



MIGNEX Background Paper

Migration-relevant policies in Tunisia

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MIGNEX

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List of acronyms

AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
ANETI	Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi et le Travail Indépendant (National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment)
ATCT	Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation
AVRR	assisted voluntary return and reintegration
EU	European Union
EUTF	European Union Emergency Trust Fund
FDI	foreign direct investment
GIZ	Deutsch Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Society for International Cooperation)
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MP	Mobility Partnership
OFII	L'Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (French Office of Immigration and Integration)
OTE	Office des Tunisiens de l'Étranger (Office for Tunisians Abroad)
SNM	Stratégie Nationale Migratoire (National Migration Strategy)
TCN	third-country national
TRE	Tunisiens résidant à l'étranger (Tunisians residing abroad)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

MIGNEX Background Paper

Migration-relevant policies in Tunisia

This paper analyses migration management regulations and practices in Tunisia and identifies opportunities for improved approaches, drawing upon the data collected from the MIGNEX policy review.

Migration and development policy in Tunisia have been greatly influenced by the Jasmine revolution of 2011, the Arab spring, the crisis in neighbouring Libya and the strategic location of the country.

With the National Migration Strategy (SNM) not formally adopted and enacted, Tunisia remains with no official migration policy.

A lack of economic opportunities, political instability, corruption, rising youth unemployment and the COVID-19 pandemic have hindered efforts to enhance development through migration.

About the MIGNEX policy reviews

This is one of 10 MIGNEX Background Papers devoted to a review of policies in the 10 countries of origin and transit covered by the project. The term **policy** can refer to many different phenomena. MIGNEX adopts a broad perspective and regards policy to include the existence and effectiveness of particular laws, common practices, development initiatives, policy interventions and the broader policy environment or framework. This inclusive definition encompasses the needs of the project's overall research.

Much of the analysis in the review involves policies that relate directly to migration and its link to development. The concept of **migration-related policies** includes both the migration policy environment and interventions that seek to affect the development impacts of migration. It also includes policy and projects that might have large effects on migration dynamics, even if not presented under a migration heading.

Methodological note

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Background
Paper

A systematic desk review on Tunisia's migration and development policy was undertaken by the Koç University research team in early 2021. Based on this work, the team was able to identify a number of experts to be interviewed. Following this, the Samuel Hall research team interviewed 14 policy experts between May and October 2021. The majority of the interviews took place online, due to COVID-19 concerns in Tunisia throughout the research period.

Summary of main results

Migration policy

Given its location on the border with Libya and bordering the Mediterranean Sea – the 'southern' border of Europe – Tunisia is under a lot of pressure from the European Union (EU) to manage migration. Although international migration is very important for Tunisian society and economy, it has not been the main priority on the policy agenda for the Tunisian government. Indeed, expert interviews highlighted that there is no official migration policy in Tunisia.

After the revolution in 2011, the country started working on a National Migration Strategy (SNM). The new Tunisian government launched its first draft SNM in August 2013 (Natter, 2015). This first version was later revised in 2015 to align with the government's newly elaborated five-year Development Plan (2016–2020) (Republic of Tunisia, 2016). The draft SNM was then revised a second time in 2017 following consultation with international and Tunisian partners, including representatives of the Tunisian diaspora (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2017). The draft strategy included five pillars: i) strengthening governance in migration management; ii) protecting the rights and interests of Tunisian migrants and reinforcing their links to Tunisia; iii) enhancing the contribution of migration to socioeconomic development locally, regionally and nationally; iv) promoting regular migration of Tunisians and preventing irregular migration; and v) protecting the rights of migrants in Tunisia, including asylum seekers and refugees (*ibid.*). However, the SNM, which is Tunisia's key policy document on all aspects of migration, has yet to be formally adopted and implemented. Some experts highlighted that this is partially because there is no 'leadership' or 'primary agent' working on migration in Tunisia. Repeated change in governments has prevented the political confirmation and support of successive drafts of the SNM (Natter, 2021a: 8).

Despite the 2011 revolution, the subsequent democratisation of policy processes and newly gained political freedoms, and unprecedented civil society activism, Tunisia's security-driven and restrictive migration policies persisted (Natter, 2021a; 2021b). Liberal migration reform has failed due to both domestic and international forces, such as the security priorities of Tunisia's Interior Ministry and European external actors, particularly the latter's demands for migration control. Inter-institutional conflict has led to policy impasse (Natter, 2021b).

Approximately 10% of the Tunisian population resides abroad, of which 80% are in Europe. This results in a large diaspora population, and therefore diaspora engagement policies have always been at the forefront of Tunisia's migration agenda. Monitoring Tunisians abroad, maintaining close ties with them, and boosting their investments and remittances have been priorities for the country (Natter, 2015; Pouessel, 2017). However, the Tunisian uprising and democratisation in 2011 represented a major turning point in terms of diaspora policies, leading to major institutional changes and the granting of new rights to members of the diaspora. For example, in the aftermath of the revolution, 18 parliamentary seats were allocated to Tunisian diaspora. Additionally, the SNM underscores the Tunisian diaspora's contribution to development and the democratic transition of Tunisia.

Development policy

The Jasmine revolution that took place in Tunisia in 2011 has greatly influenced the policy climate in the country. The Government of Tunisia has engaged in a series of structural reforms destined to support the democratisation of the country and to create conditions for sustainable growth. Despite this intention, however, the social and economic situation of the country has deteriorated since 2011. The lack of economic opportunities, corruption, rising youth unemployment and the COVID-19 pandemic have all contributed to this.

All of this has been aggravated by political instability, which hugely affects the implementation of reforms and of development policies. While the government presented a draft reform programme to partners in April 2021, a clear strategy on how to tackle the serious social and economic challenges has not been adopted to date, and major reforms, such as the national employment strategy, are yet to be adopted.

Emigration

Main policies

Three overarching concerns drive emigration-related policies and regulations in Tunisia.

- **Encouraging alignment of legal labour migration with destination-country needs:** The Tunisian government is aware of the benefits of cooperation with destination countries. It seeks to anticipate their needs and prepare potential candidates for temporary migration to fill gaps in the target labour market (Pouessel, 2017). Shaped by a motivation to encourage workers' emigration to Europe, this strategy seeks to relieve the domestic labour market, alleviate unemployment and boost the economy through remittances. The Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment, created in 1990, is the key stakeholder for implementing this. As part of this ministry, the National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment (ANETI) identifies labour migration opportunities for workers at all skill levels, and it signs bilateral labour agreements with Tunisia's main migration partners (De Bel-Air, 2016). Experts

knowledgeable on French bilateral agreements highlighted that progress has been made with these agreements in recent years, in particular when it comes to return and reintegration. Other experts highlighted that bilateral agreements with European Member States do include cooperation on migration management in exchange for development support, but that this is not always formalised within the agreement itself (which are often not made public), and the Tunisian government is resistant to facilitating returns which may not benefit the country and may violate the rights of Tunisians being returned.

- **State policy of technical cooperation with developing countries:** The Tunisian government facilitates labour migration for highly skilled Tunisian experts and consultants mainly to Arab and African countries. This includes Tunisians leading or implementing development programmes and projects within the framework of bilateral, triangular and south-south cooperation in these countries. Currently, Tunisia has bilateral technical cooperation schemes with three Gulf countries, namely Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (ibid.). In addition, due to high unemployment among tertiary-educated youth, Tunisia also encourages the emigration of skilled and highly skilled graduates, while the Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation (ATCT) promotes the placement of skilled and highly skilled Tunisians with work experience in these other countries. These are, in principle, temporary placements of up to five years, the majority of which (80%) are in Gulf countries. In addition, most of these placements are of civil servants from the Tunisian public sector (Martin, 2015).
- **Stalled discussions on free movement in the region:** Tunisia is a member of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). The five members of the AMU,¹ which are countries in North Africa, have aimed to work ‘gradually towards achieving free movement of persons, and transfer of services, goods and capital among them’, according to Article 2 of the Marrakesh Treaty (AMU, 1989). However, free movement policies have not been adopted yet. Part of the reason for lower advancement regarding regional free movement policies is that intraregional migration is less important in North Africa than West Africa (more than 90% of emigrants from North Africa lived outside the continent in 2017, whereas the number is less than 30% for West African emigrants). Another reason, mentioned by an expert, is the geopolitical tension between Algeria and Morocco which has prevented any process within AMU over the past decades. Tunisia also enjoys visa-free mobility and the right to stay 90 days in other North African countries. One expert noted, however, that the AMU is less advanced than some of its other regional economic communities when it comes to free movement, and free movement policies are not high on the agenda.

Although Tunisia is a member state of the African Union (AU), the country, along with all North African countries, has refrained from signing the Protocol to the Treaty on Free Movement Establishing the African Economic

¹ These countries are Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya

Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment that was adopted in 2018.

Trends

The Jasmine revolution in 2011, the Arab Spring and the crisis in Libya have partly shaped emigration-related trends and policies in Tunisia in the last decade. The revolution in 2011 triggered a temporary hike in irregular border crossings and asylum requests from young Tunisians. At the same time, the pressure exerted by the EU upon the Tunisian government to control its borders against irregular crossings has been relatively effective in shaping Tunisia's emigration-related policies too. While some experts noted that migration is not a top priority for the Tunisian government, given the political and social crises within the country, most did emphasise the desire of the government to align themselves with the EU on emigration policy to the extent that this was politically desirable at home. One expert highlighted instead that civil society activism at home has been helpful for the government to push back on the EU on certain migration policies, especially when it comes to emigration restrictions, return and readmission (see Migreurop, 2013 and 2014 for examples of advocacy documents produced by civil society organisations).

In November 2012, the EU and Tunisia signed an Action Plan for 2013–2017 under the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. This Action Plan granted Tunisia 'Privileged Partnership' status and aimed to enhance financial support, trade openings and improved mobility. The two parties agreed to start a policy dialogue on migration with the goal of concluding a Mobility Partnership (MP) for cooperation on the movement of people, the management of legal migration, migration and development, the protection of the rights of migrants, the fight against irregular migration and readmission. Tunisia signed the MP with the EU in early 2014 (Seeberg, 2014). The MP aims to set the stage for a negotiation framework for effective cooperation in managing the movement of people between the EU and Tunisia. Better informing Tunisian citizens and potential migrants about requisite qualifications in the labour market and employment opportunities available in EU Member States and increasing cooperation between employment services of EU countries and Tunisia in this regard constitutes a significant element of this Agreement. Accordingly, the Agreement commits the parties to facilitate the access of Tunisian vocational training and university graduates to study and employment opportunities currently existing in the relevant Member States all the while enabling the recognition of academic and professional credentials of Tunisian migrants by competent authorities of Member States (Martin, 2015).

