

# **The Contribution of Population growth to the Libyan Rapid Urbanization**

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## **1.Introduction.**

Urbanization is an international phenomenon that began in early nineteenth century; it was driven by economic development, especially the influence of the Industrial Revolution in the West. In developing countries, urbanization has increased as populations have grown and move from rural areas to cities, regional and national policies are also concentrated on urban areas. Pacione (2005, p.71) defines urbanization as the increase of the proportion of the total population that lives in urban areas. The term also refers to that proportion of the population that relocates to live in the urban sector (Dyson, 2010. P.126). These definitions mention two important

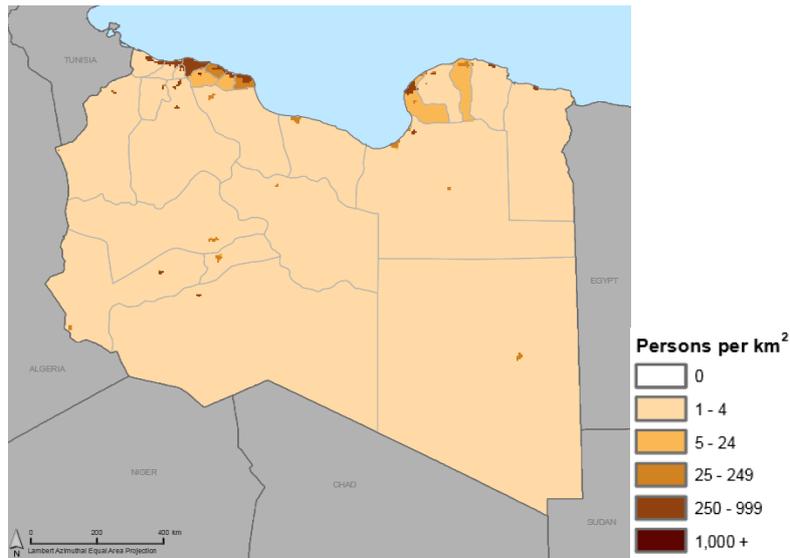
factors of urbanization: 1), the proportion that lives in the cities; 2) the proportion that migrates to live in cities. These are the key to understanding urbanization and its related processes.

**The purpose** of this study is to illustrate the role and the contribution of the population growth as the main factor behind the rapid urbanization in northern African region and Libya in particular among other factors in the urban planning and development context. In addition to linking population, growth with other factors that contribute to the rapid urbanization based on population census data for various years and migration data, which was derived from the Libyan Information Authority, in addition to other data from regional and international organizations.

### **Libyan Urbanization: A Historical Perspective:**

The Phoenicians for instance, built Tripoli along a trade route that connected a number of important cities on the Mediterranean coast. In addition, Tripoli possessed great agricultural significance, since the region around Tripoli was used to provide Rome with agricultural products during the Italian occupation (1911 – 1950). During that period of the Libyan history, Italians developed urban systems in the Tripoli and Benghazi regions in order to settle as many Italians as possible, oftentimes relocating Libyans to suburbs reserved for the labor force. By the late 1950s, Italians owned most of the agricultural lands and large farms, which were only transferred to Libyans in the early 1970s. Developments in agricultural and Tripoli's location along trade routes from north to south made it the primate city, which serves as the dominant economic, administrative, and political center for the country.

Tripoli has been a major urban center for centuries. The city's history of urbanization dates to the time of the ancient Phoenicians, who built a number of densely populated cities along the Mediterranean coast. Recognizing Tripoli's commercial potential, the Romans subsequently invaded the region and supplanted the Phoenicians. The Roman era witness the expansion of most of the coastal cities on the Mediterranean Sea. The presence of foreigners, as well as Libyans, was a strong factor driving population growth and urbanization. In a country like Libya, where the desert dominates, arable land is limited, and climatic variability greatly affects people's lives; therefore, urban planning must be a high priority. Due to the impact of desertification, Libya has increasingly limited areas for agriculture; arable land consists of only 1.03% of the total area of the country (Libyan Information Authority, 2011). As farming becomes more difficult, more people have sought refuge in the cities. Thus, urban densities are very high in the major coastal urban centers and are quite low (or sometimes non-existent) in the rest of the country. As shown in Figure 1, Tripoli, the northwestern region of Libya, contains the highest population density in the country, with over 1000 people per kilometer.



