



Migration and development dynamics in Enfidha, Tunisia

Despite high agricultural potential and significant infrastructure developments in Enfidha, many young adults feel constrained by a lack of opportunity and migration aspirations are high.

Residents have been marginalised from recent investment and development in Enfidha and the wider region, leading many to feel 'ignored' by government bodies.

International out-migration is a widespread aspiration among young adults, viewed by many as the only option left to improve prospects.

However, both legal and irregular migration have become more challenging in the past decade. Despite frustrations, most expect to stay in Enfidha.



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Photo: Camille Kasavan for MIGNEX.

Enfidha is a small town in north-eastern Tunisia with around 50,000 inhabitants.¹ It has high agricultural potential, yet land remains mostly unused and inaccessible to the local population.

While small-scale agricultural production does exist, the national government's high-cost pricing of land and a lack of transportation mean that most of the land, and more profitable agriculture, is out of reach. None of the young adults interviewed for this MIGNEX study work in agriculture.

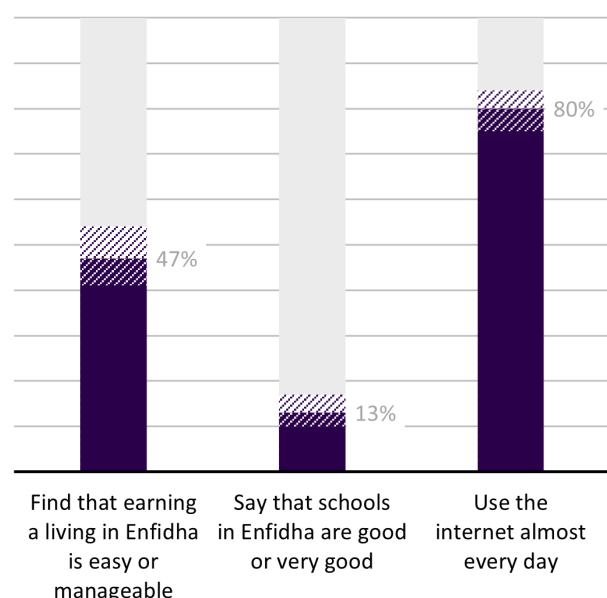


Figure 1. Indicators of development

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

A lack of livelihood opportunities is a key source of frustration. Just under half (48%) of surveyed young adults have struggled to find a job. Over half of young adults are either unemployed or studying (28% and 30%, respectively).

Tangible and visible developments in Enfidha – most notably the construction of an international airport in 2009 and the recent development of an industrial zone – have resulted in minimal livelihood expansion or improvements for locals.

These developments are frequently viewed negatively: institutions are seen to be exploiting the Enfidha population, with locals only able to access those jobs with low pay and poor working conditions. Management and other senior roles tend to be reserved for non-Enfidha residents.

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Redeyef and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Tunisia.²

Migration from Enfidha

Out-migration, in particular international out-migration, is a significant characteristic of Enfidha. Almost nine in ten (88%) of young adults surveyed have family or friends living abroad. Common destinations include

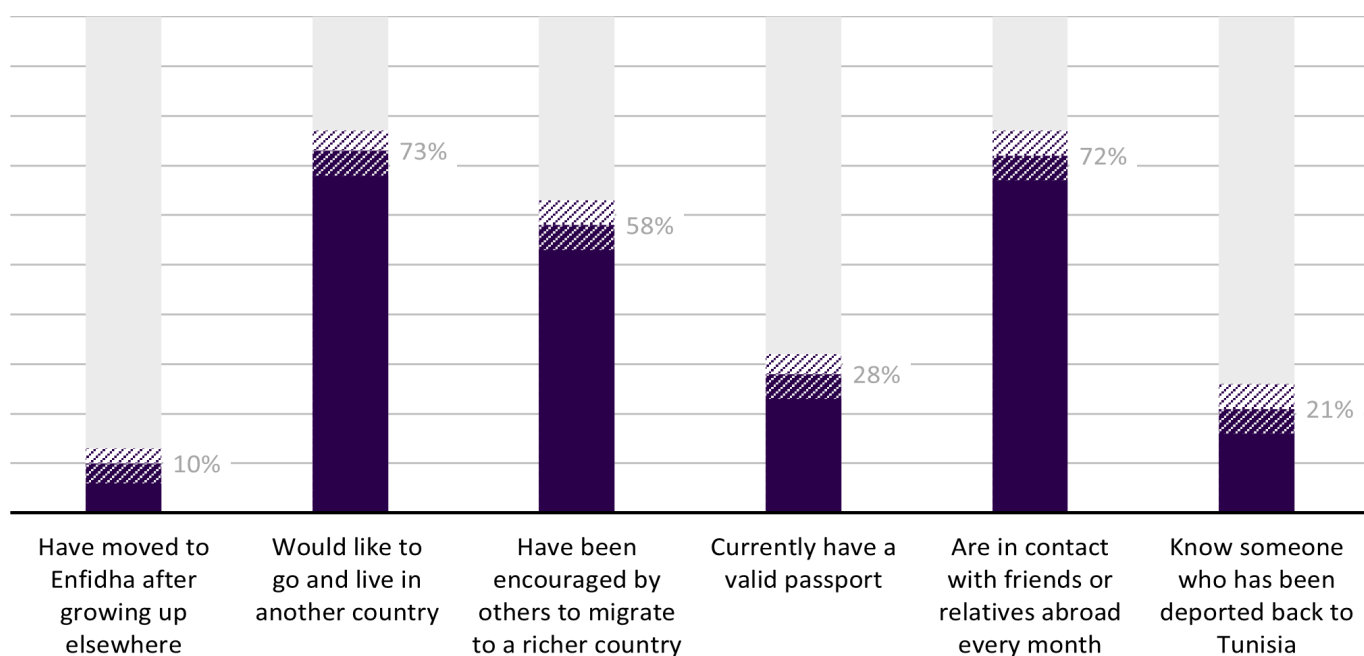


Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Germany (37%), France (28%) and Canada (11%).