There have been four key emigration policy or practical trends in the past decade:

- **New destinations – from Libya to Gulf countries:** Following its own civil war, Libya ceased to be the primary destination for Tunisian migrants in the Arab region. Gulf states took this role instead, hosting the vast majority of Tunisian expats as of 2016 (De Bel-Air, 2016). This new trend towards Gulf countries has resulted in the technical cooperation schemes signed with Gulf countries and described above. Meanwhile,

Tunisian labour attachés have been appointed in Qatar and the UAE through ATCT (ibid.). An expert confirmed the existence of ‘social attachés’ at Tunisian consulates in European countries as well as some Gulf countries, who report to the Office for Tunisians Abroad (OTE), and who are meant to facilitate information and contact with families.

- **Attempts at curbing irregular emigration and resuming legal emigration schemes** with European countries have shaped Tunisia’s response to the rising emigration pressure as unemployment rates escalated in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution (ibid.). The Tunisian government has initiated several attempts to regularise emigration through cooperation and bilateral agreements and projects with several European countries. One example is the German Tunisian Mobility Pact for 2014–2016, which aims to boost young professional employment and establish long-term networks between Tunisia and Germany. Another project is the ‘Triple Win’ which was launched in 2013 as a joint project by the International Placement Services of the Federal Employment Agency and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). The project aims to recruit foreign high-skilled workers for the German labour market (Tangerman and Grote, n.d.). Following the Tunisian revolution in 2011, relations between Switzerland and Tunisia also improved and resulted in an MP in 2012 which includes two important agreements: the Cooperation Agreement on Migration and an agreement facilitating exchanges for young professionals (ILO, 2017).
- **The growing number of Tunisian naturalisations and residence permit renewals** in countries of Europe and North America such as France, Italy and Canada suggest that Tunisian migrants are increasingly settling permanently in their host country (De Bel-Air, 2016). While 5,546 Tunisians received French citizenship in 2012, the number went up to 7,018 in 2015. Similarly, in Italy, naturalisation rates have increased from 0.4% in 2006 to 4.5% in 2014. In Canada, the number of Tunisians who received Canadian nationality grew from 410 in 2013 to 1,520 in 2014 (ibid.). Similarly, numbers confirm increasing permit renewals for Tunisians since 2008 compared to a decline in new residence permits issued to Tunisians and difficulties they experience in entering EU Member States. The number of new permits issued by the 27 EU Member States to Tunisians decreased from 35,000 in 2011 to 23,000 in 2012; and although this reached approximately 31,000 in 2019, the number fell to 23,292 in 2020 (Eurostat, n.d.a).
- **Increasing numbers of university-educated, highly skilled professionals emigrating**, particularly to Europe and North America (Natter, 2015 and Natter, 2019; Garelli and Tazzioli, 2017): Increasing unemployment among tertiary-educated youth and the growing EU preference for skilled and highly skilled migrants from Tunisia, compared to less-skilled ones who have fewer legal opportunities for migration, are major reasons for this emigration (De Bel-Air, 2016). Student migration has also been a growing phenomenon, as Germany and North America followed by France, have become leading education destinations in recent years (Natter, 2015). A decline in new residence permits and increasing migration of skilled and highly skilled individuals and students point at a change of policy from the EU perspective with regards to different

forms of visa issued to Tunisian citizens. The EU's migration policy has become more selective towards Tunisia based on a preference for skilled and highly skilled migrants to less skilled ones.

Impacts on emigration

Given the example of the France–Tunisia bilateral labour agreement, it may be safe to say that a legal framework alone does not assure labour migration; several experts interviewed for this study confirmed this. These bilateral agreements have not proved to be very effective for two key reasons:

- **Skills mismatch:** Identifying appropriate international job opportunities and matching the skills of potential migrant workers to the requirements of employers in countries of destination remains a challenge.
- **Political reasons such as more restrictive policies imposed by the EU that result in a decrease of permits issued:** The dramatic decrease in first permits issued by Italy to Tunisians is noteworthy. Up until 2012, Italy used to issue 45–47% of all first permits granted to Tunisians in the EU whereas the country issued 16% of these in 2015. This decline can mainly be explained by the severe limitations put on the entry of workers and professionals (permits granted under the category of ‘remunerated activities’) in the EU since 2010, partly because of the 2008 financial crisis (De Bel-Air, 2016).

ATCT seems to be more efficient in placing professionals and experts abroad. It has assigned more than 45,000 cooperating professionals and experts in various fields and countries in more than 47 years (ATCT, n.d.). As a result of technical cooperation schemes, approximately 30,000–35,000 Tunisians resided in the Gulf as of 2012–2014, mostly in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. ATCT recruited 3,379 Tunisians in 2014 and 78% of these were placed in the Gulf region. Tunisians in Saudi Arabia were mostly (45%) recruited in education and higher education, while Qatar mostly hired health specialists and military personnel and the UAE placed Tunisians in the sales and commerce sector (De Bel-Air, 2016).

As for the emigration of post-graduate students and highly skilled individuals, France has become the major receiver of new Tunisian migrants. The percentage of student permits that France issued to Tunisians of all student permits in the EU² increased from 62% (2,536 permits issued by France out of 4,113 by the EU) in 2008 to 78% in 2020 (4,002 permits by France out of 5,150 by the EU) (Eurostat, n.d.b).

Europe's restrictive immigration policies and strengthened border controls have failed to reduce the number of irregular migrants. Similarly, the cooperation between the Tunisian government, the EU and its Member States to fight irregular migration in the 2000s and open channels for legal labour migration after 2011 seem to have contained, but not stopped, irregular emigration to Europe. Migration has continued to be driven by

² The EU refers to 27 EU countries, excluding the United Kingdom which left the EU in January 2020.

labour market demand in Europe and high unemployment in Tunisia. In addition, overstaying visas continues to be a common phenomenon.

In the last decade, the country has witnessed two emigration booms, one in the immediate aftermath of the 2011 revolution, when more than 20,000 Tunisians left Tunisia to cross irregularly into Europe, and new increasing emigration in the second half of 2017. This more recent emigration phenomenon saw Tunisians constituted only 5% of all sea arrivals to Italy in December 2017 but this percentage increased to 23.8% by December 2018 (REACH and Mercy Corps, 2018a). In 2018, Tunisians ranked first among migrant sea arrivals to Italy, with 5,244 people out of 23,370 (UNHCR, 2019). Based on the statistics for 2020, Tunisians ranked first among the most common nationalities of Mediterranean Sea and land arrivals (UNHCR, 2021).

While there is a gap in research and in expert knowledge on the actual impact of migration awareness-raising campaigns on migrant decision-making in Tunisia,³ qualitative fieldwork conducted under MIGNEX in the country suggests that the impact of these campaigns on decision-making is fairly low.⁴ Migrants are aware of the risks, but they still make the decision to migrate.

Impacts on development

Remittances have played a significant role in Tunisia's economy over the past five decades, accounting for at least 4% of annual gross domestic product (GDP) (Natter, 2015). Remittance inflows constituted 4.5% of GDP as of October 2020. In terms of the effect of remittances on economic growth in Tunisia, studies provide mixed results. Kouni (2016) analyses the effect of remittances on economic growth in agriculture, industry and services sectors over the period 1987–2012 and finds a significant and positive effect on economic growth. Jouini (2015) argues that remittances do not influence economic growth in the long run and there is a bi-directional relationship between remittances and growth in the short run in the period between 1970 and 2010. One expert interviewed for this study was in the process of finalising a report on the impact of remittances, and highlighted that initial findings show that the impact of remittances in the country is higher than initially thought and confirm that remittances play a very significant role in the Tunisian economy. Additionally, recent research finds that remittances have an indirect effect on unemployment in Tunisia (Habib, 2022). Increases in remittances significantly reduce the labour supply as workers receiving these funds decrease their participation in the labour market, hence increasing the unemployment level particularly within the context of demographic change and the ageing of the Tunisian population. However,

³ More general research also points at the absence of reliable evidence regarding the impact of information campaigns on migrant decision-making and the difficulty of assessing the campaign impact. For an example, see:

https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/evaluating_the_impact.pdf

⁴ As part of the MIGNEX project, qualitative fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and observations was carried out in Redeyef and Enfidha in 2020. Additionally, a survey of 500 randomly selected residents was conducted in each research area in 2021. The case study briefs regarding migration and development dynamics in each research area will be available at the project website: <https://www.mignex.org/publications>

the same study also argues that the overall impact of remittances on the labour market cannot be negative because of the other indirect factors: ‘An increase in consumption and investment as a result of remittances can stimulate domestic production leading to higher employment among households that do not benefit from remittances’ (Habib, 2022: 24).

The MP scheme involves the motivation to maximise the impact of migration on development, especially by bolstering the role of the diaspora in the development of Tunisia (EC, 2014).

Key incoherence across policies

While Tunisia has sought to actively promote regular migration, including through its national employment agency ANETI and with foreign employers, a key contradiction driving emigration policy issues is the dual approach Tunisia has embraced about irregular emigration, oscillating between repressing and tolerating it (Brand, 2002; Natter, 2019). The Jasmine revolution of 2011 led to an immediate upsurge in irregular emigration due to the absence of border controls during the security void. Hence, the increased efforts of the Tunisian government to curb irregular emigration and open regulated channels of legal emigration after the revolution. These efforts aimed to address the gap between strong migration pressure (due to high unemployment) and limited legal migration channels. Partly as a result of the pressure by the EU and its Member States to reinforce its border enforcement, the Tunisian government enacted measures to curb irregular emigration. Tunisia’s Organic Law 1975-40 and Law 2004-6 criminalised irregular departure of Tunisian citizens. However, irregular emigration has continued to be an increasing phenomenon, de facto tolerated by the Tunisian authorities (Meddeb, 2012; Natter, 2019). Establishing cooperation with immigration countries through bilateral and multilateral agreements has also been a strategic tool of the Tunisian government in this regard.