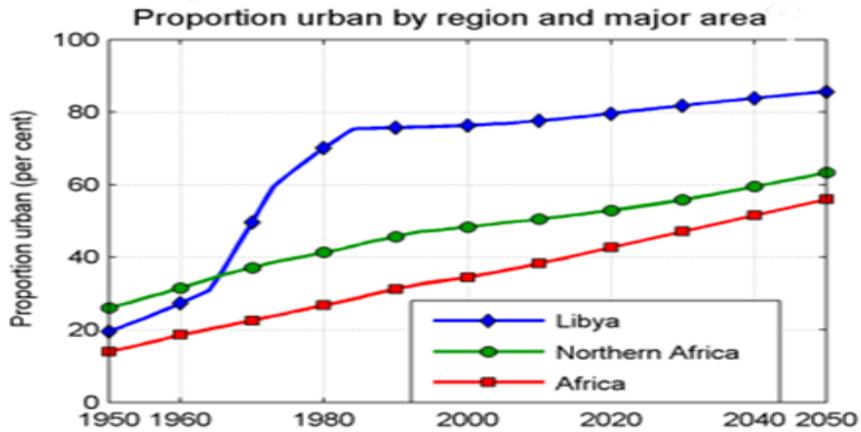
**Source: Ciesin, Columbia University**

***Figure 1. Population density 2000***

This area is called Jeffara Plain, and the majority of Libya's population - about 60% - resides there. The Benghazi region has the second highest population density, between 250-999 people per kilometer, followed by the Sabha region, which is significantly lower, with only 4-24 people per kilometer.

Patterns of population distribution have thus created a severely imbalanced concentration of population in two coastal regions around Tripoli and Benghazi, the two major cities of the country. Libya's national spatial planning is attempting to reduce the rapid increasing of population concentration in the coast in order to relieve the pressure on major cities, where resources are strained because of increasing pressures on services. The ultimate goal is to develop the internal regions of the country in order to restore the national population balance by focusing on developing the

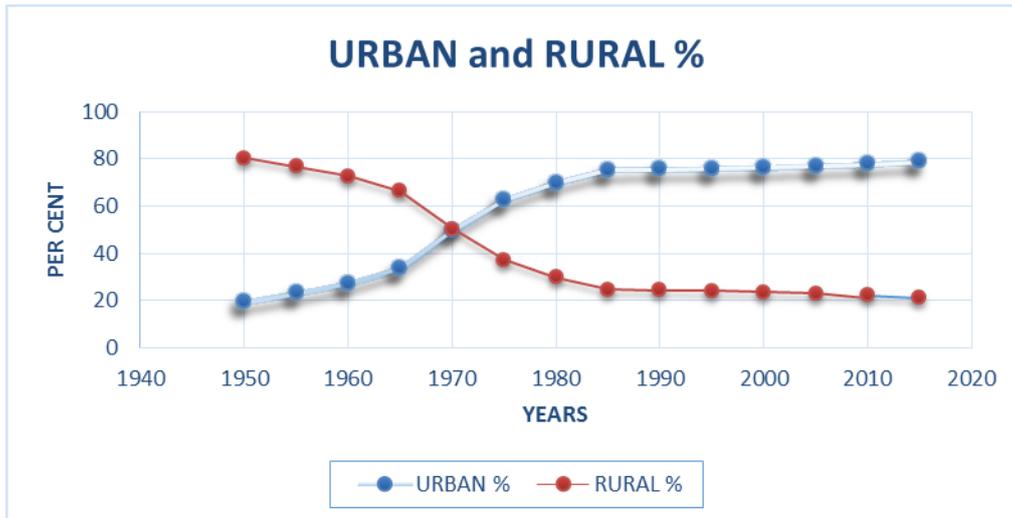
natural resources that have long been neglected. Thus, Libyan urbanization become on the top of the African continent and regionally North Africa is the highest urbanized region (Figure 2).



Source: World Urbanization Prospect

Figure 2. Urban population Libya, North Africa, and Africa since 1950

Libya has experienced an increase in its urban population for decades, which has resulted in a rapid growth of cities. As we have seen, large numbers of people have migrated to the large and the most urbanized cities, Tripoli, the capital, and Benghazi the second city. Urbanization rates in Libya have risen steadily, from 49 percent in 1970, to more than 62 percent in 1975, and to 78 percent in 2010; then to 80 percent in 2015, and it is projected to increase over 80 percent in 2020 (World Urbanization prospects, 2007).



