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# UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE LIBYAN CONFLICT ON EGYPTIAN MIGRANTS

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The American  
University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs  
and Public Policy

Center for Migration and Refugee  
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# UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE LIBYAN CONFLICT ON EGYPTIAN MIGRANTS

By Sara Sadek



## The Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS)

The Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS) is an interdisciplinary center of the American University in Cairo (AUC). Situated at the heart of the Middle East and North Africa, it aims at furthering the scientific knowledge of the large, long-standing recent refugee and migration movements witnessed in this region. But it also is concerned with questions of refugees and migration in the international system as a whole, both at the theoretical and practical levels. CMRS functions include instruction, research, training, and outreach. It offers a Master of Arts degree and a graduate diploma in Migration and Refugee studies, working with other AUC departments to offer diversified courses to its students. Its research bears on issues of interest to the region and beyond. In carrying its research out, CMRS collaborates with reputable regional and international academic institutions. The training activities that CMRS organizes are attended by researchers, policymakers, bureaucrats and civil society activists from a great number of countries. The center also provides tailor-made training programs on demand. CMRS outreach involves working with individuals and organizations in its environment, disseminating knowledge and sensitization to refugee and migration issues. It also provides services to the refugee community in Cairo and transfers its expertise in this respect to other international institutions.

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About the author:

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## Preface

With the overthrow of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya and its geographic neighbors were quickly put on alert for political upheavals that could jeopardize an already fragile regional political landscape. As experts discussed the future of Libya and its similarities and differences to its neighbor, Egypt, who had just gone through a revolution of its own, many Egyptian migrant workers who had had been employed in Libya for many years were forced to flee the country because of uncertainty and increased violence and xenophobia. However, many decided also to stay, only to have to flee after the violence was renewed in 2014-2015. For a few years, the situation of returning Egyptian migrant workers from Libya did not draw attention in research and therefore was not analyzed. This is the rationale for this study on *Understanding the Impact of the Libyan Conflict on Egyptian Migrants*, which examines issues related to push factors in Egypt, pull factors in Libya, security and economic hazards behind the return in 2011 and 2014/2015, and the long-term implications of the return of Egyptian migrants. The study also examines support provided by stakeholders and service providers during and after the conflict. It does not only deal with challenges, but also attempts to portray the strategies and mechanisms, positive and negative, to cope with the unexpected return to a country of origin.

*“Understanding the Impact of the Libyan Conflict on Egyptian Migrants”* is part of a larger research component of the European Union funded project entitled “Migrants in Countries in Crisis: Supporting an evidence-based approach for effective and cooperative state action” which is led by the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) in six countries facing a crisis situation. Egypt factors in the Libya case study, one of the six case studies, in terms of the impact on Egyptian labor migrants who returned to Egypt following the crisis. The study is funded by the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and is written by Sara Sadek who led the research in Egypt.

Through documenting the challenges faced by Egyptian migrant workers who returned from Libya after 2011 and during 2014-2015, the study falls within two research priorities of CMRS: the future of labor migration and the protection of migrant workers. CMRS has produced in the past similar studies on labor migration in its publications, “Labour Migration Governance in Transition: Continuity and Change in Egypt and Tunisia (2011-2015)” and “Labour Market Outcomes and Egypt’s Migration Potential (2014)”.

The research for this study covered four governorates: Cairo, Fayoum, Minya, and Sohag. It used a mixed-methods approach that combined focus groups and in-depth interviews with Egyptian returnees from Libya in the three governorates in Upper Egypt and interviews with academic experts, governmental authorities, and non-governmental organizations in Cairo and in the three governorates. CMRS hopes it could produce a useful and direct perspective on the economic issues raised by the situation of returned migrant workers from Libya in Egypt. The aim is to contribute to reinforcing the protection of these individuals and to secure sustainable means of livelihood for them, account being taken of the challenges faced by a developing country such as Egypt. CMRS also hopes the study will be useful to policymakers, researchers and civil society organizations interested in improving the lives of migrant workers everywhere.



Ibrahim Awad  
Director



## Abstract

Following Egyptian returnees after the Libyan crisis, this paper looks at how the events in Libya in 2011 and 2014-2015 impacted them and their decision to leave the country. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the conditions of Egyptian returnees, the paper also analyzes migration trajectories of returnees by subsequently looking at a) the push factors in Egypt, b) the pull factors in Libya, c) security and economic hazards behind the return in 2011 and 2014/2015 and d) the long-term implications of the return of Egyptian migrants. It tackles support provided by stakeholders and service providers during and after the crisis.

The research findings point to economic factors playing a paramount role in the decision to migrate to Libya and choosing it as a destination in the first place. The circular modality of migration to Libya has helped Egyptians maintain close links with families in rural Egypt and have increased the flow of remittances sent through constant returns/visits to Egypt. The fact that livelihood opportunities in Libya were available and lucrative made it the most convenient option in comparison to other countries.

After 2011, the patterns of xenophobia were aggravating underlying issues, especially considering the precarious security conditions following waves of uprisings in Libya. Furthermore, the general precarity in Libya with the lack of economic potential during and right after the uprisings lead most Egyptians to return.

The events in 2011 did not mark the elapse of migration towards Libya among Egyptians. The timeline of migration of different research respondents has shown that many continued to visit until an eventual return in late 2014 or early 2015 during another wave of violence in Libya.

The case of returnees from Libya is an interesting case since the conditions they faced, notwithstanding the precariousness of the grave conditions they witnessed prior to return; resemble the conditions faced by a larger group of youth in Egypt's rural areas. With limited economic prospects, such a larger group is prone to seek migration again to make ends meet.



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## 1. Introduction

Libya is considered one of the main destinations for Egyptian migrants; especially after Gulf countries started replacing Egyptians with migrant workers from South and Southeast Asia in some sectors (Sanz, 2011: 9). 2009 statistics by the Ministry of Manpower and Emigration rated Libya as the top destination country for Egyptian migrants, followed by Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait. Earlier statistics, provided by CAPMAS in 2000, indicated Libya was the second destination of Egyptian migrants after Saudi Arabia, with 332,600 migrants (IOM 2010).


Before the eruption of the Libyan crisis in 2011, estimates of the number of Egyptians residing in Libya reflect a rough figure above one million, which made them the largest group of migrants in Libya before the crisis (IOM, 2011a: 13). However, the numbers of Egyptians in Libya were estimated to have declined to 700,000 after the crisis (IOM 2011 cited in Bel-Air 2016). Following the Libyan crisis in 2011, reports on the number of Egyptian returnees varied, with 173,873 reported organized returns and an estimated number of 800,000 returns in general (Zohry 2014). Apart from the general precarity in Libya, the exact factors leading to return will be further investigated in section three of this paper.

