

Equal Partnerships

African Intermediary Cities as Actors and Partners in Urban Migration Governance



Partnerships in
Sfax, Tunisia
2023

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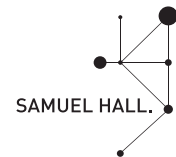
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Equal Partnerships

Africa is witnessing an ongoing transformation from rural to increasingly plural urban societies. While this transformation has been well-documented, the focus of scholarship and practice has been predominantly on human mobility towards and into major urban areas and capital cities. In contrast, intermediary cities, the in-between the rural and the metropolitan, have been largely absent in academic and policy debates. The Equal Partnerships project explores the opportunities and challenges of collaborative, urban migration governance in African intermediary cities. The project was jointly developed and is implemented by the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg, the city network United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLG Africa), the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), and the social enterprise Samuel Hall. Supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the project works in cooperation with six intermediary cities in East, North, and West Africa. Through participatory research, workshops, and networking formats, the project brings together local, national, and international actors to develop practical impulses and policy recommendations to co-shape multi-stakeholder partnerships for urban migration governance in African intermediary cities.



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List of acronyms

ADM	Agence de Développement Municipal
AESAT	Association des Étudiants et Stagiaires Africains de Tunisie
ANC	Assemblée Nationale Constituante
ARP	Assemblée des Représentants du Peuple (Parlement)
ATL MS	Association Tunisienne de Lutte contre les Maladies Sexuellement Transmissibles et le Sida
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CCL	Code des Collectivités Locales
CCTE	Conseil Consultatif des Tunisiens à l'Étranger
CORAC	Collectif de réflexion et d'action citoyenne
CSO	Civil Society Organization / Organizations de la Société Civile
CARE	Coalition for American Relief Everywhere
EU	European Union
EUTF	EU Trust Fund
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
INLTP	Instance Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes
KII	Key Informant Interview
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MDM	Médecins du Monde
OIM	Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
ONFP	Office National de la Famille et de la Population / Ministère de la Santé
ONM	Observatoire National de la Migration
OTE	Office des Tunisiens à l'Étranger
SDGS	Stratégie de Développement du Grand Sfax
SEMTE	Secrétariat d'Etat à la Migration et aux Tunisiens à l'Étranger
SYNAGRI	Syndicat des Agriculteurs de Tunisie
TAT	Terre d'Asile Tunisie

TRE	Tunisiens Résidents à l'Étranger
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UGTT	Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UTICA	Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat
WB	World Bank / Banque Mondiale
WFP	World Food Program

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Glossary

Migration

The Equal Partnerships project works with a broad definition of migration, understanding a migrant as any person “who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.”¹ This broad definition proved helpful for working in partnership with African intermediary cities that experience a wide range of migration movements at times classified under umbrella terms such as “mixed migration”² or “transnational mobility.”³

Intermediary Cities

Building on research conducted by the Cities Alliance,⁴ the Equal Partnerships project moves beyond a definition of secondary/intermediary cities based predominantly on city size often considered to range between 50,000 and 1 million inhabitants.⁵ Instead, we combine demographic aspects with a city’s connectivity and status. We, therefore, use the terms “secondary” and “intermediary” interchangeably, as they refer to different city aspects: The cities on which we focus our research are intermediary in the sense that they link capital cities with smaller towns and rural areas through flows of goods, ideas, funds, and people. At the same time, these cities are secondary regarding economic status, municipal capacities and resources, as national development strategies for urban planning have for a long time prioritized capital cities.

Multi-stakeholder Partnerships

Multi-stakeholder partnerships can be defined as “voluntary initiatives involving governments, intergovernmental bodies, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders in pursuit of a common goal or commitment.”⁶ Equal Partnerships research shows that approaches striving towards equal participation of stakeholders need to include a broad range of partners in the initial development stage, remain open for new actors as the cooperation evolves and continuously review roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder within the partnership.

(Urban) Migration Governance

Migration governance entails an “interdependent set of legal norms, policies, institutions, and practices to administer, regulate, and mediate activities and relations within defined socio-political entities, whether states, administrative regions, cities, or corporate bodies.”⁷ Urban migration governance takes an urban setting – such as a town or city – as the defined socio-political entity.

