



Protection Sector: Tripoli clashes protection update (18 April 2019)

Situation overview:

The military operation to capture the Libyan capital of Tripoli by the Libyan National Army (LNA) is rapidly escalating, with a potential for catastrophic consequences for civilians. As a result, **the physical safety of civilians is increasingly threatened by indiscriminate attacks as fighting remains active** in Abu Salim, Gharat, Suq Al-Jumaa and Hadbaa, and spills into different neighbourhoods of the city including Ain Zara, Khala, Azizya, Wadi Rabiya'a and Qasr Bin Ghashir. More than ever, ensuring the protection of civilians' remains of paramount importance. The growing protection needs for the most vulnerable groups such as those caught up in the conflict areas, displaced people, migrants and refugees in and outside detention centers, should also be addressed immediately.

Over the last two weeks, more than 25,000 persons have been displaced to several locations in Tripoli and across Libya. In addition, according to WHO, 189 persons (**including 18 civilians**) were killed and more than 800 were injured as a consequence of clashes and indiscriminate shelling.

Protection of Civilians:

Fighting in Tripoli escalated dramatically in the last few days as the LNA began to make rapid advances to the edge of Tripoli. **Thousands of families remain trapped in conflict-affected areas** as not all parities responded to calls for humanitarian corridors. As documented by several humanitarian actors, the neighbourhoods most affected by casualties in the last two weeks were Ain Zara, Khala, Azizya, Wadi Rabiya'a and Gasr Bin Ghashir. The indiscriminate attacks, shelling and usage of

Immediate protection concerns:

- *Indiscriminate shelling and the use of medium and heavy weapons in heavily populated areas have resulted in the death and injury of many of civilians and in the destruction or disruption of health and education facilities, in violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL);*
- *Thousands of families (Libyans and non-Libyans) remain trapped in conflict-affected areas without access to a safety as calls for a ceasefire and the establishment of humanitarian corridors to facilitate the evacuation of civilians have not been respected.*
- *Parties to the conflict are allegedly responsible for serious violations of IHL, including the use of indiscriminate attacks and location of military objects near to civilian objects, failing to take adequate measures to ensure the protection of civilians is respected, as well as, the forced recruitment of detainees to stock and carry weapons, or serve as combatants.*
- *Armed actors and security institutions have restricted freedom of movement, increased security check towards the civilian population. Tripoli residents and IDPs who are originally from the east have been particularly targeted due to perceived risk of their military involvement or political affiliation.*
- *Thousands of refugees and migrants continue to be arbitrarily held in detention centres, including in conflict-affected areas where they are directly exposed to the fighting and lack access to food, water and health services.*
- *Migrants and refugees who have been displaced by the conflict are prevented from accessing collective shelters and are therefore cut-off from access to safety and essential services*
- *General lawlessness including looting, carjacking, kidnapping and petty crime activities have been reported in conflict affected areas;*

medium and heavy weapons in populated areas continued and resulted in the loss of many civilians. Illustrating the vast insecurity facing the conflict-affected population, civilians were killed and injured most frequently inside their homes (80%), at public services and infrastructure sites (10%), and in cars including medical staff in ambulances (10%). In addition, the bombing of schools, hospitals and ambulances has taken place in violation of International Humanitarian Law.

General lawlessness including looting and criminal activities have been reported in southern Tripoli, contributing to the firm refusal by many civilians to leave their homes out of fear that their property would be damaged/looted. Many of the displaced families left relatives behind to protect their properties during the displacement. Additionally, protection actors reported that some family members have been arrested/ kidnaped while they are trying to return to their house to check on their properties. Reportedly, many civilian structures in the conflict-affected areas were damaged. Houses were the most frequently impacted structures, as well as civilian infrastructure including main roads, telecommunications and government compounds. Other structures used by civilians were also damaged, including food stores and, educational and healthcare facilities.

Of particular concern is the use of civilian sites and infrastructure, such as the IDP camp in Al Fallah as a base from which to launch attacks, which constitutes a violation of IHL as it places civilians at greater risk through the loss of the perceived civilian characterization of the site, and by creating a condition where civilians could be targeted. By bringing the hostilities closer to them and turn these civilian sites and facilities into a legitimate military target.

Due to the insecurity, many international organisations have scaled down or suspended their activities or staff movements in Tripoli due to concerns over staff safety and relocated the majority of their international staff outside of Libya, thus hampering their capacity to provide life-saving and essential services to the affected population.

At-risk population groups, Vulnerabilities and Persons with Specific needs:

As the conflict continues and many people remain trapped, women, children migrants, refugees and persons with specific needs are at a heightened risk. These risks include but are not limited to family separation, sexual violence, kidnapping, trafficking in persons, food insecurity and lack of access to basic healthcare. Increased risks for gender based violence as women are on the move and losing their community support members and sense of safety

Minorities and geographical groups

Protection actors have reported that Tripoli- residents as well as IDPs who are originally from the east (including IDPs from Derna and Benghazi), are at increased risk of being targeted for killing, enforced disappearance and arbitrary arrest due to perception by military and security actors about their possible involvement in the fighting or their supposed political affiliation.