Results of a study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) showed that Libya was the top destination for youth in rural areas of Egypt. Respondents in the study of socio-economic profiles of returnees reported to be mainly working in the construction sector followed by the agricultural and fishing sectors (IOM, 2011b: 53). Before the eruption of the crisis, there was a general satisfaction towards the socio-economic conditions in Libya, which was also reflected in the findings of this research (IOM 2011b: 53).

Easy and cheap access to Libya was considered one of the main factors, which lead Egyptians to prefer it as a destination. Their legal conditions in Libya depended on the security conditions and events occurring at the time of residency before 2011 until the recent crises in 2014 and 2015. The legal conditions will be further discussed in section four of this paper.

An estimation of \$20 billion remittances was recorded to have been received in 2014 in Egypt from migrants abroad. Egypt is the largest country in terms of remittances received in the MENA region and is one of the top ten remittance receiving countries in the world (World Bank Annual Remittance Data). World Bank and Central Bank of Egypt data showed that, in Egypt, the total amount of remittances received did not decrease during and immediately after the beginning of the civil unrest in Libya. In fact, they increased 15 per cent in 2011 compared to 2010, and even picked up in 2012 (34% year on year increase) (World Bank Annual Remittance Data). This data is supported with the findings of this research concerning the decisions made to leave and the fact that, while a large segment of Egyptians left in 2011, groups of Egyptian migrants continued to stay even after the crisis until eventual return in 2014 and 2015. Following the crisis timeline and the migratory movement of Egyptian migrants, the paper looks chronologically into the conditions faced pre-departure from Egypt and in Libya before, during and after the crisis, then after return. By looking at living conditions in Libya, the paper analyzes the economic situation in Libya as well as the different hardships faced by Egyptians, which manifested due to xenophobia and violence during the crisis. Additionally, the paper aims at understanding the implications of return on the current conditions of Egyptians returnees from Libya. The subsequent





section in this paper, Section two, presents the methodology used to gather data and on which findings of this paper are based, including challenges and ethical considerations. Section three analyzes the factors behind migratory patterns towards Libya and the socio-economic conditions before the crisis, including relations with the Government of Egypt through its consular representations. Section four focuses on the onset of the crisis and the journey of return. It argues against considering 2011 as the only crisis affecting the return journey of Egyptian migrants, but rather extends its analysis to subsequent waves of crises in 2014 and 2015. It looks at conditions of the return journey and hazards met to reach villages of origin in Egypt. The section will conclude by looking at the long-term impact and repercussions of return reflected in pressures on informal labor markets in villages of origin and domestic and social tensions resulting from lack of employment and decrease in income, which has instigated the desire to attempt to migrate to Libya or elsewhere. The final section will provide conclusions.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative research methods, mainly focus groups and interviews. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews were used with Egyptian returnees from Libya. Interviews were also conducted with stakeholders (Government Authorities, Intergovernmental Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, Experts and Private Sector Actors). Descriptive and analytical coding technique was used to analyze the data. Before starting primary data collection, secondary data including agencies' reports and scholarly work on Egyptian migration particularly to Libya were reviewed. Over the course of four months starting in March 2016 until August 2016, fieldwork was conducted in Cairo, Fayoum, Minya and Sohag. Fieldwork in Cairo covered interviews with NGOs, governmental bodies and international organizations. Stakeholders interviewed were collected through a purposive sampling technique from a list of organizations, which helped returnees in the aftermath of the Libyan crisis in 2011.

### 2.1 Interviews with Stakeholders

To gather relevant information concerning the conditions of and services provided to the group of migrants of concern, interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders. They included representatives of: Governmental entities, international organizations including UN agencies non-governmental organizations and experts.

#### 2.1.1 Governmental Entities:

These included ministries and national councils. The first under-secretary of one key ministry concerned with migrants was interviewed. The research team has attempted to interview two ministerial entities through communications, but meeting requests were either declined or not responded to until the submission of the final draft. Information concerning governmental authorities was based on desk research as well as fieldwork with migrants concerning their access to services.

#### 2.1.2 International Organizations:

These included supranational organizations like the European Union (EU) and UN agencies. Program managers from the European Union Delegation to Cairo Commission were interviewed in Egypt. Interviews were also conducted with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as one of the key actors responding to the Libyan crisis, including members of IOM's senior management in the country. Representatives for one of the UN agencies were interviewed twice on the condition of anonymity for their identities and that of the entity itself.

#### 2.1.3 Local non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs):

Two local NGOs were interviewed. One of the local NGOs also considers itself under the private sector. In Egypt the line between the two categories is blurred with the same entities registering in both forms. The director of the National Employment Pact (NEP), one of IOM's partners addressing the needs of rural migrants among which are returnees, defines the NEP as both a private actor as well as a civil society entity working on creating employment opportunities. Respondents from the NGOs preferred to be interviewed anonymously, keeping the identities of their organizations secret. Consultations with an International NGO took place after they did an earlier assessment on the needs of returnees.

#### **2.1.4 Experts:**

These are academics in the field of migration. Only one expert who has worked on issues of rural migration and return was interviewed.

#### **2.2 Focus Group Discussions and Interviews with Returnees**

Returnees from Libya were selected from three main governorates: Fayoum, Minya and Sohag. The three governorates are in Upper Egypt as Upper Egyptians have the highest tendencies to migrate towards Libya. Fieldwork was conducted in rural villages within these governorates. Such selection was based on identification of stakeholders initially interviewed in the beginning of the research and based on the precedent of migration to Libya. While Delta governorates such as Sharqiya and Menoufia were also reported as sending migrants to Libya, locating the sample was challenging.


In each governorate, a gatekeeper (someone who is very familiar with the community) was identified to support in the recruitment of the sample, using purposive and snowball techniques. The gatekeeper in Minya represented the NGO “Better Life Association”, working for the last decade with rural inhabitants in Minya, albeit not returnees in particular. Through the network of the association, returnees were recruited. The gatekeeper in Sohag, meanwhile, represented a practitioner working with a local NGO in Cairo and who has familial and societal links in Tunis village, one of the main villages in Sohag sending migrants to Libya. The gatekeeper in Fayoum is a key figure who has collaborated before with the UN and inter-governmental agencies to work on issues related to irregular migration from Fayoum towards Libya and southern Europe.

The interviews targeted migrants who have been to Libya for two or more visits and who witnessed the 2011 events. They were also selected based on focus group discussions, which conveyed that the majority of migrants included in this study returned to Egypt after 2011, some of them have attempted to or successfully entered Libya afterward and eventually returned to live. In one of the focus groups in Fayoum, the eight participants said they migrated to Libya after the 2011 crisis, which added a different perspective.

