

**Forum:** Rights and Ethics

**Issue:** Challenging the issue of human trafficking in Libya

**Student Officer:** África Gladstone Contioso

**Position:** Co-chair

---

## PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates of the Rights and Ethics committee,

I am honoured to welcome you to this year's Social and Humanitarian & Cultural committee, on the topic of Challenging the issue of human trafficking in Libya. My name is África Gladstone Contioso and this is my third time participating in the MUN conference here at QE. It was my experiences as a delegate that have inspired me to take on the role of chairing a topic this year.

Whether you are first-timers or returning delegates please do not worry if you don't quite understand how the conference works or feel nervous talking in front of others, I assure you most people will feel the same. The key is to get involved as much as you can and push yourself to be confident in what you are saying. MUN really is a great opportunity for all of us and I am certain you will enjoy the 2-day conference alongside your fellow delegates.

Researching this topic has allowed me to deepen my understanding of the true extent of this issue impacting hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians and why these horrendous crimes aren't being combated. This guide acts as a starting point for further research that you and your delegation can look into in further detail, therefore it is imperative that you conduct your own research and consider other resources to be able to fully immerse yourself into debate during the conference.

If you have any questions whatsoever, no matter how small, please do not hesitate to contact me at @3368@queenelizabeths.kent.sch.uk

Kind Regards, África



## TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The issue of Human Trafficking in Libya has been labelled as a ‘Special Case country’ for the 8th year in a row, from the the Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report. The ongoing conflict and political instability in Libya has created a lawless environment where traffickers operate with impunity, exploiting migrants and refugees who seek better lives. To combat this, there must be a concerted effort from international organisations, neighbouring countries, and local authorities to strengthen legal frameworks, enhance border controls, and provide support for victims.

In August 2022, there were an estimated 134,787 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Libya, a majority of which were displaced due to the deteriorating security situation within the country. In general, IDPs, due to their volatile situation, are particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of sex and labour trafficking.

Despite known trafficking coming from the region, Libyan national authorities have failed to act.

Migrants in Libya have been especially vulnerable to trafficking. As of August 2023, Libya has had an influx of over 700,000 migrants – mainly Sub-Saharan Africans trying to reach Europe. The influx of demand within the smuggling market to bring migrants across the Mediterranean Sea has also opened up the floodgates for trafficking and other human rights violations. While many hope to reach the European Union, crossing the Mediterranean is deadly: nearly 2,000 have died or disappeared at sea since the beginning of 2023.

## KEY TERMS

### ➤ HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labour or commercial sex act. Human trafficking can occur within a country or internationally, people of all genders, ages and backgrounds can become victims of this crime.

### ➤ IMMIGRANTS

People who move from their home country to another country to live and work

### ➤ FORCED LABOUR

Refers to a situation in which an individual is compelled to work against their own will, under threat of coercion. These victims are usually trapped in situations they cannot escape from, with their freedom and autonomy severely restricted.

### ➤ EXPLOITATION

Exploitation involves being groomed, forced or coerced into doing something that you don’t want to do for someone else’s gain. Human trafficking usually consists of three stages. In the first stage, the victims are recruited, in the second they are transported and in the third, they are **exploited**.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Libya's government and political system have been in shambles since the outbreak of Civil War in early 2011 when rebel forces, backed by NATO, took over Tripoli and killed long-time dictator Muammar Qaddafi. As of June 2008 and as in previous years, there had been isolated reports that women from sub-Saharan Africa were trafficked to Libya for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. The Government of Libya did not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but was making significant efforts to do so. In 2017, Fatou Bensouda, chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, called Libya "a marketplace" for human trafficking, but merely considered whether to investigate migrant-related crimes in Libya. In 2022, scholars showed that contemporary trafficking from sub-Saharan Africa to Libya could lead to different forms of captivity, such as debt bondage, prison labour, and hostage taking for ransom.

### Libya's Government

In June 2008, the Government of Libya provided no public information on its law enforcement efforts to punish trafficking in persons, as Libya's laws did not prohibit trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation or forced labour. The government failed to provide data on any criminal investigations, prosecutions, convictions or sentences for trafficking offences this year, although senior officials noted during the year that Libya prosecuted individuals for confiscating foreign workers' passports corruption in the country may facilitate trafficking, but the government did not report prosecuting, convicting, or sentencing any official for complicity. The government did not provide protection services such as psychological or legal assistance to victims of trafficking. The Libyan government does not actively encourage victims to participate in investigations and prosecutions against their traffickers. In June 2008, Libya took no action to prevent trafficking in persons. The government did not conduct any public awareness campaigns to highlight the issue of trafficking in persons. Libya also did not take any measures to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

### The UN

Internationally, Libya is a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (2000), which acts as a supplement to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Although the country has lacked the institutional capacity to eliminate human trafficking, the United Nations has attempted to act within the country. For example,



the United Nations Support Mission for Libya (UNSMIL) was adopted in 2011. In October 2015, the United Nations Security Council adopted a resolution which authorised member states to seize and inspect vessels in Libya that are suspected of being used for either human trafficking or migrant smuggling.

