

RENTED OUT

An assessment of migrants' access to the rental housing market



March 2023

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Cover photo: In April 2022, in coordination with the local organization Tripoli Good, IOM's Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) team distributed essential food kits to more than 400 vulnerable families and individuals from Libya, Sudan, Mauritania, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Chad, Niger, Mali and Eritrea. Throughout the month of Ramadan, daily distributions took place to reach people whose food security was compromised due to increase in prices

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
FGD	Focus group discussion
HNO	Humanitarian needs overview
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MSNA	Multi-sector needs assessment
NFIs	Non-food items
UN	United Nations
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Programme

HIGHLIGHTS

Factors of influence in accessing the rental housing market

Sociodemographic factors



Sociodemographic factors such as language skills, nationality, socioeconomic status, cultural affinity and gender were identified by most groups as being the most important factors that influence one's ability to navigate the rental housing market.

Length of stay



Generally, the longer migrants stay in Libya, the greater their chances are to acquire real-life knowledge, make connections and learn Arabic — all skills highlighted as vital in gaining better and more equitable access to the rental housing market.

Earning capacity and employment status



The majority of both migrants and landlords agreed that some of the main factors influencing migrants' access to the rental housing market are their level of earnings, employment type and income stability. Being able to afford rent payments and paying rent on time were among the main obstacles limiting migrants' ability of finding adequate housing. At the same time, the lack of affordable (and adequate) housing was highlighted by nearly all participants as a major obstacle to accessing (decent) rental housing in Libya.

Language skills



The ability to communicate in Arabic was noted as being useful for both finding housing and negotiating the rental arrangement with the landlord. Those who are not able to communicate in Arabic are not only worst off but also more vulnerable to abusive and predatory practices. Language skills also impact the ability to network and to find employment, two key factors that can help an individual successfully navigate the rental housing market.

Socioeconomic status and demographics



Participants highlighted that there is a tendency for landlords to prefer Arabic-speaking tenants who are of a higher (perceived) socioeconomic status. Many respondents believed that in general landlords prefer renting to migrants over Libyans presumably because it allows for abusive and predatory behaviour to go unnoticed.

Social networks



Overall, the ability to rely on support from family and friends was found to be largely beneficial in enabling migrants' access to the rental housing market. The majority of respondents reported having found temporary or longer-term accommodation through acquaintances or family, often of the same nationality or through a Libyan intermediary, such as an employer, an acquaintance or an estate agent.

Documentation



The majority of migrants reported that a lack of official documents was a hindrance to getting an official (written) lease. In turn, undocumented or invalid lease arrangements create uncertainty, fear and increase the risk of eviction which paves the way for abusive practices as migrants are left with little to no alternatives but to comply with arbitrary rent increases or other predatory practices. However, while possessing documents and a written lease are ideal, neither is a major constraint to accessing the rental housing market.

Gender



Discussions highlighted that it tends to be more difficult for unmarried women — whether single, widowed or divorced — to access rental housing in Libya because of cultural and social norms. Issues unmarried women may face included the inability to engage directly with landlords because they are generally expected to be accompanied by a male guardian in the process of searching for and securing housing.

Safety and security



Living in safe, secure as well as affordable housing and neighbourhoods were among the top needs of migrants who participated in the focus group discussions. However, living in a safe location may involve a trade-off. For example, rent in neighbourhoods considered safer may be higher, which can compromise one's ability to fulfil their basic needs. At the same time living in a more affordable location can often mean being cut off from services and further from employment opportunities or services, such as healthcare and schools.

Marital and family status



Overall, navigating the rental housing market appears more difficult for single individuals — regardless of gender — compared to families who are perceived as being more desirable tenants.

There was a general agreement among migrants that it tends to be easier to negotiate the price and conditions of rent as a family. However, large or extended families may experience greater difficulties in securing adequate housing that can accommodate their specific needs (e.g. sufficient space, located near schools).

INTRODUCTION

Context

The lack of access to adequate housing options is a [significant protection risk](#)¹ for migrants in Libya with consequences on their wellbeing, living standards and resilience. Housing [impacts](#)² an individual's ability for social integration and inclusion as well as their health outcomes and employment opportunities. Migrants can often experience [legal](#)³, cultural, political, linguistic and socioeconomic [barriers](#)⁴ to accessing resources, such as housing, which can result in conditions of vulnerability. In Libya, in 2022, around one in five (19%) migrants were living in sub-standard accommodation, according to the [Humanitarian Needs Overview](#)⁵.

At the same time, the issue of access to housing has been further exacerbated by the security operations targeting migrants and refugees in their [homes](#)⁶ in Gargaresh and surrounding areas in [October 2021](#)⁷. According to [OHCHR](#)⁸, the raids took place in the context of xenophobic statements associating foreigners with drug trafficking and crime. These events instigated a climate of fear and increased exposure to arbitrary detention and other protection risks for migrants while [reducing the operational space](#)⁹ for the humanitarian community to provide principled assistance to migrants.



694,398

migrants of over 42 nationalities were identified by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) to be currently present in Libya as of December 2022.

About this assessment

This assessment aims to inform on the factors that influence migrants' access to rental housing markets in Libya with the objective to support programming efforts to help migrants successfully navigate the rental market.

More specifically, this exercise will help highlight persisting barriers and obstacles that migrants face in the process of renting accommodation in Libya, as well as information gaps, misperceptions and concerns among migrant populations about housing options, prices and contracts, with a view to addressing them through awareness raising campaigns as well as programmatic activities.

This study provides a snapshot of the situation of migrants in urban settings using evidence from four municipalities with a high migrant population in western, southern and eastern Libya (Tripoli, Misrata, Benghazi and Sebha).

This assessment builds on a 2020 DTM Libya [report](#)¹⁰ on migrants' housing conditions as well as a preliminary findings from focus group discussion with refugees conducted by the Shelter and NFI sector in February 2022.



DEFINING 'SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE RENTAL HOUSING MARKET'

For the purpose of this assessment 'successfully navigating the rental housing market' is understood as the ability to find, on equitable grounds, adequate housing aligned with the target population's priorities including location, cultural adequacy and cost (source: [Global Shelter Sector](#))

1 OCHA Libya (2022). Libya 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/libya_hno_2022_6dec21.pdf (accessed April 2022).
 2 UNHCR (2013). A New Beginning: Refugee Integration in Europe. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/operations/52403d389/new-beginning-refugee-integration-europe.html> (accessed April 2022).
 3 Law No. (19) of 1378 FDP – 2010 AD on Combatting Illegal Immigration. Available at [https://security-legislation.ly/sites/default/files/lois/510-%20Law%20No.%20\(19\)%20of%202010_EN.pdf](https://security-legislation.ly/sites/default/files/lois/510-%20Law%20No.%20(19)%20of%202010_EN.pdf) (accessed April 2022).
 4 IOM (2015). World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2015-migrants-and-cities-new-partnerships-manage-mobility> (accessed May 2022).
 5 OCHA Libya (2022). Libya 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview. Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/libya_hno_2022_6dec21.pdf (accessed April 2022).
 6 UNSMIL (2021). Statement of the UN Assistant Secretary-General Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Libya, Georgette Gagnon. Available at <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/statement-united-nations-assistant-secretary-general-resident-and-humanitarian-coordinator-libya> (accessed April 2022).
 7 IOM Libya (2021). Libya – Hai Alandalus Flash Update (03 October 2021). Available at <https://migration.iom.int/reports/libya---hai-andalalus-flash-update-03-october-2021> (accessed April 2022).
 8 United Nations (2022). Report of the Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya (23 March 2022). Available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/A_HRC_49_4_AUV.pdf (accessed May 2022).
 9 OCHA Libya (2022). Libya 2022 Humanitarian Response Plan: Periodic Overview. Available at <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/libya/document/2022-hpc-libya-periodic-monitoring-report-jan-mar-2022> (accessed June 2022).

10 IOM Libya (2020). Libya – A Long Way from Home: Migrants' Housing Conditions in Libya. Available at <https://migration.iom.int/reports/libya---long-way-home---migrants-housing-conditions-libya-23-nov-2020> (accessed April 2022).

Methodology

This report presents findings of a study on migrants' access to rental housing in Libya conducted by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) from 01-15 June 2022 in four municipalities with a high migrant population (Benghazi, Misrata, Sebha and Tripoli). Data was collected through 30 focus group discussions (FGDs) with migrants (26) as well as with landlords, property owners and brokers (4) (Fig 1).

The FGDs were used to generate knowledge on social norms, perspectives and experiences. The FGDs with migrants focused on gaining a better understanding of their experiences securing accommodation, the challenges they faced, the options that were available to them, their needs, their knowledge of the market and relationship with landlords. Selection criteria for FGDs included country of origin (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Niger, Chad), living arrangements (see classification in Fig 2) and migration intentions.

The FGDs with landlords were centred around their criteria for choosing tenants, the factors that may help or hinder tenants from being able to rent their accommodation and their requirements for signing a housing contract.