All migrants interviewed in the three governorates were males with basic education; the majority of them were under 35 with few exceptions (ages ranging between 35 and 45). The gender and age groups served as a representation of the larger migration to Libya, resonating with the primarily male migration to countries in the Gulf (BelAir, 2016). Migrants, who mainly targeted Libya as a migration destination, also came from a few main villages: Tunis Village in Sohag, Tatun Village in Fayoum, Tahnasha, Demshir and Hasan Basha Villages in Minya.

Migrants were selected by three gatekeepers (one in each of the three locations), using a set of criteria identified by the research team including:

- Returning from Libya
- Witnessing 2011 or 2014/2015 events in Libya
- Migrating from one of the key villages where migration to Libya takes place



While the focus of the initial research was on return after 2011, the circular pattern of migration could not be avoided with the same migrants visiting Libya again for shorter or longer periods to work until their second return.

53 returnees from the three governorates participated in six discussions, out of which 15 migrants were selected for interviews based on their return experience after 2011. The selection also ensured diversity in ages, marital statuses and economic conditions. For security precautions, interviews and focus groups were not recorded, but notes were written in real time. The interviews and focus groups were translated into English within the same step of note-taking. In focus groups, a second note-taker was assigned to complement the research team in documenting the session, as they reiterated in moderating the session.

### **2.3 Ethical Considerations**

To protect the anonymity and confidentiality of migrants interviewed, reference was made to their accounts by their age and governorate in Egypt throughout the paper. Stakeholders interviewed were given four options of disclosure according to standard procedures with partner institutions involved in this research: a) Full disclosure including name and organization, b) Partial disclosure I: Name of the organization, c) Partial disclosure II: Category of organization (i.e. UN agency, NGO...etc.), d) No disclosure: reference to the organization as an “entity”. Accordingly, different levels of references are made throughout the paper.

### **3. PUSH FACTORS AND MIGRATORY PATTERNS TO LIBYA**

The following section is concerned with understanding the migratory patterns to Libya before 2011, focusing on the circularity nature of the movement and the socio-economic challenges (push factors) in the villages of origin in Egypt. It further analyzes the legal, social and economic conditions faced in Libya with regards to relations with host communities and authorities, including the Egyptian representation in Libya. By comparing living conditions in Egypt prior to migration, albeit circular in many cases, in addition to conditions in Libya, it became evident that migrating to Libya was lucrative and helped in core economic needs.

### 3.1 The social and Economic needs in villages of origin

*“Money sent would be used for the marriage of one or more sibling, also some houses were built or refurbished with money sent, there is a difference between those who had to go because it is a need and others who sought better income, most us belong to the first group.” (A 32-year old participant in a Focus Group Discussion in Sohag, May 15, 2015).*

One of the important determinants of the decision to migrate to Libya was the familial, social and economic commitments young men in such rural areas held. The main cities that sent migrants from Egypt to Libya were: Sohag, Assuit, Minya and to a lesser extent Fayoum, Sharqiya and Menofia (Interviews with: UN agency March 17, 2016; Ayman Zohry, March 28, 2016 Expert).

As earlier noted in the methodology section and concurring with an IOM survey on Egyptian returnees, young male migration to Libya was the trend, without any family members joining from their original villages in Egypt. Single and married young Egyptian males migrated to Libya in pursuit of a better daily wage to support their families in Egypt through regular transfer of remittances.

According to a returnee from Minya:

*“We are looking to build ourselves. What makes young men want to travel? If I stayed in Egypt, I would not afford to get married. If I work for one month in Egypt, I would stay unemployed for the month after.” (A 24-year-old returnee from Tahnasha village, Minya, Focus Group Discussion, April 20, 2016).*

Supporting the marriages of family members, especially sisters, was one of the duties male returnees were responsible for, thus deciding to travel to Libya. The low wages in Egypt and the lack of prospects were the main push factors driving young Egyptians to migrate to Libya.

*“You would work for EGP200 a week. We lived off very little money in Egypt. If there is a job here [in Egypt] that would pay me 1000 pounds I would stay.” (A 28-year-old returnee from Tunis village, Sohag, Focus Group Discussion May 14th, 2016, Sohag).*

In a focus group in Minya, a 48-year-old respondent explained (April 19th, 2016),

*“Work opportunities in the village are only available for one month here and on certain days if harvesting every year, you would find work during this period 15 days for agriculture and 15 days for farming but the rest of the year no jobs at all.”*

The fact that opportunities in Egyptian villages are seasonal depending on the harvest season and the need for daily laborers made the income in Egypt very unstable and unpredictable. While there was a consensus among the respondents in the three governorates that there were no livelihood prospects in their villages, a representative from National Employability Pact, a private sector entity working on employability, highlighted there were economic opportunities. However, he pointed out that migrating to the Gulf was more lucrative and the opportunities were not preferred by youth due to their lower compensation or to the fact that blue-collar jobs are looked down upon. This has discouraged job matchmaking companies from working in certain governorates such as Minya (Interview with representative of National Employability Pact, April 26, 2015).

### 3.2 The Circularity and legality of Migration to Libya

As earlier noted, Libya has been one of the main destinations of migration from Egypt since the 1950s. The history of Egyptian migration to Libya could be traced back to the 1950s. During Nasser's era (1952-1970), Egyptian white-collar labor was sent to Libya, including teachers, to promote education.

When compared to other states such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, migration to Libya came at lower costs. Traveling to Saudi Arabia had social implications, namely Kafala or the sponsorship system, which increased the cost of travel, while the living costs in Kuwait were very high when compared to Libya. Besides that, Kuwait lacked prospects for low-skilled jobs, unlike in Libya.

According to a personal interview with a 38-year-old-respondent in Tatoun Village in Fayoum (May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016),

*"It's cheap. If I want a contract for Saudi Arabia it's difficult; you pay EGP 3000 and you need a sponsor (Kafeel). Libya is cheaper. Now you can go to Sudan and from there to Libya. At the start of the revolution some people were paid 8000 or 10000 pounds to help with smuggling. I went without a passport. Smuggling started a long time ago."*

During Sadat's era (1970-1981), the Libyan-Egyptian relations deteriorated due to hostilities between the two governments, leading to the deportation of hundreds of Egyptians and Egyptian state bans on traveling to Libya. Despite the ban, Egyptians continued to work in Libya, namely doctors and nurses, who had to endure ill treatment (Tsourapas, 2015).


The fieldwork conducted with returnees in Egypt highlighted the circular migratory pattern, which was reflected in regular visits from the 1990s and early 2000s until the crisis. Many have even attempted or successfully gone to Libya after 2011 and had to return with the second wave of violence in 2015 that witnessed events such as the beheading of Egyptian Copts in Libya by the Islamic State.

