



# Diaspora engagement mapping LIBYA

## Facts & figures

### Political rights



Dual citizenship<sup>1</sup>



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad<sup>3</sup>



### Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP<sup>2</sup>: -  
Remittances inflow (USD billion): -

### Voting from abroad:

At embassies/consulates and other polling stations<sup>4</sup>



### Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the World Bank (2023).

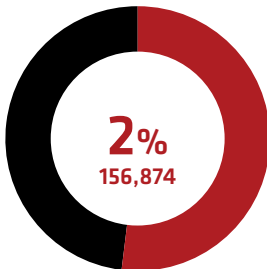
### Emigration



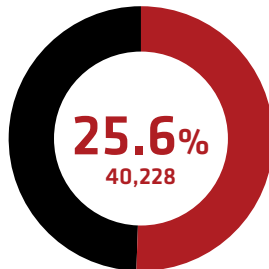
% of emigrants in total population<sup>1</sup>



% of which in the EU



♂ 52.1%  
♀ 47.9%



♂ 50.8%  
♀ 49.2%

### Top countries of destination<sup>5</sup>



Türkiye	29,478
Italy	29,343
Jordan	28,839
Israel	19,768
Canada	10,737

**Libya does not have a diaspora engagement policy.<sup>6</sup>**

1 Law Number (24) for 2010/1378 On The Libyan Nationality - according to this dual citizenship requires government approval

2 World Bank Migration and Remittances Data does not have any entries for Libya since 2006

3 For further information on voter registration in Libya, please see International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), *Beyond Constitutional Legal Framework Analysis: Libya Electoral Legal Framework Analysis*, 2019 (available at <https://www.ifes.org/publications/beyond-constitutional-reform-elections-libya-electoral-legal-framework-analysis> ):

"Under the existing Libyan legal framework, there are no constitutional provisions regarding voter registration; although, if adopted, the Draft Constitution would include a provision that provides every eligible citizen the right to vote or run as a candidate. Instead, voter registration provisions have been included in the specific legislation for each national election; although, it should be noted that the GNC, CDA and HoR elections have already passed, leaving the Constitutional Referendum Law as the only election-specific legislation with practical implications for future national elections." Indeed, all specific legislations for Libyan elections since 2012, including the Constitutional Referendum Law, charge the High National Election Commission (HNEC) with enabling out-of-country voter registration. Out-of-country voting took place during elections e.g. Council of Representatives elections in 2014. However, as there is no constitutional or generalised legal provision for this, de facto out-of-country voter registration and thus the right to vote for citizens abroad could not be maintained for future elections.

4 In 2014, the HNEC also contracted the International Organisation for Migration to establish polling station in 13 countries.

Cf International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), *Elections in Libya - June 25 Council of Representatives Elections: Frequently Asked Questions*, 2014 (available at [https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2014\\_ifes\\_libya\\_council\\_of\\_representative\\_elections\\_faqs.pdf](https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2014_ifes_libya_council_of_representative_elections_faqs.pdf))

5 The used data of UNDESA does not seem to account for the fact that in the last years also other countries such as Tunisia and Egypt are important destinations for Libyans living abroad. Given their status in these countries, statistics seem to miss this trend.

6 Institutions with the mandate to engage with the community abroad exist (cf in Annex). However they have not developed a dedicated policy yet.

Terminology: In the mandates of the competent institutions, Libya refers to its diaspora in different ways: The terms “Expatriates” (in Arabic: المغتربين - *almughtaribin*) is frequently used. Less recurrent are the terms “Libyan citizens abroad” (in Arabic: المواطنين الليبيين في الخارج - *almuatinin alliybiyin fi alkharij*) and “Libyans residing abroad” (in Arabic: الليبيين المقيمين في الخارج - *alliybiyin almuqimin fi alkharij*). Lastly, linked to the security context since 2014, the term “Migrants/Displaced abroad” (in Arabic: المهجرين بالخارج - *almuhajarin bialkharj*) is used in the phrase “Migrants abroad and internally displaced” (in Arabic: المهجرين بالخارج والنازحين بالداخل - *almuhajarin bialkharj walnazihin bialddakhil*). The difference here in comparison to the previous terms seems to allude to the characteristic of forced movement linked to the conflict as opposed to to an emigration of choice