1 IOM. “About Migration” (2023). Available at: <https://www.iom.int/about-migration>.

2 IOM Migration Data Portal 2023. Mixed migration (2023). Available at: <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/mixed-migration#:~:text=Definition.seeking%20better%20lives%20and%20opportunities>.

3 Van Hear, N. Policy Primer: Mixed Migration Policy Challenges (2011). Available at: https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PolicyPrimer-Mixed_Migration.pdf.

4 Cities Alliance. Taking a Closer Look at Secondary Cities (2019). Available at: <https://www.citiesalliance.org/newsroom/news/spotlight/taking-closer-look-secondary-cities>. Cities Alliance. Connecting Systems of Secondary Cities: How Soft and Hard Infrastructure can foster Equitable Economic Growth among Secondary Cities (2019). Available at: https://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Secondary-Cities-Book-Brief_v2.pdf.

5 UCLG n.d. Intermediary cities. Available at: <https://www.uclg.org/en/agenda/intermediary-cities>.

6 Bester, A., and Hermans, L. Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: Implications for Evaluation Practice, Methods and Capacities (2017). Available at: <https://nec.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-07/Multi-Stakeholder%20Partnerships%202017.pdf>.

7 Global Migration Policy Associates (GMPA), “Governance of Migration: a context note for reference in current national and international processes and discussions”, updated in 2017. Available at: <http://globalmigrationpolicy.org/articles/governance/Governance%20of%20migration%20Context%20Note%20rev%20GMPA%20jun2017.pdf>.

Key findings and recommendations

This study on the governance of urban migration in the city of Sfax in 2023 is both timely and necessary, at a time of unprecedented politicization of mobility issues between North Africa and Europe on the one hand, and between Tunisia and sub-Saharan Africa on the other. In the current context, faced with the complexity of intersecting migrations - emigrants, return migrants, economic transit migrants, asylum seekers and refugees - the associations and institutions interviewed for this study in Sfax often agree on the same word: denial.

1. The institutionalization of partnerships at the city level in Sfax has already been informally established and can still be leveraged for increased engagement with urban migration governance issues (hygiene, health, legal information, gender, culture among others). But just as synergies have naturally been established since 2016-2017, **a lack of dialogue persists between the central government, which remains in a position of denial with regard to international migration from sub-Saharan Africa, and the Sfax municipality as well as local mobility stakeholders**. The fact that Sfax is locked into a dual logic of crimmigration, in the image of President Kais Saied's recent comments in February 2023, and migration management aligned with European funding, confirms that dialogue on these issues, which are essential to Sfax's economic and social life, is unlikely to remain open in the short to medium term.
2. The many young Tunisians leaving the country irregularly is now well established as a socio-economic reality, this form of departure now an option openly discussed in Sfax. The intention to emigrate varies significantly according to gender, age, and education variables, but around one in five of the non-migrant population aged 15 and over declare that they intend to emigrate to live, work or study abroad. According to most workshop participants and individual interviewees in Sfax, **the economic slump is the main reason young people choose to emigrate, along with political and societal disaffiliation, underscoring a widespread loss of faith vis-à-vis the Tunisian political community**.
3. **With no real law covering asylum seekers and refugees, the Tunisian government delegates this responsibility to the UNHCR**. In the Sfax region, however, people displaced by conflict (Syrians over the last decade, Somalis, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Central African Republic, Eritreans, Ethiopians more recently) are a reality that the municipality must deal with daily.
4. In southern and coastal Tunisia, the term 'economic migrant' generally refers to young people who have fled poverty and unemployment in their home countries,

mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, with the aim of reaching European shores. **Not all migrants we met in Sfax expressed the desire to continue their journey.** Some have been in Sfax for several months or even years, either by choice or by obligation. Economic attraction is of course a driving force for the men and women who migrate from sub-Saharan countries to the North, in the hope of making their way to Europe. Some will try to proceed all the way, others will stop along the way, which can also contribute to their economic well-being, as well as that of the cities and communities in which they come to reside. **Many stakeholders explain that the construction and agricultural sectors would find it very difficult to survive without the presence of sub-Saharan workers.**

5. While transit migration has always been mixed, evidence gathered from both associations and migrants who have lived in the city for several years suggests **an increased feminization of youth emigration, economic migration and asylum seeking in Sfax.** This trend is also accompanied by increased intersectional risks: modern slavery, exploitation, abuses, gender-based violence.