Surviving "two revolutions" was frequently referred to during the fieldwork. According to one focal point discussed in focus groups in Tatoun Village in Fayoum, marriage ties and historical and geographical links between the two countries encouraged migration waves from Egypt to Libya (Focus Group Discussion in Fayoum, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016).

Accessing Libya, except during political tensions between the two countries, has been quite easy for many young Egyptians. When asked why Libya was chosen, the convenient travel costs and good living conditions in comparison to the other Gulf States were often the top reasons behind the choice. According to respondents, it used to cost them LE 400 to travel to Libya, which has completely changed after the crisis. Until March 2007, visas or work contracts were not a requirement or obligation to enter Libya. In 2007, the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower in Libya started requiring work permits for Egyptians entering Libya. In 2007, a report from Al-Ahram newspaper stated that around 35,000 Egyptians returned to Egypt due to new regulations from the Ministry of Manpower in Libya (Pesha, 2015).

As of 2013, the General National Congress in Libya started systematic deportation of Egyptians. Subsequently, the visa crisis started due to the arrest of 50 Egyptian





migrants in Libya who entered irregularly. They were convicted of proselytizing charges with one migrant dying while in custody. In August 2013, the Libyan authorities denied entry to over 2,000 Egyptians attempting to re-enter the country following the Eid holidays in August on the basis of not acquiring residency permits. The Libyan authority was estimated to have deported 400 Egyptian migrants daily in late 2013 (Pesha, 2015).

In 2014, tensions between the two governments escalated due to Pro-Qadafi Libyans seeking refuge in Egypt. The Libyan government promised to open doors for Egyptians on the basis of Pro-Qadafi figures being handed over by the Egyptian government. Continuous tensions between the two countries led to the targeting of Egyptians and denying entry to migrants attempting to go to Libya.

### **3.3 Livelihood in Libya**

#### **3.3.1 Job opportunities**

One of the key factors driving migrants to go to Libya was the variety of job opportunities, namely in the construction sector, as well as agriculture and trade. Social networking among migrants was an important factor in locating jobs in Libya. As highlighted by a 38-year-old respondent in Tatoun in Fayoum, “There is an advantage in Libya. If the person you work for likes you he will keep you. He’ll ask you to recruit people too. Almost 90% of Egyptians were laborers.” (Interview, May 30, 2016).


Egyptians primarily worked in the construction sector due to the high demand for construction in Libya. This demand certainly increased after 2011 because of the low supply of labor from other nationalities (An interview and Focus Group Discussion in Fayoum, May 30th, 2016). The majority interviewed worked on daily contracts as ceramic/marble workers or wall painters. More privileged Egyptians worked as brokers recruiting Egyptians for daily labor and supervising the refurbishment of properties for Libyans. Some Egyptians also worked in the Arab Market as street vendors (Interview in Minya, April 21, 2016).

The daily pay for Egyptian workers ranged from 30–40 dinars before 2011, but this number skyrocketed to 60–70 dinars during the crisis. As explained by many respondents, Egyptians were the majority in comparison to Tunisian, Chadian and other migrant workers. According to IOM, before the crisis, the total number of migrants in Libya was estimated to be 2.5 million: 1 million Egyptians, 80,000 Pakistanis, 59,000 Sudanese, 63,000 Bangladeshis, 26,000 Filipinos, and 10,500 Vietnamese, in addition to others from Niger, Chad, Mali, Nigeria and Ghana (IOM 2011c).

#### **3.3.2 Remittances Flow**

The fact that living in Libya was cheap allowed respondents to save and send remittances to their families. Leaving their families behind has helped migrants to share houses in large numbers and save housing and utility costs.

A study by IOM on the migration crisis in Libya indicated that the majority (93.7%) of Egyptian returnees indicated sending remittances to their families in Egypt, out of which 77.8 percent reported being the breadwinner for their households in Egypt (IOM 2011c). The low cost of living was constantly referred to as the main privilege in Libya. Migrants were not concerned with living costs and were able to save and send remittances to their families.



A 26-year-old respondent from Tatum Village in Tunis highlighted the low cost of living in Libya saying:

*“You could live off 5 Dinars per day maximum even if you do not work for some days, meat would cost no more than 2 dinars and 0.5 for clothes and other costs, life was very cheap in Libya. We used to stay 17 persons in one small house, it was hard but affordable” (Focus Group Discussion in Fayoum, May 30th, 2016).*

Out of 15 respondents, 12 affirmed sending between 50-90% of their income to their families back home. Remittances sent were used for various purposes ranging from marrying off siblings, repaying debts, covering daily needs of family and extended family and in some cases savings and buying real estate for later marriages (11 interviews conducted in Minya, Sohag and Fayoum respectively in April and May 2016). The three remaining respondents kept their money in Libya. Two of them were single and did not have financial obligations in Egypt. Thus, they kept all their money at their disposal. Meanwhile, the last respondent had conflicts with his family back home, so he kept all his income in Libya (Interview in Fayoum, May 14, 2016).

According to a 32-year-old returnee from Tunis village in Sohag, “We also had to find extra work in Libya sometimes. You could have two different jobs, we all had lots of financial commitments in Egypt, so we had to send money back, you would keep around 100 dinars with you there and the rest could be sent back” (Interview, Sohag, May 14, 2016).

In focus groups, the detailed process of sending remittances was explained. Migrants hand amounts they need to send in dinars to a Libyan, who changes currency to US Dollars and sends it to another Libyan in Egypt, who in turn hands the amount to the families of the migrants (Focus Group Discussion and an interview in Fayoum, May 3, 2016). Libyans involved in the process benefit from the exchange rate and sometimes charge extra costs. Egyptians cannot access funds in USD, thus the need for Libyan brokers.

In other cases, trusted Libyan drivers were given the amounts in return for a percentage. Due to the frequent visits between Libya and Egypt, some migrants resorted to other Egyptian migrants visiting Egypt to transfer money. One respondent explained that he preferred sending regular remittances to avoid being mugged in Libya (Interview, Sohag, May 15, 2016).

In addition to monetary remittances, migrants also affirmed sending gifts with other Egyptians (Tsourapas, 2015). Electrical appliances and clothes were sent to family either with an intermediary person or during visits back home. Gifts were bought one at a time in advance to avoid paying large lump sums. Migrants prepared for such visits by buying clothes and other items and storing them at home in Libya (Focus Group Discussion and an interview in Sohag, April 14th and 15th, 2016). This, however, only happened in periods before 2011 as none of the respondents interviewed were able to transfer any goods after 2011.

