaiting the Italian warship responsible for rescue operations. . . This stage is the most dangerous of the journey. . . as boat capsizing or sinking cases are frequent, and no ship can pick up migrants except in rare rescue cases, otherwise it is accused of participating in smuggling operations and fined. Any ship participating in transporting migrants must obtain permits from the Red Cross and wait for the coast guard. . . Once the designated Italian warship rescues them and transfers them to the Italian coasts, they are placed in a refugee camp where the opportunity to escape is deliberately available from the Italian authorities to avoid having to fingerprint them, and thus granting them asylum in Italy. Finally, migrants escape from the camp, with collusion from the Italian authorities, and their possible train journeys from Italy through several European countries to Sweden or the Netherlands cost between (300–600) dollars, and they may agree with one of the smugglers present in Italy to help them in this task at a cost of up to (600) dollars per person." [20].

In the same context, we review the most important migration routes through the Libyan desert. While many focus on the dangers of migration at sea, little is said about the dangers on land, especially in Libya. In the far south of Libya, away from the eyes of the media and human rights organizations, irregular migration and smuggling gangs are active, exploiting the length of the southern borders and the near absence of the state from the crossings. Among the most famous of these crossings is Al-Awainat crossing on the Sudanese border near Kufra in the southeast, where about (1000) migrants and refugees enter daily. Smuggling gangs receive them and transport them for a financial amount reaching (3000) dollars per person through a long and exhausting desert route of about (1200) kilometers, by four-wheel drive cars taking rugged roads starting from Kufra to Ajdabiya through the Great Man-Made River, then transferred to the city of Marada, reaching Bani Walid, until reaching coastal Sabratha, which is (150) kilometers away from the capital. Sabratha and Zuwara are among the most active cities in smuggling migrants through Mediterranean coasts to Italy. It is also noted that there are other crossings in the south, including Jabal Malik crossing between Egypt, Libya, and Sudan, which receives daily (600) migrants and refugees according to statistics of the irregular migration Control Agency, Kufra branch. There are also two crossings, Sara and Ouzo, on the border with Chad, and a fourth crossing in the southwest of Libya adjacent to the Niger border [8].

10. STAGES OF MIGRATION AND ITS PROBLEMS

First Problem: Linked to the urgent need of European countries for labor coming from the south, meaning labor from African countries. European countries themselves controlled the flow of migrants from the south through family reunification channels or through illegal offices.

Second Problem: migrants in irregular situations competing with native citizens for all services. This problem highlighted sufficiency and the lack of need for a surplus of migrants in irregular situations [10, pp.23–24].

Third Problem: Concerns about the organization and security of cross-border movement affecting European countries, which prompted European and wealthy countries to take strict security measures through implementing the provisions of the *changes in immigration and asylum policies*, which is based on adopting strict measures regarding family reunification and concluding agreements on deporting migrants.

Fourth Problem: The emergence of forced migration due to armed conflicts. irregular migration has constituted an economic burden on developed countries, as it was initially economic migration by migrants seeking what is known as the *European paradise*. But current migrations are migrations that take the form of forced displacement.

Fifth Problem: The growth of trafficking and smuggling networks poses serious humanitarian, legal, and security challenges. Assertions about their profitability relative to other crimes require robust comparable data and should not be treated as established facts. It constitutes a dilemma for Europe and requires solutions in the field of humanity [10, pp.24–25].

11. STAGES OF MIGRATION

It is necessary to clarify the order of these stages by migrants and their overlap with the social and psychological situation. They are as follows:

1. Stage of Decision-Making for Migration: Making the decision is not easy for the migrant. This stage is accompanied by feelings of fear of the future, hesitation, despair of the current situation, frustration, and loss of hope. Migration becomes the only way to survive and the possible option.
2. Stage of Setting Migration Mechanisms: After making the decision, the stage of setting mechanisms and plans to leave the homeland and reach the target or host country begins. Here, the ways of reaching the target may be legal or illegal. The individual may suffer at this stage from migration phobia, which is the fear of making the migration decision or regret.