As evidenced by the visit of the President of the European Commission in June 2023 to Tunis to negotiate one billion euros in aid to deal with the migratory situation in the country, the European Union wields significant influence over Tunisia in terms of local governance and migration management. *What answers can a secondary city like Sfax provide from a perspective that is both politically responsible and respectful of people's dignity?*

The findings inform the following recommendations, aimed at strengthening partnerships and cooperation frameworks for urban migration governance in Sfax.

- **Questioning “migration governance” and “migration management”.** We recommend applying a critical lens to the “migration governance” approach, which focuses on the Euro-Tunisian relationship and neglects municipalities and the local sphere – the only ones in direct contact with the reality of mobility (flows, characteristics, needs, services, protection, rights, etc.). In this regard, promoting the principles of the Global Compact by strengthening the representation of local authorities and key urban and mobility stakeholders in existing networks (e.g., UCLG, Mayors’ Migration Council, Global Alliance for Urban Crises, etc), could benefit the urban ‘migration governance’ agenda for Sfax.
- **Rethinking ‘mixed migration’ and ‘transit migration’.** It is recommended to rethink the idea – extremely politically sensitive for both Tunisia and the EU – that migrants in transit are all temporarily in Sfax and are merely passing through on their way to Europe. For many sub-Saharan migrants, this is not the case, and their experience of mobility is much more complex from a temporal, spatial and intersubjective standpoint. It is thus recommended to encourage the civic potential of transit migrants, who are also often very familiar with the socio-economic reality of the communities in which they live. In Sfax, this could take the form of disaggregated citizenship (specific local voting rights) to increase the societal commitment of a population that will soon represent 10 to 12% of Sfax’s population.
- **Recognizing written rules and unwritten practices.** The variables of race and ethnicity (for sub-Saharan Africans and blacks), language (for non-French and non-Arabic speakers), religion (for non-Muslims) and gender are explanatory factors, which combine to maximize or limit migrants’ access to services and rights. The

examples of access to formal employment and health are the ones most frequently mentioned by the stakeholders. It is recommended to advocate for the adoption and operationalization of human rights approaches to migration governance by all relevant stakeholders in Sfax, with the active support of all key stakeholders.

- **Applying a critical race lens to migration dynamics in Sfax.** The crackdown on sub-Saharan migrants is nothing new and is part of a pattern of authoritarian tightening designed to strengthen the central government's control over society - this is being said, it is nonetheless important to underline the recent shift in political narrative surrounding sub-Saharan migration, which has led to a rise in physical and discursive attacks on migrants. It is recommended to develop inclusive local narratives to counter xenophobic national narratives, by highlighting socio-economic successes and joint cultural projects between Sfaxian stakeholders and transit migrants can help reverse the current trend. It is equally important to enable all migrants, whatever their status or origin, to report cases of discrimination, hate crimes and racist speeches.
- **Using an intersectional lens to understand vulnerability, violence, and agency.** Faced with the feminization of transit migration to Europe (both among sub-Saharan migrants and among young Tunisian candidates for departure), it is important to develop non-stigmatizing and more specifically female access to information on risks, rights, health, and psychosocial assistance. Issues such as sexual violence, decent work, easier access to contraception and support for pregnant and breast-feeding women were all raised.

