



# SAME BUT DIFFERENT?

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*An analysis of the experiences  
of migrant men and women  
in Libya*

April 2023

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| <b>05</b> | HIGHLIGHTS      |
| <b>06</b> | INTRODUCTION    |
| <b>08</b> | FINDINGS        |
| <b>18</b> | RECOMMENDATIONS |

# LIST OF ACRONYMS

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|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| <b>DTM</b>  | Displacement Tracking Matrix             |
| <b>FGDs</b> | Focus Group Discussions                  |
| <b>IOM</b>  | International Organization for Migration |
| <b>KIIs</b> | Key Informant Interviews                 |
| <b>UN</b>   | United Nations                           |
| <b>UNDP</b> | United Nations Development Programme     |

# HIGHLIGHTS

## *Household responsibilities*

Cultural norms and social practices mean that migrant women and men may have different roles and responsibilities, which present diverse opportunities and challenges. As men tend to be the primary income earners, they may be more prone to pressures related to unemployment, economic constraints and debt. The management of household responsibilities, a role usually assumed by women, was described by some as being limiting, straining and stressful. Household responsibilities, such as childcare and chores, were also found to limit women migrants' ability to find and secure employment, as well as, in some cases, socialize.

## *Women-headed households*

Women sometimes also have to assume the role of primary income earner when, for example, their spouse dies, is sick or unemployed, or if they are not married. This translates into additional barriers to building and benefiting from strong social connections as well as finding and securing employment, which can in turn have an impact on their financial status, vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse as well as the ability of their children to fully enjoy their right to education.

## *Labour market*

Findings from the focus group discussions, suggest that it tends to be more difficult for women than men migrants to find employment in Libya. However, in parallel, multiple other factors may influence migrants' chances of finding employment, including cultural affinity, social networks, education levels, length of stay in Libya and language skills.

## *Building social networks*

Women appear to generally have fewer opportunities than men to participate in kinship and build social connections, in part owing to their lack of economic means or financial autonomy as well as their responsibilities in the home. However, while men generally seem to enjoy more freedom to establish and grow social relationships, both in the frequency with which they can gather and in the locations where they can meet, their necessity to work limits their opportunities to do so.

## *Safety and security*

Being a man or a woman influences the types of security risks migrants are exposed to. More migrant men work outside the home, have to travel to different locations and wait at recruitment points, which increases their vulnerability to violence, abuse and exploitation.

Both men and women reported taking precautionary measures, such as avoiding certain streets or neighbourhoods, or only using taxi drivers who they believe to be trustworthy. However, more women migrants than men mentioned being constrained in the types of jobs they can undertake, the times at which they can travel and the means of transportation they can use because of security concerns.

Furthermore, these issues were particularly acute for migrants who lack cultural affinity with Libyan society and/or documentation — all factors which were identified as leading to an increased risk of arrest and detention, particularly for men who tend to travel to a greater extent, to (find) work, for example, than women.

# INTRODUCTION

## Context

Being a woman or a man is a critical factor of influence in human mobility dynamics, from [determining](#) who moves and the nature of the movement, to shaping how migrants adapt to a new country, keep contact with their country of origin, and potentially return.

There is emerging evidence, for example, that the nature of difficulties faced by migrant women are significantly different from those faced by migrant men. Similarly, risk-taking behaviour among migrant men has been observed to vary from among migrant women on account of socially shaped understandings of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, there is a need to consider the needs of women and men to improve the efficacy of policies which are designed to address issues tied to migrant vulnerability, safety and security.

This study is part of IOM Libya's efforts to gain a better understanding of how specific vulnerabilities play a role in influencing the experiences of migrant women and men in the country. Based on the [DTM data](#)<sup>2</sup>, out of the total adult migrant population in Libya there were an estimated 551,412 adult men (87%) compared to 81,934 adult women (13%).

## About this assessment

This study aims to compare the issues that migrant men and women may experience in Libya and that are associated with community cohesion, household responsibilities, labour market engagement and safety and security with the ultimate objective to contribute to the design of effective interventions in these areas.



## 706,062

migrants of over 42 nationalities were identified by IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) to be currently present in Libya as of [February 2023](#).

## Methodology

This report presents the analysis of data collected by IOM Libya's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) team between 04 – 13 September 2022. The assessment included three components: a literature review, semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs).

Individual-level semi-structured KIIs were conducted with six men and six women from among the most-represented countries of origin (Niger, Chad, Sudan and Nigeria) to generate knowledge on the specific experiences of migrant men and women in Libya. Informants were selected based on their first-hand knowledge of their community and the dynamics in Libya.

The FGDs were held to generate knowledge on the collective understanding of the experiences of migrants in Libya and create dialogue around their shared and differing experiences. The discussions focused on the specific experiences of women and men socializing in their communities, household responsibilities, difficulties finding employment and feeling of safety. The FGDs were conducted with 68 migrant women and 79 migrant men from eight countries, between the ages of 24 - 67, of different socioeconomic backgrounds (e.g. employed and unemployed) and marital statuses.