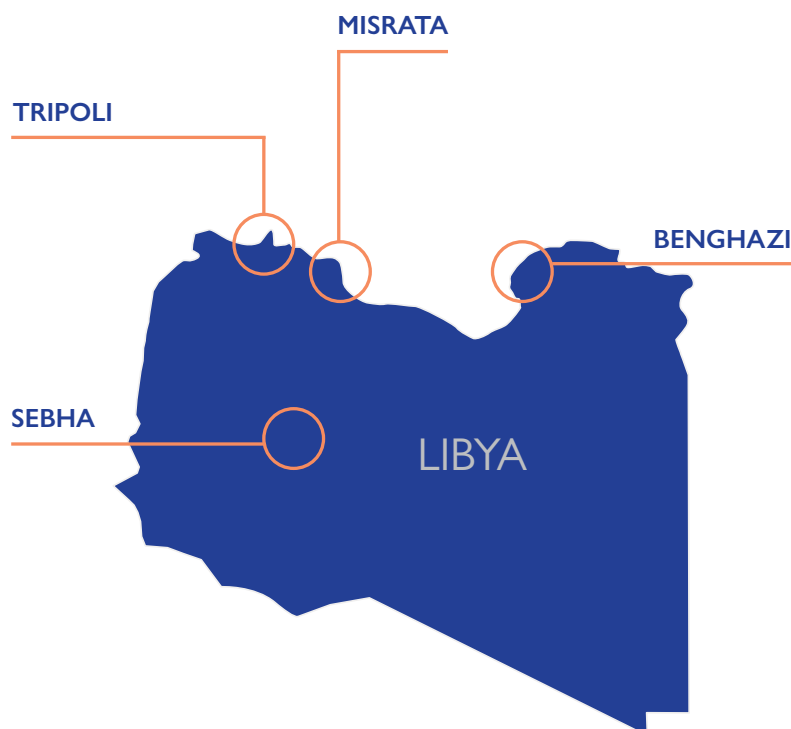
Findings were analysed using deductive coding drawn from the research questions, and contextualised using quantitative data collected in 2021 and 2022.

A desk review of the main types of living arrangements used by migrants in Libya as well as their needs, ability to access services and experience of eviction helped inform the design of the research tools.

Figure 2: Classification of migrants' accommodation

- **LEVEL 3:** single-occupancy housing unit or apartment shared with family only in conventional dwelling
- **LEVEL 2:** shared room in a conventional dwelling
- **LEVEL 1:** non-conventional dwelling, including informal housing, semi-permanent dwelling, mobile housing (shared or not), mattress in inadequate type of accommodation setting

Figure 1: Location of focus group discussions



This map is for illustration purposes only. Names and boundaries on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by IOM.

Limitations

Respondents were asked about sensitive information like migration intentions, price of rent and other economic and legal matters which may have led to under- or misreporting.

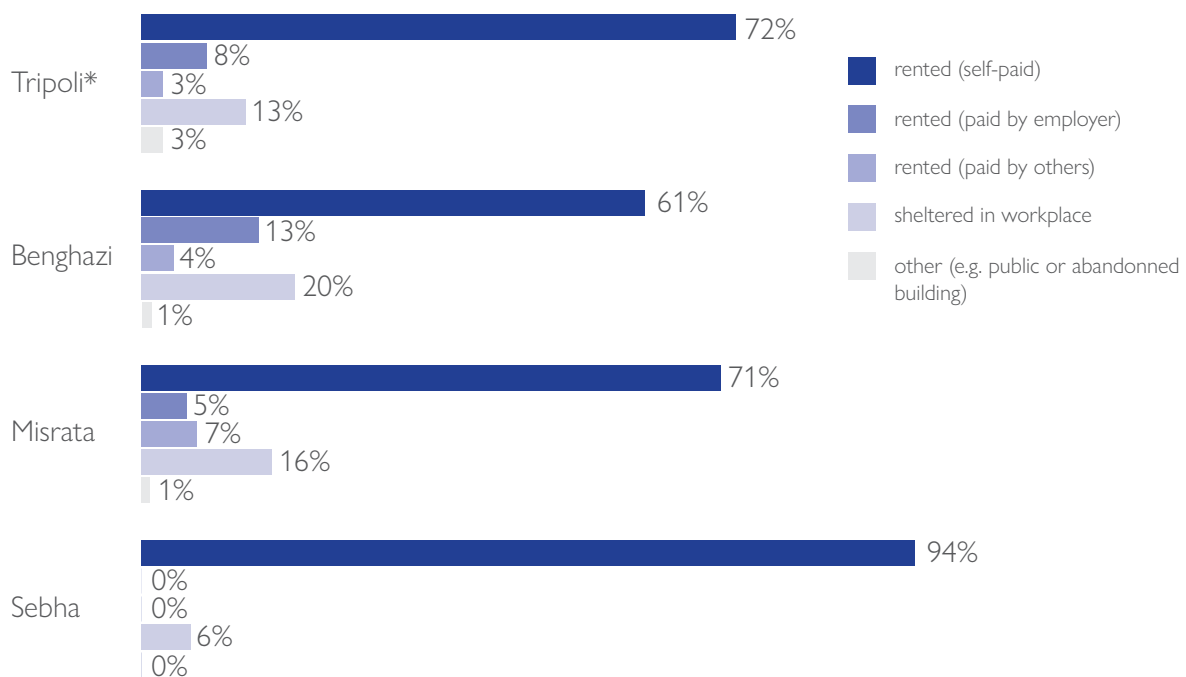
This study is primarily based on qualitative data collected by DTM Libya. While a qualitative approach allowed to gain in-depth knowledge as to why and how migrants access the rental housing market, the findings cannot necessarily be generalised to the broader population group it is based on.

Background on migrant housing

Based on key informants interviewed by DTM Libya during Round 45 of data collection (Nov - Dec 2022), a total of 66 per cent of migrants in urban areas are estimated to live in rented accommodation for which they pay themselves while nine per cent live in rented accommodation paid for by their employer.

According to DTM Libya data, a greater proportion of migrants lived in rented accommodation paid for by themselves in Sebha (96%) than in Tripoli (74%), Misrata (71%) or Benghazi (63%) whereas a greater percentage of migrants in Benghazi reportedly lived in rented accommodation paid for by their employer (15%) or sheltered in their workplace (18%) than in any of the other three municipalities (Fig 3).

Figure 3: Breakdown of migrant accommodation by type of arrangement per municipality based on key informant interviews held in November and December 2022 as part of DTM Libya Round 45 of data collection



*Tripoli refers to the greater Tripoli area which includes the municipalities of Abusliem, Ain Zara, Hai Alandalus, Suq Aljumaa, Tajoura and Tripoli.



In April 2022, in coordination with the local organization Tripoli Good, IOM's Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) team distributed essential food kits to more than 400 vulnerable families and individuals from Libya, Sudan, Mauritania, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Chad, Niger, Mali and Eritrea.

Throughout the month of Ramadan, daily distributions took place to reach people whose food security was compromised due to increased prices.

FINDINGS

This section outlines the factors that contribute to migrants being able to successfully navigate (or not) the rental housing market, the extent to which these factors influence migrants' access to the rental housing market and how they intersect or influence one another.

Language skills

The majority of migrants who participated in focus group discussions (FGDs) noted that the mastery of Arabic had been helpful while searching for accommodation and could simplify and speed up the process, including negotiating and reaching an arrangement with the landlord. Some migrants also believed that property owners generally feel more comfortable having tenants with whom they can communicate easily. This was corroborated by some of the landlords interviewed. For instance, one of them recognised having a preference for Arabic-speaking migrants because it facilitates the communication as there is no need for translators.

However, other landlords remarked that migrants' inability to speak Arabic was not an issue or a barrier to communicating as they can use mediators and translators, particularly when renting shared accommodation. In these cases, some migrants pointed out that the owner will generally select one person from the community, who speaks the migrants' language and Arabic, to represent all tenants and facilitate the agreement. Having to rely on an intermediary was highlighted during the discussions as potentially undermining migrants' ability to negotiate for a better rate, for example, as they depend on a third party.

Moreover, being dependent on an intermediary can be a factor of vulnerability to abusive and exploitative practices as they may take advantage¹¹ of migrants' limited knowledge of local conditions and reduced bargaining power. For example, one Nigerian migrant in Misrata stated that the intermediary through which they had been dealing with the landlord stole their money. They were subsequently compelled to move out because they were unable to explain their situation in Arabic and find a solution with the landlord.

Social networks

The lack of linguistic skills can also be a hurdle¹² to accessing information that is key to daily life and finding work, and can limit opportunities for networking with Libyans. According to many participants, speaking Arabic and knowing Libyans was helpful when searching for employment. A DTM Libya study¹³ on social networks highlighted that nearly one in five migrants (18%) reported having found employment through their social networks with Libyans, for example. In turn, migrants' socioeconomic status influences their access to the rental housing market (see section on earning capacity).