3. Stage of Integration in the Host Country: Upon arrival in the new country, the migrant lives a cultural, social, and psychological conflict, carrying accumulations of his original culture, and tries to open up to the culture of the host country, adapt, integrate, and belong to a new human group with which he interacts [15].

12. LIBYA'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING IRREGULAR MIGRATION

The Libyan state worked to limit the phenomenon of irregular migration through the implementation of a set of practical and ambitious programs in coordination and cooperation with Arab, African, and international countries. Libya's efforts did not stop there, but it also demanded that European countries contribute to helping African countries in order to limit, eliminate, or mitigate the phenomenon of irregular migration [11, p.86].

Historical accounts indicate that Libya, between the 1970s and the 1990s, encouraged migration from other Arab countries and from Africa in general, in order to help meet local labor needs. However, Libya became a major transit country for people seeking to reach Europe during the 2000s, and adopted increasingly restrictive immigration measures in parts of its regulatory system. This came partly in response to pressure from European countries. Visa requirements were introduced for many nationalities, with exemptions described for some Maghreb nationals in the historical policy discussion, along with detention and deportation policies for migrants in irregular situations [21, p.5].

The governance of irregular migration has moved to the forefront of regional and international concerns due to its negative consequences. This has pushed countries to cooperate regionally and substantially to limit irregular migration, similar to the European Union countries, Mediterranean countries, and Maghreb countries. Many regional agreements were concluded, including Euro-Maghreb agreements, out of fear and concern for anything that affects and threatens their stability [7, pp.42–43].

Since 1990, the European Union has called for exerting all efforts to address all issues raised by irregular migration in the Mediterranean basin, highlighting the role of the difference in living standards in fueling this phenomenon. Arab, regional, and international efforts intensified in bilateral and collective cooperation through agreements and partnerships, among which we mention the following:

- **Schengen Agreement (1985):** The agreement, initially signed by five states in Luxembourg, contributed to the progressive removal of internal border controls among participating countries. It was later incorporated into European Union law through the Treaty of Amsterdam, signed in 1997 and effective from 1999. The membership and institutional arrangements developed gradually, and the Schengen system should not be equated with all EU migration or asylum policies.
- **5+5 Dialogue and European Neighbourhood Policy:** The 5+5 Dialogue emerged in 1990 as a forum for cooperation among countries of the Western Mediterranean. Separately, the European Commission proposed a wider neighbourhood framework in 2003, and the European Neighbourhood Policy was launched in 2004. These initiatives addressed different sets of political, economic, security, and migration-related cooperation objectives.
- **Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process, 1995):** The Barcelona Declaration established a framework for dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and Mediterranean partners in political, economic, social, and cultural fields. Although migration and mobility formed part of the evolving policy dialogue, this partnership must be distinguished from Frontex. Frontex was established by EU regulation in 2004 and became operational in 2005; it was neither formed in 1995 nor dissolved in 2012 [7, pp.43–47] [22].
- **Rabat Agreement/Declaration (2006):** (60) European and African countries participated in this declaration. Its goal was to address the problem of irregular migration comprehensively and in a balanced manner consistent with humanitarian principles, represented in respecting human rights, the dignity of migrants, and providing them with protection [10, p.42].
- **European border-management cooperation:** Discussions about managing external borders preceded the formal establishment of Frontex in 2004. The agency later coordinated aspects of operational cooperation among participating European states [22]. Negotiations were held to establish centers for deported migrants outside Europe, with Libya being the first host outside Europe.
- **Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue Agreement:** An agreement signed between Italy and Libya in 2000, revolving around the issue of illegal migration. Between 2003–2004, the partnership included an agreement to prepare and train Libyan police officers and border guards [10, pp.47–49].
- **EU Cooperation with the Maghreb:** In 2005, the European Commission listed foreign policy priorities of the EU regarding migration, asylum, and border management, including:

1. Improving the capacity of third world countries in migration management and refugee protection.
2. Supporting their operational capacity in border management.
3. Greater security for official documents.
4. Reducing the risk of irregular migration.
5. Enhancing synergy between migration and development.
6. Providing refugees with better opportunities for permanent solutions.
7. Ensuring the return of migrants in irregular situations.