Findings were analysed using deductive coding drawn from the conceptual framework and research questions. A desk review of the profiles of male and female migrants interviewed in 2021 was used to help inform the design of the research tools. Results of individual interviews conducted with 29,369 migrants (1,090 females and 28,279 males) surveyed in 2022 were used to contextualise the findings of this report.

## Limitations

It should be highlighted that the opinions of migrants may vary based on personal situations, opinions, beliefs, or cultural backgrounds and that as such the ability to extrapolate the findings of this study to the whole

<sup>1</sup> Boyd, Monica, and Elizabeth Grieco (2014). Women and Migration: Incorporating gender into International Migration Theory. Available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/women-and-migration-incorporating-gender-international-migration-theory> (accessed March 2023).

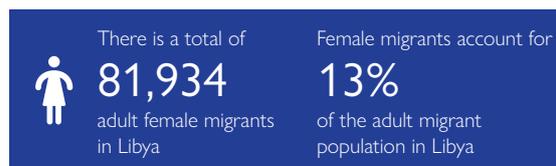
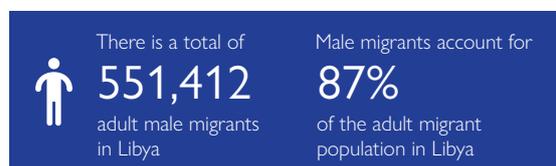
<sup>2</sup> IOM Libya (2023). Libya – Migrant Report 46 (January - February 2023). Available at <https://dtmiom.int/reports/libya-migrant-report-46-january-february-2023> (accessed June 2023).

population of migrants in Libya is limited. However, sex-disaggregated data collected in 2022 from a robust sample of 29,369 individual interviews with migrants was used to contextualise the findings of the FGDs and KIs and provide further insight.

In addition, because FGDs rely heavily on assisted discussions to produce data, the potential biases of the moderator may have influenced the results of the conversations. Similarly, the individual FGDs may have gone in different directions and some topics that surfaced in some groups may not have in others. In the same manner, some topics might have been debated from different angles depending on the composition of the group. To overcome these limitations and to minimize the risk of biases, all moderators who led the FGDs participated in a two-day workshop on 15-17 August 2022 where they were trained on qualitative data collection tools and methods as well as the study itself, its background and the data collection tools used.

Figure 1: Methodology

|        | FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS<br><i>(in-person)</i>   | INDIVIDUAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS<br><i>(face-to-face)</i>                        |
|--------|---|--|
| WHO?   | <b>147 migrants</b><br>(68 females, 79 males)<br>from Chad, Sudan, Egypt, Nigeria, Niger, Tunisia, Ethiopia and Eritrea | <b>12 migrants</b><br>(6 females, 6 males)<br>from Chad, Niger, Sudan, Nigeria |
| WHERE? | <b>Tripoli, Benghazi, Misrata and Sebha</b>   | <b>Misrata and Benghazi</b>  |
| WHEN?  | <b>04 - 13 September 2022</b>   |  |



\*In addition there were 72,716 migrant children in Libya as of February 2023.



## GUIDING DEFINITIONS

- **Migrant:** according to the [IOM glossary](#) on migration ‘migrant’ is an umbrella term, not defined by international law, which reflects the common understanding of a person leaving their place of usual residence, either within a country or crossing international borders, either temporarily or permanently and for various reasons. The definition does not refer to the (1) legal status of person, (2) nature of move (voluntary or involuntary), (3) reason for the move, or (4) length of stay. For the purposes of collecting data on migration, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) defines “international migrant” as “any person who changes his or her country of usual residence” (UN DESA, Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1 (1998) para. 32). This report only takes into consideration “international migrants” in Libya as defined above.

- **Sex-disaggregated data** refers to the differentiation of information by sex categories as typically listed on official identification, such as male and female. ([IOM Gender and Migration Data, 2021](#)).

- **Women-headed households** “are households where either no adult men are present, owing to divorce, separation, migration, non-marriage, or widowhood; or where the men, although present, do not contribute to the household income, because of illness or disability, old age, alcoholism or similar incapacity (but not because of unemployment). Household headship has ‘real’ (de facto) and ‘perceived’ (de jure) dimensions. The de facto head is the main decision-maker responsible for financial support and welfare of the household. The de jure head, traditionally associated with the man ‘breadwinner’, is a person who usually lives with the household and is recognized as head of household by its other members. Often implicit in woman’s headship is the perceived problematic of the de facto status running counter to the established de jure norm, that is, man’s headship”.

# FINDINGS

This section describes how the norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman or a man play as a factor of vulnerability and whether they lead to the adoption of coping strategies among migrants in Libya.

## Social participation and interactions

During the FGDs migrants were questioned about their social interactions with family members and friends as well as with their broader communities.

### Social isolation and social networks

From the FGDs, women migrants appeared to have fewer opportunities to participate in kinship and build social connections than men migrants. Respondents indicated that women more than men appeared to be limited in their ability to establish and grow social relationships by spending time with contacts, building trust and engaging in social, cultural and religious activities and associations, for example. More specifically, respondents explained that the majority of women were more directly either constrained to their private home because of social customs or security concerns, or tended to gather inside friends' and family members' homes rather than in public places.