These findings are also in line with the results of FGDs held by REACH¹⁴ on accommodation issues faced by migrants in Libya which highlighted the significance of language in building social connections with Libyans and as a means to access information about work opportunities, as well as a critical factor in the ability to enjoy safe housing and neighbourhoods.



LANGUAGE SKILLS AND VULNERABILITY TO PREDATORY BEHAVIOUR

Some migrants stated that those who are not fluent in Arabic are not only worst off but more vulnerable to predatory practices, such as abusive and arbitrary rental price increases, unfair tactics, or fraud. For instance, one unmarried female participant explained that a mediator intimidated and bullied her into agreeing to rent a house by making her believe that no other homeowner would agree to have her as a tenant. In her opinion, the mediator took advantage of her being a woman and not being able to speak Arabic. This example is in line with findings of the Global Shelter Cluster, which identified uneven power dynamics and language barrier as being able to potentially weaken the ability of some tenants to effectively negotiate with their landlords exposing them to increased risk, particularly for groups which tend to be more vulnerable, such as female-headed households.

11 IOM (2019). IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/iom-handbook-migrants-vulnerable-violence-exploitation-and-abuse> (accessed April 2022).

12 IOM (2015). World Migration Report 2015 - Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2015-migrants-and-cities-new-partnerships-manage-mobility> (accessed April 2022).

13 IOM Libya (2021). Closely Knit: An Assessment of Migrants' Social Networks in Libya. Available at <https://migration.iom.int/reports/libya---closely-knit-assessment-migrants-social-networks-libya-january-2021> (accessed July 2022).

14 REACH (2022). Key Issues of Refugees and Migrant Accommodation in Libya: Preliminary Qualitative Findings. Available at https://shelterclusters3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/briefing_note_-_key_issues_of_refugee_and_migrant_accommodation_in_libya_-_feb_2022.pdf (accessed April 2022).

Furthermore, for many migrants, moving away from their place of origin can rupture¹⁵ the family and community ties that usually provided them with a social safety net, including financial and emotional support. However, social networks and connections based on ethnicity, country of origin or kinship in Libya can constitute an important source of support and resilience. As such, the FGDs confirmed that the more social ties a person or household holds and the better their quality, the greater the likelihood they could tap into those social networks for accessing rental housing (and employment). In turn, those social ties have also been associated with greater health and well-being outcomes¹⁶. For example, throughout the FGDs with migrants, language as a barrier appeared to be less significant among those who benefit from stronger or more extensive social networks. More specifically, many participants from Niger perceived that language was not a hurdle but agreed that the presence of a mediator who spoke Arabic and their language was beneficial and had helped them earn the landlord's trust. Similarly, some participants from Chad who do not speak Arabic reported having delegated the task of searching for accommodation to a family member who is fluent in the language. On the contrary, one Ethiopian

participant remarked that they tend to benefit from weaker networks of support and know fewer Libyans than migrants from other countries who speak Arabic. Similarly, several participants from Eritrea expressed a lack of opportunities to socialise and build relationships with Libyans because of their inability to speak Arabic.

Overall, these findings point to the importance of social networks — which are also influenced by geographical proximity as well as the socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural ties that developed over time through the circular migration of populations from neighbouring countries — in overcoming the language barrier.

In parallel, according to data collected among 26,137 migrants, a smaller proportion of migrants from the East and Horn of Africa reported that they intend to remain in Libya (10%) compared to other nationalities (34%) potentially further restraining their ability or willingness to invest in building a network. Similarly, not intending to stay in Libya could also constitute a deterrent to devoting resources into looking for (more) suitable housing.

15 IOM (2015). World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2015-migrants-and-cities-new-partnerships-manage-mobility> (accessed May 2022).

16 IOM (2019). IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/iom-handbook-migrants-vulnerable-violence-exploitation-and-abuse> (accessed April 2022).



A member of IOM Libya's Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) during a distribution of hygienic kits and core relief items to migrants in situations of vulnerability in Bani Waleed.

Although a DTM [report](#)¹⁷ on migrants' social networks found that the majority of migrants lived without family or relatives, many reported relying on a wider network of support among ethnic community members for an array of services, including insider knowledge and assistance with finding housing. The majority of migrants interviewed in 2020 by DTM for a [study](#)¹⁸ on housing reported having found their accommodation through their social networks (88%), such as friends, relatives, migrant community leaders or members. This was also corroborated by findings of the FGDs conducted for this study, in which several participants mentioned having found their current dwelling through migrants of their community.

Moreover, many participants from countries including Niger, Eritrea and Sudan explained that newly arrived migrants are usually hosted by members of their community until they find accommodation, get acquainted with the country, the location of residence, the culture and the job market. Some participants, Eritreans in particular, stated that they often rely on migrants of their country of origin to share accommodation which lowers the rent, a strategy which is convenient especially when job opportunities are scarce, according to some participants. However, while sharing one apartment with multiple people can be a solution to lower the rent, many participants mentioned that some landlords will demand compensation for each person spending the night in their residence or impose a limit on the number of individuals who can share a room. Hosting friends and acquaintances (for short or extended periods of time) appeared from the discussions as being a major point of contention between tenants and landlords, as mentioned by both parties.

At the same time, analysis of the FGDs highlights that while strong social networks can be beneficial for some communities with greater resources, better status or more strategic connections, they may restrict access to some sections of the rental housing market for other communities. For example, many interviewees explained that houses are passed on to migrants of the same nationality through word of mouth. Similarly prospective tenants are introduced to the landlord by the family who is moving out which helps earn their confidence. Likewise, some property owners renting housing consisting of multiple rooms each of which

shared by multiple tenants, may use intermediaries from the migrant community (for example, Nigerien migrants who are fluent in Arabic) to recruit (Nigerien) tenants. The intermediary in exchange for their services may be offered free accommodation and earn a commission from each tenant.

This not only points to the importance of social networks in securing housing but also demonstrates how social networks that provide support to some groups may exclude others. Therefore, social networks [protect](#)¹⁹ some while they may increase vulnerability and protection risks for others who are not able to fully access the rental housing market, including options that may be more suitable to their specific needs.



INTERMEDIARIES

Most migrants explained that access to housing was only possible through an intermediary – often a Libyan national or a member of their community of origin who enjoys a strong network of acquaintances and has generally been in Libya for a long period of time. Several participants from the FGDs across all nationalities and four municipalities expressed that knowing Libyans had helped them earn their landlords' trust and respect which in turn often helped speed up the process of negotiating for and securing a house, and could reduce the fee paid in commission to intermediaries.

Source of local knowledge

Social networks were highlighted during FGDs as being a source of real-life knowledge on rental housing market prices. Several participants from Chad, Sudan, Egypt, Palestine and Syria reported that they had asked their employer as well as friends from Libya and other nationalities to ensure that the amount they pay in rent was in line with market prices. Such knowledge of local conditions can help reduce the risk of being targeted by unscrupulous landlords who take advantage of tenants and help their search for housing.

Cultural affinity and socioeconomic status

Many participants across municipalities noted that Libyan landlords generally prefer tenants based on their actual (or presumed) socioeconomic status. One migrant explained that the majority of property owners are interested in gaining money hence they will generally turn a blind eye on the nationality or race of the tenant.

17 IOM Libya (2021). Libya – Closely Knit: An Assessment of Migrants' Social Networks in Libya. Available at <https://migration.iom.int/reports/libya---closely-knit-assessment-migrants-social-networks-libya-january-2021> (accessed April 2022).

18 IOM Libya (2020). Libya – A long Way from Home: Migrants Housing Conditions in Libya. Available at <https://migration.iom.int/reports/libya---long-way-home---migrants-housing-conditions-libya-23-nov-2020> (accessed April 2022).

19 IOM (2019) The Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability. Available at https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd486/files/our_work/DMM/MPA/1-part1-the-determinants.pdf (accessed April 2022).

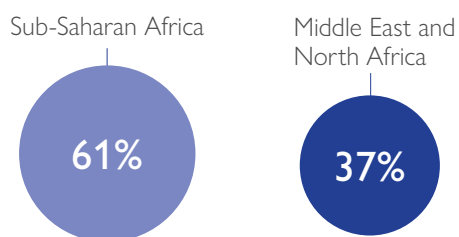
This was echoed by a participant from Niger who stated that the “only language property owners understand is the language of money”. This statement also aligns with the findings from the FGDs held with landlords across municipalities who expressed that a tenant’s income, occupation, and ability to pay rent were their main selection criteria for a prospective renter.

Landlords’ preference for renters with a higher (perceived) socioeconomic status may translate in an inclination for certain population subgroups over others. Based on a total of 29,370 individual interviews conducted by DTM in 2022 a greater proportion of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa (61%) than the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (37%) reported working in elementary occupations²⁰, such as construction, farming and manufacturing (unskilled) labourers and as cleaners, which are generally lower paid than professional and managerial jobs (Fig 4). Moreover, a larger percentage of sub-Saharan migrants reported being unemployed (28%) and facing financial difficulties (65%) than those from the MENA region (16% and 52%, respectively).

