

NOTE

This is an excerpt from IDMC's 2019 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID).

SPOTLIGHT

LIBYA

Urban displacement driven by escalating conflict and insecurity



There was hope in 2017 of a decrease in fighting and displacement in Libya, but clashes escalated in several areas of the country in 2018. Fighting took place particularly in the urban centres of Tripoli, Derna and Sebha, triggering 70,000 new displacements. Around 221,000 people were living in displacement nationwide as of the end of year, suffering dire conditions and unable to return because of destroyed housing, ongoing insecurity and a lack of resources.¹⁰⁴

In Tripoli, the seat of the internationally recognised government, the deteriorating economic situation fuelled new conflict. Militias from outside the city attacked its southern neighbourhoods in late August, and the intense clashes continued until early October. The fighting was sparked by a push to gain greater control over economic institutions based on the perception that a small number of rival militias and interest groups in the capital have disproportionate access to the country's wealth.¹⁰⁵

Almost 33,000 people were displaced as a result, and many others were trapped in their homes without access to basic goods and services. The Libyan Red Crescent received more than 2,000 calls from families asking to be evacuated, of whom only ten per cent had their request granted. The use of heavy weaponry caused severe damage to homes, roads, telecommunications and utilities infrastructure and health and education facilities. Most of those displaced sheltered with family or friends, though about 200 families sought refuge in five schools across Tripoli.¹⁰⁶

Libya continues to be the main point of departure for people attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Europe and a final destination for economic migrants from West Africa. Thus, the fighting also affected the lives of around 8,000 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

held in detention centres in the city. Humanitarian access to the areas affected by conflict was severely restricted, leaving thousands of detainees without food or water for several days.¹⁰⁷ Hundreds more were evacuated to safer locations or simply released and left to find their own way to safety through the conflict zone. Others were pulled out of the detention centres by militias, who then forced them to take part in the hostilities.¹⁰⁸

The coastal city of Derna has been under siege by the Libyan National Army (LNA), linked to the authorities in the east of the country, since July 2017. It was controlled by a coalition of local fighters and Islamists known as the Derna Shura Council, and was the only city in the east resisting LNA control.¹⁰⁹ A renewed offensive to take the city began in May 2018 and heavy fighting and shelling continued into June, triggering almost 24,000 new displacements. Electricity and water supplies were cut and the provision of basic services disrupted. Markets ran short of food and non-food items, and only one hospital was left working at severely reduced capacity. Entry points to the city were initially closed, hindering the delivery of life-saving assistance, but the authorities opened a humanitarian corridor and began allowing families to leave the city at the end of May.¹¹⁰

Conflict in southern city of Sebha erupts periodically between the Tebu and Awlad Suleiman tribes over the control of smuggling and trafficking routes, and fighting in 2018 triggered almost 7,000 new displacements. Those who fled the southern and eastern districts of the city were initially housed in schools that were on holiday, but they have since been moved on to allow them to reopen.¹¹¹ Civilians' freedom of movement was also restricted and severe shortages of basic goods and services were reported.¹¹² Very few reports mentioned the plight of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, but given that Sebha was named the world's human traf-

ficking capital last year, they are very likely to have been affected. Assessments undertaken in Sebha's districts report the presence of refugees and migrants in every assessed area.¹¹³

