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Migrants

European Union, Libya: violence against migrants

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In a report published ten days ago, Amnesty International denounces, on the basis of an investigation, the shameful policy of the European Union in collaborating with Libya in the management of migration issues. [1]

Here are some excerpts:

The report found that since late 2020 Libya's Directorate for Combatting Illegal Migration (DCIM), a department of the interior ministry, had legitimized abuse by integrating two new detention centres (Al-Mabani and al-Zawiya) under its structure where hundreds of refugees and migrants had been forcibly disappeared in previous years by militias. At one recently rebranded centre, survivors said guards raped women and subjected them to sexual violence including by coercing them into sex in exchange for food or their freedom.

The report also highlights the ongoing complicity of European states that have shamefully continued to enable and assist Libyan coastguards in capturing people at sea and forcibly returning them to the hellscape of detention in Libya, despite knowing full well the horrors they will endure.

In the first half of 2021, more than 7,000 people intercepted at sea were forcibly returned to Al-Mabani.

Detainees held there told Amnesty International they faced torture and other ill-treatment, cruel and inhuman detention conditions, extortion and forced labour. Some also reported being subjected to invasive, humiliating and violent strip-searches.

Tripoli's Shara' al-Zawiya centre is a facility which was also previously run by non-affiliated militias and was recently integrated under DCIM and designated for people in vulnerable situations. [...] Three women also said that two babies detained with their mothers after an attempted sea crossing had died in early 2021 after guards refused to transfer them to hospital for critical medical treatment.

Between January and June 2021, the EU-backed Libyan coastguards intercepted around 15,000 people at sea and returned them to Libya – more than in all of 2020 – during what they describe as “rescue” missions.

People interviewed by Amnesty International consistently described Libyan coastguards' conduct as negligent and abusive. Survivors described how Libyan coastguards deliberately damaged their boats, in some cases causing them to capsize, leading refugees and migrants to drown on at least two occasions. One eyewitness said after Libyan coastguards caused a dinghy to capsize, they filmed the incident with their phones instead of instead of rescuing all survivors.

Refugees and migrants told Amnesty International that as they attempted sea crossings, they frequently saw aircraft overhead or ships nearby that did not offer them assistance before the Libyan coastguards' arrival.

Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard agency, has carried out aerial surveillance over the Mediterranean to identify refugee and migrants' boats at sea and has operated a drone over this route since May 2021. European navies have largely abandoned the central Mediterranean to avoid having to rescue refugee and migrants' boats in distress.

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PS:

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[1] Amnesty International, 15 July 2021 "[Libya: Horrific violations in detention highlight Europe's shameful role in forced returns](#)".