However, even though Tunisia tries to promote legal emigration by opening channels through cooperation and bilateral agreements with destination countries, the country also tries to control periods of stay abroad by specifying the length of stay in the framework of technical cooperation with a given country.

Interaction with development policies

Emigration policy is one of the central items of Tunisia’s development agenda. Furthermore, emigration is a key pillar in Tunisia’s (still not enacted) SNM (Natter, 2019) one of the core goals of which is to reinforce the contribution of migration to the country’s development, at the local, regional and national levels (GRDR, 2017) and to boost remittances by strengthening diaspora links to Tunisia. Furthermore, the development of the SNM and preparation of its successive drafts led to a round of discussion across the Tunisian territory in the context of its regional development policies (Natter, 2019). For instance, the earlier draft of the document was revised in 2015 and 2017 to align it with the priorities of the 2016–2020 Development Plan, especially those related to the contribution of migration to development (Council of the EU, 2018). The ratification of this SNM would provide a

stronger foundation for linking emigration and development policies further.

Diaspora

Main policies

Tunisia has long been a country of emigration, since its independence in the 1950s. Today, approximately 10% of the Tunisian population resides abroad. More than 80% live in Europe and the vast majority in France (Edelbloude et al., 2017). Therefore, diaspora engagement policies have always been at the forefront of Tunisia's migration agenda. Tunisia attaches great importance to its citizens residing abroad, and it monitors the diaspora to maintain close ties with them and boost their investments and remittances (Natter, 2015; Pouessel, 2017).

Following Gamlen's (2006) typology of diaspora engagement policies, the policies and programmes embraced by the Tunisian government to engage its diaspora can be grouped under three categories:

- **Developing programmes and a set of state institutions responsible for managing diaspora affairs and maintaining close ties with the diaspora:** Tunisia has established various state institutions and has been carrying out many cultural and educational programmes to monitor its diaspora and maintain close ties with Tunisians living abroad. The OTE, created in 1988, is the main state institution responsible for diaspora engagement policies. It has officers and offices in the main destination countries (including 44 social attachés), and in the different Tunisian regions. The OTE offers administrative services, social mediation, intercultural and educational activities, and support for getting used to changing situations (Office des Tunisiens à l'Étranger, 2018). Social attachés established in 1972 are responsible for protecting the interests of Tunisians residing abroad (TRE) in terms of social coverage and the difficulties that they face in health-related, judicial and administrative issues. Under the Ben Ali regime, these social attachés were also key in monitoring Tunisian emigrants' involvement in labour unions or political activities (Natter, 2019). The OTE has opened *Les Espaces Famille* in key European countries and in Canada to engage in cultural, sports and educational activities.
- **Developing programmes that seek to extend rights to Tunisian diaspora:** The major rights extended to people in the diaspora include dual citizenship to naturalised Tunisians and electoral rights (Pouessel, 2017). Persons born abroad automatically have the nationality of their parents' country of origin (ibid.). TRE have had the right to vote in presidential elections since 1988 but it is considered that the Tunisian diaspora did not have real access to political participation until 2011 because of the authoritarian regime (Pouessel, 2020). After the fall of the Ben Ali regime, and with the establishment of the new government, some changes were made to the electoral rights of the diaspora to engage them better in national politics. TRE were granted the right to vote and to stand as candidates in parliamentary elections (Pouessel,

2017). The Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), which was created in 2011, supervises elections abroad. In 2011, the Tunisian government also created six districts to represent the diaspora through 18 members of parliament (Natter, 2019).

Additionally, Tunisians who live and work abroad may register in a voluntary social insurance scheme that involves old age, disability and survivor benefits (UNESCWA, 2016). The Tunisian government seeks to ensure that migrants benefit from the transfer of the host country's retirement regime to Tunisia, as well as all the social rights that they had abroad. To guarantee the social rights of Tunisian emigrants, particularly the transferability of benefits, Tunisia has signed 14 bilateral social security agreements with 14 European and North African countries: France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, Austria, Libya, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Spain and Portugal (ILO, 2017; Pouessel, 2017; Gelb and Marouani, 2020). Social protection policies for Tunisian diaspora abroad, however, are constrained to healthcare, pensions and family benefits because, regardless of whether they live in Tunisia or abroad, Tunisian nationals have limited access to social policies (Pouessel, 2020).

- **Extracting obligations from the diaspora:** Several incentives have been provided by the Tunisian government to boost the diaspora's contribution to the country's development and economic growth. There are a number of tax incentives which aim to encourage the Tunisian diaspora to invest in Tunisia by facilitating the investment process at many levels, ranging from legal and administrative to financial (ibid.). For instance, Tunisian nationals living abroad enjoy tax benefits in all regions of Tunisia. Furthermore, the investment of Tunisian emigrants is facilitated by way of one-stop-shops and bolstered through special incentives such as tax and custom exemptions (Pouessel, 2017; 2020). Tunisian entrepreneurs residing abroad can enjoy the right to import goods connected to their core business activities without paying custom duties. Moreover, Tunisia has signed non-double-taxation treaties with around 50 countries, including almost all European countries, to avoid double taxation and encourage diaspora engagement in their home country's economy (ibid.).

Experts highlighted the limitation of incentives to encourage diaspora investments, however, and noted instead the administrative challenges faced by the diaspora when wanting to invest in the country. Bureaucratic processes (which often require attendance in person) and lack of information are practical impediments to diaspora investment. One expert suggested that something as simple as a website laying out the information needed for the diaspora to invest, and the ability to process applications online, could go a long way towards facilitating and encouraging diaspora investments.

That being said, some programmes do exist. Under the EU-funded ProGreS project,⁵ GIZ has been managing a diaspora component which

⁵ For more information on this project, see: <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/projects/progress-migration-tunisia>

both seeks to encourage investments as well as facilitate knowledge transfer. It has worked with diaspora organisations – including, for instance, a collaboration with a Tunisian doctor’s association in Germany. This programme is still in progress, and other similar programmes are limited.

Trends

Diaspora policies and efforts to monitor Tunisians abroad have always been a priority for Tunisia.

However, the Tunisian uprising and democratisation in 2011 was the major turning point in terms of diaspora policies, which led to major institutional changes, a radical reform of OTE, and the granting of major rights to members of the diaspora. Thus, following the 2011 revolution, ‘the diaspora has become institutionalized and has been recognized by the Tunisian authorities’ (Edelbloude et al., 2017: 96).

Since the 2011 revolution, Tunisian emigrants have been progressively involved in Tunisian politics (Natter, 2019). Political exiles who returned from Europe following the revolution brought emigration and diaspora policies to the political agenda: before the October 2011 election, Tunisians abroad were given 18 seats in the Parliament (out of 217) (Natter, 2019). Besides this, according to Article 55 of the new Tunisian Constitution, the Election Law guaranteed representation in the Chamber of the People’s Deputies for TRE. Additionally, new institutions were created to strengthen the relations with Tunisian diaspora at many levels. Among these institutions were the short-lived State Secretariat for Migration and Tunisians Abroad (SEMTE)⁶ (2012) within the Ministry of Social Affairs, the National Migration Observatory (ONM) (2014), and the National Council for Tunisians Abroad (2016).

Additionally, the country developed the draft SNM which underscores the Tunisian diaspora’s contribution to development and the democratic transition of Tunisia. The SNM also aims to increase remittances to 10% of Tunisia’s GDP by 2020 (Natter, 2019). Furthermore, in 2013, the Central Bank of Tunisia (BCT) specified two major goals to increase the impact of remittance inflows on the country’s economy: 1) to reduce the cost of money transfers, which was around 13% of the total transfer value in fees in 2013, and 2) to promote new financial products and services specifically for migrants, aiming to optimise the contribution of these funds for the country’s development (African Development Bank Group, 2013).

The OTE also underwent a radical reform that would increase its efficiency (De Bel-Air, 2016). An expert noted that this radical reform also aimed to increase the OTE’s legitimacy in the eyes of Tunisian citizens who perceive it as an institution of surveillance rather than support. As a result of decreasing remittances, its mission ‘has evolved from providing support for and information about migrants (including monitoring the political activities of migrants) to a focus on services to Tunisian migrants in all required fields:

⁶ The name of the state secretary has changed several times over the years. It is currently named the State Secretariat in charge of Immigration and Tunisians Abroad (SEITE) (Natter, 2019).

education, social security, administrative support and reintegration of returning migrants' (Martin, 2015: 8). Decreasing remittances also led the OTE to diversify its activities beyond control and include the provision of legal assistance to citizens abroad, cultural programmes and investment facilitation (Natter, 2019).

Impacts on development

While diaspora remittances are a significant factor in the country's economy, and a key subject of interest for the Tunisian government, interviews with experts highlighted that there is no formal policy in place to link diaspora investments to development. This is in part due to the lack of a ratified national migration strategy, which would provide the foundation for linking migration and development policies further.

The fall of the Ben Ali regime in 2011, the Arab Spring and the Libyan crisis have shaped the volume of remittance inflows into Tunisia, however. Although diaspora remittances increased from US\$2.1 billion in 2010 to US\$2.3 billion in 2012 and remained stable until 2015, remittances fell to US\$2 billion in 2015, and to US\$1.8 billion in 2016 (World Bank, 2017). However, since 2016, remittances have steadily recovered and continued to rise even during the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching US\$2.4 billion in 2020 (World Bank, n.d.). It is estimated that remittances reached over US\$2.8 billion in 2021, outweighing both tourism receipts and foreign direct investment (FDI) as a source of foreign currency (Economist Intelligence, 2021; World Bank, 2021). This increasing reliance of Tunisia on remittances and the resilience of these inflows during COVID-19 reveal the significance of remittances for the development of the country.