The European Union pursued these objectives through regional frameworks and bilateral cooperation with North African partners, including the Barcelona Process and European Neighbourhood Policy, although the legal status and policy commitments of individual partners differed. However, the EU also relies on other specific tools (financial mechanisms, field cooperation in operations, and bilateral agreements on re-entry) [23, p.52].

Although Libya is not a participating party in the Barcelona Agreement or Process, it has participated in many regional meetings within this framework and now enjoys observer status. Since November 2008, the European Commission has been negotiating with Libya regarding an emergency agreement with content largely similar to partnership agreements (enhancing economic cooperation and political dialogue). Several negotiation meetings have already been held, with the European Union eager to reach quick results. Migration should be one of the elements of this agreement, and it should stipulate the inclusion of a clause on readmission, as is the case in the partnership agreement with Algeria. The agreement should also stipulate updating migration management capacities and border monitoring, as well as reforming the legislative framework of this country in this field. However, it seems that Libya wanted to negotiate financial assistance as a condition, regularly raising the issue of large payments before signing any agreement that included migration issues. Libya repeatedly refused to ratify any instruments for the protection of refugees and migrants, and according to the 2010 historical account, those negotiations did not result in an agreement at that time [23, p.54].

Libya also hosted regional and international meetings about migration and development, reflecting efforts to combine diplomatic coordination, labor-market concerns, and discussion of border governance. The activities described in the historical literature include:

1. Hosting a conference in Tripoli on migration and development between African and European representatives in 2006; the exact meeting date requires confirmation in the original conference record.
2. Hosting the seventh ministerial meeting on migration for the 5+5 Dialogue countries, held in Tripoli on December 13, 2010.

Libya contributed effectively to addressing the causes of the phenomenon of irregular migration through the establishment of a package of important economic mechanisms, most notably:

1. Establishing the *Libya–Africa Investment Portfolio* with a cash capital of (5.5) billion dollars.
2. Establishing the *Libya Fund for Aid and Development*, allocated (300) million dollars within the state budget for the years 2008–2009.
3. Establishing the *Fund for Encouraging Investment in Africa*, allocated (250) million dollars.
4. Implementing projects to replace traditional agriculture with mechanized agriculture in rural areas in (32) African countries.
5. Implementing investment projects in various economic fields in (Sudan, Benin, Mali, and Uganda).
6. Contributing to combating transboundary animal diseases, agricultural pests, locusts, and rodents.
7. Projects for transferring technology to the agricultural sector in cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program to deliver relief aid to Chad and Sudan [11, pp.86–88].

With the increase of irregular migration from Libya to Italy, rulings were issued to combat irregular migration within bilateral agreements signed between the two countries in 2007–2008, for the purpose of intercepting migrants in international waters and returning them to Libya (known as cases of return). On 23 February 2012, the European Court of Human Rights, in *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy*, found violations arising from Italy's return of intercepted migrants from international waters to Libya, thereby exposing migrants from Somalia and Eritrea to the risk of ill-treatment in

Libya. Thus, Italy was found to have violated the European Convention on Human Rights, in particular the principle of non-refoulement and the prohibition of collective expulsion of migrants [21, p.5] [24].

The newspaper *Al-Ghad* published an article entitled “Libya, a Launching Point for Desperate Migrants”, describing the condition of migrants, their suffering, and their belonging to several Sub-Saharan African countries torn by wars, who hope to reach European shores. In the detention center on Al-Sikka Road in central Tripoli, hundreds of men sit in a parking lot under the midday sun on May 24, 2015. One migrant named *Koshin* from Somalia said: “*We have been here for hours, we beg you to help us, you must see where we sleep, we sleep standing, then we are left to sit under the sun all day.*” Others reported tragic cases in detention centers regarding water, food, exploitation, as well as the spread of diseases, poverty, and more [25].