As explained by a 29-year-old returnee from Minya (Interview, May 15 2016),

*“Before 2011, I used to prepare the gifts I would take back home few months before my return date to avoid paying for all gifts in one shot, so I would buy every month few gifts for my brothers, sisters, nephews and cousins. So basically, what I took home was clothes and small electric appliances.”*



### 3.4 Xenophobia and Hardships in Libya

Through analyzing each presidential era, Tsourpas (2015) highlighted the continuous maltreatment of Egyptians in Libya by Libyans, especially at times of crisis. Egyptian returnees complained of acting as scapegoats for Libyans. Before the crisis, there was less of a threat in random verbal attacks. However, during 2011, many actors became armed and Egyptians were particularly targeted on the basis that they come from a country that encouraged a revolution and, more importantly, were earning income and thus, competing for jobs. "You are here to eat our food, that's what they used to tell us" (Interview, Minya, April 19, 2016).

Despite being seen as competitors, Egyptians in fact did not share any of the privileges Libyan citizens had. They were instead self-reliant in order to cover their basic needs and find work. In many occasions, especially starting in 2011, they were deprived of their own wages even after finishing the work expected from them and unable to fight back (Six Focus Group Discussions in Minya, Sohag and Fayoum, April and May 2016).


According to a 26-year-old returnee in Tatum village in Fayoum (Interview, Fayoum, May 30, 2016),

*"I was working as a contractor for one Libyan and I had my friends work to finish his house. He owed us 8,000 Dinars in total and has been delaying paying them on the basis of excuses. I went to his house and told him I will take my money either by killing you or by being killed. He told me to leave before he shoots me. I resorted to another Libyan to help me. He came with me to my employer and told him that he was projecting a bad image for Egyptians and that he should pay me to pay the other workers. He talked to him in private and later told me to wait for a week and I will be paid. I called the Libyan mediator and he told me to forget about being paid so I realized they were together in this. I had to pay the workers half their pay from my personal pocket so I lost a lot of money after paying all workers."*

There was a consensus regarding the existence of general mistreatment towards Egyptians, in particular. One participant explained how he managed to overcome such mistreatment by trying to assimilate with the Libyan citizens. The 32-year-old from Tunis Village in Sohag explained, "They (Libyan nationals) never liked Egyptians, even before 2011, but in my experience I made friends with them, dressed and talked like them so they never treated me the way Egyptians were treated" (Interview, May 14, 2016).

### 3.5 Relations with relevant stakeholders

One of the key issues discussed in fieldwork was aiming to understand if Egyptian migrants received any support from either the Libyan government or the Egyptian representation in Libya. According to interviews with stakeholders, it was often challenging to get an estimate of the number of Egyptians in Libya for one main reason; many migrants had minimal interactions with the consulate there, and thus were not registered with the authorities. Before 2011, they only resorted to the consulate for passport procedures and in the case of issuing marriage certificates. Nevertheless, in instances of deaths, acquaintances of the deceased migrant approached the consulate for procedures and transfer to Egypt for burial.



After 2011, it was different. Although several interviewees returned through family support, some migrants benefitted from the services the consulate provided during the crisis, which will be explored in Section Four of this paper. Egyptian migrants had minimal contact with the Libyan authorities and in comparison, to locals, were not included in any subsidies or socio-economic services. Only during and after the crisis did some of the migrants interviewed report tensions with the rising authorities, some of which has led to detentions.

#### **4 CRISIS, THE RETURN (TWO WAVES 2011-2015) and AFTERMATH**

This section looks at the reasons behind return, the conditions right before and during the return of migrants (following both waves of violence), and the emergency services by both the Egyptian government and international organizations. It particularly presents narratives of decisions, gearing towards taking the dangerous return journey and the conditions endured en-route to Egypt through transiting in Tunis in some cases, or entering through Salloum borders, in other cases.

The section also explains how the different stakeholders and migrants defined the Libyan crisis and how the events of 2014 had a bigger impact on Egyptian migrants. The section looks at how the 2011 event has helped those who stayed or who managed to enter Libya afterwards to find jobs at higher rates as many migrants from other nationalities departed, even despite the overall high risks. The subsequent subsection includes the international organizations operating in Libya and Tunisia and the stakeholders' response to providing emergency services to Egyptian migrants. The final sub-section investigates the long-term implications reflected in socio-economic challenges and desire to migrate to Libya or to one of the Gulf States.

##### **4.1 Which Crisis?**

While fieldwork conducted for the initial study focused on returnees after 2011, many migrants witnessed what they labeled as “two revolutions” or “two crises” in Libya. The first took place in 2011 following the uprisings in Libya and the second wave of violence due to rival groups seeking control of the territory of Libya, leading to a final return in late 2014 and early 2015.

The next section will explain the reason of the return highlighting how the economic factors played a major role in the decision to return. The crisis in Libya from the view point of Egyptians was manifested itself in the huge decrease in their incomes or the loss of an income altogether after return. Security was not the main determinant condition for return; the research team had tackled the incident of the beheading of Christian migrants in 2015, it was found that it did not affect the decisions to stay in or leave Libya.

In consultations with experts and stakeholders, it was evident that Egyptian returnees from Libya no longer constitute a group “in crisis”. According to one expert, their needs resonate with the ones of any young, male Egyptian prone to migrate. The interventions should be to help them stay or regularize their migration (Interview with Ayman Zohry, March 28, 2016).

## 4.2 Reasons for Return

One of the key findings reflected in the fieldwork conducted regarding the majority's decision to leave Libya after 2011 and 2014 was primarily related to economic and security issues. In some cases the economic conditions precluded the security ones, driving migrants to leave Libya. In other cases, migrants were protected by their Libyan employers who eventually had to leave or ask them to leave for their own security.

As narrated by a 29-year-old returnee from Tahnasha Village in Minya, who left Libya in 2011,

*"We used to buy our food items from the subsidy outlets, when the crisis started, all outlets closed and the first thing we felt that we were deprived of food, so we had to leave. We have always suffered from their ill-treatment not paying us our salaries timely or at all, and if you decided to complain, no one will support you, we were unable to leave our houses and the employer used to bring us food every day, my main concern was when this employer leaves Libya, I wouldn't be able to stay."*

There was a clear distinction of what ill-treatment entailed before and after 2011. As highlighted by several respondents, it was common to have disputes with Libyan employers over salaries and terms of work. However, the type of violence became aggravated after 2011, where it became common that Egyptians were targeted for murder. Respondents continually highlighted certain challenges faced at the onset of the Libyan crisis and following it. In particular, xenophobia against Egyptian migrants was reflected in the perception that Egyptians had played a significant role in the uprising in Libya, even though respondents highlighted that Egyptians did not take any part in the crisis and were in Libya for economic reasons.