**Source: World Urbanization Prospect**

**Figure 3. Urban and Rural Percentage 1950-2015**

Interestingly, there was a significant change in 1970 (Figure 3), when urban and rural rates intersected. Hope (1998, p.354) has argued that the rapid pace of urbanization is characteristic of African cities, and has resulted in growing demand for urban services, which have largely been absent in rural areas.

In Libya, the increase in the urbanization rate is due to economic development, decreased death rates, and increased fertility rates. It is crucial to mention that the highest urbanization rates occurred in Tripoli and Benghazi. The urban population concentration trend has been apparent since late 1970s; both, Tripoli and Benghazi, had urbanization rates that reached 95.7 percent and 84.9 percent respectively (Waniss, Karlberg, 2007, p.89), while other small cities did not exceed 58 percent. The rapid growth of urban areas is due to major infrastructure projects and enhanced access to health care, which has contributed to high fertility rates, as well as

to internal migration from rural to urban areas. Additionally, there is a significant contribution from external migration. Many illegal migrants entered the country under the former regime, which opened the borders to neighbors from north and sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, there is no official and accurate statistics of the exact number of the illegal migrants

### **Population Growth:**

In developing countries, natural population growth and internal migration are the main factors of today's accelerated urban rates (Rogers, 1984, p.262).\_This is a result of the so-called "demographic transition." Such transitions or revolutions are the stages in which a society moves from being characterized by high birth and death rates towards low birth and death rates. This revolution leads to a massive increase in the population, which tends to produce substantial internal migration. Consequently, the urban-rural balance is disrupted, and cities begin to grow while rural areas decline.

Population growth is thus one of the main factors of the urbanization. There is a gap between rural and urban areas in that fertility rates in rural areas are lower than urban areas. This is a result of the economic and social changes wrought by urban life, which produces significant economic, social, cultural, and political transformations. People often seek jobs in the cities in order to earn more money and utilize the kinds of services that are available in cities. Rural people often abandon their old lifestyles, which are mostly connected to agriculture, for other kinds of work that are associated with cities, such as services, industry, and transportation.

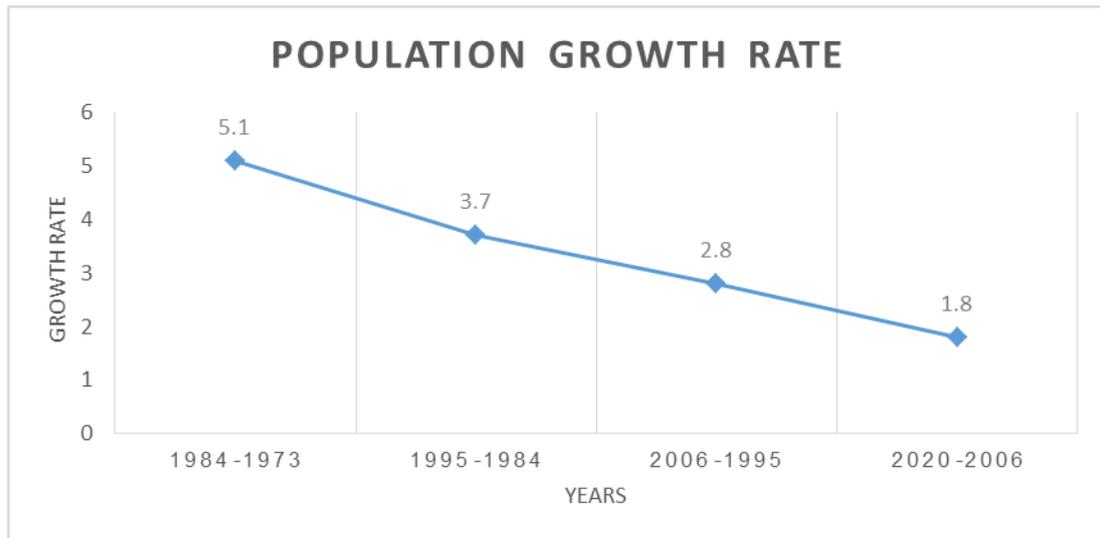
Moreover, the discovery of oil has influenced the Libyan economy in general and Tripoli's growth in particular, and led to great improvements in

economic and social conditions. The influx of revenue has helped to provide better health care, which in turn has worked to increase birth rates and lower mortality rates, as well as providing an incentive for rural-to-urban migration flows.