According to reports and statistics of the International Organization for Migration, (168,542) migrants arrived in Italy from North Africa during the period between January 1 and November 22, 2016, most of them from Libya, compared to (144,205) migrants during the same period in 2015. Furthermore, (4,164) migrants in 2016 who traveled through Libya died at sea along the central Mediterranean route [21, p.6].

Federico Soda, head of the International Organization for Migration mission in Libya, said in a statement to *Migrant News Network* about migration through Libya: “*The eastern route began to flourish since the beginning of last summer, and the majority of migrants there are Egyptians and Bangladeshis who seek to sail quickly after arriving in the country instead of heading west, in an attempt to avoid any of the risks on the road, such as arrest, kidnapping, or exposure to violence. . .*” Many migration observers consider the eastern Libyan route more desirable recently, especially due to the lack of intensive monitoring compared to the western coasts under the authority of the Tripoli government, because of agreements signed between that government and several European countries [26].

Another report announced by Carolina Hernandez, adviser to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the field of migration and human rights, stated: “*Thousands of migrants arrive in Libya annually in search of safety and dignity for themselves and their families. However, they often remain stranded in Libya due to a migration and border management approach that focuses on preventing them from reaching Europe.*” While no official government data is available in this regard, estimates indicate that more than (600,000) migrants belonging to more than (44) nationalities are currently present in Libya, most of them undocumented and living under fragile conditions. Deportations are carried out without any individual assessment of their circumstances or meeting their protection needs [27].

13. LEGAL MECHANISMS FOR ADDRESSING IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN LIBYA

Although the Libyan Penal Code was not the sole instrument governing migration offenses, specific legislative measures were enacted to regulate entry, residence, exit, and conduct connected with unauthorized border crossing. Their application requires consideration of human rights and refugee-protection obligations. The most important laws are:

First: Law No. (6) of 1987: Concerning the regulation of the entry, residence, and exit of foreigners in Libya. The law was amended in 1997 to regulate entry, residence, and exit of foreigners in Libya, adding entry and exit points through the following: land crossings – air airports – sea ports – oil ports.

Second: Law No. (19) of 2010: Concerning combating illegal migration. This law deals strictly with the phenomenon of irregular migration, and in case of violation of this law by foreigners, the Libyan state has the right to expel or deport them from Libyan territory [3, pp.106–107].

The Libyan legislator criminalized irregular migration and considered the migrant a criminal upon entering or residing in Libya without obtaining permission, authorization, or a visa from the competent government authorities [2, p.9].

14. SECURITY INSTITUTIONS AND IRREGULAR MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN LIBYA

According to Law No. (19) of 2010, the tasks of controlling crimes of irregular migration, seizing funds obtained from the crime, means of transport used in smuggling, referring those arrested to judicial authorities, and monitoring borders and crossings are carried out by several agencies and central administrations, most notably:

1. irregular migration Control Agency: Established by Decision No. (386) of 2014, headquartered in Tripoli with branches in the state’s regions. It is affiliated with the Ministry of Interior, enjoys legal personality and independent financial liability, and was granted several executive powers.
2. Department of Passports and Nationality: Its establishment dates back to independence in 1951.
3. Anti-Infiltration and Smuggling Agency: Established on June 30, 2020, affiliated with the Control Authority of the General Command of the Libyan Armed Forces.
4. Ministry of Labor and Rehabilitation: Supervises the process of registering incoming labor [3, pp.108–110].

The United Nations documented serious impediments to Libya's judicial system after 2011, especially amid renewed fighting and insecurity from 2014 onward. Many courts are non-functional or only partially functional, while armed groups have threatened and attacked judges, lawyers, prosecutors, and law enforcement officials. The official judicial system has not adequately addressed human rights violations and abuses, creating an obstacle to victims' rights and justice [21, p.12].