On the contrary, respondents noted that men gathered not only at friends' and relatives' homes but in various public settings, including in cafes, at the mosque as well as in parks and stadiums to watch or play football. One Sudanese female participant believed that "men have absolute freedom in their movements from one place to another" and that they therefore are easily able to spend a lot of time with each other.

### Social interactions



Men have absolute freedom to move around from one place to another, so it is easy for them to spend a lot of time with each other in any place that suits them.

*Female migrant from Sudan in Benghazi*

However, not all men exhibited the same freedom in their ability to socialize, which appeared to be influenced by their perception of safety (and susceptibility to security risks). For example, Ethiopian men reported meeting near work recruitment points because they deem their location safe and convenient (also see 'Location and Security Concerns' section).

Overall, social isolation and the lack of interactions can lead to a limited social network, which may be an [indicator of vulnerability](#)<sup>3</sup> as it can reduce migrant's ability to access resources, such as information and assistance, and hinder their ability to find jobs. The more social ties or social networks a person benefits from, and the better their quality, the greater is the likelihood they can tap into those social networks to access information, resources, the labour market or other things of value in order to meet their needs. For example, one female participant from Nigeria described having had to use an intermediary to find work (rather than her own social network, for example), which involved additional costs as the mediator retained a proportion of her salary.

Moreover, high-quality social connections not only influence quality of life but are also [essential to mental and physical health](#)<sup>4</sup>. For example, restricted social interactions and access to community and family networks can potentially [lead](#)<sup>5</sup> to psychological distress and negative mental health outcomes. Some male respondents from countries including Sudan, Chad, Nigeria and Egypt pointed out that being secluded and homebound has a negative impacts on the [health and wellbeing](#)<sup>6</sup> of women, their families and spouses.

<sup>3</sup> IOM (2019a), 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).

<sup>4</sup> WHO (2022), Social Isolation and Loneliness. Available at <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/social-isolation-and-loneliness> (accessed March 2023).

<sup>5</sup> IOM (2019a), 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).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

### Financial and labour market aspects

FGDs also highlighted the types of restrictions that men and women face and how they differ. On the one hand, some migrant men may be restricted in their social interactions because of work commitments and their need to make ends meet. On the other hand, a lack of financial means (or economic independence) and limited earning capacity was a barrier for many migrant women to engage in social interaction and socialization. Some Ethiopian and Sudanese women explained, for instance, that in combination with other factors such as responsibilities at home and a lack of time, their ability to enjoy social gatherings was limited because of their inability to afford transportation costs. One male respondent from Sudan described how some women are often unable to visit their families in their country of origin, for events such as funerals, for example, because of their financial dependency and their husband's inability to afford paying for their journey back.

Moreover, the places where women meet, and the frequency at which they meet, was often related to or shaped by their household duties and child-rearing obligations. Sudanese women in Misrata, for example, reported being exhausted from their household chores which prevented them from visiting relatives. The burden was double for women-headed households who participated in the FGDs who mentioned that in addition to housekeeping responsibilities and childcare they have to work outside the home in paid employment. For instance, a Sudanese widow in Misrata explained that she rarely goes out to meet friends and relatives because she cannot afford the associated transportation costs and because she must work to support her children since she lost her husband. As such, the extra burden women must face when taking on men's responsibilities as the primary income earner when they have been widowed or their spouse is sick or unemployed, for example, may translate into additional barriers to building and benefiting from a strong social network and enjoying social connections.

In comparison, several respondents across nationalities also indicated that men's responsibility as the main income earner was a barrier to social interaction and might prevent them from interacting or taking part in social activities in part due to a lack of time because "they have to work" to meet their needs and those of their household members. One migrant from Niger stated that "men are in Libya to work and not to entertain themselves. They have no money and no time". Similarly, some men acknowledged the responsibility they feel to send remittances to their household members in their country of origin. For

instance, one men migrant reported that with "six children in Nigeria, I'm thinking a lot about them, I have to work hard to send them money".

This finding points to the [social pressure and stigma](#) that are associated with the expectation and hopes of the family and relatives of the person who leaves their country of origin to migrate.

### Burden of being primary income earner



Men are in Libya to work and not to entertain themselves. They have no money and no time.

*Male migrant from Niger*

### Responsibility of sending remittances



I have six children in Nigeria, so I'm thinking a lot about them, I have to work hard to send them money.

*Male migrant from Nigeria in Misrata*

### Responsibility of children and social interactions



We go to the sea for recreation, and for children's play after a week of being denied play in an open space.

*Female migrant from Sudan in Misrata*

Location and security concerns

Perceptions of insecurity appeared to shape both men’s and women’s access to places of socialisation as well as the level of precaution taken to stay safe.

Some men from Sudan, Nigeria, Chad and Niger, for example, reported meeting at their own, or at friends’ or relatives’ homes to avoid the threat of harassment, general insecurity or because of a lack of options to meet in public places. While more men mentioned that security was a concern during the FGDs this is likely as a result of fewer women being allowed in the public sphere because of social customs and expectations, according to several participants. Data collected by DTM Libya in 2022 from 29,369 interviews showed that 19 per cent of male migrants identified attacks or assaults as one of the top three difficulties they faced; the percentage was even higher for women (29%) (Fig 2).