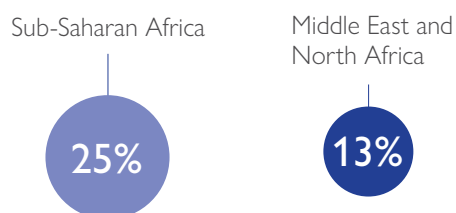
Beyond economic status and financial resources, cultural affinity as well as stereotypes, preconceived ideas or assumptions about other cultures may lead some landlords to prefer certain groups over others.

Figure 4: Migrants’ field of occupation and unemployment status in Libya by region of origin in 2022 (n=29,370)

Migrants working in elementary occupations



Unemployment status



²⁰ As defined by the International Standard Classification of Occupations, elementary occupations consist of simple and routine tasks which mainly require the use of hand-held tools and often physical effort.

Socioeconomic status



One participant from Niger claimed that the “only language property owners understand is the language of money”.

This can in turn partly explain the differences in the ability of some migrants to access equally the rental housing market in Libya. For example, according to some Sudanese participants, migrants from Sudan generally have a good relationship with Libyans because of the similarities between their cultures.

Apart from resulting in unequal access to the rental housing market, differences in religion, cultures and nationalities can also be a source of disputes between tenants and landlords. In turn, soured relations between landlords and tenants can lead to predatory or abusive practices.

Gender

Several assessments have highlighted²¹ that women were more likely to face increased challenges in finding housing and this appears to be confirmed by the results of the FGDs. One participant explained that unmarried women - whether single, widowed or divorced - face many obstacles in the process of renting because of gender stereotypes in society as well as cultural and social norms. Female participants from Nigeria and Eritrea mentioned that being a single woman, according to them, leads to more harassment from landlords regardless of nationality. Several women highlighted having suffered from various incidents that put their protection at risk in the process of finding and renting accommodation ranging from bullying to threats and harassment.

Furthermore, several participants highlighted that landlords are generally not inclined to rent to, or engage with women, often requiring a male guardian to step in. For example, one participant reported having had to deal with a representative for all transactions because she is a widow. For some women this may involve additional costs. One participant explained that it is difficult for a single mother to find a dwelling and rent it without the assistance of a mediator, such as a male guardian, who will sometimes ask for financial compensation. Women

²¹ OCHA (2021). Humanitarian Needs Overview Libya 2022. Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/libya_hno_2022_6dec21.pdf (accessed April 2022).

may also be forced into accepting inflated rent because they are unable to negotiate with the landlord, according to female participants in Tripoli.

This information was corroborated by the findings of the FGDs with landlords, some of whom reported that they prefer renting out to male-headed households.

These findings are also in line with a recent [REACH](#)²² assessment, which found that single women tend to be excluded from the housing market for traditional and cultural reasons. Moreover, women are often perceived by property owners as less likely to be employed or to have a sustainable and sufficient income to be considered as financially reliable. Individual interviews with 29,369 migrants (1,090 females and 28,279 males) conducted in 2022 highlighted that the average amount earned in the last 30 days by females (974 LYD) was similar to that of males (964 LYD). However, fewer females were employed (38%) compared to male migrants (79%).

Beyond landlords' lack of acceptance and economic concerns, the social expectations and traditions of migrant communities themselves may also be limiting females' ability to fully access the rental housing market in Libya. For example, some Nigerien men mentioned that widowed or single women are hosted with families until they can return to Niger from Libya and that single women are very rarely allowed to live independently without a husband or guardian.

Gender



One participant explained that unmarried women - whether single, widowed or divorced - face many obstacles in the process of renting because of gender stereotypes as well as cultural and social norms.

Marital and family status

Many participants noted that some property owners refuse to rent to unmarried young people — and to unmarried women in particular because it is frowned upon in the local customs. Respondents also expressed

that generally property owners are more sympathetic to migrants who have children. This was confirmed by landlords in Tripoli and Benghazi who mentioned that they prefer renting to families or small groups. One migrant shared that “Libyans sanctify and respect the primacy of the migrant family”. According to many participants, families are perceived by landlords as being more stable and trustworthy. Some mentioned that this may be because landlords assume that families with children tend to have more financial resources than those who are single and younger. In addition, many participants reported that landlords prefer families rather than unmarried men because it is assumed the latter will create problems with the neighbours related to the noise they might potentially create if they have visitors.

Family status and gender



Many participants noted that some homeowners refuse to rent to unmarried young people — and to unmarried women in particular — as it is frowned upon in the local culture.

At the same time, according to one participant, unmarried men are more likely to be evicted upon shorter notice than families as landlords tend to be more lenient with those with children. Moreover, some participants expressed that it was easier to negotiate with landlords because Libyans prefer families with children. Many participants stated that while some landlords might give a discount to families out of solidarity they may increase the rent for groups of unmarried individuals.

These findings are in line with a recent [assessment](#)²³ conducted by REACH that found that landlord may have a preference to rent to families, which in turn impacts the quality of accommodation and the neighbourhoods where single migrants are able to find housing.

However, accessing the rental housing market with a family may also involve some challenges. A few participants reported that some landlords tend to fear the potential noise, disturbance or damage that large families with numerous children can cause. For example, one participant mentioned that his landlord

²² REACH (2022). Key Issues of Refugee and Migrant Accommodation in Libya: Preliminary Qualitative Findings. Available at https://shelterclusters3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/briefing_note_-_key_issues_of_refugee_and_migrant_accommodation_in_libya_-_feb_2022.pdf (accessed April 2022).

²³ REACH (2022). Key Issues of Refugee and Migrant Accommodation in Libya: Preliminary Qualitative Findings. Available at https://shelterclusters3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/briefing_note_-_key_issues_of_refugee_and_migrant_accommodation_in_libya_-_feb_2022.pdf (accessed April 2022).

had complained and asked him to vacate the house because of the children's clamour and his fear that they would damage the house. In addition, many participants expressed that it was challenging to find affordable housing suitable for families near essential services such as schools and healthcare.

Furthermore, several migrants noted that it was difficult to find housing that are spacious enough to accommodate large families. For instance, some migrants who participated in the FGDs in Sebha argued that the housing options available to them for rent were more suitable for single men than families because they consist of multiple-occupancy rooms shared amongst five or so people with a communal bathroom. Many migrants in Sebha also noted that in their experience landlords preferred groups of individuals from whom they could expect to earn more than by renting to a single family. For instance, one participant explained that for a four-bedroom dwelling a landlord could potentially charge between 50 to 100 dinars to five to ten people sharing each room (potentially earning between 1,000 - 4,000 dinars per month) compared to an estimated 300 dinars a month for a family.

Family status



One participant claimed that Libyans sanctify and respect the primacy of the migrant family.

Length of stay

Those moving away from their places of origin may face a [lack of understanding](#)²⁴ of the new local context (at least in the short term), which can translate into a lack of knowledge of how to access housing as well as a lack of awareness of local hazards (such as unwelcoming neighbourhoods). In turn, this may result in increased vulnerability and risk of exclusion for the incoming population, especially in the earlier stages. For example, recently arrived migrants have been found to be [more at risk](#)²⁵ of geographical isolation as a result of having few alternatives but to live in cheaper housing that is potentially not well adapted to their needs or which may be further from work opportunities.

²⁴ IOM (2015). World Migration Report 2015: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2015-migrants-and-cities-new-partnerships-manage-mobility> (accessed May 2022).

²⁵

ibid.

According to some respondents, recently arrived migrants and those who have few or no acquaintances in Libya tend to struggle to navigate the rental housing market. Many participants from different nationalities explained that based on their experiences their chances of finding adequate housing increased with the amount of time they spent in Libya and as they familiarized themselves with the region and the culture, bridged new relationships with people of different nationalities, got acquainted with their neighbours and learned Arabic.

Beyond time spent in Libya, economic means and relations with the landlord were identified as key factors. Migrant who participated in the FGDs in Tripoli, all of whom had been in Libya for more than three years, believed that they faced no major issues related to accessing accommodation because they paid a significant amount of money for rent and because they perceived their relationship with their landlord as being excellent.

Findings from the Global Shelter Cluster [highlighted](#)²⁶ that trust and proximity between landlord and tenant are a key factor in security of tenure although written lease agreements are also helpful. This highlights that aspects such as language, cultural affinity, social networks and family status – all factors which have been found to elicit landlords' trust – are linked not only to migrants' ability to secure housing but to maintain a better relationship with their landlord and therefore potentially decrease the risks related to landlord's predatory behaviours.

In addition to influencing migrants' access to the rental housing market, the duration of stay in Libya is also related to other factors that further contribute to better housing outcomes (e.g. employment). For example, among 29,370 migrants interviewed in 2022 by DTM Libya, 55 per cent of those who had been in Libya for less than six months were unemployed compared to 12 per cent of those who had been in the country for two years or longer (Fig 5). Similarly, a greater proportion of those who had arrived more recently (less than 6 months ago) (72%) reported that financial difficulties were among the three main issues they faced when surveyed compared to those who have been in Libya for over two years (58%).