Libyan legislation is characterized by a high degree of unpredictability and contradictions between the various adopted laws and their implementing decrees. The law in Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya obliges any person who shelters a foreigner, regardless of his status, even as a courtesy, to inform the police or national guard of his place of residence. This obligation applies to workers in hosting fields, otherwise they fall under criminal penalties. Although Libya is a traditional migration haven for migrant workers and has signed bilateral agreements with many Asian, Arab, and African countries, Libyan policy fluctuates between openness to migrant workers and imposing restrictions on them, especially workers from Sub-Saharan Africa, according to economic, social, or political decisions [23, pp.22–23].

According to the cited 2016 United Nations report, the Department for Combating irregular migration (DCIM), operating within the Ministry of Interior, was a principal institution involved in managing official migrant detention facilities. This is a historically situated description and should not be assumed to characterize every facility or administrative arrangement in subsequent years. The other main institution is the Libyan Coast Guard, part of the Libyan Navy under the Ministry of Defense, responsible for search and rescue operations. Both institutions are under pressure from armed groups that spread after 2011, appearing to be the strongest party in the smuggling, human trafficking, and abuse system [21, pp.12–13].

The historical study also identifies the International Organization for Peace, Care, and Relief, a Libyan organization, among civil-society actors involved in assisting migrants and refugees. The precise partnerships and their present status require verification before they are described as continuing arrangements. The partnership also includes the International Center for Migration Policy Development and the Italian Refugee Council, especially in detention centers. The Commission also cooperates with the Al-Wafa Association, particularly in vocational training, guidance, and healthcare for refugees [23, p.40].

15. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN LIBYA (IMMEDIATE MEASURES)

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued recommendations rooted in their human rights monitoring activities. These provide a concrete institutional reference point, alongside academic proposals and statements from Libyan authorities, for assessing possible reforms. These recommendations to improve the situation of migrants in Libya are directed to the Libyan authorities:

1. To urgently end arbitrary detention of all migrants, immediately release the following categories: (the most vulnerable persons, particularly women – pregnant women – families – children – persons with disabilities – patients), in addition to individuals identified by the UNHCR as in need of international protection as asylum seekers and refugees, and protect them from refoulement.
2. Close all detention centers not managed by the irregular migration Control Agency.
3. Ensure women are detained separately from men and guarded by female officers.
4. The Libyan authorities must: improve detention conditions, provide food, healthcare, water, and sanitation services, protect detainees from torture, resume official registration of detained migrants, facilitate greater access for national and international organizations, prevent refoulement, adhere to legal procedures, and provide fair trial guarantees.
5. Improve conditions at entry points, protect migrants, register arrivals, and screen them.
6. Ensure the irregular migration Control Agency has sufficient resources, improve working conditions of its staff, and guarantee training courses and health insurance.
7. Establish the position of Minister of Migration to be responsible for developing a comprehensive migration strategy.
8. Support initiatives aimed at coordinating response operations for those rescued in Libyan territory and transferred to Libyan lands with organizations and agencies related to irregular migration and refugees [21, pp.24–26].

16. MEDIUM-TERM MEASURES DIRECTED TO THE LIBYAN AUTHORITIES BY THE UNITED NATIONS SUPPORT MISSION IN LIBYA

1. Amend Libyan legislation to abolish the criminalization of irregular migration and cancel mandatory detention of migrants.

2. Prohibit automatic expulsions without conducting individual assessments, in line with the prohibition of arbitrary and collective expulsions and the prohibition of refoulement.
3. Facilitate the issuance of proper and official documents for all migrants inside Libya and issue work permits for migrants qualified under Libyan law.
4. Establish safe and regular channels and facilitate entry and job opportunities for migrants.
5. Ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, adopt a national asylum law, and formalize relations with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
6. Investigate crimes of human trafficking and smuggling and prosecute them judicially while ensuring respect for human rights.

There are also recommendations directed to destination countries and countries of origin, excluding Libya, by the United Nations Mission, emphasizing cooperation, expanding safe entry channels, search and rescue, training programs, coordination, and all matters related to irregular migration [21, pp.26–28].