According to a case study assessing the impact of diaspora investments in Tunisia based on a survey of 400 diaspora-owned and other foreign-owned companies, diaspora investments go into less-developed and rural regions that attract very little FDI, hence creating more employment in rural and under-served areas. Moreover, the employment rate of women in these diaspora-owned companies is above average (UNDP, 2016). However, the overall impact of diaspora investments on employment and wages is less than that of foreign-owned companies. Several reasons can account for this result. First, diaspora-owned firms experience more difficulties in investment in the country and receive fewer government benefits and concessions. Second, even though there are special incentives in place for diaspora investors, they are often not aware of these investment incentives. Third, diaspora-owned companies do not have as many local partnerships compared to foreign-owned companies (ibid.).

One expert noted that if diaspora engagement policies could be effectively drafted and implemented, this could have a significant impact on the socioeconomic development of the country in the long run. Currently, however, the economic and social crisis in Tunisia has meant that government priorities lie elsewhere, and the potential of diaspora investments has not been leveraged.

Key incoherence across policies

The incentives to boost the contribution of the diaspora to Tunisia's development and economic growth, such as tax benefits, exemptions from custom duties and treaties with EU countries to avoid double taxation, are coherent with other diaspora engagement policies. They not only encourage the diaspora to invest in the country and maintain business connections, but also maintain and reinforce the social relations of TRE with their homeland at various levels.

In practice, however, bureaucratic and administrative processes continue to impede the diaspora's capacity to invest in the country. In addition, a key incoherence is that although Tunisia tries to increase remittance inflows, the costs for money transfers are excessive which undermines the effects of remittances on increasing household incomes and boosting economic growth in Tunisia.

Interaction with development policies

The current development initiatives in Tunisia encourage the participation of the diaspora in national development, especially through investments and remittance inflows. Unemployment has been a huge problem in Tunisia and has been increasing even more since the 2011 revolution. Therefore, employment creation is part of Tunisia's major development policies. In this regard, Tunisia's efforts to encourage diaspora investments through providing certain incentives to migrant entrepreneurs is interacting with the country's policy of job creation.

Several experts highlighted, however, that while there is keen interest from the government to better leverage diaspora policies, the lack of an official national migration strategy and emergency priorities elsewhere have meant that no tangible links between development and diaspora policies exist to date.

Return migration

This section focuses exclusively on the return of Tunisians from abroad, rather than Tunisia's policy of returning foreigners from Tunisia. It also touches upon the negotiations with the EU on the readmission of Tunisians and third-country nationals (TCNs) from European countries, although this topic is covered more extensively in the section on Internal migration.

Main policies

On paper, the Tunisian government's draft SNM aims to attract 4,000 highly qualified returnees, and there are various programmes to support vulnerable returnees. Organisations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), GIZ, the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII) and the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) have different programmes to assist the voluntary return and reintegration of Tunisians from abroad. New initiatives through the EU-IOM Joint Initiative and the LEMMA project have been developed in the past five

years. However, in spite of a relative abundance of programming, experts working on return and reintegration in the country confirm that there remains a lack of coherent policy frameworks and infrastructure to support this.

The main objective of assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) programmes is to support return and reintegration. Thus, these programmes are predominantly perceived as a conditional incentive to return (with a kind of social benefit attached to it) rather than an actual aid to reintegration (Martin, 2015). They include support for the voluntary return of Tunisian emigrants through information sessions and planning logistical details, and guidance on socioeconomic reintegration of returnees (including but not limited to support with labour market reintegration through the provision of information on employment prospects and services in Tunisia), skills training and financial support. Guidance is also provided on the setting up of local businesses through entrepreneurship training programmes and seed capital. Training programmes are conducted in collaboration with ANETI. Besides this, ANETI also provides entrepreneurship training programmes for jobseekers in Tunisia, including return migrants, which involves modules on business idea development, business creation and entrepreneurship, and business development (ibid.).

Among the main AVRR programmes are the Swiss AVRR programme managed by IOM and the French AVRR programme managed by the OFII, whose operational mechanisms were reviewed in 2014. For the French AVRR programme, there has been an agreement with ANETI to provide entrepreneurship training to returning migrants to establish their own businesses and to provide 200 dinars per month to beneficiaries/trainees as support (100 dinars until 2014). The most common modality of AVRR is to provide a conditional grant to develop a business based on a business plan (ibid.). The IOM has also directed, in the last decade, the return of migrants from 10 other countries under the framework of its global AVRR programme (ibid.).

The return of Tunisians from abroad was particularly notable between 2010 and 2014 due to the crisis in Libya. Approximately 60,000 Tunisian workers (out of 91,000 officially registered in Libya) returned to Tunisia between 2010 and 2014 (World Bank, 2017). Later, the North Africa branch of the EU–IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration was launched in September 2019, offering support to migrants returning to Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. The main goals are to improve assistance for migrants along migration routes, enabling the voluntary return of stranded migrants and migrants in transit in North Africa, and to increase the capacities of North African countries (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia) to develop or strengthen return and reintegration policies and processes.

Trends

There have been two significant trends regarding return migration to Tunisia over the last decade:

- **Intensification and burgeoning of AVRR programmes since the Tunisian uprising in 2011:** Experts confirmed that while programmes to support

return and reintegration – mainly through international actors or civil society organisations – have multiplied, the development of a comprehensive framework on return and reintegration is still missing. Civil society activists claim that the Tunisian institutional and legislative framework is too weak to deal with TCNs, particularly due to ‘the lack of an official regularisation policy or of voluntary return programmes’ (Zardo and Abderrahim, 2018: 95). Experts confirmed this.

- **The EU’s effort to convince Tunisia to sign an EU-wide readmission agreement** and negotiations between the two in this regard as part of the MP signed in 2014: The MP pushes the Tunisian government to collaborate on the return and readmission of unwanted migrants in Europe through the joint EU readmission–visa facilitation policy instrument. However, talks on these double agreements have remained fruitless so far due to political and practical challenges (Abderrahim, 2019). Although Tunisia usually expresses its willingness to re-admit its own nationals, there are disagreements with the EU on some practical details of this process. As for the readmission of TCNs, Tunisia has strongly refused to collaborate on their return as this contradicts its domestic and foreign policy interests (ibid.).

Impacts on return migration

A total of 44,195 Tunisian nationals were forcibly returned to Tunisia between 2010 and 2019. Of these, Italy and France forcibly returned the most Tunisian nationals, returning 12,980 and 23,040 individuals respectively (Eurostat, n.d.c).

Data indicate that AVRR programmes are generally ineffective in increasing returns or improving reintegration. However, an expert underlined the undeniable role IOM’s AVRR programme plays in Tunisia in terms of providing the opportunity for some Tunisians to return to their home country.

As part of this AVRR programme, IOM provides support especially for stranded migrants, with 2,217 people returned to Tunisia between 2011 and 2020 (IOM, 2016; 2019; 2021). Although the numbers increased considerably between 2011 and 2013 (from 278 to 609), there was a sudden drop to 139 in 2014 and the number stayed nearly the same until 2020 with 123 people returned (ibid.). The top five host countries from which returnees came in the year 2018 were, respectively, Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Belgium and Italy (IOM, 2019).

As a result of the Swiss AVRR programme, implemented between 2012 and 2015, 723 Tunisian irregular migrants or asylum seekers who had had their applications rejected in Switzerland were returned to Tunisia (708 men and one woman). Of these returnees, 527 developed a reintegration project following their contact with IOM Tunisia. The returns were predominantly to the key regions of emigration such as Sfax, Tunis, Kairouan and Mahdia (IOM, 2015).

Impacts on development

AVRR programmes have the potential to create a significant impact on employment in the regions of origin through support for business development (ibid.). For instance, the evidence on the impact of the Swiss AVRR programme shows that positive results have been identified in terms of employment and the supply of goods and services (especially agricultural) in regions where the number of returns is important. As part of the Swiss AVRR programme, 520 micro-projects were financed through funding for the implementation of reintegration projects which supported 951 jobs (ibid.).

Tunisian workers returning from Libya following the Libyan crisis had two significant impacts on the Tunisian economy. First, this led to a 32% decline in official remittances inflows from Libya, decreasing from 55.9 million dinars in 2010 to 38 million dinars in 2014 (World Bank, 2017). And moreover, since many of these workers were from Tunisia's poorest regions, these areas were negatively affected by the fall in remittances. Secondly, these Tunisian returnees contributed to a notable increase in the unemployment rate, which skyrocketed from 13% in May 2010 to 18.3% in May 2011 (STATISTA, n.d.). Even though the unemployment rate fell in the following years, it did not go below 15%. Upon returning from Libya, the majority of these Tunisians worked in the construction business and for oil processing companies. Even though some started their own businesses or worked as bakers, many were employed in the informal sector (World Bank, 2017).

Key incoherence across policies

There is an inherent incoherence between Tunisia's draft SNM to attract highly qualified returnees (see the section on Main policies under Return migration) and those policies and incentives that aim to increase remittances and diaspora investments (see the Diaspora section). Higher rates of return migration are likely to decrease the flow of remittances and investment from abroad.

The AVRR and reintegration programmes do not align with Tunisia's emigration policy. While return and reintegration programmes target the return of Tunisians from EU countries and their reintegration into the labour market, Tunisia's emigration policy encourages labour migration to Europe to relieve the domestic labour market and decrease unemployment in Tunisia.

Interaction with development policies

There has been interaction between AVRR programmes and policies that aim to mitigate unemployment by promoting small businesses, by improving vocational training systems and by developing skills for sectors with labour shortages (Jafari, 2017). As part of the reintegration schemes, beneficiaries are participating in training programmes on entrepreneurship and business development as well as skills development. By financing micro-projects of return migrants which have led to new businesses and jobs, some AVRR programmes interact with Tunisia's development agenda of economic reforms to boost private investment, economic growth and job creation.

However, as confirmed by experts, explicit inclusion of return and reintegration policies remains lacking, and coherent and harmonised return and reintegration policies are still under discussion and in draft stages.

Immigration

Main policies

There are four key policy aspects that drive the discussion regarding immigration in Tunisia: 1) the Organic Laws 1968-7 and 1975-40 regulating the entry, stay and status of foreign nationals in Tunisia; 2) the range of bilateral agreements with African, Maghreb and European countries (Natter, 2019) which set out the criteria for the entry and residence of foreign nationals in the country as well as conditions for access to formal labour markets; 3) the Organic Law 2004-6 tackling smuggling and irregular migration; and 4) the challenges related to asylum and protection, notably the lack of a national asylum policy. The discussion below expands on each of these aspects.