²⁶

Global Shelter Cluster (2020). Humanitarian Rental Market Interventions: A Review of Best Practices. Available at https://shelterclusters3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/rental_markets_report_final_1.pdf (accessed April 2022).

Figure 5: Percentage of migrants unemployed and facing financial difficulties by length of stay in Libya in 2022 (n=29,370)



Documentation

In general, not possessing identity and legal documents is an indicator of vulnerability as it impacts a tenants' ability to access formal mechanisms protecting their rights. For example, several participants of the FGDs identified that a lack of official documents had directly hindered their search for housing by limiting their options and their ability to secure a formal lease that would "protect their rights".

More specifically, the majority of migrants, and particularly those from Niger, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Nigeria, reported that the inability to produce official identity and legal documents when required was a hindrance to obtaining an official (written) lease that would, they believe, "guarantee their rights" and "protect them" against problems such as fraud, issue with service provision (e.g. water, electricity), arbitrary rent increases or threats of eviction. Female participants also shared that they had been asked by landlords to produce official documentation, such as marriage certificates when seeking housing as a couple. A total of 37 per cent of migrants interviewed by DTM in 2022 in Libya identified that a lack of identity documents was one of the three main issues they faced. Furthermore, throughout 2022, a minority (14%) of migrants interviewed by DTM reported having residence or work permits in Libya.

Housing contract

96%

of migrants are estimated to have undocumented rental lease agreement or none at all.

Nearly all migrants (96%) are estimated²⁷ to have undocumented rental lease agreement or none at all, which means they are not benefiting from legal protection²⁸ against forced eviction, harassment and other threats. At the same time they are at increased risk of eviction, arbitrary rent increases, inadequate housing maintenance, lack of access to services and lower quality housing. According to the eviction tracker²⁹, as of April 2022, a total of 6,103 migrants had been affected by collective expulsions from their accommodations and 149 migrants had been impacted by individual evictions since its launch in April 2021, although the actual numbers are estimated to be higher.

However, not all migrants who participated in the FGDs reported that a lack of documentation was an issue and not all migrants mentioned having been asked for documents in the process of securing rental housing.

On the one hand, many participants stated that they had not been requested to produce personal or official documents because they believe that landlords' priority is to receive rent payments on time rather than focus on legal documentation. This in turn also suits migrants who do not possess documents, according to many migrants who participated in the FGDs.

On the other hand, FGDs revealed that many landlords appear to assume that migrants are generally not in possession of the necessary identification papers, which in turn means that they do not envisage a written or official lease as a possibility in most cases. Although in some migrants' opinion this practice is intentional as it allows landlords to increase rent arbitrarily or evict lodgers when they can find an alternative tenant "who can pay a larger amount of money", for example.

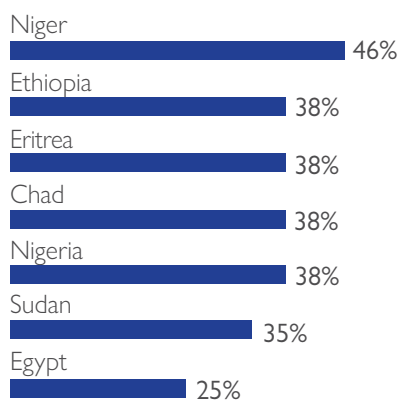
27 OCHA (2021). Humanitarian Needs Overview Libya. Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/libya_hno_2022_6dec21.pdf (accessed April 2022).

28 OHCHR (2014). Forced Evictions - Fact Sheet No. 25/Rev.1. Available at https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FS25_Rev.1.pdf (accessed April 2022).

29 The Eviction Tracker is a joint initiative of the Shelter & NFI and the Protection sectors under the umbrella of the Eviction Task Force launched in September 2021. Its objective is to record, track and trigger response, including through interagency referrals, in case of evictions and threats thereof affecting individuals and collective sites and gain a better understanding of factors which put persons at heightened risk.

Among the 29,370 migrants surveyed by DTM in 2022, more than a third of migrants from Niger (46%), Eritrea (38%), Ethiopia (38%), Chad (38%), Nigeria (38%) and Sudan (35%), as well as a quarter of those from Egypt (25%) reported that issues related to identity documents was one of the main difficulties they faced (Fig 6). There was little difference between the proportion of female (40%) and male migrants (37%) who reported identity documents as a major obstacle.

Figure 6: Percentage of migrants who reported that identity documents issues was one of the top three difficulties they faced in 2022 by country of origin



At the same time, some participants expressed a preference for oral types of contracts which are more affordable, according to them, because they believe a written contract would necessitate a mediator or a lawyer, which involves more fees.

A few migrants who participated in FGDs in Sebha highlighted that those who are illiterate would struggle to obtain and handle a written contract.

Hence, in addition to a lack of documentation, limited economic means and being illiterate appear as two other factors that can contribute to migrants' inability to obtain formal contracts and equitably access the rental housing market as well as potentially limiting their housing options.

Contract validity



According to many participants, oral contracts are as valid as any other types of contract because in their opinion “the landlord decides whether the contract is valid or not” either way.

However, some migrants who participated in the FGDs mentioned that oral contracts suited their needs because it affords them more flexibility and the ability, they claim, to negotiate the value of rent with more ease than with a written contract. According to many participants, oral contracts are as valid as any other type of contracts because in any case “the landlord decides whether the contract is valid or not”.

Risk of renting to migrants

According to the [Libya Shelter & NFI sector](#)³⁰ having a written contract creates a risk for landlords who could be perceived as supporting “illegal migration” since migrants are considered “illegal” by the Libyan authorities.

Landlords who participated in the FGDs in Benghazi agreed that renting to migrants involved the risk of encountering issues with authorities particularly in case of incident or crime, such as a robbery, because they would need to report it to the authorities on behalf of their tenants because they lack identification documents. One landlord in Sebha mentioned that the raids being conducted on migrants' home are problematic and instill fear of renting out to migrants as there are no regulations protecting them or tenants.

Housing supply and earning capacity

The lack of affordable (and adequate) housing was highlighted by nearly all participants as a major obstacle to accessing (decent) rental housing in Libya. At the same time migrants also mentioned that their wages were generally too low to allow them to afford rental housing market prices. For instance, migrants from Sudan in Tripoli remarked that they constantly have to search for lower-cost alternative accommodation options because rent prices are too high compared to their average wages.

WHAT IS AFFORDABLE HOUSING?

For the purpose of this report the term ‘affordable housing’ is used to express the financial affordability of housing with respect to occupants’ income rather than to describe ‘social housing’ or ‘public housing’. Based on a World Bank and UN-Habitat established [threshold](#), housing is considered affordable when a household spends less than 30 per cent of their income on housing related expenses such as rent payments.

30 Shelter NFI Sector Libya (2021). Guidance Note: Shelter Solution for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Libya. Available at https://shelterclusters3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/v2-guidance_note_-_rasm_shelter_solutions_-_17.09.2021.pdf (accessed April 2022).

Most migrants who participated in FGDs across municipalities explained that they have no other choice than to accept the rental housing options available at the lowest cost to be able to afford daily expenses and provide for their families in Libya or abroad because of their low wages and the high prices of rent.

Being the sole provider for their family or being financially responsible for people outside of the household/family is not in itself an indicator of [vulnerability](#)³¹. However, if a person is responsible for people and cannot fulfil their responsibilities, it constitutes a risk factor to vulnerability. Moreover, remittances – monetary transfers sent by workers living abroad – are a [lifeline](#)³² for many of migrants' households in the country of origin as they serve as risk mitigation and an income diversification strategy. Nearly half of migrants interviewed in September and October 2022 by DTM Libya as part of its Flow Monitoring Surveys [reported](#)³³ that the remittances they send home were their household's primary source of income.

Labour migration and remittances



We did not come to Libya to look for a house. We all came here to earn money in order to help our families. We must bear with all the circumstances that arise so that our families can have a better future.

Many participants, including two migrants who have lived in Libya for more than 20 years believed that the housing options in the country have deteriorated. They explained that the living and housing conditions in their opinion have worsened and that what “they used to pay for a month’s rent only affords you a night’s rent now”. This also points to the shortage of (adequate) affordable housing [leading](#)³⁴ some dishonest landlords to behave in an exploitative, illegal or predatory manner as they are aware that migrants may have little to no other alternatives or lack the resources needed to find better housing options.

According to the [Africa Housing Finance Yearbook 2021](#)³⁵, there was a housing deficit in Libya prior to 2011 which was further exacerbated by the conflict. While there is no recent official data on the housing deficit in Libya, according to [UN Habitat](#)³⁶ the number of informal settlements has increased since the onset of hostilities and there is a severe housing shortage, particularly in urban areas. For example, in Benghazi, the number of informal constructions [rose](#)³⁷ by 81 per cent between 2006 and 2018. Moreover, UN-Habitat [stated](#)³⁸ that licenses for construction and registration of properties has reportedly stopped since 2011. At the same time prices of rental properties have skyrocketed, according to [media reports](#).