What is noteworthy in most reports, recommendations, media, and some studies and research on irregular migration is that all assert and confirm Libya's shortcomings in limiting this phenomenon and consider Libya a cause of migrants' and refugees' suffering. The truth is that there is exaggeration and unfairness in some of them. In one of the Libyan migration departments, the Deputy Head of the irregular migration Control Agency (*Colonel Mohammed Abu Braida*) stated: *"In the media, they portray Libya as not even trying to move to help, but we are doing our utmost, and in reality, it is the first country harmed by irregular migration."* He complained that since the outbreak of the revolution in 2011, Italy and Europe in general launched "empty promises" of support. Abu Braida added: *"I cannot say that no assistance was provided, but it never reached this agency. We did not receive any international assistance. Libya is not responsible for protecting the European Union from this problem, but if it obtains the necessary capabilities and assistance, it can contribute much more. This agency is ready to work with any country or organization willing to help."* [25].

17. POLICY SOLUTIONS AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The necessity of cooperation and participation between developed countries and migrant-sending countries in implementing economic projects in sending countries, working on reintegration and rehabilitation of migrants in irregular situations, supporting them, and encouraging them to establish small economic projects in their homelands.
2. Activate conferences, seminars, and local, regional, and international workshops, and raise the level of coordination and consultation among concerned countries to set clear strategies for addressing migration in all its forms, adopting solutions and treatments, and mechanisms for implementation, as it is an international humanitarian issue.
3. Support means and mechanisms for monitoring land and sea borders of concerned countries, raise the efficiency of cadres and employees in combating migration, and train them on modern means and systems to limit the phenomenon of irregular migration.
4. Successive governments should attempt to create job opportunities suitable for youth qualifications, provide stability and economic security for the country, raise wages, and follow up educational programs in line with contemporary requirements.
5. There must be political will in the international community to understand, address, and absorb this phenomenon in its comprehensive political, economic, social, and security framework, through establishing necessary mechanisms and programs and setting strategic and future plans to address and limit this phenomenon.
6. Reject all types of conflicts, disputes, extremism, and all forms of cultural, social, customary, and sectarian discrimination that hinder human communication, understanding, tolerance, and civilized dialogue, in order to build a human society characterized by peace, tolerance, respect for others, and contributing to development among countries concerned with the phenomenon of irregular migration.

18. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

1. Irregular migration is a policy challenge encountered across regions because its governance intersects with political, economic, and social interests, whether as source countries, transit countries, or destination countries.
2. The weakness of the state, political and security instability, and the abundance of external interventions formed one of the most important reasons that led to the aggravation of the phenomenon of illegal migration. When citizens do not feel stability and security, they inevitably seek a safer and more stable environment.

3. Relying on security solutions has not and will not be effective; rather, it worsens the inhumane conditions of migrants in irregular situations due to detention and imprisonment in camps, as well as poor treatment in migrant detention centers.
4. The spread of terrorism and international intervention in internal affairs—under the pretext of protecting human rights, humanitarian intervention, or supporting a certain regime—has led to the weakening and fragility of state authority. Thus, the state may relinquish some of its powers in favor of a global government represented by international economic and financial institutions.
5. Weak contributions of developed and affected countries, such as EU states, in developing the resources of migrant-sending countries and their lack of serious involvement in implementing developmental projects in various economic, productive, and service fields to absorb the workforce from unemployment.
6. Health crises, conflict, climate-related pressures, environmental degradation, and economic inequality can intersect with migration decisions. Their contribution varies across countries and periods, supporting the need for evidence-based, multi-sector responses rather than a single explanation for irregular migration.

Ethical considerations

This study consists of a review and interpretation of publicly available and previously published materials. It involved no direct recruitment, interviews, interventions, or collection of personally identifiable research data. The article does not claim any new ethics approval or exemption; the authors should confirm the declaration required by their institution and the journal for a documentary study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed equally to the preparation and revision of the manuscript, according to the submitted authorship declaration.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this study.

Data availability

No new primary datasets were generated or collected for this documentary study. The analysis is based on previously published historical, legal, policy, and institutional materials cited in the reference list. Some historical records and secondary-language sources may require access through the original publishers or archival repositories.

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