Beyond being related to being a woman or a man, these barriers may also be linked to the location of survey and country of origin. Among migrants interviewed as part of DTM Libya Round 45 of data collection (November - December 2022), around a quarter of those from sub-Saharan Africa (24%) and a fifth of those from Asia

Figure 2: Percentage of migrants who reported security issues as one of the top three difficulties they faced in 2022 by sex

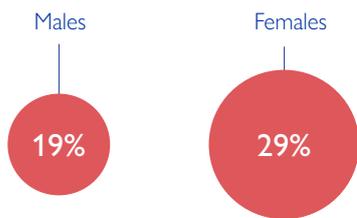
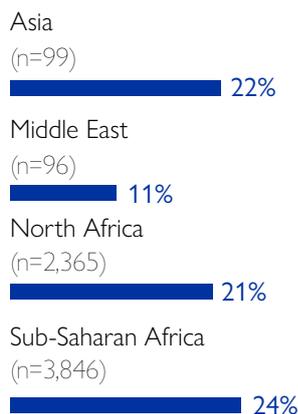


Figure 3: Percentage of migrants who reported security issues as one of the top three difficulties they faced (Round 45, Nov - Dec 2022) by region of origin



(22%) or North Africa (21%) reported that attacks or assaults were among the three main difficulties they faced compared to fewer of those from the Middle East (11%) (Fig 3). More male migrants from Sudan, for example, stated facing security issues compared to females from Egypt (Fig 4). In the majority of cases, a greater percentage of female migrants compared to male migrants — regardless of country of origin — stated that security issues were among the top three difficulties they faced. Furthermore, a greater percentage of migrants surveyed in November and December 2022 in the regions of Tripoli (42%), and Sebha (38%) reported that security difficulties were among the three main obstacles they faced compared to fewer of those surveyed in Misrata (14%) or Benghazi (6%) (Fig 5).

Figure 4: Percentage of migrants who reported security issues as one of the top three difficulties they faced (Round 45, Nov - Dec 2022) by country of origin and sex

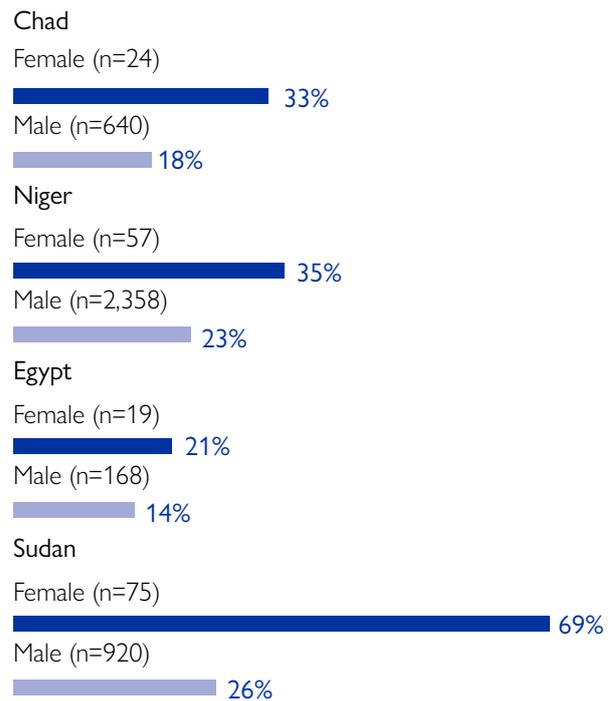
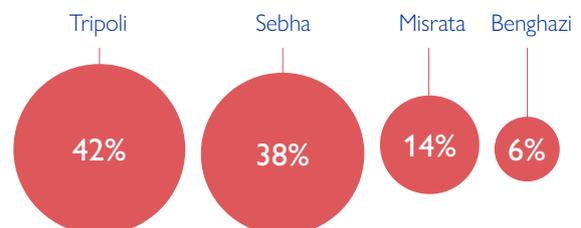


Figure 5: Percentage of migrants who reported security issues as one of the top three difficulties they faced (Round 45, Nov - Dec 2022) by region of survey location



### Psychological pressure of primary income earners

It is a widespread<sup>8</sup> cultural belief that men should be the primary income earners in a family. From the FGDs, it emerged that one of, if not the biggest, challenge for most male migrants was being the breadwinner and having to provide for their family. While being the sole or main household provider is not in itself an indicator of migrant vulnerability, being unable to fulfil that responsibility because of insufficient work or low wages, for example, may create pressure on the primary income earner, as well as on their families and is associated<sup>9</sup> with greater risk-taking behaviour to earn an income.

Many respondents noted that being the primary income earner in the current economic climate (e.g. lack of job opportunities<sup>10</sup>, rising prices of essential items<sup>11</sup>, low salaries, high rental prices<sup>12</sup>, threats of abduction and theft, including when traveling to the workplace) could have a negative impact on men's mental health and on family stability. For instance, one male migrant from Egypt in Benghazi explained that being “responsible for the family, caring for the children and bearing all related expenses was the biggest challenge he faced” and that the anxiety it created as a result led him to suffer from stress-related aches and disorders, including insomnia and headaches.

