



Transit migration policies in the European neighbourhood and their impact on nationals

As Tunisia becomes a major border point for irregular migration it faces growing pressure to implement EU transit migration policies. Yet, these policies seem to have little effect on migration patterns and inadvertently impact the mobility of Tunisian nationals.

The Tunisian context exemplifies some of the major impacts of transit migration policies on nationals of transit countries across the European neighbourhood.

Amid high unemployment and political instability, migration aspirations are high among Tunisian nationals.

There is a rising number of Tunisian nationals travelling on irregular migration routes. Many are prevented from doing so regularly by EU transit migration measures.

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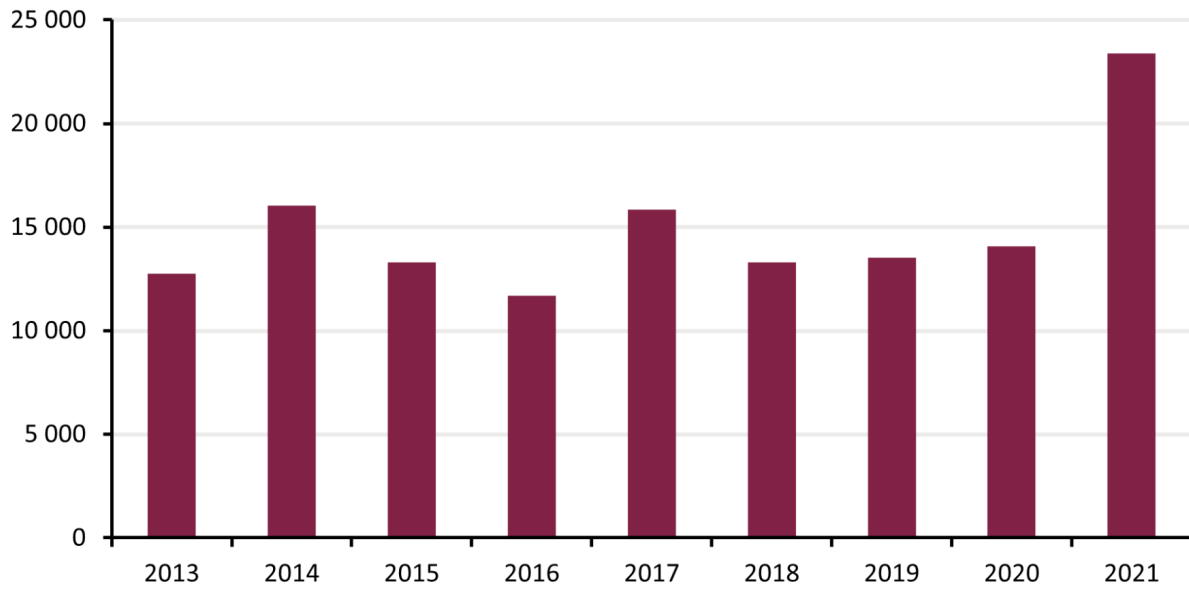


Figure 1. Annual number of undocumented Tunisians present in EU-27

Source: Eurostat Statistics

There has been an increase in closures at EU external borders, incentives and conditionalities that require neighbouring countries to play an active part in ‘combating’ irregular migratory flows of third-country nationals.

This reflects the logic of externalised migration control: that transit migration can be prevented or managed through good cooperation with third countries.

Nationals, in principle, are not directly targeted by the measures of transit migration management, but they are inadvertently affected by them.

MIGNEX research reveals the experiences and perceptions of transit migration management among residents of the countries neighbouring the EU.

This policy brief draws on MIGNEX research in Enfidha and Redeyef in Tunisia and a review of migration-relevant policies at the national level.

The term ‘transit migration’ is unhelpful

‘Transit migration’ is criticised as a term due to its analytical shortcomings, Eurocentric origins and political implications for migrants and countries associated with transit migration.

Most countries labelled as ‘countries of transit’ can simultaneously exhibit emigration,

transit, and immigration. Hence, those affected by transit migration management policies may include various categories of migrants.

This includes migrants (temporarily) residing in transit countries, as well as nationals who are leaving the country through irregular means.

Tunisian nationals planning to migrate experience the detrimental impacts of transit migration management

EU attention has focused on the increasing but still small number of non-Tunisian migrants who have started to enter Europe through Tunisia over the past decade.

At the same time, Tunisia has historically been a country of emigration, with increasingly growing numbers migrating through irregular pathways in recent decades (see Figure 1).

MIGNEX research in Redeyef and Enfidha, reveals that transit migration has had widespread direct and indirect consequences for Tunisian nationals.

As shown in Figure 2, 19% of respondents in Enfidha and 48% in Redeyef knew someone who had been deported from abroad and forced to return.

Respondents in both areas were familiar with the risk of injury and death (see Figure 2).

Exposure to transit migration policies does not deter people from undertaking irregular migration journeys

Focus group discussions highlighted that irregular migration has become more difficult and expensive. Hence, unrealised intentions to migrate were prominent in both Enfidha and Redeyef. MIGNEX data reveal that nearly one-third of respondents had prepared to migrate in the past five years but were not able to proceed with their journey.