- The Organic Law 1968-7 mainly covers **the status of foreign nationals in Tunisia**. Decree 1968-198 regulates the entry and stay of foreigners while Law 1975-40 deals with passports and travel documents as well as entry and exit of both Tunisian and foreign nationals. A visa is required except for nationals of states that have signed bilateral agreements with Tunisia, albeit with some exceptions (Planes-Boissac et al., 2012). As for residency conditions, a temporary (one-year) residency card may be issued to foreigners who have been in the country for three successive months or six non-successive months during a one-year period (ibid.). According to Tunisian labour law, foreign workers are only authorised to work in Tunisia if a Tunisian citizen cannot occupy a given position. Moreover, employment contracts are limited to one year and only one renewal is possible, requiring migrants to have a residence card, which is only accessible to individuals who already have a work permit. Additionally, according to Article 258 of the Labour Code, a Ministry of Employment visa is required to obtain a work permit (REACH and Mercy Corps, 2018b).
- In line with **bilateral agreements**, European and Maghreb nationals as well as nationals from some African countries (e.g., Niger, Senegal, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana and Liberia) are exempt from visa requirements, which grants them the right to enter the country on a tourist visa for 90 days (Bartolomeo et al., 2010). However, a three-month entry permit does not allow the holder access to the formal labour market during this time. Upon the expiration of their visas, these nationals should apply for a residence permit and work permit to regularise their stay, a process that is administratively challenging. Those who overstay their entry permits become irregular migrants. This situation is especially problematic for citizens from African countries who are stranded in Tunisia on their way to the EU as they cannot pay the high penalty fees of overstays to be able to leave the country (REACH and Mercy Corps, 2018b).

- The Organic Law 2004-6 amending the Law 75-40 of 14 May 1975 on passports and travel documents focuses on **the prevention of irregular migration and human smuggling**. It was enacted by the Ben Ali regime in part to comply with EU demands regarding the prevention of irregular migration and to introduce efforts against trafficking into Tunisia’s migration policy following the adoption of the United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants in 2000 (Badalič, 2019). The law, however, not only criminalizes human smuggling but punishes all forms of assistance to a person entering or exiting the Tunisian territory irregularly. Article 38 prescribes a penalty of four years in prison and a fine of 10,000 dinars for ‘anyone who has sheltered persons entering or exiting Tunisia illegally, [...] or has provided them with accommodation [emphasis added]’ and ‘[a]nyone providing them with any type of transportation’ (Organic Law 2004-6). The law has been criticised for sanctioning any person providing assistance or failing to report irregular migrants, including medical staff, humanitarian workers, legal advisers or family members (Natter, 2015; NAMAN, 2020).
- Tunisia is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention. Despite its 1967 Protocol and the new Constitution of 2014 guaranteeing the right to seek political asylum, Tunisia does not have a legal protection framework, nor a national asylum law, which would regulate the status of asylum seekers and refugees within its territory. Given the lack of recognition of refugee status in Tunisian law, the laws governing foreign nationals and regulating their irregular entry and exit – the Organic Laws passed in 1968, 1975, and 2004 – are applied to refugees with respect to residency. In other words, refugees with protection status still have to obtain a residency permit to be able to live and work legally in the country (Badalič, 2019). Technically, refugees have rights to accommodation, healthcare, employment and education in Tunisia, yet they cannot consistently enjoy those rights due to legislative gaps and the lack of formal recognition (Mixed Migration Hub, 2018). For instance, refugees are registered with the Red Crescent Society and claims are processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR). However, since the documentation provided by UNHCR is not formally recognised by the authorities who refuse to provide refugees with residency permits, refugees fall into a precarious situation, are considered irregular migrants, and are unable to enter the formal labour market (Tringham, 2016). On the other hand, there are small-scale policies and laws on the protection of vulnerable people, including migrants. Examples include the law on the prevention and fight against human trafficking (2016), which involves stronger prevention measures for trafficking victims, including non-Tunisian nationals, who are even more vulnerable due to their irregular status in Tunisia; the law on the elimination of violence against women (2017), which integrates migrant women; and the law on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (2018) (Veron, 2020).

Trends

Tunisia’s 2011 revolution fundamentally reshaped immigration in Tunisia. Civil war in Libya and the following influx of hundreds of thousands of

African, Arab and Asian refugees and migrants from Libya transformed Tunisia into an important immigrant destination in North Africa (Natter, 2015; 2019). The prolonged Libyan crisis also resulted in the long-term settlement of Libyan nationals in Tunisia (Natter, 2021a). Emergency measures were taken by Tunisian authorities, including the ratification of a cooperation agreement with the UNHCR in July 2011, fully recognising the role and mandate of UNHCR in Tunisia. The new Tunisian government launched its first draft SNM in August 2013, including a framework on immigration, asylum and human trafficking. In addition, the 2014 Constitution incorporated new protections for migrants, in particular the right to political asylum (Natter, 2015).

A comprehensive domestic legislation to establish a national protection system for refugees and asylum seekers was drafted in 2014. Then in January 2018, a revised version of the law was adopted by the Council of Ministers. However, the law, still awaiting adoption by Parliament, has not been implemented yet and thus the right to asylum has not been legalised. Expert interviews confirmed that to date Tunisia does not have any official asylum law. Repeated change in governments has prevented the political confirmation and support of successive drafts of the asylum law and SNM (Natter, 2021a).

As legal reform has remained minimal over the past decade, policies targeting immigrants, Natter (ibid: 8) notes, ‘were either enacted through ministerial decrees that introduced exemptions for particular migrant groups without touching the overarching legal framework or were kept at the level of promises and case-by-case arrangements by individual policy-makers and street-level bureaucrats’. As for exemptions, the ‘tolerance’ of Tunisian authorities towards Libyan immigrants constitutes a significant example. Libyans are de facto exempt from irregular stay penalties, detention and deportation, despite not being provided with residence permits (ibid.). Tunisia’s approach to refugees can be considered as an example in terms of case-by-case arrangements. Notably, while refugees recognised as such by UNHCR are not given a residence permit from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Employment grants work permits to refugees who participate in specific labour market integration projects. This then allows those refugees to apply for a residence permit at the Ministry of Interior (ibid.).

Finally, the number of sub-Saharan African students in Tunisia declined after 2010. Although there were more than 12,000 sub-Saharan students before 2010, this number reduced to 5,000 in 2018 (Abderrahim and Aggad, 2018). Among the major factors that lessened the appeal of Tunisia as a destination for sub-Saharan students are the country’s failure to implement cooperation agreements and various problems foreign students experience such as cumbersome administrative procedures and delays in receiving residence permits (ibid.). The decline in numbers pushed the Tunisian government to launch a programme to address this issue and increase student numbers to 20,000 by 2020, using measures such as reduced fees to attract sub-Saharan African students (ibid.). This is notably motivated by the fact that the private education sector, which mostly relies on foreign students, is an important part of the Tunisian economy. Besides this, in August 2017, the first Tunisian African Empowerment Forum was held in

Tunis to promote Tunisia as a potential destination for sub-Saharan students (ibid.). However, in spite of these advances, one expert noted that since 2011 the situation for sub-Saharan African students has actually grown more difficult in practice, with rising levels of racism and discrimination also impeding administrative access to student visas and universities. In 2021–2022, reports of arbitrary arrests multiplied, despite students providing valid identification documents (Blaise, 2022).

Impacts on immigration

It is difficult to estimate the actual number of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia as official numbers are highly unreliable, partly due to irregularity and informality. Employment figures do not give the full picture either, as immigrants in an irregular situation, from sub-Saharan African countries and from other countries in the Maghreb, participate in the informal labour market. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that immigration flows have increased since 2011, especially with the influx of Libyan nationals. Evaluating the impacts of immigration policies on immigration is also difficult but the origin of the migrants can provide some insights.

In April 2014, according to the country's sixth census, the population of foreigners was around 53,500, constituting 0.5% of the total population (INS, 2015). However, this figure is unreliable as it neither includes the Libyan citizens who came to Tunisia after 2011 nor irregular migrants from Europe and Africa (Natter, 2021a). In fact, Europeans are the largest migrant group in Tunisia numerically, but since many Europeans live and work there irregularly or on a tourist visa, official numbers do not accurately reflect the size of European migrant communities (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2017, cited in Natter, 2021a). Natter (2019) estimates Tunisia's immigrant community to be around 600,000, based on the assumption of 500,000 Libyan citizens, 53,000 migrants recorded in the census, and 25,000–50,000 non-Libyan irregular migrants.

As for asylum seekers in Tunisia, it is hard to establish an accurate number since very few register as refugees. In 2014, according to official statistics, 1.8 million Libyan nationals entered Tunisia and 1.4 million exited, suggesting that the number of long-term (more than six months) and short-term (less than six months) Libyan residents and visitors in Tunisia is larger than the 2014 census estimate of 8,777 people (World Bank, 2017). According to Natter (2021a), a conservative estimate of the Libyan community in Tunisia is half a million, constituting around 5% of the Tunisian population. Most Libyan nationals live in urban areas and moved to Tunis and other urban centres, while the less well-off have tended to go to Gabes and Ras Jedir in southern Tunisia (Karasapan, 2015; Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, 2017).

On the other hand, there were 6,744 refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia as of 31 January 2021, according to UNHCR estimates, with nationals of Cote d'Ivoire (37.4%) and the Syrian Arab Republic (29.7%) representing the largest proportion of this population.

Impacts on development

The influx of Libyan nationals has both positive and negative impacts on the Tunisian economy. The Libyans that currently visit, reside or stay on a long-term basis in Tunisia are mostly middle class, with significant purchasing power. According to estimates, only 3% are poor (World Bank, 2017). Since late-2011, the Tunisian authorities have allowed Libyan nationals, regardless of their residency status, to open bank accounts and conduct banking transactions. This regulatory reform brought useful foreign currency inflows and liquidity to Tunisia's banks, pointing at the economic potential of Libyan citizens in Tunisia. Additionally, informal currency exchange agents in Tunisian border towns processed an estimated 1.25 billion Libyan dinars in 2015 (approximately 814 million Tunisian dinars) from Libyan travellers entering Tunisia (*ibid.*).