Similarly, one Sudanese female respondent, for instance, noted that the lack of jobs can be frustrating for men, and, that according to her, it can fuel “tension within the household and domestic violence”. There are many individual risk factors<sup>13</sup> that contribute to domestic violence including economic stress (e.g. unemployment), social isolation and depression. Societal factors such as cultural and traditional norms and inequality (e.g. women should stay at home, women should not enter the workforce) are also considered as risk factors related to domestic violence.

While not discussed directly in the FGDs or KIs, it should also be noted that the psychological pressure of being the primary income earner can also affect women who are heads of household.

### Pressure of being breadwinner



Being responsible for the family, caring for the children and bearing all related expenses is the biggest challenge I face. It gives me headaches and insomnia.

*Male migrant from Egypt in Benghazi*

### Debt accumulation

Having the responsibility of being the sole or primary income earner, which more often than not falls on men, was also described as a burden that can lead to debt accumulation, according to many male respondents. For example, one man from Sudan in Benghazi mentioned that his inability to provide for his family led him to contract debt from his friends, which had a negative impact on his personal situation. While debt is not inherently negative, it can lead to stress, stigma and shame.

Debt can also lead to increased exposure to eviction or threat thereof and is associated<sup>14</sup> with a higher risk of vulnerability due to the challenge of repaying debt while at the same time meeting one's own needs as well as those of their household members.

### Pressure of being breadwinner



Sometimes my salary is not enough to cover all the costs, including children's school fees and rent, so I find myself owing money to some of my friends. This situation has a negative impact on me as a breadwinner for the family, especially when for example my daughter asks me every day when I will buy her school clothes and equipment.

*Male migrant from Sudan in Benghazi*

8 IOM (2019a). 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).

9 Ibid.

10 IOM (2023a). IOM Libya Migrant Report Round 45 (November - December 2022). Available at <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/libya-migrant-report-45-november-december-2022> (accessed March 2023).

11 World Bank (2022). World Bank in Libya. Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/libya/overview> (accessed March 2023).

12 IOM (2023b). Rented Out: An Assessment of Migrants' Access to the Rental Housing Market. Available at <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/libya-rented-out-assessment-migrants-access-rental-housing-market?close=true> (accessed March 2023).

13 Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2021). Risk and Protective Factors. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html> (accessed March 2023).

14 IOM (2019a). 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).

### Challenges of family carer and household chores

Respondents also recognized the pressure of the various household responsibilities on some women's mental health which they qualified as straining and potentially limiting women in their ability to socialise and find work. One Egyptian participant, for example, described the challenges of women he knows as greater than those of men because their tasks include cooking and caring for the children and the family's needs, which according to him are significant sources of stress that may impact the marital life as well. One man from Nigeria explained that while women do not work they are homebound and responsible for child rearing and often find themselves "bored".

The opinions of migrants varied based on their personal situation, background and individual values. For example, some men who participated in the FGDs claimed that women are not faced with any challenges because the main problems migrants face are related to the necessity to earn an income to afford essential goods, which is the "sole responsibility of men". One Ethiopian participant said "women only have one challenge: to raise and protect children educating them according to their values and customs". Similarly, some women who participated in the FGDs claimed that their husbands were "shouldering all responsibilities and were faced with issues at work, including exploitation from their employers".

It should also be noted that there were exceptions in household responsibilities based on cultural differences. For example, Tunisian women who participated in the FGDs reported that their husbands or their male relatives were at home taking care of the children whereas the women were at work (in beauty centres and hair salons).

### Marital status, women-headed households

While the issue of financial pressure and psychological stress related to the inability to fulfil one's household needs appeared to be a more significant concern for male migrants, it was also a primary concern among women-headed households, such as those who were widowed, divorced or whose husband is sick and are responsible for several children or relatives.

Being part of a large household comprised of many family members and having a less stable or insufficient level of income to cover one's own needs and one's external responsibilities can increase the burden on other household members, placing more demands on

them and by the same token representing a [risk](#)<sup>15</sup> that they adopt risky coping strategies.

Several women reported that their reluctance or their inability to work (e.g. for cultural or safety reasons, or lack of trade or diploma) in the absence of their husband had an impact on their children who were often taken out of school and had to work leading to a vicious circle of ignorance. Having young household or family members who are working outside the home means that they are [less likely](#)<sup>16</sup> to continue to attend school, which in turn means that they are more likely to become vulnerable as a result of a lower education level.

Similarly, another respondent recalled that one of the challenges she faced was affording the education fees for her children, medical treatments and rent. As a result, she incurred debt from her relatives. She also noted that her 14-year-old son had left school to work in a car maintenance workshop as he was obliged to help support the family. A migrant from Sudan in Misrata reported that she was compelled to remarry to alleviate the burden of having to care for the whole family.

Overall, this may indicate that women-headed households or those who contracted debt are at an increased risk of vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse as a result of an inadequate supply of decent work and livelihood opportunities in communities.

