

Links

www.libyan-cna.netwww.kas.de/poldimed/

From Niger to Libya: A Perilous Journey

LIBYA CLOUD NEWS AGENCY – ASSOCIATED CORRESPONDENTS IN NIGER

This report is a product of a training of journalists on migration reporting organized by the Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean and Libyan Cloud News Agency (LCNA) from 24 to 28 August 2017 in Tunis. The article has been translated from French.

Migrants who manage to cross the borders and enter the Libyan territory are going to start a new difficult phase of their journey. It is the preparation phase, with the help of some Libyan smugglers, to embark on the perilous journey to Europe, on which tragedies have become common. Mahmoud Al Shobrak, one of the members of the Libyan Coast Guard, testifies on this: "In order to properly conduct the rescue operations of migrants, we ensure regular patrols at sea. Sometimes, we receive information from the Italian Rescue Center and also from our representatives on the oil platforms at sea." He adds that "once we receive the information, we try to contact our fixed points in order to launch the rescue operations. Otherwise, the Italian coast guards or EU-operated rescue mission vessels will take care of it through their rescue operations including SOPHIA – a name inspired by the story of a migrant woman who delivered her child during a rescue operation." He explains that it was after this birth that the operation was named SOPHIA.

Mahmoud Al Shobrak strictly denies the accusations of the coast guards' complicity with the smugglers and human traffickers. "I completely deny that we are colluding with the smugglers. We are an official institution that operates within the legal framework. The only interaction we have with smugglers is when we try to intercept them. Sometimes, the interception is not easy when smugglers are holding large caliber weapons. They shoot at us and we shoot back. But generally, when they see us, they flee. We especially come across the smugglers in the Eastern part."

European countries concerns

Since the Valetta Summit in Malta, where several heads of African states met with the European Union, many things have changed with regard to the perception and management of migration flows between the two continents. On this occasion, Europe communicated



Irish Defense Forces / Flickr / CC BY 2.0

December 2017

Links

www.libyan-cna.net

www.kas.de/boldimed/

its solutions for pressing migration issues to the concerned African countries, such as Niger. As a transit country for people departing from Western Africa, our country has to accompany these European solutions: setting up a taskforce dedicated to fight against immigration, building three transit centers including one in Agadez which would host 10,000 to 20,000 people, and assistance for voluntary return. In return, several hundred million Euros will be paid to the contracting country. Given the gravity of the situation concerning the migrant movements at sea, the European countries have decided to change their approach and adopt another policy consisting of the creation of hotspots for migrants in several countries of the sub-region. This approach aims at canalizing the flow of migrants and encouraging a selective departure to Europe according to the migrants' skills.

The implications of the Nigerien law number 2015-36 of May 26, 2015 on the flow of migrants

Agadez, a town located nearly a thousand kilometers north of the capital Niamey, did not fully understand the implications of such a commitment on its economic life and social stability in the region. In fact, for the last few months, a relentless hunt has been launched against migrant smugglers and against the owners of "ghettos" which are compounds where groups of migrants on their way to Libya are hiding. Since the implementation of the Law no 2015-036 of May 26, 2015, departing migrants in the Sub-Saharan region have become more discreet when they are in the migration stations of the south and in the transit towns in the North of Niger. They prefer to hide and are victims of confinement by smugglers in "ghettos" or so-called "houses of solidarity." While waiting for the precarious trip to Algeria or Libya, a period that can last for ten days or longer, migrants remain locked up; they cannot go out to look for a job or to meet certain vital needs. These repressive and dissuasive measures resulting from the implementation of the Law no 2015-036 have directly led to a drastic decrease in migrants' flows to the North coupled with a sharp increase in the number of returnees, according to the IOM.