Some migrants also noted that they had lowered their expectations because there were very few houses available within their price range. One participant from Egypt in Misrata mentioned that there is no leeway for negotiating the price because of the low supply of housing and the high demand. He explained that if he is not satisfied with the price, the landlord will rent it to another tenant. Another migrant added that tenants tend to agree to price increases imposed by their landlords because they have no other alternatives. For some migrants, a lack of alternatives means staying in a house even if it is not adequate. Most participants agreed that improvement in financial conditions go hand in hand with improvement in the housing situation, highlighting earning capacity as a major factor influencing migrants' ability to afford adequate housing and enjoy some protection against abusive practices, such as arbitrary price increases.

Furthermore, earning capacity [affects](#)³⁹ both the ability to meet the initial costs associated with establishing a housing tenancy as well as ongoing rental payments. As such, earning capacity was frequently highlighted by all groups of migrants who participated in the FGDs as a major factor of influence in migrants' ability to navigate the rental housing market. Many respondents explained that the main factor of influence in accessing housing was income levels and stability and that as such unemployment or unstable employment was a major obstacle.

In addition, several participants reported that delayed rent payments was a major source of contention with landlords. Landlords who participated in the FGDs

31 IOM (2019). IOM Handbook on Protection and Assistance to Migrants Vulnerable to Violence, Exploitation and Abuse. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/books/iom-handbook-migrants-vulnerable-violence-exploitation-and-abuse> (accessed April 2022).

32 World Bank (2020). Remittances: A Lifeline for Many Economies. Available at <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgsatlas/goal-17-partnerships-for-the-goals/> (accessed April 2022).

33 IOM Libya (2022). IOM Libya Migrant Report Round 44 (September - October 2022). Available at <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/libya-migrant-report-44-september-october-2022> (accessed October 2022).

34 UN HABITAT (2011). Quick Guide 7: Rental housing. Available at <http://capacitybuilding.unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/Trainings%20and%20publications/Housing/Housing%20the%20Poor%20in%20African%20Cities/English/Quick%20Guide%207.pdf> (accessed May 2022).

35 Centre for Affordable Housing Finance Africa (2021) Africa housing yearbook 2021 (Libya). Available at <https://housingfinanceafrica.org/app/uploads/2021/12/Libya.pdf> (accessed June 2022).

36 UN Habitat (2018). Urban Issues: Libya. Available at <https://unhabitat.org/urban-issues-libya> (accessed April 2022).

37 UN Habitat (2018). City Profile of Benghazi, Libya. Available at https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-04/city_profile_of_benghazi.pdf (accessed May 2022).

38 UN Habitat (2018). City Profile of Benghazi, Libya. Available at https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-04/city_profile_of_benghazi.pdf (accessed May 2022).

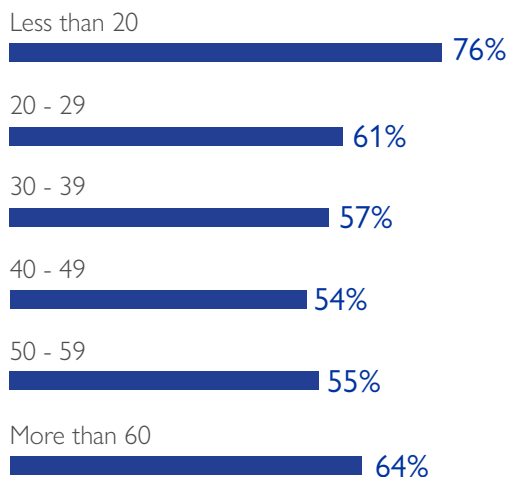
39 UNHCR (2022). Access to Secure and Affordable Housing. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/handbooks/ih/housing/access-secure-and-affordable-housing> (accessed April 2022).

concurrent with this view. Most of them expressed that their main criteria for choosing a tenant was their income levels, their ability to pay rent as well as to pay it on time. According to the [2022 Libya HNO](#)⁴⁰, the high reliance of migrants on insecure sources of income, such as daily or temporary work in the informal sector combined with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, negatively affected migrants' livelihoods and their ability to pay rent, which was the most reported cause of actual or feared eviction.

Age

Some participants believed that it is more difficult for younger migrants than those who are older to navigate the rental housing market. This is likely to be at least partially related to their respective earning capacity and financial resources. Among a total of 29,370 individual interviews conducted in 2022 by DTM, a greater proportion of migrants aged 18 - 20 (76%) cited that financial issues were among the three main challenges they faced compared to 55 per cent of migrants aged 30-59 and 64 per cent of migrants aged 60 or older (Fig 7). The rate of unemployment was also higher among those aged 18-29 (36%) compared to those aged 30-59 (14%).

Figure 7: Percentage of migrants who reported financial issues by age group based on 29,370 individual interviews with migrants conducted in 2022



40 OCHA (2021). Humanitarian Needs Overview Libya. Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/libya_hno_2022_6dec21.pdf (accessed April 2022).



A member of IOM's Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) during a distribution of hygienic kits and core relief items to migrants in situations of vulnerability in Bani Waheed.

Disability

Some participants noted that disability may reduce one's ability to work, which can in turn limit their housing options. Disability was highlighted in a DTM [study](#)⁴¹ on migrants' housing conditions as being a barrier to inclusion and access to adequate housing. The analysis of six key areas of adequate housing revealed that migrants living in accommodation where at least one person reported living with a disability (such as visual, hearing, physical impairments) fared worse in all areas than those where this was not the case. For example, migrants' accommodation where at least one person with a disability lived were generally more crowded and the physical infrastructure was more damaged than those who did not report living with a person with a disability.

Some landlords who participants in FGDs in Tripoli mentioned that they understand that injury or disability can impair someone's ability to pay rent but will only be lenient provided that tenants can pay later.

Security and affordability

Safety was one of, or the main criteria, for selecting housing for most migrants who participated in the FGDs, regardless of nationality. The inability for some migrants to feel safe in all or some neighbourhoods may limit their housing options while the lack of adequate housing in the areas that are deemed safe further constrain their ability to find suitable options. For example, one migrant from Niger in Benghazi mentioned he is constrained to remain in his dwelling despite being inadequate because he prioritises safety, demonstrating his lack of alternatives.

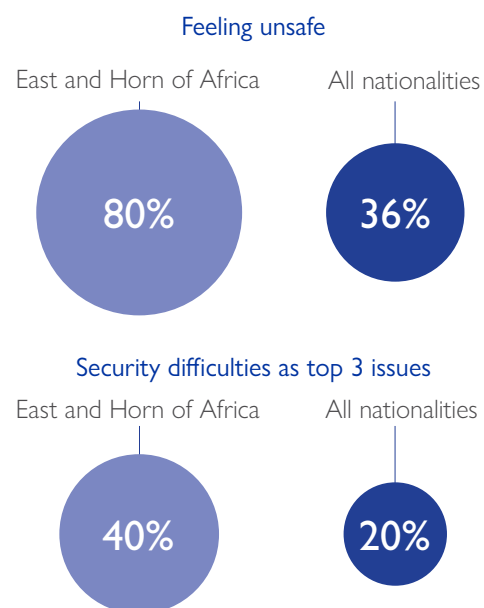
At the same time, safety and affordability are difficult to reconcile in migrants' experiences because according to some the safer the area the more expensive rental prices tend to be. Furthermore, some migrants in Sebha and Misrata reported that more affordable rental housing are not always considered adequate for living because they are often in remote locations, where the security situation can be unstable.

While the higher prices for housing located in areas deemed safer appear to impact all migrants, it may impact some population groups more than others because of their country of origin and level of cultural affinity, which may further limit the number of areas that are considered safe. For example, according to some participants, Eritreans and Ethiopians are affected by

security issues including armed robbery by criminal gangs to a greater extent than other nationalities, such as Sudanese migrants. This constitutes a major barrier to being able to access the rental housing market equitably as it limits their options for renting both spatially and financially. Based on a DTM Libya [study](#)⁴² on social networks, a greater proportion of migrants from the East and Horn of Africa mentioned feeling unsafe (80%) compared to the rest of migrants (36%) (Fig 8).

Moreover, based on interviews conducted by DTM Libya in 2022 with migrants from the East and Horn of Africa, 40 per cent reported that security issues (such as attacks and assaults) were among the three main challenges they faced, compared to 20 per cent of migrants across all nationalities. These findings are also in line with a recent [assessment](#)⁴³ conducted by REACH which highlighted that the relations with and (cultural) acceptance of neighbours are significant factors contributing to migrants' security as well as employment opportunities.

Fig 8: Percentage of migrants who reported feeling unsafe and that security issues were among the top 3 issues they faced by nationality



42 IOM Libya (2021). Libya – Closely Knit: an Assessment of Migrants' Social Networks in Libya. Available at <https://migration.iom.int/reports/libya---closely-knit-assessment-migrants-social-networks-libya-january-2021> (accessed April 2022).