UN experts expressed serious concern about the situation of migrants and refugees in Libya in 2023 who were allegedly held captive and tortured, subsequently released by Libyan authorities and transferred to unknown places of detention. **“This is not an isolated incident, and we are very concerned about the situation of many more migrants and refugees, including victims of trafficking, who have also been transferred to detention centres where no humanitarian agencies, lawyers or civil society organisations have been granted access,”** the UN experts said.

The UN is already operating in the territory through the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which has helped 13,000 people out of detention centres in Libya, and another 8,000 from those in Niger. But IOM's efforts do not end in Libya. Once the refugees and immigrants are safe, the organisation stores their information and testimonies and offers them the possibility of returning home; guaranteeing the assistance of the IOM in the process..

## Libya

Libya has become a hub for human trafficking due to its strategic location on the Mediterranean, which serves as a key transit point for migrants and refugees attempting to reach Europe. Trafficking networks exploit the chaotic situation, with organised groups controlling various routes and operations. Various militias and armed groups operating in Libya are involved in trafficking. These groups control detention centres where migrants are held under harsh conditions. They often engage in extortion, forced labour, and other forms of exploitation. Many migrants and refugees are held in overcrowded and poorly managed detention centres, where they face severe abuse and exploitation. Conditions in these centres are often deplorable, detainees are frequently subjected to forced labour and other forms of exploitation. Corruption within various levels of Libyan society, including within law enforcement and governmental institutions, hampers efforts to combat human trafficking. Ineffective governance means that even when trafficking cases are identified, enforcement and prosecution can be inconsistent and inadequate.

## Egypt

Egypt, like many countries in the region, is a source of migrants who may become victims of human trafficking. Economic challenges and political instability can drive individuals to leave Egypt in search of better opportunities, and some end up in Libya. Egypt also serves as a transit route for migrants becoming victims, economic challenges and political instability can drive individuals to leave Egypt in search of better opportunities. Egypt and Libya have attempted to engage in efforts to address trafficking issues, including discussions and cooperations on factors like border control, security and migration management. Egypt's role in the human trafficking crisis in Libya is primarily a source and transit point for migrants.

## The EU

The EU continues to externalise and outsource border management, political deal-making, and humanitarian assistance for displaced populations to Libya, with little to no advocacy for the human rights situation of said displaced migrants remaining on Libyan soil.

## Minor Countries

Many of the countries involved are among the world's poorest, where lack of economic opportunity drives people to seek better lives elsewhere, making them vulnerable to traffickers. Minor countries play critical roles in the broader human trafficking network connected to Libya, either as sources, transit points, or destinations for trafficked individuals. Addressing the issue requires a coordinated effort that involves not just Libya but also these smaller nations.

- **Gambia:** Many Gambians have fled poverty and political instability, attempting the perilous journey through Libya to Europe. Some become trapped in Libya, falling victim to trafficking networks.
- **Niger:** Although Niger is a significant transit country, it is also a source of migrants. Migrants from Niger, particularly from rural areas, are often trafficked into Libya for forced labour or sexual exploitation.
- **Burkina Faso:** Migrants from Burkina Faso often pass through neighbouring countries like Niger before reaching Libya, where they are at risk of being trafficked.
- **Chad:** A landlocked country neighbouring Libya, Chad is a key transit route for migrants heading to Libya. The journey through Chad is perilous, and many migrants fall prey to traffickers before even reaching Libya.



- **Sudan:** Sudan is a significant transit country for East African migrants, particularly from Eritrea and Ethiopia, heading towards Libya. Some migrants are trafficked in Sudan before they reach Libya.
- **Algeria:** Like Tunisia, Algeria is another destination or transit country for trafficked migrants from Libya. The border regions between Algeria and Libya are particularly lawless, making it easier for trafficking networks to operate.
- **Lebanon:** Some trafficked migrants, particularly women, are trafficked from Libya to Lebanon, often for forced labour or sexual exploitation.

## TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

Event	Date
The fall of Gaddafi- Libyan Civil War begins, leading to the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in October. The collapse of central authority creates a power vacuum, resulting in lawlessness and the rise of various militias. Libya becomes a key transit point for migrants and refugees attempting to reach Europe, setting the stage for widespread human trafficking.	2011
The rise of human trafficking networks- Post-Gaddafi instability leads to an increase in smuggling networks, which quickly evolve into organised human trafficking operations. Migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia become targets.	2012
Libya's second civil war- destabilising the country. Traffickers exploit the chaos, and reports of abuse, extortion, and forced labour become more common.	2014
The European Migration Crisis- over a million migrants and refugees entering Europe. Many pass through Libya, where they are subjected to horrific conditions, including slavery and torture.	2015
The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that migrants are being sold in slave markets in Libya. The revelation sparks global outrage.CNN airs an undercover report showing African migrants being auctioned off as slaves in Libya.	2017
International Efforts- The United Nations Security Council imposes sanctions on six human traffickers operating in Libya, marking the first time traffickers are specifically targeted.  The European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU) step up efforts to repatriate stranded migrants from Libya. Thousands are returned to their home countries, but many remain trapped.	2018
The humanitarian situation in Libya deteriorates further, with increasing	2021