The diverted routes used by smugglers



Oxfam International / Flickr / CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Since February 2016, IOM has been monitoring migration flows in the Agadez region in Niger. Monitoring points for migratory flows are placed on migratory routes, namely in the transit towns of Ségédine and Arlit, in the Agadez region. It is true that the outflows have seriously dropped, but these are only estimates of migrants who pass through official checkpoints on both migration routes to Algeria and Libya, whereas the majority of the migrants who do not fit the travel requirements, choose to take backroads. Since the implementation of the Law no 2015-036 date on May 26, 2015, some smugglers have created new routes for migrant trafficking.

The anger of the smugglers

The association of smugglers rejects the accusations of being criminals and call for the fast embodiment of the promises made within the framework of programs for the conversion of actors in the "migration economy" supported through a trust fund. The proclamation of the list of accepted persons to benefit from this trust fund has created tensions in the town of Agadez. On 25 August, 2017, thousands of smugglers and drivers stormed the town hall since some of these actors in the migration field who were not selected were enraged about the decision of the selection committee. They held a rally in the citizen's square in front of the town hall to voice their anger and disarray at what they call "patronage" organized by

December 2017

Links

www.libyan-cna.net

www.kas.de/boldimed/

the selection committee made of their representatives, the commune representatives, the *Haute Autorité a la Consolidation de la Paix* representatives and the NGO KARKARA.

Hamza Hamoumou, called Djata, is the spokesman of these angry actors. He said to the newspaper the Nation that "the committee we set up did not meet the expectations of the real players of migration, that is why we have created a crisis committee." "We have taken measures everywhere to have clarification on this masquerade but without any result," he said before continuing, "from this moment on, we no longer recognize the people in charge of the smugglers association; we no longer recognize the committee in charge of selecting the actors who will benefit from the trust fund. We ask the president of the Regional Council to intervene to bring back order and restore our rights. This is a serious matter. Partners who have given their money have to know that their trust fund has not benefitted the concerned people".

Djata concluded by stating the following: "On behalf of all my comrades, I demand the dissolution of the Selection Committee in charge of choosing the beneficiaries. These people are dishonest. We have evidence of their patronage. It is unfortunate that people in the shadows are enjoying what is not theirs. In what world are we living? It is necessary for the highest level authorities to know that this false list, and other lists that may follow, could harm the national interest. We are tired of the treatment we have been enduring since the implementation of this law that criminalizes our business".

The trend of returning migrants

IOM has published monthly data on inflows and outflows to and from Niger. The inflows rose from 1,207 arrivals in February 2016 to 23,778 in June 2016, nearly 20 times more. From then on, it declined gradually to 1,683 entries in December 2016, 14 times less. There is an increase in the inflows from the current year, with a peak of 27,239 entries in February 2017. This increase in returns is related to the closure of the Djado gold site and the growing insecurity in Libya. At the same time, there was a gradual increase in outflows (individuals intending to leave Niger) of 4,084 migrants in February 2016. The flow increased to 71,094 outgoing migrants in May 2016; a 17-fold increase. With the application of the law no. 2015-036, 2015 on the smuggling of migrants, a drastic decline in outflows was noted in June 2016 from 71,904 to 6,329, thus 11 times less.



December 2017

Links

www.libyan-cna.net

www.kas.de/boldimed/

An undeniable impact

The region of Agadez has become a migratory crossroads for Sub-Saharanans departing to North Africa and/or Europe. Located in the north of Niger, Agadez is a contact zone between Niger and Algeria on the one hand and between Niger and Libya on the other. This geographical location induces the passage of thousands of migration candidates seeking a better future. Beyond creating and consolidating migration networks and activities, the role as a passage point for migrants has contributed to the demographic and economic growth of the town of Agadez from the 1990s to the present day. The passage of migrants has led to the emergence of many activities. These activities provide substantial income for the players who accommodate migrants and organize their travel and transportation. The Nigerien government has taken repressive measures that have decreased the flows of migrants but caused precariousness among the inhabitants of Agadez, who benefited from the economic revenues of the migration activities. While smugglers are multiplying their protests, diverted roads are being created with their trail of tragedies.