43 REACH (2022). Key Issues of Refugee and Migrant Accommodation in Libya: Preliminary Qualitative Findings. Available at https://shelterclusters3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/briefing_note_key_issues_of_refugee_and_migrant_accommodation_in_libya_-_feb_2022.pdf (accessed April 2022).

41 IOM Libya (2020). A Long Way from Home - Migrants' Housing Conditions in Libya. Available at <https://migration.iom.int/reports/libya---long-way-home---migrants-housing-conditions-libya-23-nov-2020> (accessed April 2022).

Migration intentions

Understanding migration intentions can be [challenging](#)⁴⁴ as they can be coloured by migrants' broader life ambitions and beliefs, rather than realistic expectations related to migration itself.

Findings of the FGDs conducted as part of this study do not allow to claim that migration intentions were a major barrier hindering migrant's ability to navigate the rental housing market. However, migrants who intend to stay and those who have no fixed intentions reported having used the services of mediators, often of the same nationality as them, to help them in the process of arranging rental agreements. In comparison, migrants who intend to return home did not state having availed of this strategy, which points to migration intentions being related to the extent to which individuals may invest in livelihoods, housing and social networks in Libya. Vice-versa, the lack of adequate livelihoods and housing as well as limited support from social networks may also influence an individual's intentions to stay, migrate onwards or return to their country of origin.

Overall, in urban environments, populations are generally [more mobile](#)⁴⁵ meaning that individuals may move to and from different communities or between rural and urban areas for work, which can also influence their way of planning and organising their housing situation and may also point to the minimal influence of migration intentions as a factor determining equal access to the rental housing market.

Predatory behaviour and ill-treatment

The majority of migrants, regardless of nationality, gender, location, accommodation setting or migration intention, shared that they had experienced ill-treatment and that many landlords employed exploitative practices for profits including extortion, threats of eviction, eviction and infringement on tenants' ability to enjoy their dwelling (Fig 9). One migrant who participated in the FGDs noted that he believes that landlords prefer renting to migrants over Libyans because they benefit from an unbalanced relationship with migrants whereas landlords would have to treat Libyan tenants "as equal".

The most frequently cited ill treatment was the arbitrary eviction or threat of eviction of tenants which affected migrants across municipalities, nationalities, gender, levels of accommodation settings or migration intentions. Arbitrary increases in rent payment, failure to perform maintenance on the house or provide essential services (e.g. water, electricity), as well as preventing tenants from having visitors were also among the most frequently cited behaviours. Those living in accommodation settings that are considered inadequate (levels 1 and 2) mentioned having been affected by a greater range of ill practices than those living in accommodation settings deemed adequate (level 3).

Other misconduct or predatory behaviours reported during the FGDs included property owners charging a disproportionate amount for the state of the dwelling, restricting access to certain part of the house despite having agreed otherwise, harassment, deception, theft and threat of reporting them or their irregular status to the authorities.

44 Global Shelter Cluster (2020). Humanitarian Rental Market Interventions: A Review of Best Practices. Available at https://shelterclusters3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/public/docs/rental_markets_report_final_1.pdf (accessed April 2022).

45 Ibid.

Figure 9: Types of predatory practices and ill treatment reported by type of focus group discussion (nationality and location)

TYPE OF PRACTICE	Ethiopia		Eritrea		Sudan			Niger			Chad			Mixed nationalities												
	Benghazi	Tripoli	Tripoli	Tripoli	Sebha	Misrata	Tripoli	Benghazi	Tripoli	Benghazi	Misrata	Sebha	Tripoli	Sebha	Misrata	Syria, Egypt and Palestine	Tripoli, level 1 accommodation	Sebha, level 1 accommodation	Tripoli, level 2 accommodation	Sebha, level 2 accommodation	Sebha, level 3 accommodation	Benghazi, level 3 accommodation	Tripoli, no fixed intention	Tripoli, intend to stay in Libya	Tripoli, intend to return home	
Arbitrary rent increases, asking for payments early	●					●	●			●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●		
Unreasonably priced			●		●		●		●			●					●	●			●		●	●	●	
Restricting access to certain part of accommodation (e.g. room, parking spots)																	●									
Arbitrary eviction or threat of eviction	●	●		●	●				●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●		●	●	●
Verbal, physical or sexual harassment, intimidation, manipulation	●							●			●					●	●		●				●		●	
False promises, lying, deception, fraud						●			●				●		●	●	●					●				
Failure to perform maintenance (e.g. water and/or electricity supply)						●	●		●		●			●	●		●	●				●	●	●		
Disruption or failure to allow tenants to exercise their rights to enjoy the property as agreed (e.g. inability to invite friends or relatives at home)			●	●					●		●			●		●	●	●					●			
Theft, burglary, breaking in										●			●				●	●				●				
Threat of reporting migrant to authorities																			●							
Restricting services (e.g. water, electricity)																	●		●							

Male respondents
 Female respondents
 Female and male respondents

Summary of the main factors of influence in accessing the rental housing market

The following section summarises the main barriers faced by migrants as well as the means they rely on to overcome these obstacles while searching for and securing housing in Libya. This section also highlights how some factors can be considered as beneficial to some groups while considered disadvantageous to others.

ERITREA

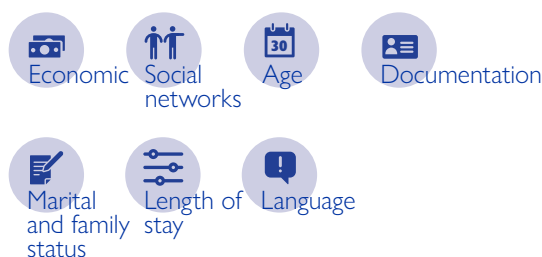
Females

The main obstacles reported were economic in nature. Social networks were highlighted as a means to lower the cost of rent (e.g. sharing with migrants of the same nationality) and as a way to help find housing (e.g. using an Eritrean mediator).



Males

The main barriers mentioned were economic (e.g. high rent of dwellings available considering their quality) and related to the difficulty of renting for those who are younger, single and without a family. Migrants highlighted that social networks and the ability to share housing with migrants of the same nationality were useful to overcome financial barriers but that landlords often imposed a limit on the number of migrants sharing a room (e.g. 3). The inability to speak Arabic was highlighted as being a major obstacle to finding housing and obtaining a lease but social networks with migrants of the same nationality was identified as a means to overcome this issue. The longer they remain in Libya, develop social networks, especially with Sudanese, and the greater their knowledge of the culture and Arabic, the better migrants reported they fared. Migrants expressed that a lack of identification papers was a barrier to obtaining a lease.



ETHIOPIA

Males

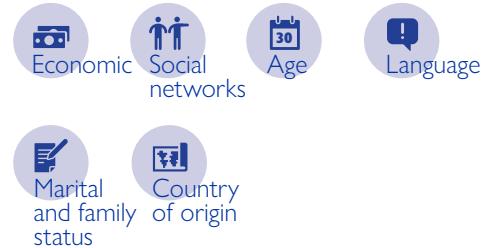
The lack of adequate housing at an affordable price was mentioned as being a significant barrier. Being single and without a family were also identified as obstacles. Discrimination based on race and nationality, socioeconomic status (e.g. occupation) and health condition were all mentioned as barriers. The lack of mastery of Arabic was also described as a major obstacle to communicating and negotiating with landlords. Migrants reported relying on social networks with migrants and Libyans to find housing and overcome financial hardship. The lack of identification papers and the inability to pay the fees charged by mediators were highlighted as barriers to obtaining a lease.



NIGER

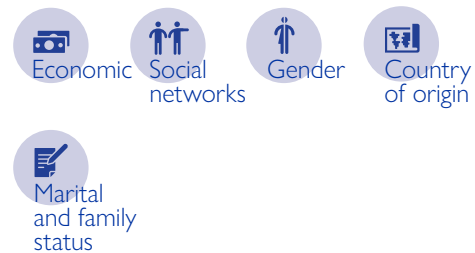
Males

The main obstacles cited were economic (e.g. having an unstable income, high rent of dwellings available considering their quality and inability to afford mediator costs). Age was reported as a barrier for those who are younger. Respondents also highlighted that it was more difficult for single men than families to find housing. The lack of social networks with Libyans was identified as a barrier to being able to equitably access the rental housing market. The mastery of the Arabic language was also highlighted as being helpful.



Females

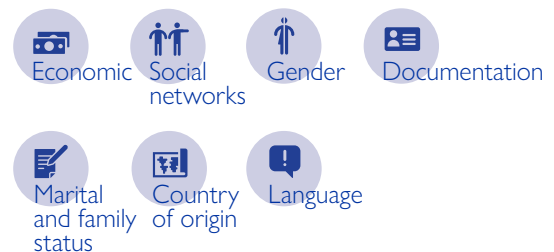
The main barriers were financial (e.g. high rent of dwellings available considering their quality, migrant wages not on par with rental housing market prices) Being a single woman may be an obstacle because of customs (e.g. “women are not left alone”). Discrimination based on family status (i.e. easier for families than single men to rent) were also cited as factors influencing access to housing. Social networks with Libyans and other migrants were found helpful in overcoming obstacles in accessing rental housing.