Elbendak (2008) argues that Tripoli is the place where the greatest social change has occurred in Libyan society, and its position as the primate city has led to significant interactions between the urban population, rural migrants, and foreigners.

New patterns of social interaction are one result of this process. For example, in urban environments women often have many more opportunities to study, work, and otherwise participate in economic activities and social change than would otherwise be the case in rural contexts. These changes also tend to affect rates of fertility. An increasing number of women studying and working tends to increase the age of marriage, which in turn results in lower fertility rates. At the same time, however, the mortality rate has fallen dramatically due to economic development and the enhancement in health services. At this stage, fertility rates in Libya can be characterized as moderate, while mortality rate has declined to the lowest level.

The population growth rate depicted in Figure 4 gives a picture of population growth since the 1970s. It shows that the highest growth rate was 5.1%, between 1973 and 1984. Between 1984 and 1995, the rate decreased to 3.7%. However, during those years Libya's population also grew quickly, thanks to an influx of a large number of external migrants. The growth rate decreased to 2.8% between 1995 and 2006, due to the changes in the government's economic development policy as well as broader social changes in Libya.



Source: Population censuses 1973, 1984, 1995, 2006

Figure 4. Libyan population growth rates 1973-2020

For example, in spite the growth of Libya’s total population, the natural growth rate has actually declined since 1973. This decrease is attributable to the low rate of female illiteracy: the data shows that illiteracy rate decreased from 85% in 1973 to only 27% in 1995. Women have increasing access to education, and the number of women between the ages of 6 and 24 enrolled in schools and colleges rose from 51% to 63%, in 1984, respectively, to 74% in 1995. Moreover, the female proportion in the labor market increased from 5.6% in 1973 to 10.7% in 1984. This proportion has increased to 15.5% in 1995. (Urban Planning Authority, UN Habitat, 2006. P.50),\_and since that time there has been a sharp growth, as more women are earning their masters and doctorate degrees, which opens up access to more influential positions. All of these trends have combined to slow population growth rates.\_

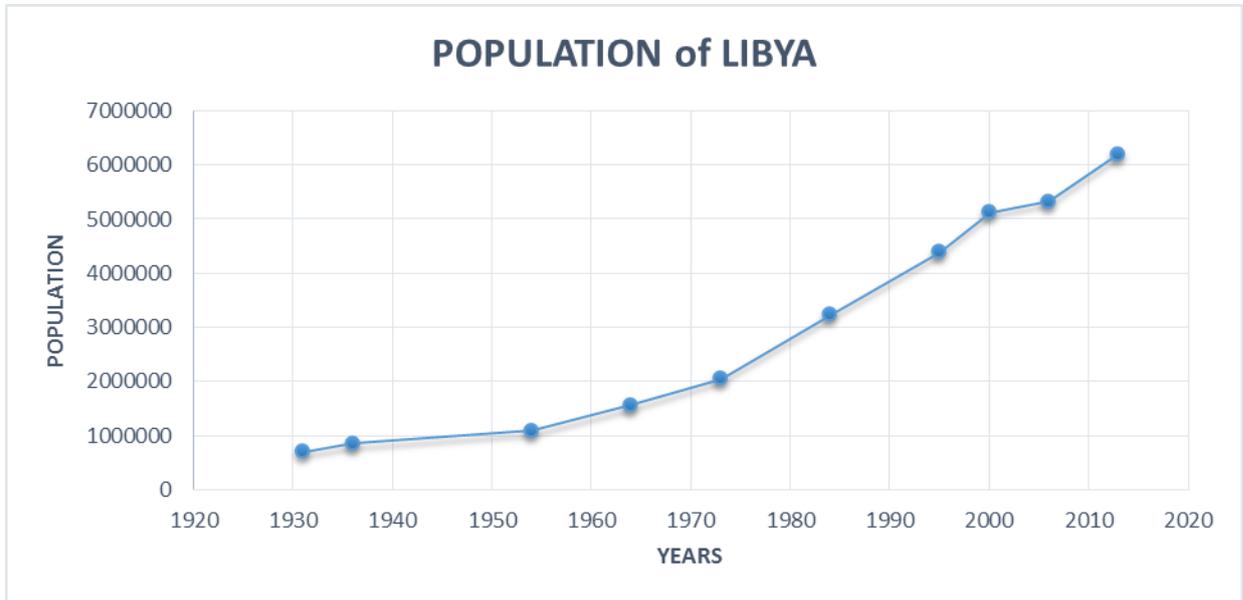
In terms of policy, the government also promulgated a law that prevented residents of others cities from registering in the city of Tripoli. This policy was meant to reduce internal migration toward the capital. Since 2006, when the last census was conducted, Libya's growth rate had declined sharply, to only 1.8% (Figure 4) and it is expected to decline even further as a result of internal conflict, instability and economic hardship that resulted from the revolution of 2011.