In highlighting the specific treatment Egyptian migrants were subjected to, one 29-year-old respondent from Sohag stated, "Seif El Islam came on TV and announced that Egyptians were the source of all this chaos and that Libyans were taught this violence from the Egyptian revolution. Our house was bombed shortly after this speech so were the houses of so many Egyptians." The same respondent added:

*"The revolution started on 17 February at night, we were shortly attacked in our home by armed groups, citizens were well-armed. We used to live near the director of Intelligence Unit, which before 2011 served as a source of safety but after it was extremely risky. We were targeted by all groups because of this location."*

According to a 20-year-old respondent from Fayoum, who had arrived in Libya in 2015 (Interview, May 30, 2016),

*"They humiliated us and took our money, that's why I decided to leave. I travelled for EGP8000. We returned with the help of a Libyan smuggler for 700 Dinars; he drove us to the barbed wire then you were transferred to another smuggler for an extra cost. We were driven at night to avoid being caught on the borders; you are taken from one smuggler to another. We were covered like goods."*

In light of the above conditions, the decision to depart from Libya was driven by both economic and security factors. Egyptians faced discrimination and mistreatment even before 2011. The intensity of the difficult living conditions, however, increased after 2011 because of the generalized violence. Many, as such, returned to Egypt in 2011.



Nevertheless, the economic needs forced some to endure the increased difficulties and continue to work in Libya and/or go back to Libya after their return to Egypt. The departure of many nationalities from Libya in 2011 meant that Egyptians were able to get better pay given the shortage of labour supply. This situation did not last long as the re-eruption of the violence in 2014 pushed them to eventually return to Egypt.

### 4.3 The Journey

After contemplating the departure from Libya, they took to Tripoli Airport after watching the statement of a prominent TV presenter on an Egyptian satellite channel. The presenter called for Egyptian migrants in Libya to head to Tripoli Airport, where Egyptian planes would take them home. Consequently, groups of migrants made their arrangements to take items back home and arranged for cars to take them to Tripoli airport only to be stopped at the gates.

As illustrated by a 32-year-old migrant from Tunis Village in Sohag (Focus Group Discussion, May 15, 2016),


*“We called drivers in Libya there to ask if they could take us to the airport. On the TV we heard ....the famous Egyptian TV presenter urging Egyptians in Libya to head to the airport. We went to the airport; it was winter. I wish we didn’t.”*

Egyptian migrants faced a lot of challenges during the process of leaving Libya included being threatened and having their items confiscated as a condition to leave the borders. The following accounts by returnees narrate such hardships.

*“They wouldn’t let people enter the airport. They started shooting at us. There was electrocution amidst a very heavy rain. Some Libyans were collecting money on the basis that they will take you somewhere but you wouldn’t see them again. We were stranded for 3 days unable to enter or exit the airport area. Our money started depleting. Also all your pending payments were not paid from your employers. We took our stuff; anything valuable was confiscated at the airport later. They allowed other nationalities to enter the airport, but not Egyptians. Libyans were preventing Egyptians specifically from leaving. (Interview with a 40-year-old returnee, Sohag, May 14, 2016).”*

*“We were unable to go out and buy food; we remained stranded for a few days until we contacted a Libyan to take us to Tripoli airport. We were unsure what to take and what to leave. So I had to make some decisions about the priority gifts and items. We also took the expensive equipment with us and left many items back in the house in Libya. Every checkpoint we passed through in Libya, we sacrificed few of our items. Until we arrived at Tripoli airport when it sounded like a sale for Libyans to get our items for very cheap prices. It was raining very heavily and we were unable to drag our items and had to leave many of them or sell it for less than half its original price. We were then told by Libyans at the airport to leave all our belongings behind to be able to enter the airport. Only those who had contacts in the airport, among the more privileged Egyptians working as engineers or in other professions, were able to catch the free flights to Egypt.” (Interview with a 29-year-old returnee, Sohag, May 15, 2016).*

Some returnees who could not take the land journey through Salloum had to transit through Tunisia. Particularly, returnees from Sohag took this route. Respondents in the



two focus group discussions and the six interviews conducted in Sohag expressed their gratitude towards the Tunisian state and civil society for saving them and providing emergency aid and shelter.

A few days after, charter flights and ferries were provided, and Egyptians were taken by one of these means towards Alexandria or Cairo. Upon arrival in these governorates, migrants made their own arrangements to secure a vehicle to their villages. They mainly asked the drivers to wait and be paid by their families once they reached their homes.

Other migrants from both the 2011 and 2014/2015 return waves took the more dangerous route and complained of ill-treatment from the authorities on the Libyan-Egyptian border.

*“We had no option but to try to leave again through what was known as “death way” by land from Tripoli to Salloum. On the way, after passing so many points, the driver told us he could only drop us at an area called Beni Walid for us to find further transport. We dropped at Beni Walid, there were many cafeterias and checkpoints, it was quite dangerous and they asked us to pay extra money. We had to pay then we proceeded to a broken road with armed groups in checkpoints, we were asked to pay 20 Dinars each extra. We were mugged. All our telephones were confiscated. We were detained for a few days, I resorted to another Libyan I knew in Libya who paid us an equivalent to 11,000 (2,200 per person) Egyptian pounds to have these groups release us. Another Libyan sent the amount and we were released and walked to Salloum. In Salloum, we faced other challenges with the Egyptian customs. We were put into three groups: those with valid visas to Libya, those with passports but invalid visas to Libya and those with no documents.”(Interview with a 26-year-old returnee in Fayoum).*

A group of returnees in Tatoun village in Fayoum returned to Egypt because they were deported from Libya due to irregular entry. This group had migrated to Libya for the first time in 2011, at the time where entry to Libya was closed. They entered the country via forged passports and visas and were hence deported back to Egypt. This group was completely different from the other interviewed ones, who had been in Libya before the crisis or those who had been there, returned to Egypt and then left back to Libya. They ranged from being completely illiterate to having primary education certificates only. They additionally exhibited extreme poverty and economic vulnerability more than their counterparts in the other focus group discussions.


#### **4.4 Stakeholders’ response to the crisis**

This section explains the assistance provided by both the Egyptian government and International organizations during the journey and after settling in Egypt. The section is based on both the interviews with the returnees and stakeholders.

##### **4.4.1 Emergency:**

While the initial responses by participants indicated a lack of assistance provided by the Egyptian consulate, migrants interviewed across the three governorates, where the fieldwork was conducted, revealed otherwise. Through further discussions, some respondents explained being transferred back to Egypt by the Egyptian government and/or receiving food assistance after return.





It was evident in some focus groups held in Minya and Sohag that the Egyptian authority provided flights from Tunis with the support of other governments from the Gulf to transfer Egyptians back home. Additionally, the authorities provided ferries in conjunction with IOM to escort some Egyptians towards Alexandria and Matruh (E/I/03). Upon arrival in Egypt, migrants from Sohag explained that there were some buses waiting for Egyptians from Salloum borders towards Alexandria for free, however some drivers asked for money and migrants had to pay.