Refugees and Migrants:

Currently there are **3,886** detained refugees and migrants who are exposed to or at risk of clashes in eight detention centres in the Tripoli area. Based on their experience from previous conflicts, refugees and migrants in Libya are worried that they will be forced to take a role in supporting

the militias during the conflict. Protection actors reported that refugees and migrants have been used to provide logistic support to the militias in two detention centres such as cleaning military vehicles and uploading and stocking weapons. Several refugees and migrants reported that several militias approached them asking them to join the military, and others reported that militias had asked them or forced them to wear military uniforms. Non-Arabic speaking refugees and migrants have less access to information to make informed decisions about their safety and security. In addition, refugees and migrants have less access to cash and transportation to relocate themselves to safer areas.

Migrant and refugee women and girls remain the most at risk group, especially those who are either the main household owners, pregnant/lactating women or are single. They are exposed to exacerbated vulnerabilities due to the conflict facing a number of risks such as:

- Discrimination – they are refused access/accommodation in the collective shelters given that priority is given to Libyan families and refugees (usually of the same religious background)
- Alternative accommodation is challenging to secure due to discrimination and lack of financial resources; so migrant women end up in overcrowded locations that do not meet basic living conditions and their needs.
- Food scarcity: as most migrant women and/or single women are scattered in different places outside collective shelters, their access to food is even more limited and inaccessible due to transportation constraints as well.

The protection sector call on:

The parties to the conflict to

- Respect their obligations under International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law to ensure the safety of all civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and public utilities. In particular, parties to the conflict shall immediately cease attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, and stop the indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in populated areas **The protection sector is concerned by the the widespread violations of IHL and IHRL which are committed by all parties with impunity.**
- Allow unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to all affected areas and agree to a temporary humanitarian truce to allow for the provision of emergency services and the safe and voluntary passage of civilians out of conflict-affected areas of conflict, in particular for the purpose of medical evacuation

Protection sector response:

- UNHCR hotlines are active and are providing information to IDPs, refugees and migrants on available services, shelters identified by local authorities and to those agencies facilitating evacuation from the affected areas, as required. Information on available shelters and services is updated on daily basis. As of 17 April, 2,085 individuals were assisted with information through the hotlines.
- GBV partners including IRC, IMC and UNFPA in collaboration with its national partners (PSS Team, Elssafa and Al-Bayan) continue to distribute dignity kits and provide psychosocial support (PSS) to conflict affected populations in the collective shelters and urban areas targeting IDPs, host communities and migrants. To this date, 2,793 individuals have been reached with PSS while 3,480 women and girls have received dignity kits.
- Child Protection partners have reached 968 children with PSS/recreational activities and specialized PSS in eight shelters and urban settings in Tripoli. In addition, 166 caregivers were reached with awareness sessions and PSS. The response included distribution of recreational kits and Child Protection rapid assessments in different IDP shelters.
- Following heavy clashes in Abu Salim area, on 17 April, UNHCR conducted a relocation of 179 refugees and asylum-seekers from Abu Salim detention centre to the UNHCR's Gathering and Departure Facility (GDF). In addition, during the day UNHCR transferred 21 refugees and asylum-seekers from Zintan detention centre to the GDF in Tripoli. At present there are some 650 refugees and asylum-seekers hosted in the GDF.
- IOM continue assisting the most vulnerable migrants, including women and children, to access safety and provide for their basic needs by the provision of cash assistance, distribution of NFIs and food items, placement in host families away from conflict-areas, provision of options to return to their home countries, and the monitoring of detention centers wherever possible.

The Libyan authorities to

- Ensure the safe and unrestricted access of all population groups affected by the fighting and displacement, including Libyans and non-Libyans, to access collective shelters and site where they can enjoy safety, freedom of movement and access life-saving and essential services.
- Facilitate access for service providers and mobilize assistance to conflict-affected households both within Tripoli and to the surrounding areas which are receiving increasing numbers of displaced populations.

International community:

- Negotiate and coordinate the immediate release of refugees and migrants from detention centers and expedite the evacuation of those held in detention centres to a safe place outside of Libya where protection and medical needs of refugees and migrants can be assessed.
- **As the conflict continues, more people are expected to flee the violence so the international community must expand the legal routes for migrants and refugees in the short and long-term.** The absence of legal channels for both migrants, asylum-seeking as well as refugees waiting to be resettled to safer places fuels smuggling and more dangerous journeys that people decide to take. This exposes refugees and migrants to abuse and exploitation. **Safe and legal routes for migrants and refugees to safer countries must be expanded. In the long-term, initiatives should include resettlement, the expansion of humanitarian visas and family reunification.**
- **Children, women and girls are exposed to higher risks** during the conflict and the humanitarian response is not yet tailored to respond to their needs. Given the levels of discrimination, insecurity and expected rise in GBV abuses, shelter is one of the main protection gaps for this specific vulnerable group. The donor community must ensure funding is provided for accommodation and targeted to protect all women and girls, especially migrant women and refugees.
- The humanitarian community has appealed for **US\$202 million** under the Libya Humanitarian Response Plan 2019. To date, only 6% is funded. **If no additional funding is received, humanitarian partners including protection actors will not be able to respond to the immediate humanitarian needs of the people who have recently been affected by the clashes in Tripoli.**
- Urban migrants fleeing conflict areas, who are often particularly vulnerable due to language barriers and a lack of safety nets, require access to safe spaces and lifesaving assistance, as well evacuation options.



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