The conclusion of this study, based on both a participatory and qualitative methodology, is that the situation of tension between the national, regional, and municipal levels is symptomatic of the Tunisian denial identified by Sfax institutional players as well as migrants themselves. There is no doubt that, at a time when:

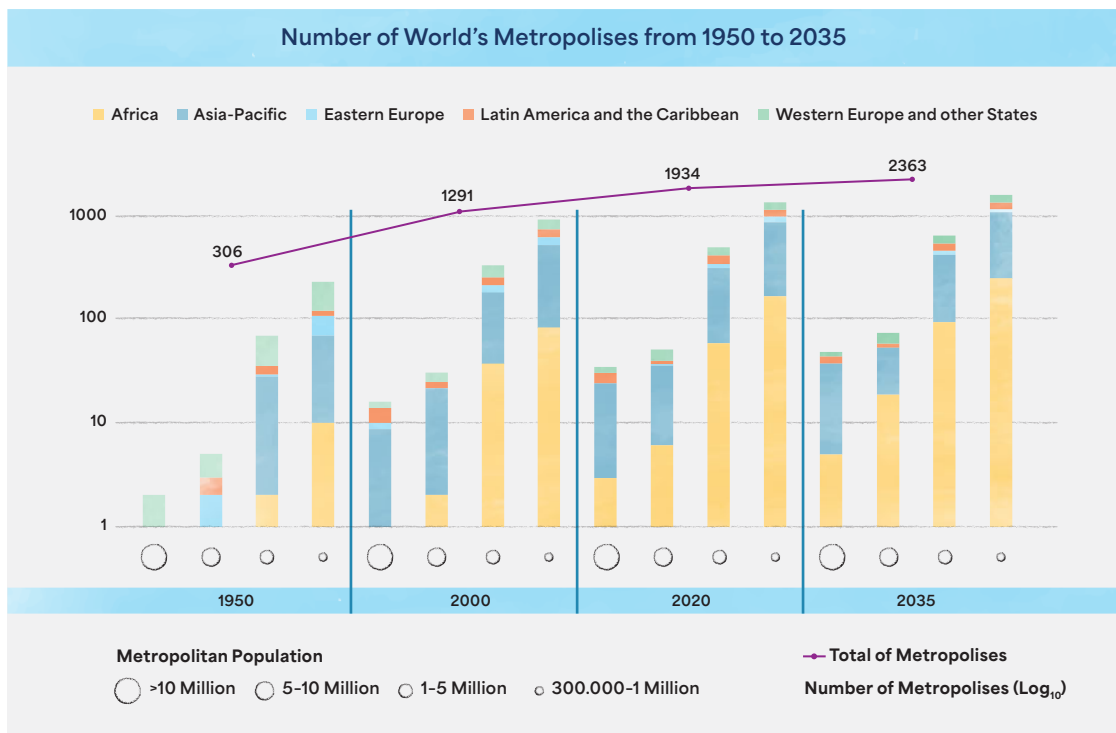
- The security situation and the consequences of climate change in West Africa are leading to a significant increase in migratory flows towards the Tunisian coast and Sfax in particular,
- Economic prospects and social disenchantment are leading many young Tunisians to opt for emigration, particularly from the Sfax coast, overcoming this denial means **starting from local realities, transnational partnerships between urban players, and concrete human experiences of mobility.**

1 Introduction

1.1 Urban migration governance in African intermediary cities

Africa is witnessing an ongoing transformation from rural to increasingly plural urban societies. While this transformation has been well-documented, the focus of scholarship and policymakers has been predominantly on human mobility towards and into major urban areas and capital cities. In contrast, intermediary cities, the in-between the rural and the metropolitan, have been largely absent in academic and policy debates. Addressing this gap becomes increasingly important,⁸ as African cities with 1 million or less inhabitants already account for the highest relative share among African cities – a trend forecast to continue in the future (figure 1).⁹

Figure 1. Intermediary cities dominate African cityscape (Source: UN Habitat 2020)



⁸ Stürner-Siovit, J. and Morthorst Juhl, L. Migration in African intermediary cities: why multi-stakeholder partnerships are key to inclusive action (2023). Available at: <https://oecd-development-matters.org/2023/03/30/migration-in-african-intermediary-cities-why-multi-stakeholder-partnerships-are-key-to-inclusive-action/>. Accessed: 21 May 2023

⁹ UN Habitat. Global State of Metropolis. Population Data Booklet (2020). Available at: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/09/gsm-population-data-booklet-2020_3.pdf. Accessed: 21 May 2023

Both natural population increase, and human mobility contribute to the growth of African intermediary cities. These cities constitute central spaces for mixed movements driven by processes of urbanisation, socioeconomic transformation, and environmental stressors, as well as conflict and persecution. Though not always intended as final destinations, persons on the move may consider intermediary cities more accessible – financially, geographically, and socially – than capital cities.