Also, Egyptian authorities monitored emigration through consular registration on the borders. They shared in the development of an integrated database on regular Egyptian migrants abroad as a governmental priority. This was done in part to collect information on the Egyptian diaspora and their profiles, which could be developed as a tool to support nationals caught in countries in crisis.

The Egyptian government's response to the situation of Egyptian migrants in Libya was explained in a follow-up interview conducted with high-level representatives of the Counsellor Affairs Sector for Egyptian Expatriates at the Egyptian ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). In general, two government entities are concerned with migration issues in Egypt: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and The Ministry of Migration, both in different capacities.

MOFA Counsellor's Affairs scope of work with Egyptian migrants could be summarized through the work of the "Crisis Committee/Unit". The aim of the committee is to respond to any migration crisis. Its work is active, yet not consistent as it responds to the needs of migrants as they arise. The committee has worked explicitly on the Libyan crisis through returning migrants from two main areas: Gherba in Tunis and Salloum on the border with Libya. The committee also handled constant family inquiries about the stranded migrants and provided updates to them on their movements and conditions until their return.

Through the crisis committee, for which its ministerial members are changeable as needs arise, MOFA provides emergency support. Emergency responses as such to migrants' crisis have been reflected as providing immediate assistance for return, medical support and handling family inquiries. Once returnees are back, the work of the committee ends. As such, the support provided by MOFA is limited to emergency rather than sustainable support.

As for the Ministry of Migration and Egyptian Expatriates (MOM), it handles all types of complaints and inquiries from Egyptians abroad. The mechanisms of handling such complaints include online avenues such as Skype and social media.

In addition to government entities, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), while its focus was on Third Country Nationals in Libya, played a role in providing medical and return services to 30,583 Egyptian migrants in Libya. IOM provided evacuation assistance to over 30,000 Egyptians identified at the Libyan-Egyptian border. Sea evacuation took place by IOM to Alexandria. The ship transported humanitarian aid to Misurata, including medical supplies and equipment, and evacuated migrants on the return leg from Misurata to Benghazi. Land transportation was also provided to migrants in order to reach the Libya-Egypt border, where, if needed, consular representatives would identify and provide a laissez-passer to migrants with no protection concerns. By January 2012, IOM, in cooperation with the border authorities, recorded a total of 263,554 persons (including 173,873 Egyptians and 89,681 third country nationals (TCNs))

crossing the Libyan–Egyptian border (Interview with IOM Emergency representative, Regional Office, Cairo, May 19<sup>t</sup>, 2016).

Returnees interviewed, in particular those who were from Sohag, reiterated their gratitude for the Tunisian state and civil society sector. They narrated being taken care of while they waited for emergency transfers to Egypt. They were provided with cell phones to communicate with their families in Egypt and were provided food and shelter. “We would like to thank the Tunisians” or “long live Tunisia!” were sentiments expressed in both focus group discussions in Sohag (May 14–15, 2016).

According to a 38-year-old returnee from Tunis Village, Sohag (Focus Group Discussion, May 15, 2016),

*“We arrived in Tunis to witness generosity that we are very grateful for, had my mother or family been in Tunis she would not have received me the way the Tunisians did, it was beyond our expectations. In Ras Geber, we were provided food, juice by Tunisian families and Tunisian army; we were also accommodated in schools and other places.”*

#### **4.4.2: Assistance and Employability:**

In contrast to positive feedback to the emergency response provided by the Egyptian government explained above, the response to long-term assistance and employment opportunities was not positive.


An employment service and compensation programme for Egyptian returnees from Libya was to be implemented by a governmental entity<sup>1</sup> but it has largely failed. Despite returnees paying a small contribution, nothing has been provided. A returnee in Sohag explained that in 2015 the same governmental entity asked returnees to approach post offices to register for services similar to those they promised before, but again no services were offered until the time of the interview (May 2016). He explained that the government has greatly benefited from the money paid by returnees, without providing anything in return (Focus Group Discussion, Fayoum, May 30 2016),

*“We filled an application for EGP 10 and paid EGP 10 for papers and documentations, so imagine 20 pounds from 4 million Egyptians, how much money did the government make out of this initiative? It happened again in 2015, the ministry called for us to go to the postal office to register and again we got nothing back. Also in 2011, the local council informed us to come at a certain date with our passports, people received a food bag for one time, I abstained, I don’t need a bottle of oil and a pack of rice.” (Interview with a 26-year-old returnee in Sohag, May 15, 2016).*

The 2011 food assistance mentioned in the above quotation was also reflected upon in an interview carried out with a UN agency. According to this interview, the government approached a UN agency to distribute food vouchers in four districts in Sohag to 23,000 returnees. The distribution took place through the Ministry of Manpower. However, there were many security and miscommunication challenges during the process of distribution and many were frustrated for not receiving the promised food support (Interview with UN agency representative, July 25, 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> Identity of the entity withheld based on the preference of the interviewee



After the 2011 crisis, the Ministry of Manpower and Labour also informed migrants through municipalities in their villages of job announcements for returnees. Yet, after applying, they never heard back from the ministry. Such employability has not materialized as narrated by returnees.

According to a 29-year-old returnee in Sohag (Interview, Sohag, May 15, 2016),

*“In late 2011, early 2012, the [a governmental entity] announced work opportunities for returnees and when one reads the criteria, you feel it is tailored to us. We applied through paying EGP50 for the application and we received nothing back. None of the people I know benefited from this employment service. Three to four months after, we were asked to pay EGP10 to fill a reparations form listing all items lost in Libya; we did and heard nothing in return, too.”*

Due to the fact that several among the respondents were migrating irregularly, upon return they were unable to seek support from the relevant ministries (Interview, government representative, May 9, 2016). Migrants interviewed explained that they were asked through announcements in their villages to fill forms for compensation of lost items in Libya, but until the time of the fieldwork, they have not yet received further information.<sup>2</sup>

It was quite interesting to observe comparisons being made by both migrants and the government representative between the returnees from Libya and returnees from Iraq in light of the Gulf War in 1991. While migrants perceived compensations as their full right, having lost their income and other assets in Libya, the government representative found that the comparison was invalid due to the fact that Egyptians in Iraq fell under the mandate of work of the relevant ministries due to their migration being regularized. The argument could hypothetically include the majority of migrants to Libya before 2011, as many of them entered legally, yet they lacked interaction with the consulate in Libya by avoiding registration.