Tunisian hotels and restaurants, as well as retailers, suppliers and their workers have substantially benefited from immigration. Two of the primary sectors in Tunisia that have profited from the presence of Libyan refugees are private education and private clinics. The Tunisian government does not provide asylum seekers (Libyan or otherwise) access to public schools, thus forcing well-off Libyans to send their children to private schools. According to one estimate, across all of the sectors that benefit from Libyan refugees, there is an annual injection of €1 billion into the Tunisian economy (Karasapan, 2015). Even though it is difficult to estimate the numbers, some Libyan investments have also been diverted into Tunisia (*ibid.*).

As for the downsides, asylum seekers put an additional strain on public resources and the labour market in Tunisia's already struggling economy, which faces an unemployment rate of 15%. Rent costs have increased especially; and asylum seekers, particularly refugees, are purchasing goods such as food and oil which are subsidised by the Tunisian government (Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, 2017). Unable to receive work permits unless they have residency permits, asylum seekers and refugees have limited access to formal employment sectors, and therefore participate mostly in the already large informal economy in Tunisia (*ibid.*).

Key incoherence across policies

Although the post-revolutionary authorities initiated a few minor improvements in managing migration issues (e.g., improving access for UNHCR officials to migration detention centres, decreasing the number of Tunisians imprisoned for irregularly leaving their country), to a large extent they stuck to the parameters of the migration policy of the pre-revolutionary period. Despite the transition into a democratic system with its promise for greater human rights and protection, all laws enacted by the previous regime, geared towards criminalising irregular migration and migration-related activities, were kept in place by the post-revolutionary political elite (Badalič, 2019). Furthermore, since the government does not have a holistic, legal and long-term approach to managing migration and the protection of migrants' human rights, they have indicated a preference for 'informal arrangements over written commitments' (Natter, 2021a: 12), which has created incoherence in practice.

Another example of incoherence across policies is the efforts of the Tunisian authorities to attract sub-Saharan African students without addressing issues related to the mistreatment (reports of racism and discrimination) of sub-Saharan migrants, including students – a problem that seems to have worsened recently (Blaise, 2022). More broadly, the differentiated treatment of migrants according to their country of origin and nationality is also the mark of inconsistency in the application of migration policies.

Interaction with development policies

Between 2011 and 2018, a Joint Global Programme on Mainstreaming Migration (MM) into National Development Strategies was implemented by the IOM and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The Programme supported eight governments – Bangladesh, Ecuador, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Morocco, Serbia and Tunisia – to integrate migration into their national development planning and other sectoral policies from a multistakeholder and holistic government approach. One of the objectives of the programme was to ‘strengthen [the] evidence base for migration and development as a basis for planning, policy development and monitoring and evaluation’ (UNDP, N/A), which resulted in different actions in the countries taking part in the initiative. In addition, the programme enhanced the institutional capacities of selected migration and development institutions. Tunisian authorities also took part in a learning mission with the Mexican government, which allowed participants to discuss the management of migration flows and the integration of migration into national development plans. However, not all objectives were met; in Tunisia, in particular, the programme failed to lead to the identification and implementation of national migration and development policy priorities (UNDP, N/A, UNDP, 2017 and IOM, N/A).

Internal migration

Main policies

As internal migration is not an explicit policy domain in Tunisia, this section discusses development policies that impact internal displacement dynamics, such as economic and territorial development policies.

Tunisia is one of the most urbanised countries in the region, with the urban population making up 70% of the total population as of 2020 (Worldometers, n.d.). The three metropolitan regions of Greater Tunis, Sfax and Sousse account for 85% of GDP (The Cities Alliance, n.d.). Over the years, most investment has gone to Tunisia’s coastal cities, where 75% of the country’s urban population live and most of its industry exists. The 2014 census showed that Tunisia’s main cities are all located near the coast, from Bizerte in the north to Djerba in the south, including Tunis, Ariana, Ben Arous, Nabeul, Sousse, Monastir, Sfax, Gabes and Médenine (Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018). These cities are in governorates that experience the greatest population increase and show urbanisation rates that are far above the national average. This has been accompanied by the development of job-

generating economic activities, such as hotels, energy plants and industries. Indeed, the coastal areas account for 84% of businesses and 87% of jobs (Euronet Consortium, 2012, cited in Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018). This can be explained by the fact that between the 1970s and 2011, both public and private investment benefited the eastern part of the country. Data on the accumulated private investment per capita in 1992–2010 from the Ministry of Regional Development (2011) show that the governorates located in the north-west of the country are those that have received the least investment (below 3,617.54 dinars per capita) while those situated to the north-east received between 7,274.19 and 9,507.56 dinars per capita (Ministry of Regional Development, 2011, cited in Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018). According to the Ministry of Employment, in 2012 the lowest poverty and unemployment rates (10.3% and 10.7% respectively) were in the northeast, which includes Greater Tunis. The region has the highest level of public investment (48%), and the highest concentration of companies per inhabitants (89 enterprises per 1,000 inhabitants) (Szakal, 2016).

As a result, many smaller inland cities have largely been left behind, with higher unemployment rates than those of coastal cities (Cities Alliance, n.d.). For instance, in 2012, the centre-west region had the highest poverty rate (32.3%) and the lowest public investment rate (4%) (ibid.). This resulted in large disparities between regions in terms of infrastructure, access to services, investment and job opportunities, which have been exacerbated by government interventions in favour of export-oriented companies located in the coastal governorates (Viviana Zuccotti et al., 2018). Similarly, in the agricultural sector, policy measures have subsidised crops and products produced in the coastal areas and for which Tunisia is not competitive, such as cereals, beef and milk, and have neglected products from the interior regions (World Bank, 2014). These regional disparities are reflected in the country's socioeconomic indicators: in 2012, average poverty rates were four times higher in the interior of the country, compared to the coastal areas (INS and World Bank, 2012, cited in World Bank, 2014).

In addition to regional disparities, there is a significant economic and social gap between rural and urban areas. While urban areas enjoy better access to the advantages of economic exchange, rural areas are more isolated and experience higher levels of unemployment (Viviana Zuccotti et al., 2018). While the total population living below the poverty line decreased from 32% to 16% between 2000 and 2010, the improvement in living conditions has not benefited rural areas as much as urban and coastal areas. As a result, extreme poverty is more likely to be found in rural areas (Amara and Jemmali, 2017, cited in Viviana Zuccotti et al., 2018).

The new Constitution of 2014 acknowledged the development disparities between regions and the necessity to adopt policies targeted towards the less prosperous areas. However, the investments selected during the preparation of the 2016–2020 Development Plan remained favourable to the coastal areas, which are more densely populated and where productivity tends to be higher (Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018).

Trends

MIGNEX
Background
Paper

Although a rural exodus led to intensive waves of migration during the 1960s and 1970s, this has since slowed down considerably (INS, 2017, cited in Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018). The urban population increased in size from 66.7% of the total population in 2010 to 70% in 2020 (Worldometers, n.d.). The data from the 2014 national census showed that Greater Tunis was the most popular destination, with a migratory balance of +34,300, the highest in the country (2014 census, cited in Szakal, 2016). The north-east and centre-east regions also show a positive migratory balance, unlike the regions located on the eastern side of the country, where the number of people leaving the region is greater than the number of people moving there. In particular, the centre-west region (Kairouan, Kasserine and Sidi Bouzid) is the least attractive, with a migratory balance of -39,500 (2014 census, cited in Szakal, 2016). As a result, the hinterland regions and those of the western periphery have seen stagnating population growth since the 2004 census (Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018).

These internal migration waves have important implications for both sending and receiving regions. First of all, out-migration from eastern and inner regions means that already economically deprived areas see their human capital diminish, which in turn affects their potential for development. The concentration of the population in specific locations also leads to competition over resources in these areas, such as water (ibid.). In the coming years, internal migration to coastal regions might amplify as a result of climate change, which will have a greater affect in the less popular and populous regions. These areas are also more dependent on agriculture, as their economies are poorly diversified. Schwoob and Elloumi (2018) stress that agriculture accounts for 40% of employment in the governorate of Sidi Bouzid, against 16% at the national level. The low level of diversification of economies in the hinterland and subsequent pressure on natural resources make them particularly vulnerable to climate change.

Impacts on internal migration

Internal migration is strongly determined by living conditions, especially access to employment and basic services. A World Bank study (2014a: 289) finds that ‘internal migration flows indicate that people are moving from high-poverty to low-poverty regions in search of opportunity’. The key reasons for internal migration are rural under-development as well as regional disparities in living standards and economic opportunities between rural and urban areas and between ‘leading’ (coastal areas) and ‘lagging’ regions (non-coastal areas). Evidence shows that lack of transport in the western and central regions is one of the main constraints preventing access to employment (Magouri et al., 2018).

Development policies that mainly focus on coastal areas (Requier-Desjardins et al., 2018) exacerbate regional disparities and have shaped internal migration dynamics (INS, 2017, cited in Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018). As discussed in the previous sub-section, the largest out-migration flows originate from lower-income and deprived regions in the inland part of the country. People migrate to economically advantaged areas, particularly

urban areas in the littoral part of the country, in search of better job opportunities and improved living conditions.

Impacts on development

Households with international migrants are much more likely to receive remittances than households having only internal migrants. Evidence suggests that remittances are used for consumption, education, health and savings, rather than investments (Viviana Zuccotti et al., 2018). While incomes from remittances are not often invested in productive activities, 23.4% of internal migrants in Tunisia have an economic activity in their place of origin, most of them being connected with agricultural production (87.7%) and livestock activities (15.2%) (ibid.).

Development policies have deprived rural areas of their productive forces and financial resources, as a consequence of the out-migration of people who are generally better educated (Schwoob and Elloumi, 2018). Meanwhile, the socioeconomic resources (such as social capital or investment capacity) of inland regions are being transferred to coastal areas. Furthermore, their weakly diversified and mostly agricultural economies are facing overexploitation and the degradation of resources in many cases (ibid.). At the same time, in eastern urban areas, resources are being put under pressure due to rapid population growth even though the economy is being diversified (ibid.).