As we see in Figure 5, the population of Libya has grown dramatically since 1930s. The low population growth at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was largely due to weak economic growth and the dispersion of the Libyan population, both inside and outside the country. The population began to rise slightly after Libya gained its independence, from 1,091,000 in 1954 to 1,559,000 in 1964.

This was a result of a national policy implemented by the king, who encouraged migrant Libyans, many of whom fled the county during the Italian occupation and the western mandate period, to return to the county. Most of the migrants, who were primarily located in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Niger, and Chad, ultimately resettled in Libya. Moreover, the population growth since the 1960s is can be attributed to the use of oil revenues on social projects that improved living conditions. This was one of the priorities of a remarkable national development plan, which established housing projects, known as "The King's Housing Complexes project," in regional cities and towns.

The second period of major population growth in Libya can be dated from between 1964 and 1973. During this period, the country's population grew rapidly, from 1,559,000 to 2,052,372. Again, Libya's oil revenues were often allocated for new spatial development projects in many towns

and cities across different regions, as well continuing projects implemented in the earlier period.



Source: Population censuses 1973, 1984, 1995, 2006

Figure 5. The population growth of Libya

The third period of growth, which fell roughly between 1995 and 2000, also witnessed significant population growth, increasing from 4,389,739 to 5,125,519. This increase was due to migration and natural population growth. Unlike previous periods, however, this growth associated with what called an “urban spatial duality,” since it was marked by significant rural-urban and interregional migration, as well as an increase in the regional and national development plans (Lawless, Kezeiri, p.83). This period also witnessed the considerable impact of political policies in the 1990s that lifted visa requirements for neighboring Arab

countries; another law that lifted visa requirements for African citizens followed these policies. Both laws had the effect of allowing huge waves of external migrants, both legal and illegal, into the country. Unfortunately, there is no accurate estimate on the number of illegal immigrants, but officials have admitted that likely over three million people entered Libya in this fashion.

Population growth began to slow between 2000 and 2006, which is the year of last census. During this period, the population grew slightly, from 5,125,519 to 5,324,000. The slow growth is due to the aforementioned social changes, particularly in the realm of gender equity, which helped to curb birth rates. Social mores also began to shift at this time, and there was a marked trend towards having smaller families, although this trend was due as much to economic hardship and a serious housing shortage as it was to changes in gender norms.

Since the last census in 2006, some economic development were achieved due to the national economic plan and increasing the national infrastructure projects, which created more economic chances that led to more housing construction in urban fringes where most of the growth has occurred. It has to be noted that since the revolution in 2011, Libya has suffered from death toll due to the war and its consequences of population displacement from several urban and rural areas. This has affected the population growth and the regional and national plans in the absence of central and powerful government and the laws and regulation enforcement.

### **Internal Migration:**

Migration from rural to urban areas can be considered, along with natural population growth, to be the main cause of rapid urbanization in

Libya. Population movements at the regional and national scales reflect the economic conditions in both source and destination areas. The understandable search for a better life and a bright future for one's family, has led huge numbers of migrants toward large cities, and Tripoli in particular (since, as mentioned previously, the capital has historically been the most attractive urban center in the country).