As intermediary cities, thus, gain in importance as places of origin, transit, destination and return, African local authorities are increasingly confronted with key issues of mixed migration and are further directly impacted by (inter)national policies. Due to their proximity to local communities, local authorities have the potential to shape inclusive approaches for migrants, refugees, and local populations. However, developing local strategies often proves challenging to local authorities, since national or international actors holding official mandates for migration and displacement rarely consider them (equal) partners, and they are often not equipped with sufficient resources and capacities to play an active role. This creates knowledge and cooperation gaps between local, national, and international actors addressing urban migration and displacement on the ground, and in policy dialogues. To address such challenges, some local authorities have started seizing opportunities for engaging in multi-stakeholder partnerships, bringing together local, national, and international actors working on questions of migration in African cities.

In this context, the still recent concept of ‘urban migration governance’ appears to be the obvious way of thinking about both the phenomenon of rapid urbanization in secondary African cities and the often-complex dynamics of migration for policy makers. As Carling points out,¹⁰ in recent years, ‘migration management’, rather than ‘migration control’, is being circulated in policy agendas, suggesting both a technocratic and neoliberal shift in thinking about migration and development.¹¹

One consequence of this shift is the neglect of responsibilities vis-à-vis migration-related issue demonstrated by certain high-level governance entities such as the European Union. Such neglect translates to the externalization of “migration management” tasks towards regions of origin (e.g., Sub Saharan and North Africa) and known points of transit to Europe (such as Sfax in Tunisia, or Saint Louis in Senegal). At the national level, moreover, this political approach tends to result in either (a) the decentralization and devolution of migration governance mandates – often unaccompanied by the necessary allocation of resources to fulfill said mandates at the local level (as is the case in Garissa County, Kenya, or the Department of Saint Louis, in Senegal); or (b) a pervasive denial of (certain) migration issues, and resulting absence of appropriate national policy frameworks (as is the case in Tunisia), resulting in the de facto need for local authorities to address migration issues with limited resources, and within often ambiguous or non-existent political mandates. The challenge, therefore, is to determine how secondary cities – often faced with the brunt of migration-related issues daily – can build strong partnerships to tackle migration issues, and ultimately provide achievable, politically sensible, and practical solutions sensitive to the needs, experiences, and aspirations of migrants.

¹⁰ Carling J. (2019) Key concepts in the migration-development nexus. MIGNEX Handbook, Chapter 2 (v2). Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo (www.mignex.org/d021).

¹¹ Geiger M. and Pécoud A. (2010) *The Politics of International Migration Management*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

1.2. *The Equal Partnerships project*

The Equal Partnerships project explores the opportunities and challenges of collaborative, urban migration governance with African intermediary cities. The project is jointly developed and implemented by the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg, the city network United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLG Africa), the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS), and the social enterprise Samuel Hall. Supported by the Robert Bosch Stiftung, the project works in cooperation with six intermediary cities in East, North and West Africa: Garissa in Kenya, Gulu in Uganda, Kumasi in Ghana, Oujda in Morocco, Saint Louis in Senegal, and Sfax in Tunisia. Through participatory research, workshops and networking formats, the project brings together local, national, and international actors to develop practical recommendations to co-shape multi-stakeholder partnerships in African intermediary cities.

This case study report is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the research methodology with a specific focus on case study selection, data collection and research limitations. Section 3 presents the migration dynamics in Sfax and explores impacts of migration on the ground. Section 4 discusses partnership approaches in Sfax via a stakeholder mapping and zooms in on cooperative actions, challenges, and prospects. Section 5 summarizes key findings and provides policy recommendations to strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships on urban migration governance in Sfax.