Services by the private sector and civil society in Egypt did not target Egyptian returnees in particular. National Employment Pact (NEP), in collaboration with GIZ (German Development Cooperation), the German Embassy and IOM provided job matchmaking services in the blue-collar sectors that included governorates with precedence of migration towards Libya and the Gulf (Interview, April 26, 2016). Services were provided to a total of 5200 individuals and awareness training was offered to 800 job seekers from Fayoum and Munufia, two governorates from which migration to Libya was relatively common, as well as Qalyoubia. Employment fairs in Fayoum and Munufia were additionally set up (Interview, April 26, 2016).

#### **4.5 Long-term Implications**

Due to the economic predicaments endured upon return, many migrants have lost a lot of their earnings on their way back. The absence of remittances has also had an impact on both migrants and their families. Coping strategies to cover for basic needs varied between finding alternative jobs in Egypt, counting on family and attempting to cross back to Libya or to migrate to any of the Gulf countries.

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<sup>2</sup>One key challenge facing researchers has been inability to verify important information expressed by several respondents; some information was not expressed accurately regarding the source of action of communication with relevant entities.





As explained by a 28-year-old from Tunis Village, Sohag (Interview in Sohag, May 15, 2016):

*“It took me a long time to adapt to the situation. I am engaged in the Ceramic business, I fix ceramic pieces. But the supply has been very high due to the return of Egyptians, so the daily income is quite low. So I decided to work in agriculture in our family business, it’s better for me to be employed by my father rather than other employers.”*

Being unable to find a decent income is also related to the return of a large number of Egyptian migrants to certain villages in the interest of the employers, who have decreased wages. For this reason, some migrants have decided to look for daily labour work in Alexandria, Cairo or any other governorate for better pay and less competition. Attempts to start small business have been rated as unsuccessful by respondents.

As explained by a 38-year returnee from Fayoum (Focus Group Discussion, May 30, 2016):

*“If you started a project, it’s doomed to fail, why? Because the income is low, so who will buy from you? My cousin had a small restaurant, he closed it, the food items are expensive and there is no revenue. If I have work, I would hire a friend of mine and it rotates.”*


Another 29-year-old returnee from Sohag (Focus Group Discussion, May 14, 2016) also gave his account, saying:

*“I returned with no money at all! The demand over jobs increased with the high numbers of Egyptians returning, some people who managed to have some capital started small businesses, but the majority struggled through seasonal daily labour. Many people were indebted to pay back the cost of their travel or return. I am now unable to give my children the same pocket money and privileges they used to have, I took out my children from private nurseries and sent them to public ones. I decided to be more creative and I decided to work as a taxi driver.”*

There was a constant complaint by returnees that any job opportunity offered by the government would not match their skills since it would require more education and would not utilise their vocational skills. Migrants portrayed compensations or small loans as the only solutions to address their socio-economic problems.

Most of the migrants interviewed are still very keen to go back to Libya once the conditions become better. They contacted their Egyptian friends in Libya to provide them with information before they made a decision. As earlier indicated in the pull factors, Libya continues to be more attractive in comparison to the Gulf countries. The high living conditions in Qatar and Kuwait as well as their high rates for migration costs have made it impossible for returnees to try migrating to one of these countries. The challenge of the sponsorship system in Saudi Arabia was also a main challenge, depriving them from considering it as an option. Nevertheless, a few migrants interviewed were preparing to travel to one of the Gulf countries at the time of the FGD or interview.

*“It’s insecure to go to Libya now, but if the conditions became better and I was able to afford the cost of travel, I will. But you need to know those who left to Libya*



*can only go to Libya, they became familiar with the environment and work venues, they would never go to Saudi or Kuwait, not only because they are more expensive but more because they are not familiar with them. Also the Libyan exchange rate compared to the Saudi one is much better with less travel costs.” (A 29-year-old returnee, Focus Group Discussion, Sohag, May 14, 2016).*

Other implications as explained by an organization in Egypt included child labour and narratives of domestic violence and tensions resulting from lack of income (Interview April 4, 2016). One assessment of the needs of Egyptian returnees from Libya was conducted. An international NGO in Egypt conducted the mentioned assessment in April 2015 with the aim to advocate for needed services (Interview April 4, 2016). Minya and Fayoum were identified as governorates with a high number of returnees. Samples did not solely include returnees, but also their family members, some of whom were women. It was found that there was no psychosocial support by any service provider to victims of domestic violence, which was prevalent (Interview April 4, 2016).

According to the INGO interviewed, *“There was some child labour; 40% of children dropped out of school because there was no money to cover school fees”* (Interview April 4, 2016). There were incidences of child labour, although not among the sample frame, but it was heard of in the community. Some returnees reluctantly made references to domestic tensions, resulting from wives being asked to sell their jewellery to cover debts and expenses and being asked to cut costs hugely after return of spouse (Interviews in Minya and Sohag, April and May 2016).

## **5. Conclusion**

Egyptian returnees from Libya continue to face challenges that reflect the direct impact of the Libyan crisis on their livelihoods. Interviews conducted with stakeholders in Cairo and with returnees in three Egyptian governorates confirmed that the most significant challenge returnees are currently facing is the lack of income that is linked to loss of jobs in Libya as a result of the crisis and lack of opportunities in the villages that could have met the increased labor supply. On the contrary, the increased labor supply because of returnee further decreased wages.

Despite the willingness of some to return to Libya on the basis of higher income levels in comparison to Egypt, the precarious security situation in Libya has also increased reluctance amongst Egyptian returnees to seek employment there at the current time. Furthermore, opportunities to migrate continue to be limited. This is primarily due to the high costs associated with migration to the Gulf States.

The provision of services by civil society, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector in Egypt, as well as the Egyptian government has generally been limited. No effective compensation programme has been implemented by governmental institutions to assist Egyptian returnees from Libya, even though it had been announced that such a programme was to be implemented.

The loss of income has had longer-term effects on returnees and their families. Returnees noted depression and reduced educational opportunities for children. Those who fled Libya at the onset of the crisis may at the time of writing this paper no longer be categorized as returnees per se on the basis that time has generally lapsed since their return. An effective approach is needed by the Egyptian government and international organizations to address the needs of such groups. More rigorous



policies targeting Egyptian migrants are required, as well as effective responses by governmental institutions in crisis situations.

While returnees had expressed few concerns related to their loss of income and precarious journeys to and from Libya, their overall economic conditions resonate with the larger group of youth who are prone to migration from rural areas. The lack of opportunities or the seasonal kind of opportunities will continue to drive migration. While there is an actual lack of viable livelihood opportunities, it is worth highlighting that a large category of youth does not prefer to engage in menial jobs in Egypt. There is a need for relevant stakeholders to further embark on initiatives encouraging work opportunities in rural areas. Further research is important to investigate the actual skills of youth in the villages who are prone to migrate.



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