Key incoherence across policies

Despite the huge economic and social divide between coastal and inner regions of Tunisia – with the former receiving internal migrants who are looking for job opportunities – government policies are still in favour of coastal governorates (Viviana Zuccotti et al., 2018). The 2016–2020 National Development Plan (Republic of Tunisia, 2016) included a set of reform strategies meant to improve the socioeconomic conditions, reduce poverty and address the issue of growing regional inequalities (Dridi, 2021). The plan set an objective of 4% GDP growth, a 30% gap reduction in regional development indicators and the creation of 400,000 jobs by the end of 2020 to tackle unemployment and poverty. However, these targets have not been achieved and the economic disparities between regions have not been addressed (ibid.).

The adoption of the 2014 Constitution offered an opportunity to give impetus to the development of the less prosperous regions. In addition to the constitutional recognition of the need to implement policies of positive discrimination with regard to disadvantaged regions, expert interviews highlighted that territorial inequalities could be solved through increased decentralisation. The 2014 Constitution provides for the decentralisation and reorganisation of the administration. However, while this has allowed the election of local authorities capable of, in principle, conducting their own policy (devolution), they have not received the human, technical and financial resources or decision-making power to effectively assume these new responsibilities (International Crisis Group, 2019). An interview with one expert further highlighted the gaps in municipal capacity to govern

locally and the need for stronger leadership when it comes to implementing development policies at local levels.

Interaction with development policies

Since the mid-1980s, Tunisia has carried out a structural adjustment programme aimed at privatisation and the opening up of the economy. Tunisia's diversified economy experienced rapid growth averaging 5% per year before the 2011 revolution and achieved remarkable success in poverty alleviation. However, these achievements have been accompanied by unequal growth in the economic performance and employment opportunities between coastal and interior regions. Given these regional disparities and the failure of both constitutional provisions and the objectives of development plans to address the issue, internal migration has become a coping strategy for citizens living in disadvantaged regions to access employment opportunities and better living conditions.

Transit migration and externalisation of EU migration policies

Tunisia's policies and programmes regarding transit migration are shaped by the efforts and initiatives of the EU and its Member States to stop irregular migrants reaching EU territory. Migration controls have been externalised and outsourced to countries outside the EU since the late 1990s (Badalič, 2019). Tunisia is one of the major countries of transit for irregular migrants, including asylum seekers, travelling from Africa on their way to Europe. The EU has been putting pressure on Tunisia to collaborate on migration management and border controls as well as on the readmission of Tunisian nationals and TCNs. Therefore, the sub-sections on transit migration and the externalisation of EU migration policies are grouped and discussed together here.

Main policies

There are two key policy aspects that drive the discussion regarding transit migration and the externalisation of EU migration policies in Tunisia:

- **The criminalisation of irregular migration through Organic Law 1968-7, 1975-40 and 2004-6:** Norms regulating the entry, stay and exit of foreign nationals are specified in Organic Law 1968-7, and Organic Law 1975-40 concerns passports and travel documents for foreigners. Article 23 of Organic Law 68-7 provides for the fining and imprisonment for up to a year of any non-citizen who enters or exits Tunisia without proper documentation, or who overstays their temporary visa or residence permit. Organic Law 2004-6, discussed in the previous section, is even more restrictive and security-driven, tightening existing sanctions for the irregular entry, stay and exit of migrants. This law criminalises not only human smuggling but also any form of assistance provided to irregular migrants. As Cassarino (2014: 105) notes, the criminalisation of irregular migration has been used in Tunisia as a way to reinforce control over society and 'to legally conceal the root causes of social

discontent in depressed areas'. However, the interpretation of many of the provisions of Organic Law 2004-6 has been left to judges, which explains why it has been applied inconsistently (Meddeb, 2012).

- **Policy interventions and attempts by the EU to outsource migration management operations to Tunisia**, as part of the externalisation of migration controls to countries outside of the EU: the EU's externalisation of its migration controls to Tunisia relies on the link between effective migration management and the allocation of financial assistance provided by the EU to Tunisia (Badalič, 2019). This strategy increases the bargaining power of the EU and EU Member States in negotiations with Tunisia, although it does not consider the fact that remittances represent a significant source of revenue for Tunisia compared to EU assistance. Through agreements signed with Tunisia, the EU and EU Member States seek to outsource to Tunisia various migration management operations. These include preventing irregular migration from Tunisia to the EU by halting 'boat people' trying to reach Italian coasts from Tunisian territory (Frontex, 2013); collecting and sharing intelligence on migration flows from Tunisia to EU territory in collaboration with Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency); enacting legislation to criminalise activities (e.g., smuggling of migrants and human trafficking) related to irregular migration so as to curb the assistance provided to irregular migrants crossing through Tunisian territory towards the EU (Cassarino, 2014); as well as accepting the return of irregular migrants (both Tunisian nationals and the TCNs who reached the EU transiting through Tunisia) in the EU (Badalič, 2019).

EU Member States also use visa facilitation programmes for Tunisian citizens seeking work in the EU as an incentive to convince Tunisian authorities to adopt EU-friendly migration measures, in particular the readmission of irregular migrants who have reached the EU from/through Tunisia (ibid.). Even though Tunisia agreed, in principle, to the return of its own citizens residing irregularly in Europe, these agreements have not been fully implemented (Abderrahim, 2019), partly because of the hesitations of the Tunisian government to collaborate in this area (Carrera et al., 2016). Therefore, implementation of existing bilateral agreements remains rather sketchy and marked by delays (Abderrahim, 2019).

Additionally, under economic and political pressure from the EU, Tunisia reluctantly signed the MP with the EU in early 2014 (Seeberg, 2014), involving a provision to negotiate the readmission of individuals present irregularly in the EU (Badalič, 2019). However, talks with Tunisian authorities have remained fruitless so far due to political and practical challenges such as differences in perceptions and priorities (Abderrahim, 2019). Although Tunisia usually expresses its willingness to re-admit its own nationals, there are disagreements with the EU on some practical details of this process. As for the readmission of TCNs, Tunisia has strongly refused to collaborate on their return as this contradicts its domestic and foreign policy interests (ibid.), such as Tunisia's willingness to strengthen its relations with sub-Saharan African countries and attract more students in Tunisian universities.

Besides, Tunisia prefers the conclusion of separate bilateral agreements with EU Member States rather than conceding to an EU-wide readmission agreement, as the former provides Tunisia with more bargaining power (Limam and Del Sarto, 2015). Since the 1990s, Tunisia has signed a series of bilateral readmission agreements with individual EU Member States (such as Italy, France and Germany, as well as with Switzerland (Mazzoleni, 2016; Pouessel, 2017; Badalič, 2019)) covering forced return of irregular migrants from EU countries. The content of these agreements is not often made public. However, discussions with one expert highlighted the following elements when it comes to Tunisia's bilateral relationships with regard to migration management:

1. Pressure is exercised by EU actors, but within limits: the Tunisian government is very careful about what it does and does not accept.
2. Tunisia is more likely to be active on border management of the Libya–Tunisia border, due to security reasons. This interest has included the provision of technical support and training materials in exchange for more robust management of Tunisia's border with Libya.
3. Tunisian government actors change often, making effective and long-term cooperation on migration management difficult. In addition, experts highlighted that ministerial actors have been disappointed in EU migration management proposals, in particular when it comes to the return of Tunisian nationals and the (lack of) benefits to Tunisia thereof.

The EU also funds initiatives to improve Tunisia's migration management operations through integrated border management programmes (Badalič, 2019). This includes funding for equipment, infrastructure (i.e., migration detention centres) and capacity-building support in the area of border control (ibid.). One example is the EU–IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, funded through the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF for Africa). Tunisia benefits from bilateral and regional funding under the North Africa window of the EUTF Africa, currently amounting to €69.7 million (EC, n.d.; EUTF, 2019). Another example is the Strengthening the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community project, through which the EU granted €4 million to African countries to secure its borders. The project aims to achieve more effective border management by improving the operational capabilities of partner countries and promoting information exchange.

Trends

Since independence, Tunisia has always been a country of origin and transit for African migrants seeking better economic opportunities and/or escaping political instability. However, after the 2011 revolution and the following Arab Spring, Tunisia rapidly became an immigration country, particularly for Libyans, and a transit country for migrants coming mainly from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa heading to Europe through irregular migration routes via the Tunisian coasts (IOM, n.d.; European Training Foundation, 2020). Furthermore, the upsurge in unemployment and limited legal means of labour emigration has also pushed Tunisian nationals to cross Tunisian borders irregularly to reach Europe. Therefore, although policies aimed at stopping irregular migrants from reaching European borders have multiplied, they became more restrictive at the turn of the 21st century and

to an even greater extent in the post-2011 period, with several laws and policies adopted by the Tunisian government to criminalise irregular migration with the encouragement of the EU. In practice, however, despite the discourse held by the Tunisian authorities regarding their desire to curb irregular immigration, inconsistencies observed in implementation bring into question the commitment of the authorities to address irregular migration (Meddeb, 2012).

In both pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Tunisia, irregular migrants were kept in secret detention centres and had no chance to access legal aid or to make an asylum claim (Badalič, 2019). Together with the continuation of pre-2011 detention and expulsion practices, it has also remained very difficult for irregular migrants to regularise their stay. Penalties for irregular stay have even doubled since 2013 from 10 to 20 dinar per week and their implementation is reinforced (Natter, 2019).

Furthermore, throughout the last decades, local authorities denied many refugees with protection status the right to work and prevented them from accessing the formal labour market (Badalič, 2019). Before the 2011 revolution and based entirely on luck, only 40% of protected refugees were awarded residency permits (Planes-Boissac et al., 2012). There were even a few cases of deportations of refugees with residency permits, let alone irregular/undocumented immigrants (Badalič, 2019). After the revolution, the Tunisian authorities have continued to refuse to grant residency cards to refugees and treat them as ‘semi-illegals’ who could be deported (Tringham, 2016).

Following the revolution in 2011 and the Arab Spring, the EU also reinforced its attempts to externalise migration controls to third countries (Dini and Giusa, 2020). EU Member States pushed for stronger cooperation on the return of irregular Tunisian nationals as well as TCNs in the EU. In particular, there has been a considerable increase in cooperation on readmission between Italy and Tunisia since 2011. On 17 August 2020, an agreement was concluded between the Italian and Tunisian governments, the precise details of which are unclear as the agreement was not published. The deal reportedly envisages Italian financial support of €11 million to bolster border control systems and train security forces with the goals of preventing the departure of migrants and intercepting vessels in Tunisian territorial waters (Global Detention Project, n.d.).