Migration aspirations are high. Around two-thirds of respondents in Enfidha and over half of respondents in Redeyef aspire to move to another country.

These aspirations are linked to socioeconomic and development factors: families encourage their children to migrate because of stagnating or declining economic conditions compared to the previous decade.

Our findings suggest that campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of irregular journeys would not curb aspirations and intentions to migrate from Tunisia. Knowledge and experiences of the detrimental effects of transit migration policies are already high.

Policy dialogue is needed on the impact of transit migration management on nationals and how their safe, regular migration can be facilitated

While migrants taking long, arduous journeys been on the agenda of policymakers and international organisations, there is a need to recognise and shape policy design in light of their impacts on the (im)mobility of nationals:

- While assessing the effectiveness of externalisation policies, experts should consider the frustration such policies create among nationals who aspire to but are unable to migrate, and who instead resort to more dangerous forms of irregular migration.
- Policymakers at the EU level should align transit migration management efforts with large-scale investment to improve the conditions for both nationals and immigrants in so-called transit countries. This is true in Tunisia as well as in other countries facing similar pressures of externalisation and the out-migration of their own nationals.
- The creation of employment opportunities in-country should go hand in hand with the opening of channels for regular migration for both men and women.

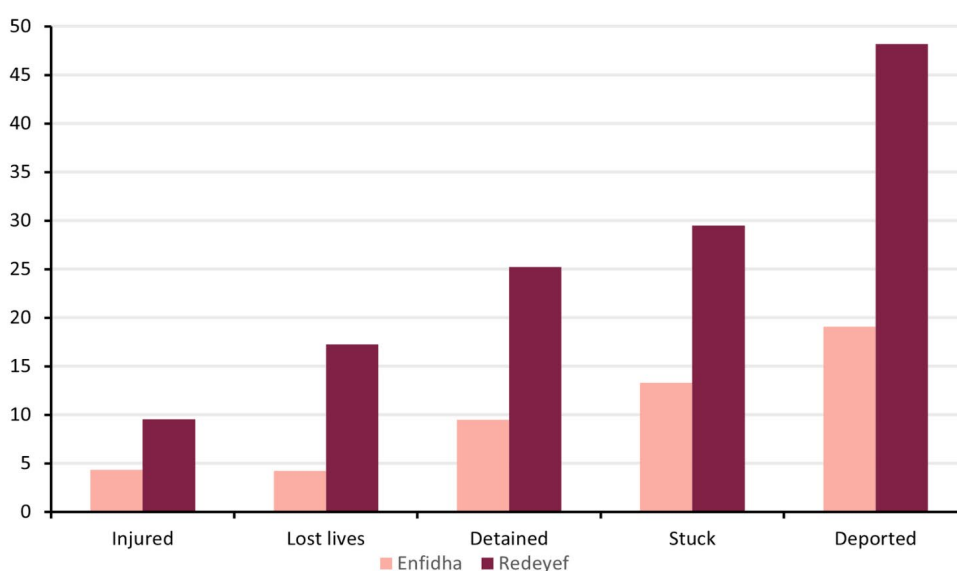


Figure 2. Share of respondents who are aware of negative migration experiences

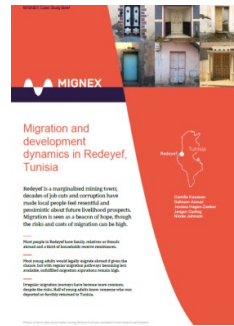
Source: MIGNEX Survey Data.¹

- Negotiators in EU member states and the Government of Tunisia can draw on the existing Mobility Partnership agreement² along with other ongoing cooperation tools as a basis to negotiate channels for the safe and orderly migration of Tunisians.
- Given the gendered characteristics of irregular migration experiences in Tunisia, investments to create employment opportunities may target young unemployed men, especially in certain areas of the country facing economic hardship.

Further reading



Kasavan, C. Azouzi, S. Hagen-Zanker, J. and Murray, H. (2022) Migration and development dynamics in Enfidha, Tunisia. MIGNEX Case Study Brief. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo
<https://www.mignex.org/tun1>



Kasavan, C. Azouzi, S. Hagen-Zanker, J. Carling, J. and Johnson, N. (2022) Migration dynamics and development dynamics in Redeyef, Tunisia. MIGNEX Case Study Brief. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.
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Üstübici, A. İçduygu, A. Ergün, K. Ekhtiari, M. Cangönül, M. Nicolle, H. Thenot, E. Adhanom, T. Vlamis, C. Aslam, S. and Fallon, A. (2023) Comparative experiences of transit migration management. MIGNEX Background Paper. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.
www.mignex.org/d081

Notes

¹ Bars indicate those who answered YES to the questions “have you or someone you know in the past five years been injured / lost lives/ detained/ was stuck / deported” while moving to another country.

² Republic of Tunisia and EU (2014) Déclaration conjointe pour le Partenariat de Mobilité entre la Tunisie, l'Union Européenne et ses Etats membres participants. Brussels: EU (https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2016-12/declaration_conjointe_tunisia_eu_mobility_fr.pdf)

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

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