### Having a man as head of household



The absence of a father or head of household (male) in the family is a very big challenge for migrant women as it is difficult to assume all household responsibilities alone

*Female migrant from Sudan in Benghazi*

15 IOM (2019a), 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).  
16 Ibid.

## Labour market engagement

During the FGDs migrants were questioned about the advantages that men or women migrants benefit from in finding jobs in Libya and how they differ. This section outlines the barriers and constraints in the job market, such as attitudes towards men and women, the type of work that is deemed appropriate in either case, as well as their impacts on men’s and women’s levels of vulnerability.

The majority of migrants who participated in the FGDs recognized that currently there is a general lack of job opportunities in Libya, which affects all migrants regardless of whether they are a man or a woman. At the same time, many participants believed that male migrants had “a greater chance of finding employment and that a wider variety of opportunities were available to them.” Some participants also pointed out that it was generally hard for women to find work in Libya and that their employment was generally limited to the health or service sectors. These findings are in line with a UNDP labour market [assessment](#)<sup>17</sup> which found that while 29 per cent of companies surveyed would be willing to hire male migrant workers, only 10 per cent declared they would be ready to employ female migrant workers.

Similarly, an IOM Libya labour market [assessment](#)<sup>18</sup> conducted in 2021 found that more than half of employers (56%) expressed a preference for hiring male over female workers, particularly in the agricultural and construction sectors. The exception was for the care sector where employers stated having an inclination for female workers to fulfil roles which are typically considered to be feminized such as cooking, cleaning and child-minding. In line with these findings, according to a UNDP labour market [assessment](#)<sup>19</sup>, the manufacturing and construction sectors were fields of employment identified as employing a large proportion of male migrant workers whereas the health sector was more likely to employ female migrant workers.

While fewer women tend to be employed in Libya, several respondents highlighted that those who are working are often employed in domestic and care work as well as the hotel and catering sectors, which are quite regularly [characterized](#)<sup>20</sup> by poor working conditions, low pay, withheld wages, considerable insecurity and high risk of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse.

According to [data](#)<sup>21</sup> collected in 2022 from 29,369 interviews, the top three most common jobs of female migrants were cleaner, housekeeper and tailor or garment worker (Fig 6). The top three most common occupations of male migrants were in the construction sector (as skilled or unskilled labourer) and cleaner. In both cases, the largest proportion of female (47%) and male (42%) migrants was employed in elementary occupations, which also include manufacturing or factory labourers, mine workers (without specific skills), cleaners, garbage collectors, kitchen workers and street vendors.

The service and sales (e.g. salesperson, hairdresser, waitress, cook or chef) and craft and related trades (e.g. production of handicrafts and foodstuffs) sectors accounted for the second and third highest shares of female migrant employment respectively.

In comparison, the second and third largest percentage of male migrants were employed in crafts and related trades (14%) (e.g. car mechanic, carpenter, electrician, blacksmith) or as technicians and associate professionals (13%) (e.g. manufacturing technician, construction workers with specific skills, mining technicians).

Figure 6: Top three jobs of female and male migrants interviewed by DTM Libya in 2022

### Female migrants



### Male migrants



17 UNDP (2021). Libya Labor Market Assessment. Available at [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/arabstates/LMA\\_report.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/arabstates/LMA_report.pdf) (accessed March 2023).

18 IOM (2021b). Labour Market Assessment. Available at [https://libya.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdj931/files/documents/20210811\\_LMA%20called%20Report%20ENG.pdf](https://libya.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdj931/files/documents/20210811_LMA%20called%20Report%20ENG.pdf) (accessed March 2023).

19 UNDP (2021). Libya Labor Market Assessment. Available at [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/arabstates/LMA\\_report.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/arabstates/LMA_report.pdf) (accessed March 2023).

20 IOM (2010). Gender, Migration and Remittances. Available at <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdj486/files/2018-07/Gender-migration-remittances-infosheet.pdf> (accessed March 2023).

21 IOM (2023a). IOM Libya Migrant Report Round 45 (November - December 2022). Available at <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/libya-migrant-report-45-november-december-2022> (accessed March 2023).

## Culture and social norms

Many participants explained that women's employment options may be limited because of certain views, ideas or preconception such as customs and traditions, which may prevent women from working outside the home. For instance, one male respondent from Sudan noted that he only allows his daughter to work in "safe places" which excludes her from working in public places because of their traditions. This in turn restricts her chances of employment because she is limited to operating her own business from home (e.g. as a seamstress, cook, beautician, handcraft maker or in a health-related field), which requires a substantial initial investment.

However, customs differ within and across cultures, as well as over time. For example, a male Chadian participant in Sebha noted that while traditionally homebound, Chadian women have recently been able to join the labour force while men have become more involved in tasks [traditionally viewed as feminine](#)<sup>22</sup>, such as caring for children and being responsible for domestic chores.

Overall, however, a smaller proportion of female migrants were employed in Libya compared to male migrants, in line with a [global trend](#)<sup>23</sup>. Among 29,369 migrants interviewed by DTM Libya in 2022 (1,090 females and 28,279 males), a total of 44 per cent of female migrants reported being unemployed and actively seeking employment compared to 21 per cent of male migrants. A larger percentage of female migrants stated being unemployed and *not* looking for work (16%) than males (<1%), mainly because they are involved in household work (e.g. caring for children) or because they do not intend to stay in Libya for an extended period of time.