International out-migration is a prominent aspiration which young adults expressed frequently and openly. However, both legal and irregular migration have become more challenging in the past decade. Although most young adults (73%) would prefer to leave Tunisia within the next five years, most (65%) expect to stay in Enfidha in the next five years.

Legal migration is considered nearly impossible, except for those who are highly qualified, or who have the academic results or financial means to attend university abroad.

Irregular migration is perceived as even more difficult, expensive, and risky, though it is still common. For instance, 21% of surveyed young adults know of someone who has been deported – or they themselves have been deported – from abroad, an indication of their irregular status in the host country.

While female migration in Enfidha is on the rise, it is perceived as surprising and much less common than male migration. Some 7% of surveyed young men have lived abroad for at least one year, compared to 2% of young women.

There is also gender divergence in the form of migration. Women usually migrate along legal pathways, for education or marriage, while men are more likely to use irregular

migration channels for higher education or a work contract.

Migration aspirations

The challenging employment situation and a lack of faith in government bodies to provide effective support have caused some despair among young adults in Enfidha. This has led to widespread aspirations for migration: the vast majority of young adults (81%) would migrate to another country if given the necessary papers. As such, migration aspirations often encompass feelings of constraint, sadness, and concern for the lack of opportunities at home. However, many have hope in the potential migration holds for their future.

In-migration

Almost all young adult respondents (90%) grew up in Enfidha; the MIGNEX survey found no international migrants living there and it is not a significant destination for domestic migration.

There are no easy paths of livelihood in Tunisia. Young people now want the shortest possible path to 'El Harka' [‘burning the borders’ in Arabic].³

Focus group participant

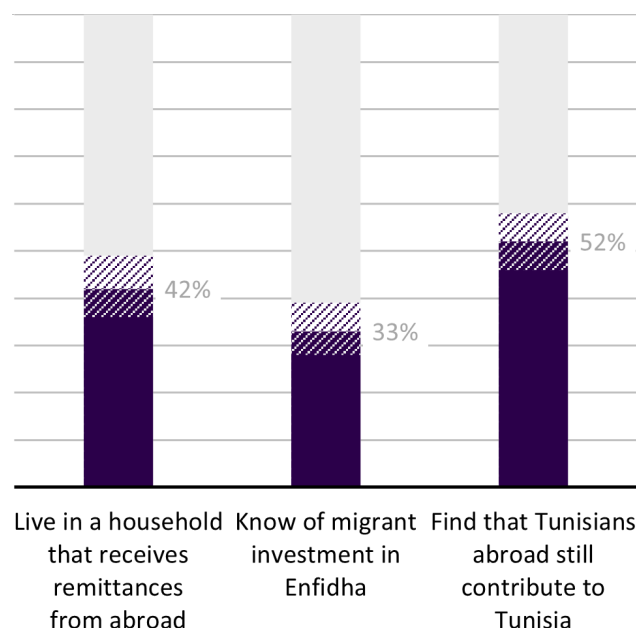


Figure 3. Migration–development interactions

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

The few government employees who are transferred to Enfidha for work often prefer to commute from the regional capital of Sousse, despite the increase in daily transportation costs and time.

Many jobs in the new industrial area and airport are reserved for people from outside Enfidha. As with government workers, rather than relocating to Enfidha, many commute from the wider region.

While there have been cases of transit migration from the Southern African region, for work in Enfidha during the harvest season, no transit migrants were reported in 2021.

Return migration

Migrants frequently return to Enfidha on a short-term basis to visit their families, usually for a few weeks in the summer.

However, the permanent return of migrants in Enfidha is quite rare. Just one-quarter of surveyed young adults (25%) have returnee migrant family or friends.

When Enfidha migrants do return to Tunisia, they often open businesses in the regional capital of Sousse or other larger cities, returning to Enfidha only to visit and provide some support for their families.

Migration and development interactions

Transnational ties in Enfidha are strong and widespread. Nearly half of young adult households with migrant family members, relatives or friends received remittances in the past year (49%). One-third (33%) of young adults know of migrant investment in Enfidha.

However, diaspora investment or collective remittances aimed at the development of the town are not visible or much talked about.

Most development comes through foreign investment in the region. However, the benefits of such investment are not widely available to Enfidha locals, which has built a sense of marginalisation in the area.

Notes

1. 49,335 during the 2014 Census.
2. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Camille Kasavan and Safouen Azouzi in February 2021. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents was conducted by Camille Kasavan and Safouen Azouzi.
3. A large proportion of emigration from Tunisia has taken the form of a clandestine crossing to Europe, often called El Harka. Harris, J. (2015) *El Harka: Perceptions of the Migration–Development Nexus in Post-Revolution Tunis*. Popul. Space Place, 21: 493– 505. doi: 10.1002/psp.1865.

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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration–Development Nexus – is a five-year research project (2018–2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners: The Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, the University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

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