## Overview of the policy and legislative framework



- 2018** ● **Constitutional Referendum Law:** All specific legislations for Libyan elections since 2012, including the still applicable Constitutional Referendum Law, charge the High National Election Commission (HNEC) with enabling out-of-country voter registration to enact the right to vote for Libyans residing abroad.
- 1991** ● **Law No 20/1991 on Promoting Freedoms:** In its Article 20, this law provides Libyan citizens with freedom of movement and thus abolishes the exit visa previously necessary for Libyans.
- 2009** ● **Decree No. (23) of 2009:** This decree establishes a standing committee with the aim of monitoring the situation of Libyan prisoners abroad, carry out exchange of prisoners where possible, visit them abroad and provide aid and financial assistance.

### » Trends

Structurally, Libya defines itself rather as a country of immigration and transit rather than a country of origin. The topic of Libyans emigrating has not been considered as a policy discussion of importance until recently.

The fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011, led both to an observed ‘awakening’ of the Libyan diaspora and a seemingly increased awareness of the relevance of engaging with citizens residing in other countries among the Libyan government. Indeed, Libyans living abroad mobilised significantly during and following the upheaval in 2011, despite being rather ‘silent’ and, at least publicly, disengaged until then.<sup>7</sup> Given this recent development, the community is still very weakly organised, there is a very limited number of Libyan diaspora organisations in general, no networks exist between them and they are not attributed a formal role of influence back in their home country. Apart from these shortcomings in terms of organisation and structure, another obstacle for strong Libyan diaspora organisations lies in the diaspora’s makeup: In line with the on-going conflict, the diaspora community is divided between different constituencies. Despite these difficulties, Libyans residing abroad demonstrate an extremely strong attachment to their home country<sup>8</sup> and a certain fatigue and concern regarding how Libya is depicted globally.<sup>9</sup> A genuine will to contribute to Libya’s development can be observed among these communities and would benefit from support.

<sup>7</sup> You can read more on this in publications such as:

- Alice Alunni (2019) Long-distance nationalism and belonging in the Libyan diaspora (1969–2011), *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 46:2, 242–258, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2019.1569303
- Moss, D.M. (2016). Transnational Repression, Diaspora Mobilization and the Case of the Arab Spring. *Social Problems*, Volume 63, Issue 4, 480 – 498.
- Dana M. Moss (2016) Diaspora Mobilization for Western Military Intervention During the Arab Spring, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 14:3, 277–297, DOI: 10.1080/15562948.2016.1177152
- ICMPD (2020), A Study on Libyans Living Abroad, Vienna: ICMPD.
- Peter Seeberg (2018) Transnationalism and exceptional transition processes. The role of the Libyan diaspora from Qadhafi’s *Jamahiriyya* to post-revolutionary civil war and state collapse, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2018.1552117

<sup>8</sup> ICMPD (2020), A Study on Libyans Living Abroad, Vienna: ICMPD.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

On the government side, the creation of the Ministry of State for Migrants and the Displaced after 2014, when a significant number of Libyans were displaced due to the conflict, and the reactivation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of Expatriate Affairs in 2018 can be seen as important markers of a nascent interest in institutionalising diaspora engagement. The Ministry of State for Migrants and the Displaced has mainly symbolic value in recognizing the issue of Libyans who left due to the conflict, as its operational capacity is currently limited and focused on internally displaced people. Since its reactivation, however, the Department of Expatriate Affairs has already engaged in some first steps to operationalise its mandate: It commissioned a study on Libyans Living Abroad, its staff has undergone a first capacity-building exercise on diaspora engagement, and it has developed initial plans for the organisation of a global meeting of Libyans residing abroad.

Whilst the described developments indicate a positive trend towards the recognition of the potential of Libyans abroad and the government's enthusiasm to work with them, it is still in its infancy and has to be seen in the broader context of conflict, where other priorities prevail.