The earliest internal movements actually occurred during the later Ottoman period, around 1711, at a time when the Ottoman Empire controlled both Tripoli and Benghazi. Internal migration continued to increase until the beginning of the Italian occupation in 1911, but slowed thereafter. Perhaps unsurprisingly, major population displacements occurred during the Second World War, since Libya was a major battleground between the German, Italian and British armies. However, the largest wave of rural-to-urban migration occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and due to the oil production boom and concomitant increasing in revenues. It was during this time that most of the Libyan migrants that had moved to neighboring countries during the Italian occupation returned. However, instead of returning to their rural districts, most made their homes in Libya's largest cities, causing rapid urbanization and radical transformation in the country's social and cultural life (Pereira, 2007. p.81). In addition, it should be noted that the majority of internal migrants are, perhaps unsurprisingly, youth from rural areas, who are searching for jobs and better lives.

**Table 1: Internal migration to Tripoli**

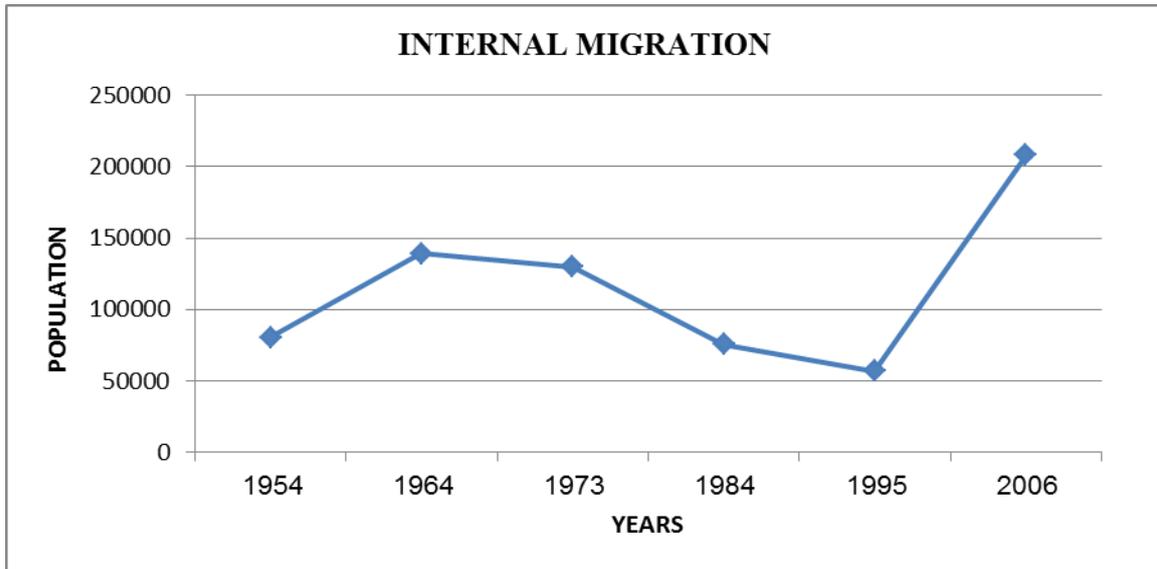
Year	Internal Migration Number	% to total population
1954	80,650	18
1964	139,009	17.3
1973	129,923	21.1
1984	75,376	7.6
1995	56,854	5.4
2006	207,844	13.7

Source: Libyan Censuses Reports 1954, 1964, 1973, 1984, and 2006. Osama *at, el.* 2011

For example, (Harrison, 1967, p.402) conducted a study on migrants and growth in Tripoli, finding that the city had experienced a substantial internal migration wave during the 1950s and 1960s due to the development of industry. In fact, at that time about 79% of Libya's industrial labor force was concentrated in Tripoli. Harrison also found that migrants moved to Tripoli to find jobs and to educate their children. These results are not particularly surprising, and indeed, during the 1980s and 1990s, both Tripoli and Benghazi grew quite rapidly, their populations bolstered by large number of rural-to-urban migrants who sought employment and services in urban areas.

Internal migration data from the 1950s through 2006 show that over 45.4% of Libya's total population, a total of 689,656 people, has moved to cities. The motivation behind these trends is familiar: people tend to move to more developed areas of the country where there is greater access to goods and services. These areas, moreover, are clustered along the coast, which has historically benefitted from significant larger funding allocations for urban development. Internal migration patterns have also reflected

Libya's political system and planning policy, which have favored the accumulation of official institutions and services near the capital city.