SUDAN

Males

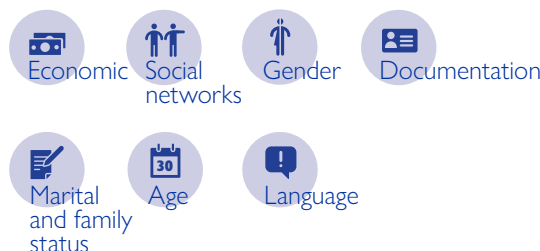
Economic factors were highlighted as a major obstacle (e.g. recent increased unemployment, inadequate income levels, type and place of work, lack of affordable housing). Moreover, it was reportedly more difficult for single, widowed or divorced women to search for housing and negotiate rent because of social and cultural norms. Family status was also mentioned as an obstacle (e.g. large families are sometimes refused). Migrants noted that having identity documents and being able to communicate in Arabic was reportedly helpful to navigate the rental housing market. Social networks with Libyans and other Sudanese were also found to be advantageous.



SUDAN

Females

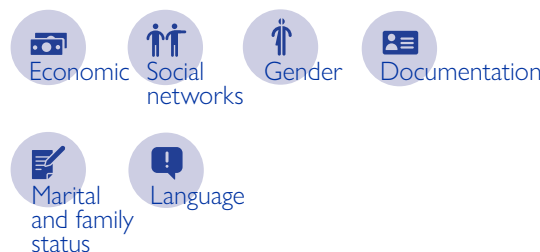
Economic factors were highlighted as a major issue (e.g. high cost of rent, low wages, lack of bargaining power because of a lack of options). Migrants relied on their social networks (Libyans and Sudanese) to help them search for housing. Lacking identity documentation was identified as a barrier affecting the process of securing housing. Age as well as marital and family status were also mentioned as factors of influence (e.g. preference of some landlords for small families, more difficult for unmarried women and young people). Being able to communicate in Arabic helped in communicating with landlords and reducing costs (i.e. by avoiding to pay for a mediator).



MIGRATION INTENTIONS

Migrants who intend to return

Economic factors were highlighted as an obstacle (e.g. high rent, unstable and low-level incomes). Gender, family arrangements and marital status were cited as hurdles to accessing housing and negotiating rent in the case of single women. Being able to communicate in Arabic and benefiting from social networks were identified as being useful. Lacking identity documents was mentioned as an obstacle to obtaining an official lease.



Migrants who intend stay in Libya

Economic factors (e.g. high prices for low quality and unsafe housing) were the main obstacles. Age, disability and illness were identified as indirect obstacles as they influence one's ability to find employment and therefore afford rent. Having the support of a social network was identified as beneficial. Lacking identity documents was mentioned as limiting housing options available to migrants.



Migrants who have no fixed intentions

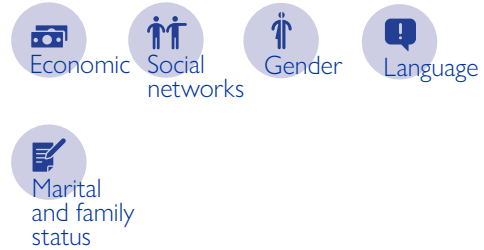
Economic factors were a significant obstacle for all migrants. Migrants in this cohort also reported having faced discrimination based on language skills and nationality. Cultural differences were also cited as an obstacle. Socioeconomic barriers (such as occupation and type of employment contract) were factors influencing migrants' ability to access the rental housing market. Being able to communicate in Arabic and being able to rely on one's social networks were identified as being useful when searching for housing.



ACCOMMODATION SETTINGS

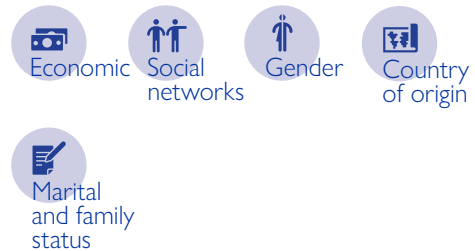
Level 1 accommodation

The main obstacles were economic (e.g. unstable and low-level income, high rental housing prices). Marital status (being single), gender (female-headed households) and being unable to communicate in Arabic were identified as factors of vulnerability to predatory behaviour by landlords. Social networks were cited as being helpful.



Level 2 accommodation

The main barriers were economic in nature. Racial discrimination and exclusion based on nationality were also identified as obstacles. Being able to communicate in Arabic and enjoying connections with Libyans and other migrants were identified as being helpful. The difficulty of finding housing that can accommodate large families was also cited as an obstacle.



Level 3 accommodation

Economic factors were highlighted as the biggest obstacle. Social networks and being able to communicate in Arabic were mentioned as being useful while women cited that certain social norms led to their exclusion from the rental housing market. Also, migrants reported it was easier for families to find housing than for single individuals.

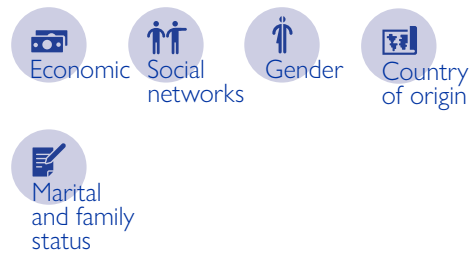


Figure 10: Classification of migrants' accommodation

- LEVEL 3 single-occupancy housing unit or apartment shared with family only in conventional dwelling
- LEVEL 2 shared room in a conventional dwelling;
- LEVEL 1 non-conventional dwelling, including informal housing, semi-permanent dwelling, mobile housing (shared or not), mattress in inadequate type of accommodation setting




المنظمة الدولية للهجرة
International Organization for Migration
The UN Migration Agency

In April 2022, in coordination with the local organization Tripoli-Good, IOM's Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) team distributed essential food kits to more than 400 vulnerable families and individuals from Libya, Sudan, Mauritania, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Chad, Niger, Mali and Eritrea. Throughout the month of Ramadan, daily distributions took place to reach people whose food security was compromised due to increased prices.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Protection- and people-centred approaches

This study underlined the need for protection- and people-centred approaches that take into account the individual factors of vulnerability that may affect migrants' ability to access the rental housing market such as socioeconomic status, language skills, cultural affinity, gender, age, marital status and whether an individual is with their family.

More information on the housing market

This study highlighted that many respondents perceived that a lack of supply of adequate housing was a major issue. The structure of the housing sector, in particular, the extent of private home ownership and the mix of government and private sector involvement affects the rental housing market and its accessibility. Finding complementary ways for the government and the private sector to increase their involvement in housing provision could help improve equitable access to the rental housing market. These initiatives could also include monitoring (informal) housing markets and rent prices, tracking major migrant collective accommodation settings and their conditions, identifying buildings to be rehabilitated as well as monitoring evictions and helping ensure that international standards are upheld.

Strengthen migration management and labour mobility

Beyond a rental contract, the ability to pay rent and paying it on time appears from focus group discussions with both landlords and tenants as being one of the key elements in being able to fully and equitably access the rental housing market as well as preventing eviction or threat thereof. Hence, programmes that aim at supporting migrants' socioeconomic status, through labour market interventions, fostering international cooperation mechanisms on labour mobility and establishing legal frameworks that will protect migrant workers, for example, may be beneficial in preventing eviction and alleviating predatory behaviour while promoting equal access to the rental housing market for migrants in Libya.

Consider the strengths and flaws of the informal rental housing market in programme design

This study highlights the advantages (flexibility, relative affordability) of the informal rental housing market as well as its flaws (poor housing quality, insecurity of tenure, increased risk of abusive and predatory practices, including unfair pricing) which should be considered when designing programmatic activities aimed at supporting migrants accessing adequate housing.

Some participants suggested that rent control laws that restrict the amount that landlords can charge for rent would help everyone, and particularly those on low and unstable income. Some landlords also mentioned that the lack of national standards meant they had to develop their own, which potentially leaves room for abusive and predatory practices.

Better urban development to the benefit of everyone

Housing and socioeconomic factors such as employment, safety and wellbeing are closely related. As such, improving urban planning and maximising accessibility to adequate housing and basic services for migrants in Libya should be considered as an integral part of urban planning and as a vector for economic and social development as it relates and impacts migrants' livelihoods and participation in the country.

Under stable political conditions, stimulating the housing industry could be a win-win for both the government and local populations, as well as migrants as it could boost the economy by stimulating interest in foreign direct investment while attracting migrant construction workers.



A member of IOM's Migrant Resource and Response Mechanism (MRRM) during a distribution of hygienic kits and core relief items to migrants in situations of vulnerability in Bani Waleed.

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IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) tracks and monitors population movements in order to collate, analyze and share information to support the humanitarian community with the needed demographic baselines to coordinate evidence-based interventions.

To consult all DTM reports, datasets, static and interactive maps and dashboards, please visit:

IOM Libya

 dtm.iom.int/libya

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