While fewer female migrants were employed (38%) compared to male migrants (79%), their earnings were on par with those of male migrants. Among migrants interviewed in 2022, the average amount earned in the last 30 days by females (974 LYD) was similar to that of males (964 LYD).

Household responsibilities, such as childcare can also limit women more than men in the type, number and location of work opportunities that are available to them. Several female participants explained that not all employees are flexible and allow women to take their children with them to work, for example.

One Ethiopian woman in Tripoli noted that she had to stop working because of an inflexible employer and her inability to reconcile working while taking care of her daughter who suffers from a chronic illness. Furthermore, many women mentioned being constrained by the amount of time they can dedicate to work outside the home when they are responsible for household chores and care work, such as child rearing, inside the home.

The inequitable or lack of access to decent work by certain members of the community can [lead](#)<sup>24</sup> some migrants to accept employment in conditions that increase their vulnerability, for example due to low wages, insecurity of employment and lax enforcement of safety standards in the workplace.

## Cross-cutting factors of influence

Multiple other factors may influence migrants' chances of finding employment, including cultural affinity, social networks, education levels, length of stay in Libya and language skills. For example, many participants noted that it was generally easier for migrants, both men and women, who are educated to find employment in Libya, particularly for jobs in the health sector, unless they have a trade or a manual skill such as training as a seamstress or carpenter.

Cultural affinity, as well as stereotypes based on nationality and the socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to males and females also appear as factors of influence. Participants from Tunisia claimed that it was easy to find employment for Tunisian women as beauticians or hairdressers because Libyan women prefer Tunisians over other nationalities for work in this field. On the contrary, according to Tunisian women who participated in the FGDs, it would be harder for a Tunisian man to find work in Libya. This finding is in line with a Clingendael [study](#)<sup>25</sup> which found that it is common for migrants of the same nationality to work in certain fields (e.g. Bangladeshi in petrol stations, Moroccans in butcher's shops and Tunisians in hair salons).

Furthermore, some respondents from Nigeria and Chad reported that employment was difficult for both men and women from their countries who do not master Arabic because of the language barrier.

22 OHCHR  
23 IOM (2023c). Women and Girls on the Move: A Snapshot of Available Evidence. Available at [https://www.migrationdataportal.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1251/files/2023-03/GD%20Briefs\\_Gender\\_Issue\\_09-03.pdf](https://www.migrationdataportal.org/sites/g/files/tmzbd1251/files/2023-03/GD%20Briefs_Gender_Issue_09-03.pdf) (accessed March 2023).

24 IOM (2019a). 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).

25 Clingendael (2019). From Abuse to Cohabitation: A Way Forward for Positive Migration Governance in Libya. Available at [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Migration\\_Governance\\_Report\\_October\\_2019.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Migration_Governance_Report_October_2019.pdf) (accessed March 2023).

In addition, a DTM Libya [study](#)<sup>26</sup> on social networks found that overall, a greater proportion of migrants who reported not having a social network (family, friends and acquaintances) in Libya prior to migrating systematically reported facing difficulties whilst looking for employment than migrants who did. More than three in five migrants (64%) mentioned having secured their employment in Libya through their social networks. While both have been [found to rely heavily on their social networks to find work](#)<sup>27</sup>, being a man or a woman also influences the development of social networks including the kinds, number, intensity and meaning of relationships developed over time, which can influence access to the labour market and also in turn shape social constructions and expectations, by reinforcing or changing roles and division of labour, for example.

### Security concerns and labour market

During the FGDs migrants were questioned about the security risks they faced in Libya and how they differ between men and women. This section outlines the main security risks for both women and men; as well as their impacts on men’s and women’s levels of vulnerability.

Both men and women shared having experienced security threats as part of their daily lives in Libya. However, many respondents recognised that men, who are generally the primary income earner are more exposed to security and safety threats (e.g. attacks, kidnapping and theft) because of their need to access livelihood opportunities which tend to be found in public places (e.g. recruitment points) and may also often involve travel (e.g. using taxis, passing through checkpoints).

Migrants who participated in the FGDs claim that this issue was particularly acute for those who lack cultural affinity with the Libyan society or documentation, both factors identified as leading to an increased risk of detention when traveling through checkpoints or if driving a car with a foreign license number, for example. Furthermore, many spoke of the importance of familiarity with the Libyan society, insider knowledge as well as connections with segments of the Libyan population within their communities to mitigate certain security risks and in case of incident. However, respondents also highlighted the risks women face, including assaults, when traveling to work by taxi, for instance. One respondent, for example, remarked that

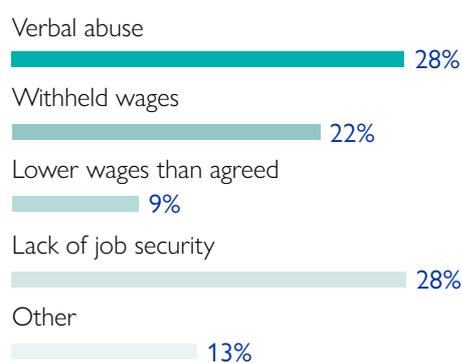
when she is hired to work as a cleaner at a private home “she asks the homeowner to pick her up from her house, because she is afraid of getting in a taxi.”