Source: Population censuses Osama at, el. 2011

Figure 6. Internal migration 1954-2006

Tripoli has been the center of governmental authorities and administrations since the 1970s. The aforementioned centralization policy thus caused even more rural-urban migration, since Tripoli became an even more attractive destination for migrants seeking opportunities in both the state and private sectors. It is worth noting that Libya depends on oil revenues and, consequently, most jobs are concentrated in the service sector, which makes up roughly 59% of all jobs in the Libyan economy. In comparison, only 17% of the labor force is involved in agriculture (Census 2006). The result is a vicious circle: the concentration of service jobs in the cities means that more people lease rural areas because services there are limited. Furthermore, rural areas have suffered from land degradation and

desertification. These kinds of challenges have seriously affected the dominant areas of employment in rural zones, such as agriculture, animal breeding, and open markets where local farmers are selling their products. Policies that have served to concentrate resources in coastal cities have thus deeply affected rural and small, gradually pulling most of the manpower away, to urban areas, exacerbating the economic development bias at both the regional and national scales.

Unlike developed regions, Libyan population concentration precedes settling the urban centers, which is a result of the lack of consistent and planned urban management system. This has led to a massive concentration of services in the coastal urban centers such as education and health facilities, which is the backbone of any stable towns and cities.

The higher education institutions, such as universities, higher institutions of professional training, and technical centers, tend to be concentrated in Tripoli. The first Libyan university was established in Benghazi in 1966, and its Tripoli branch followed it in 1973. At that time, those were only the universities in Libya. Gradually, other regional universities were established in the 1980s and 1990s (Libyan Information Authority, 2011). However, rural villages and small towns only offer small or single-school colleges, which offer a limited selection of majors that oftentimes do not satisfy the requirements of the majority of residents. Furthermore, most of the technical education institutions are also located in urban areas. Earning a higher education in urban universities, where curriculum choices are more generous and relevant, thus creates more opportunities for people from rural areas.

It is important to mention that Tripoli's higher education institutions offer all standard college degrees, including Bachelor's, Master's, and

some Doctoral degrees. However, people who complete their higher education usually stay in the cities and seek jobs. In this way, they establish a one-way migration stream of highly talented and qualified individuals, towards urban areas – a sort of internal “brain drain.” Finally, it should be noted that, addition to the attractiveness of the cities, most migrants are men. This fact is largely a function of cultural mores, but it means that men in Libya tend to be much more mobile and women, despite their advance in recent years in terms of gender equity, often will follow their husbands, brothers, and their families if they migrate from rural to urban areas.

Importantly, internal migration rates have been fairly inconsistent across different periods, but they have increased over the last few decades. Tripoli had two periods when it was a major destination for internal migration. The first of these occurred between the 1950s and the middle of the 1970s, when the city became the capital of Libya and the center of the country’s economic development. The second period of growth was during the 2000s, when the quality of life rose, especially within urban areas (Osama *at, el.* 2011).

### **Conclusion:**

Population growth has been the hallmark of Libyan urbanization contemporarily. This has been linked to economic development policies over the last decades as economic policies tended to adopt international investments. This change opened up the doors for large foreign investments and set the stage for a major improvement quality of life in Tripoli. New transportation networks have eased movement, both within urban areas and to the surrounding territories, offering opportunities for urban residents to significantly improve their lives. Most industrial areas in Libya are located

in large cities. They consist of minor and medium industries, as well as heavy industries such as building trucks, tractors, and cars. Approximately 77 percent of factories are located in Tripoli and Benghazi, while 88 percent of the labor force works and lives in urban areas. Significantly, Tripoli boasts 55 percent of the nation's factories and 75 percent of the industrial labor force lives in Tripoli (European Union, National Report of Libya, 2002, p.17). The new transporter networks have connected these industries with labor sources in a way not previously possible. Moreover, in 2005, the former government of Libya also established projects focused on building new infrastructure. Those projects, unsurprisingly, were mostly concentrated in urban areas, and neglected rural areas, which continue, in many cases, to lack very basic services. Employment in industry and the public transportation sectors continue to attract labor migrants towards Libya's cities. This is another reason that people prefer coastal areas, since the coastal urbanized promises far greater rewards. Moreover, following the patterns we have seen previously, urban areas have also benefitted from decision-making by authorities and governmental institutions, which have tended to promote developing the north of the country at the expense of the south. This will be a great future research in the Libyan planning and development context.

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