

LIBYA: 18,000 MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES DISAPPEARED

ACHRS STATEMENT | SOFUS RØNBERG



Eighteen thousand migrants and refugees bound for Europe have vanished in 2021 after being detained by the Libyan Coast Guard. Many are feared to be victims of trafficking and extortion. ACHRS condemns the Libyan Coast Guard's continuous human rights violations, as well as the European Unions and its member states' complicity in and facilitation of these abuses.

On the 17th of September, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) expressed concern over the disappearance of thousands of migrants, who had been detained by the Libyan Coast Guard after being intercepted and returned while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. While 24,000 migrants have been intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard in 2021, only 6000 of these have been accounted for in the official Libyan detention centers. The whereabouts of the remaining 18,000 migrants and refugees are unknown. IOM fears that the 18,000 vanished migrants might end up in the hands of criminal groups or be exposed to trafficking and extortion.

The Libyan Coast Guard intercepts and forcibly returns migrants and refugees bound for Europe. This is done under cooperation with the EU and with funding from EU member states. However, there have been numerous and continuous reports of human rights abuses committed by the Libyan Coast Guard. In July, Amnesty International released a report documenting human rights abuses, such as torture and sexual violence committed by the Libyan Coast Guard. Furthermore, there are consistent reports of extortion by Coast Guard personnel, deaths in custody, and trafficking for forced labour.

The Libyan Coast Guard's conduct is a clear violation of the right to life: both for those migrants and refugees who are in detention centers, and those whose whereabouts are not known. Furthermore, their conduct has a clear gender-based perspective, putting especially women's rights at risk of trafficking and sexual abuse.

Furthermore, the European Union and its member countries are obliged under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, The European Convention on Human Rights, and other international law to not expose anyone to human rights abuses, either directly or indirectly. By turning a blind eye to the Libyan Coast Guard's abuses while cooperating with the Coast Guard, the EU and its member states are complicit in the Coast Guard's violations of fundamental human rights.

ACHRS condemns the practices of the Libyan Coast Guard: both within the detention centers and the disappearance of 18,000 migrants and refugees. Furthermore, ACHRS condemns the EU and its member states' cooperation with the Libyan Coast Guard.

ACHRS calls on the Libyan government to investigate and bring to safety the 18,000 disappeared refugees and migrants. Furthermore, ACHRS calls on the Libyan Coast Guard to close its detention centers and end all human rights abuses of migrants and refugees both inside and outside the detention centers.

ACHRS calls on the EU and its member states to immediately end cooperation with and facilitation of the Libyan Coast Guard. We additionally call for the EU and its member states to end its practices of forcibly returning refugees and migrants, and instead to ensure their safety and protection.