Moreover, many participants highlighted the difficulties and risks associated with the difficult work conditions many migrants are facing, which can include violence or abuse by the employer. These findings are corroborated by migrants interviewed during Round 45 of DTM Libya data collection (November - December 2022) which identified that a lack of job security (40%), followed by employer paying less than the agreed wage (22%), withheld wages (18%) or verbal abuse (15%) were the main risks they faced at work.

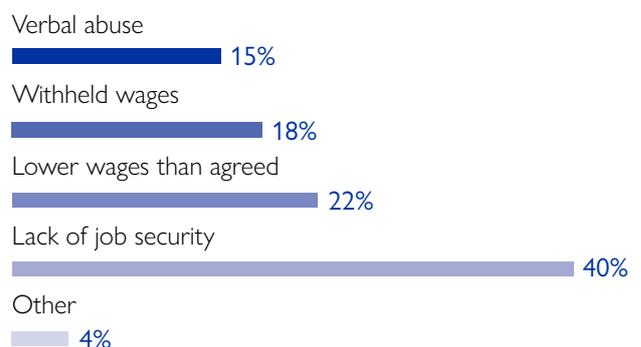
During the FGDs, more men than women spoke of issues related to being paid less than agreed, or not at all, as well as suffering from a lack of job opportunities and employment instability. In line with these results, more men interviewed during Round 45 of data collection reported that a lack of job security (40%) or lower wages than agreed (22%) was the top risk they faced at work compared to females (28% and 9%, respectively) (Fig 7). However, more females reported that verbal abuse was the main risk they were confronted with in the workplace (28%) compared to males (15%).

Figure 7: Key risks faced at work by female and male migrants interviewed by DTM Libya in 2022

#### Female migrants



#### Male migrants



<sup>26</sup> IOM Libya (2021a). 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).  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

In addition, some women mentioned that being unable to open their own bank account was also exposing them to theft and causing a constant feeling of fear. This issue may however apply to both men and women —albeit to varying degrees — as a [study](#)<sup>28</sup> of long-term migrants in Libya found that nearly all migrants were unbanked and that cash was identified by most participants (94%) as the most common means of compensation.

#### Precaution, perception of safety and freedom of movement

Many respondents, both men and women reported taking precautions such as traveling with trustworthy taxi drivers, avoiding certain neighborhoods, traveling with a group rather than alone, and avoiding going out at night, for example. However, some male and female respondents from the FGDs mentioned that it was safer for women to stay at home. Being limited in their movements, it therefore appears that threats or perception of security threats, as well as a preference of women themselves or of other household members for women to stay at home, may impact their independence and self-reliance by limiting their freedom of movement within their community, and potentially their ability to secure work outside the home, among other things.

#### Burden of male head of households



My husband is not always paid for his work and is sometimes given less than the agreed wage, which burdens him and makes him feel humiliated and unappreciated.

*Female migrant from Sudan in Misrata*

28 IOM (2019). Living and Working in the Midst of Conflict: The Status of Long-term Migrants in Libya. Available at <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/living-and-working-in-the-midst-of-conflict.pdf> (accessed March 2023).



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.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlighted the roles, responsibilities and vulnerabilities of both migrant men and women in Libya, how they differ and how some cross-cutting factors, such as cultural affinity, social networks, length of stay in Libya and language skills add to the complexity and variety of experiences migrants navigate through while in Libya.

Based on these findings, IOM Libya recommends to:

## Advocate for more inclusive mobility and labour market policies and disseminate best practices when considering men and women migrants

These measures could include financial literacy, entrepreneurship and business training based on the specific needs of men and women migrants, as well as economic support for women to enable their integration through participation on the labour market as well as access to the rental housing market, particularly for women-headed households. These efforts could also include the promotion of better regulation and employment conditions in the domestic and care work sectors as well as the provision of protection mechanisms. Moreover, the study showed that migrants would benefit from the development and implementation of strategies aimed at decreasing the stigmatization of migrants who may be socially marginalised based on social norms as well as language skills and/or culture.

## Continue to research how migration and the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed are interlinked and influence one another. Continue ensuring diversity and inclusiveness in consultations and participation in activities, including research and data collection exercises

Evidence-based policy and programmes are necessary to deliver efficient humanitarian and development assistance. The incorporation of sex-disaggregated data that also accounts for socially constructed norms is necessary to support empowering, diverse and inclusive strategies that capture the specific vulnerabilities of migrants.

## Consider how social norms based on sex influences access to services, labour market and shapes risks and vulnerabilities when designing policies and programmes

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 navigate life in Libya, including but not only limited to socially constructed norms around sex and age. Other factors, such as socioeconomic status, language skills, cultural affinity, age, marital status and whether an individual is with their family should be central considerations while designing effective policies and programmes to help support the needs of migrants in Libya.

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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

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