Impacts on immigration, emigration, return migration and transit migration

One expert with significant knowledge of the migration context in Tunisia shared that the narrative of Tunisia as only a transit country is no longer relevant, and that Tunisia is de facto a destination and area of origin, as well as a transit country these days. However, they highlighted that the government’s rhetoric is strongly in denial of Tunisia as a destination country, focusing instead on the narrative of transit migration. This narrative has partly shifted as onward migration to Europe has become more challenging, leading migrants to remain in Tunisia.

Tunisia's security-oriented migration laws and policies have therefore reflected this trend, criminalising irregular migration, imposing fines for overstaying, limiting migrants' access to the formal labour market, and making it difficult for migrants to receive residence permits. But this does not decrease irregular or transit migration. Instead, by depriving migrants of the opportunities to have sustainable lives in Tunisia, the laws and policies force migrants into irregularity.

While such policies have failed in curbing migration flows, they have led to situations of extreme precariousness and the exclusion of migrants, who are unable to regularise their situation and are forced to live in secrecy in deplorable conditions. For instance, the majority of Libyans with irregular status in Tunisia are those who have entered the country legally but have overstayed their visa and cannot obtain a residence permit (Natter, 2019). In a similar vein, the research on the experiences of irregular transit migrants in Tunisia points at the difficulties they face in terms of access to documentation, decent employment opportunities and social cohesion. Those migrants report that they do not see themselves building a future in the country in the longer term as they lack legal and practical opportunities to fully participate in society (REACH and Mercy Corps, 2018b). Furthermore, sub-Saharan Africans unable to pay their overstay penalties – a condition to legally exit the country – either continue to stay in the country or irregularly cross Tunisian borders to reach European countries, even though Tunisia was their destination of choice in the beginning (ibid.).

Impacts on development

While the dominant discourse suggests that efforts to contain irregular migration yield development by granting access to financial assistance, desktop research and expert interviews do not yield any information regarding any real or expected impact of transit migration and the externalisation of EU migration policies on development.

Key incoherence across policies

Tunisia's post-revolutionary Constitution adopted in January 2014 (Constitution of the Tunisian Republic) has a provision that guarantees the right for 'every citizen' to leave the country (Article 24) and to return (Article 25). However, current legal provisions constrain this right and criminalise the 'irregular exit' and subsequent return of Tunisian nationals. For instance, the Organic Law 1975–40 is still in effect even though it contradicts the new Constitution (Badalič, 2019).

Tunisian political authorities are reluctant to accept the role of the 'border guard' proposed by the EU (Dini and Giusa, 2020) but they did sign the MP because the EU threatened to cut financial support (Limam and Del Sarto, 2015). In this regard, these readmission agreements which require Tunisia to solidify its borders to block irregular migrants and cooperate on the readmission of irregular Tunisian migrants in EU countries lead to incoherent policies. They force the Tunisian government to implement migration-related policies against its will and interests regarding migration and development in the long run. This is reflected by the fact that the

Tunisian authorities adopt policies under pressure from the EU but do not implement them in practice, as discussed above.

In addition, Although the Tunisian state has sought to open channels for legal labour migration to limit irregular migration flows (Pouessel, 2017), the economic situation in the country and the limited legal migration channels seem to cast a shadow on the attempts to regularise migratory flows. The parallel securitisation of migration through strengthened border controls did not curb irregular migration but forced people on dangerous sea routes in search of safe havens.

Interaction with development policies

The EU also funds some other initiatives in Tunisia, which have the potential to affect migration dynamics. For instance, European financial institutions have granted loans worth €2.6 billion to support infrastructure, private sector development and water sanitation projects in Tunisia (EC, 2016). These programmes can contribute to improved livelihoods and employment opportunities which are likely to affect rural–urban and international migration.

The EU's financial assistance for the political, economic and social development of Tunisia became particularly important for the country after the fall of the Ben Ali regime in 2011 followed by prolonged political instability and worsening economic conditions (Badalič, 2019). In the period between 2011 and 2016, EU funding to Tunisia amounted to approximately €2 billion in total, which was used to support the democratic transition and achieve fiscal stability (EC, 2016).

Main development policies

The selected policies

Since the Jasmin revolution in 2011, the government of Tunisia has engaged in a series of structural reforms designed to support the democratisation of the country and create the conditions for sustained growth. In 2014, Tunisia held its first free elections and adopted a new Constitution, which led to the creation of new democratic institutions. This was followed by the adoption of the country's five-year Development Plan 2016–2020 (Republic of Tunisia, 2016)), which outlined the strategy and vision of development centred around five pillars: good governance, management reform and anti-corruption; transition from a low-cost economy to a global economic hub; human development and social inclusion; mitigation of regional disparities; and development of a green economy (World Bank, 2017). In a context of stagnant growth and high unemployment, one of the core aspects of the development plan was the development of the private sector, improvement of the attractiveness of the economy and support for investment (World Bank, 2017; 2021).

However, not only did the achievements not meet the objectives set in the Development Plan, but the social and economic situation of the country has significantly deteriorated since 2011 (Dridi, 2021). The capacity of the

government has been affected by increased public debt and heavy dependence on donors, while the private sector suffers from poor governance and cumbersome bureaucratic processes, insufficient investment and access to finance, and a large informal sector characterised by low productivity (World Bank, 2021). The lack of economic opportunities reinforces the frustration of a population facing high inflation and rising youth unemployment, corruption and deteriorating public services (UNDP, 2021). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously impacted the economy, which is highly dependent on tourism and services, and it has deepened already wide inequalities (Dridi, 2021).

All of the above is aggravated by political instability in the country, which greatly affects the implementation of the reforms and of the development policies. According to a key informant, while the government presented a draft development plan for the period 2022–2025 to partners in April 2021, a clear strategy on how to tackle the serious social and economic challenges has not been adopted to date, and major reforms, such as the national employment strategy, are yet to be adopted.

Interactions with migration-related policies

After the revolution in 2011, Tunisia started working on a national strategy on migration, with the objective to reinforce the contribution of migration to the country's development at the local, regional and national levels (GRDR, 2017). After a first version was drafted in 2012, the draft strategy was revised for the first time in 2015 to align it with the country's development objectives. The document was revised a second time in 2017 following a consultation with international and Tunisian partners (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2017), yet it has never been formally adopted.

In addition, following the implementation of decentralisation provided for in the 2014 Constitution, international partners have seen an opportunity to link migration and local development. For example, the ProGrès Migration programme, funded by the EUTF, includes a component on the integration of migration issues at the local level. Implemented in four governorates, the project aims to facilitate dialogue between all relevant stakeholders at the local level in order to integrate migration into territorial development planning as well as to support and reinforce the employability of young people by building their capacity for initiative, and technical and financial support (AFD, 2018). In practice, however, municipal actors have limited capacity and leeway, and they have other priorities to address (key informant interview, 2021). The programme is also affected by confusion resulting from the absence of a formal national migration strategy.

IOM has also emphasised the link between migration and development through its programmes linking migration and local development in Tunisia. One initiative is the Migration and Development Integrated Programme (IMAD), implemented between 2008 and 2010, which aimed to reduce emigration by supporting local development. The programme helped young people set up small and medium-sized businesses through various activities (IOM, 2010). Other examples include the Skills Mobility Partnership, implemented with the support of the government of Switzerland, which allows young Tunisians to access short-term traineeships with Swiss

companies. The programme also aims to engage the diaspora and the private sector and includes capacity development to help local and national governments coordinate on policies involving migration considerations (Migration 4 Development, 2018).

As discussed in previous sections, development and migration also interact because of donor strategies. This is reflected in the EU's effort to link development aid to migration management, especially in a context where Tunisia's dependence on donors has increased (Badalič, 2019).

Examples of impact on migration

The emphasis of successive development policies on the coastal areas of Tunisia and the subsequent marginalisation of the interior of the country seems to have had an impact on migration flows. Although the interior of the country possesses a significant proportion of the country's resources, 85% of GDP is concentrated in the three largest cities of Tunis, Sfax and Sousse (World Bank, 2014). This is to a large extent the result of years of economic policies which have exacerbated regional disparities (*ibid.*): indeed, under Ben Ali, coastal regions received about two-thirds of public investment (Meddeb, 2020).

Uneven development has led to greater inequality, reflected in indicators such as poverty and unemployment rates, which are higher in Tunisia's central and southern regions (Sadiki, 2019). In 2015, the north-west, central-west and south-west regions – which account for 30% of the population – accommodated 70% of the extreme poor and 55% of all the poor (Medinilla Aldana and El Fassi, 2016). In addition to the lack of employment opportunities, development disparities are also evident when it comes to access to basic services, which leads to differentiated health outcomes between northern coastal regions and the central-west and southern regions (Sadiki, 2019).

The social and economic challenges faced by the populations residing in these deprived regions have driven internal and international migration. Over the decade that preceded the revolution, Tunisians from the central region moved mainly to coastal areas. Faced with intense competition for jobs and the absence of legal ways to migrate, however, youths turned to irregular migration, which intensified from 2008 onwards (UNDP, 2016). Evidence shows that 67% of the Tunisians arrested by Libyan and Italian authorities in 2016 were from the southern and central regions (*ibid.*).

Any additional information related to COVID-19

Like many other countries, Tunisia has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the Tunisian economy shrank by approximately 8.8% due to the pandemic (Larson, 2021). Sectors such as tourism have been greatly impacted and unemployment figures keep rising (Mouley and Elbeshbishi, 2021).

The pandemic has also had a specific impact on the displaced. An assessment conducted by the Mixed Migration Centre shows that a majority of refugees and migrants in Tunisia lost income as a result of the restrictions implemented in the context of COVID-19. In particular, female migrants and refugees were hit the hardest, reporting challenges in affording basic services and goods, which resulted in great worry and stress. The study also reveals that the pandemic has had a negative impact on gender-based violence as the women surveyed noted an increased risk of domestic violence, labour exploitation and sexual exploitation (MMC, 2021).

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