numbers of migrants attempting the dangerous Mediterranean crossing. The UN continues to document severe abuses against migrants, including forced labour and trafficking	
Libya remains a key transit point for migrants, with trafficking and abuses persisting. The international community, including the UN, EU, and AU, continue to call for improved conditions and stronger measures against traffickers.	2022
Libya's political situation remains unstable, and human trafficking networks continue to operate with impunity. International efforts focus on reducing the flow of migrants and improving conditions within Libya	2023

## PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

While the EU has denied that it helps smugglers in Libya, the Libyan authorities—both the internationally-recognized government in Tripoli, and the Tobruk-based government in the east—have launched new initiatives to try to combat smuggling and convey a responsible migration policy.

On land, local forces are carrying out operations to demolish smuggling warehouses; at sea, there have been reports of migrant pullbacks , a militia led by Saddam Haftar, the son of Libyan National Army commander Khalifa Haftar. Despite its lack of international recognition, Haftar’s regime may be taking these anti-smuggling measures in part to access European funding.

Tripoli has also resorted to force in the crackdown on smuggling: in May, the government launched military operations in the western Zawiya region to dismantle illegal migrant camps controlled by traffickers.

Drone strikes destroyed “seven migrant smuggling boats, six drug smuggling depots and nine fuel smuggling tankers.” The Tripoli authorities have also taken measures to escort migrants back to their countries of origin, and to expel hundreds of Egyptians, Chadians and Sudanese to third countries, such as Rwanda or Gambia.

It remains to be seen whether these initiatives will convince Libya's partners—the UN, the EU, the African Union, and the US. They, too, face a challenging diplomatic balance: pressuring Libyan officials in both the east and the west to respect human rights, without undermining government initiative

## EU migration policy towards Libya

The EU’s policy towards Libya has never been consistent or coherent, as each of the different European states have always had conflicting priorities and interests in Libya. However, as a

united institution, the EU continues to pursue a specific policy in Libya in accordance with the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)

This policy includes supporting political transition, stability and democracy, resolving the current political crisis, and reaching a multilateral consensus for conducting elections

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE ISSUE

### Search & Rescue operations

Some of the solutions that Oxfam has proposed are the promotion of search and rescue operations for humanitarian purposes, increasing the number of immigration applications that are accepted to be processed, the creation of safe routes to Europe, and ending the policy that prevents migrants from leaving Libya.

### Opening & Closing borders

Being one of the most active organisations regarding the situation in Libya, Amnesty International has called on the EU Member States to stop closing its borders to refugees and immigrants from Libya. It argues that this European policy only encourages and fuels violence and extortion in Libyan territory, making the EU an accomplice in this crisis.

### NGO solutions

NGOs play an important role in helping alleviate the humanitarian problems caused by migration crisis yet the solutions they suggest oftentimes fail to take into consideration the complex political realities that make these very same solutions challenging – if not outright impossible – to achieve. As a result, many of the solutions offered by human rights agencies like Oxfam and Amnesty International are far too broad to be of any practical use.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

2023 Trafficking in persons report Libya: *U.S Department of State*

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/libya/>

The War Against Human Traffickers in Libya: *Commentary, Sada*. Published August 10th 2024

<https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2023/08/the-war-against-human-traffickers-in-libya?lang=en>

The Libyan Political crisis, implication for human trafficking: *Foreign Policy Research Institute*.  
(April 25 2024)

<https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/04/the-libyan-political-crisis-implication-for-human-trafficking/>

UN experts alarmed at reports of trafficking in persons, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and torture of migrants and refugees: *United Nations Human Rights, Office Of The High Commissioner*.  
2021 July 2023

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/libya-un-experts-alarmed-reports-trafficking-persons-arbitrary-detention>

Why NGO's are ineffective in solving the migration crisis: The Libyan Slave Trade example:  
*Universidad de Navarra, Valeria Nadal*

<https://www.unav.edu/en/web/global-affairs/detalle/-/blogs/why-ngos-are-ineffective-in-solving-the-migrant-crisis-the-libyan-slave-trade-example#>

Libya's Long Standing Human Trafficking Dilemma: A Crisis Demanding Urgent Action: *World Organisation Against Torture*. 13 July 2021

<https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/Longstanding-Human-trafficking-Dilemma-in-Libya -A-Crisis-Demanding-Urgent-Action.pdf>

2024 Trafficking in Persons Report Libya: *US Department of State*



<https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/libya/>