

PLACE

Tripoli

DATE

25 November, 2021

Evacuation flights from Libya to Italy bring hope for vulnerable asylum seekers

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, was heartened by the evacuation today of 93 asylum seekers to Italy from Libya, where they had been living in precarious situations with an uncertain future.

This group of evacuees, the first of 500 under a new mechanism for humanitarian admissions, includes children, women at risk, survivors of violence and torture, and people with serious medical conditions. Some were recently released from detention while others had been held in captivity by smuggling or trafficking networks.

“We are pleased to see these evacuation flights become a reality and that the Libyan authorities have supported them. They are a lifeline for some of the most vulnerable asylum seekers. Conditions in Libya remain dire for many refugees, and we need the international community’s help to expand similar routes to safety,” said UNHCR’s Chief of Mission in Libya, Jean-Paul Cavalieri.

The asylum seekers left Tripoli on a UNHCR-chartered flight to Rome. In total, five such flights will be organized over one year. After their arrival, the evacuees will be able to apply for refugee status, which will give them access to safety and security.

The flights are organized under a new mechanism, combining emergency evacuations with the humanitarian corridors that have been established in Italy since 2016. In addition to funding from the Government of Italy, the scheme relies on the support of a coalition of faith-based organizations, which includes the Community of Saint Egidio, the Federation of Protestant Churches and the Waldensian Table.

“We are grateful to Italy for making these life-saving evacuations possible for people in such a vulnerable situation. Italian institutions and civil society have once again demonstrated the value of working together to welcome and integrate refugees,” said UNHCR’s Representative for Italy, the Holy See and San Marino, Chiara Cardoletti.

This month, UNHCR was able to resume evacuations from Libya after more than a year, after the authorities lifted a ban on humanitarian flights. On 4 November, UNHCR evacuated 172 vulnerable asylum-seekers from Libya to Niger, where they receive support while waiting for solutions, as part of the UNHCR-supported Emergency Transit Mechanism.

Since 2017, UNHCR has evacuated or resettled 6,919 refugees and asylum seekers out of Libya, of which 967 were admitted to Italy.

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