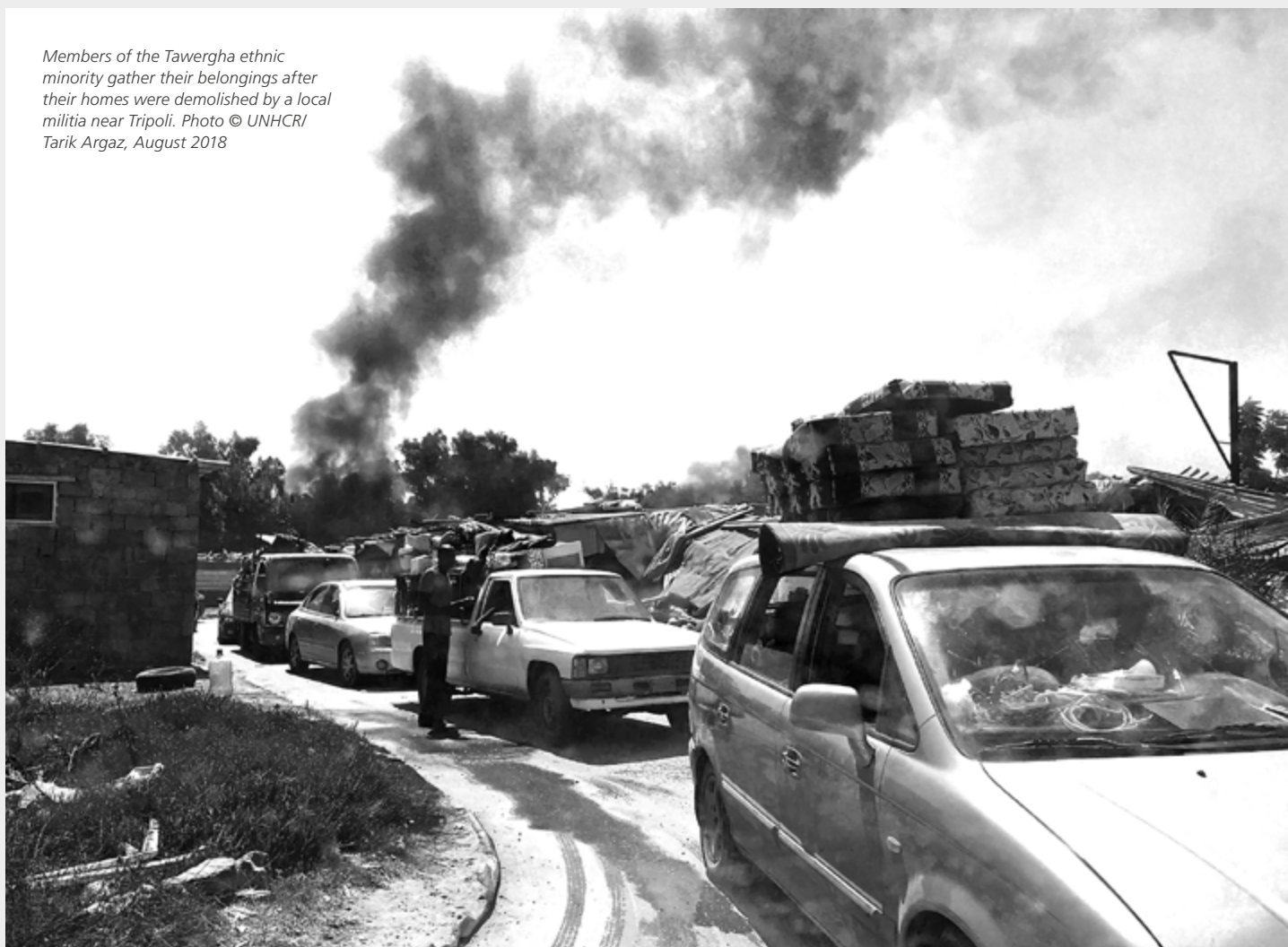
The violence in Sebha was further testament to the government's lack of control over southern Libya. The region's porous borders aggravate insecurity, allowing foreign armed groups to establish safe havens in the area, and facilitate the trafficking of people heading north. The combination of mounting lawlessness and deteriorating basic services mean conditions are dire for many residents in the south, including the displaced.¹¹⁴ IDPs in the area are in desperate need of adequate shelter, food and basic household items, but prevailing insecurity across the south means humanitarian access is sporadic at best.¹¹⁵

The internationally recognized government in Tripoli adopted the first package of economic reforms since the 2011 fall of Muammar Gaddafi in September 2018, but fighting over resources is likely to remain a central

feature of the country's crisis, particularly in coastal and urban areas where economic activity is concentrated.¹¹⁶ The government also recognises the importance of improving security in the south, but the vastness of the territory makes doing so a daunting task with relatively little promise of a political dividend.¹¹⁷

There is hope that presidential and parliamentary elections due to take place in 2019 may break Libya's political gridlock. Yet divisions remain between the rival governments in the east and west, and national reconciliation conferences have been delayed, leaving the way open for fighting to continue.¹¹⁸ It will likely be some time before the country is safe, for Libyans and for those migrants and refugees who continue to pass through the country.

Members of the Tawergha ethnic minority gather their belongings after their homes were demolished by a local militia near Tripoli. Photo © UNHCR/Tarik Argaz, August 2018



| Notes

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