## Obstacles



- **Lack of trust:** The Gaddafi era built a legacy of distrust between the government and Libyan communities abroad. This history still conditions attitudes and remains a structural barrier for many members of the diaspora. This lack of trust “can at least partly explain the missing transnational network between the different diasporic communities, resulting in a lack of frequent communication, a limited number of diasporic organizations, media, etc.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, since Libyans abroad returned after 2011 and became active on the political sphere, the ‘domestic audience’ has demonstrated scepticism of the role of returnee Libyans.<sup>11</sup>
- **Lack of consular services:** the provision of consular services is difficult in the current context of conflict, which contributes to a certain erosion of connection between Libyans and their state.
- **Lack of strategic focus on diaspora engagement:** Given the current geo-political context, the priority of the Libyan government lies in ending the conflict and addressing pressing issues around it. Furthermore, even within the thematic sub-sector of migration, the issues of immigration (regular and irregular) and border management prevail as priorities.
- **Lack of data:** Despite encouraging developments, data on Libyans residing abroad continues to be scarce and thus might hamper the development of evidence-based policies. SPOTLIGHT
- **Unstructured and divided community:** In Libya's past, its communities living abroad were relatively marginalised by its regime, which led to a very limited mobilisation of community organisations. This legacy is still evident and thus most Libyan communities abroad still gather in an informal manner without any strongly developed or institutionalised organisational structures. Furthermore, given existing conflict lines, increased polarisation around them and the presence of different constituencies within the communities of Libyans living abroad (political opposition of the Gaddafi regime, apolitical high-qualified professionals, new arrivals post-2011), divisions and tensions exist among Libyans residing abroad. Engagement needs to be depoliticized, as this situation constitutes a structural barrier to a stronger community mobilisation.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Seeberg (2018) Transnationalism and exceptional transition processes. The role of the Libyan diaspora from Qadhafi's *Jamahiriyya* to post-revolutionary civil war and state collapse, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2018.1552117

<sup>11</sup> ICMPD (2020), *A Study on Libyans Living Abroad*, Vienna: ICMPD.



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## SPOTLIGHT: effective practices

### Libya's Migration Technical Assistance Facility 2021-2023

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

is a project implemented by ICMPD and financed by the European Commission and the Swiss Confederation. It aims to strengthen the national mechanisms for addressing migration issues in Libya. Specifically, the project plan to (1) facilitate for Libyan delegations' active participation in international and regional migration dialogues; (2) support authorities in their efforts to improve consular crisis preparedness and engage Libyan diaspora; (3) support Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) who are working on migration to enhance their work and their role as a migration actor.

### Study on Libyans Living Abroad 2019-2020

DATA

The EU-funded and ICMPD-implemented project 'Strategic and institutional management of migration in Libya', which aims at supporting the development of prerequisites for effective migration governance in Libya, developed a first-of-its-kind study providing comprehensive look at the Libyan communities abroad and mapping the pertaining institutional framework, leading to key policy recommendations towards sustainable engagement strategies. Based on its findings, a first capacity building on the benefits and possibilities of diaspora engagement was held for ca. 15 officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant ministries in February 2020 concluding with the presentation of a priority list of future action.

### Speetar: A Telehealth Platform connecting Libyan doctors abroad with their home regions 2020

HEALTH/ DIGITAL

A Libyan doctor-turned-tech-CEO living abroad, helped develop a telehealth platform so doctors who had left their countries could treat patients back home. In 2020, the application Speetar was launched to support Libya's fight against COVID-19. It signed an agreement with the Libyan Ministry of Health to become the main intermediary dealing with the Coronavirus. The app was downloaded more than 5,000 times in its first three weeks<sup>12</sup> and was projected to reach about 2.3 million people.<sup>13</sup>

### Empowering Libyan women in diaspora 2017

WOMEN/ NETWORKING

In April 2017, the Hague Academy for Local Governance organised a tailor-made training and training of trainers for 17 Libyan women living abroad, financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in cooperation with CILG-VNG International. It aimed to connect Libyan women and support them in developing advocacy strategies to drive change. Three major topics were addressed: awareness raising of participants' own (potential) sources of power and existent power structures; secondly, exchanging different perspectives on the role of Libyan women in the diaspora, their challenges as well as new opportunities; and thirdly developing (collective) action plans and an advocacy strategy linked to these plans.

### Strategic and institutional management of migration in Libya 2016-2021

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The project, implemented by ICMPD in collaboration with the Libyan National Team for Border Security and Management (NTBSM), aimed to assist the Libyan administration at both central and local levels, along with Libyan civil society and academia. The overarching goal was to help them establish the necessary foundations for effective migration governance, with a focus on enhancing the management of migration flows and improving the living conditions of migrants in Libya. As part of the initiatives, ICMPD conducted capacity development sessions for Libyan authorities focused on engaging with the diaspora.

12 <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/06/10/Libya-war-coronavirus-hospital-doctors>

13 <https://scenearabia.com/Money/Meet-the-Entrepreneur-Behind-Libya-s-COVID-19-Coronavirus-Response-Mohamed-Aburawi-Speetar-Health>

## Annex:

# List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 430+ institutions](#)

### Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

#### African Union Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (AU CIDO)

Libya is a member of the African Union and is thus invited to the African Union Citizens rectorate (AU CIDO) Continental Meetings.

#### League of Arab States (LAS)

Libya is a member of the League of Arab States (LAS), a regional organisation that aims at enhancing ties and promoting cooperation among Arab countries.

#### Arab Maghreb Union

Libya is a member of the Arab Maghreb Union, a political and economic union of Arab nations established to coordinate, harmonise and rationalise policies and strategies of the member states to achieve sustainable development.

#### The Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)

Libya is a member of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), a regional economic community established to integrate and promote national development and unity among the member states through free movement of goods, capital, and labour as well as joint cooperation in educational, cultural, scientific, security, and sustainable development.

- **National institutions**
  - At ministerial level

#### Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of National Accord is the lead institution with respect to the engagement of Libyans residing abroad. According to its mandate set out in the Cabinet Decree No. (214) of 2012, its Department of Expatriate Affairs is competent for relations with the Libyans living abroad (e.g. database, expatriate contributions and exchanges, cultural heritage, connection to country of origin, facilitation of return). At the same time, its Department of Consular Affairs has a broad role in terms of protecting the interests of Libyan citizens abroad and serving them for their consular needs.



## Ministry of State for Migrants and the Displaced

The Ministry of State for Migrants and the Displaced only works with displaced Libyans (internal or external) and forced Libyan migrants. Its main function is to facilitate their return to Libya or to other places of safe refuge within Libya. In parallel, the Libyan government has set up a High Commission for Forced Migrants and Displaced Affairs with members from several ministries such as Education, Health, Foreign Affairs and Justice to follow up on the state of displaced Libyans and forced Libyan migrants and report to the Libyan government.

- At sub-ministerial level

## Social Attachés

The MFA has also set up what it calls Social Attaches. These are based within certain embassies to address the issues of displaced Libyans in those countries; they can receive requests for assistance. The Ministry of State for Migrants and the Displaced had also been working on an online system for applications for assistance, which would not require any more visits to an embassy.

## Diaspora organisations in Europe

### LIBICO Malta

#### Integration activities

Libico is an independent non-profit organisation that aims to connect the Libyan community within Malta. It aims to empower individuals to take an active role within the local society and to help their integration in different sectors. Libico also provides a platform and the space to express Libyan culture.

### Libya in the UK (LYUK) United Kingdom

#### Integration activities

Libya in the UK is an independent non-governmental organisation led by Libyan youth living in the diaspora. They provide a platform for networking and knowledge sharing for all Libyans and implement initiatives to advance Libyan art, culture, young talent and entrepreneurship.

### Lawyers for Justice in Libya (LFJL) UK 2011

LFJL is a Libyan and international human rights non-governmental organisation that pursues transformative and holistic justice to create systemic change in Libya. It has offices and staff in London, Tunis, and Tripoli and works with networking partners across the country and the MENA region to identify and support migrant and refugee victims of human trafficking and related crimes.

Read more about diaspora organisations in “[Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation](#)”



Written by: **Theodora Korkas, ICMPD**  
Edited by: **EUDI F**  
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