Figure 2. *Sub-Saharan migrants near the Medina in Sfax in February 2023 (Credit: Samuel Hall)*



2 *Methodology*

The Equal Partnerships project works with African intermediary cities that are central hubs for diverse forms of human mobility. At the outset, the project held discussions with a broad range of cities in order to identify urban areas where the local administration and/or local government showed an interest in addressing questions of migration. Throughout the project, this approach served to explore opportunities for multi-stakeholder partnerships in contexts where political will to proactively engage on urban migration governance is present at the local level. The selection of the city of Sfax and the methodological choices outlined in this section reflect this ambition.

2.1 *Case study selection*

Sfax was included in this study owing to national and regional relevance for mixed/regional migration, with immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa (Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, etc.), often described as transit migration, even though stays frequently exceed one or two years and many migrants wish to settle in Sfax; deportees from Algeria, often sub-Saharan migrants turned back by the Algerian police; emigration of young Tunisians on the rise since the 2011 Revolution and the lack of socio-economic prospects felt by local youth; last but not least, complex gender dynamics applicable to all the groups mentioned. Social tensions, gender dynamics, economic inequalities, complex legal procedures, xenophobic narratives, multi-stakeholder governance processes, financial constraints, and re-bordering policies from Europe result in unique implications on migration dynamics in Sfax.

Sfax, Tunisia's second-largest city and economic center, is a port city in the east of the country, around 270 kilometers from Tunis. The total population of the city of Sfax was around 615,000 in 2019. At the same time, the agglomeration (Grand Sfax) numbered 950,000, or 8.5% of Tunisia's total population, making Sfax second only surpassed by the capital Tunis in terms of population. Topographically and architecturally, Sfax is a flat urban fabric structured by a spider's web of communications from the port and central Medina. It is bordered to the east by the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Gabès. The economy of the governorate of Sfax, once based essentially on olive oil, frozen fish, almonds, and phosphates, has undergone significant change since the 1960s, with the proliferation of small and medium-sized manufacturing industries, the rapid development of the tertiary sector and the diversification of the agricultural sector through the emergence of new investment niches such as cattle breeding, market gardening, poultry farming and organic crops.

According to official statistics, the unemployment rate was around 11% (compared with around 15% for Tunisia as a whole).¹² These data are qualitatively transcribed during an observation stay in the city, whose socio-economic dynamism contrasts with Tunis, or even Sousse. However, with a Sfaxian population around 48% of which was under 30 years of age at the time of the last census (INS, 2014), the unemployment rate is significantly high among young people (between 33% and 43% depending on age bracket).¹³ Concerning percentages of young men (31%) and women (44%) outside of any education, training or employment system (NEET)¹⁴ in the coastal region, many young Tunisians have no prospects in the local market and cannot imagine any other path than exile to Europe.

2.2 *Fieldwork and data collection*

The Equal Partnerships project draws on three forms of data collection: (i) desk review of literature on urban migration governance, (ii) key informant interviews (KIIs), and (iii) a half day workshop. For Sfax, a fourth tool was added: (iv) semi-structured interviews with Tunisian and sub-Saharan migrants, as well as with members of the Sfax community who wished to express their views on the phenomenon of mobility.

Literature review: The research team conducted a rapid review of policies, strategy documents, reports, and academic articles on (urban) migration governance in Sfax, Tunisia and the region. The identified literature was then organized and coded in a matrix, in an Excel spreadsheet, which was used to assess the relevance of each item, isolate key findings, and facilitate cross-reference throughout the duration of the study.

Key informant interviews: Seventeen (17) interviews with institutional key informants were conducted in Sfax in January and February 2023. An anonymized list of KII respondents is presented in the Annex section. The selection of interviewees was carried out in coordination with the municipality of Sfax and FAU, thanks to the preliminary trip carried out by FAU in autumn 2021. Other NGOs and CSOs were also interviewed using a ‘snowball’ approach. Before each interview was conducted, the respondents were informed about the Equal Partnerships research project, the purpose of the interview and data protection compliance. Informed and unambiguous verbal and written consent to be interviewed was obtained.

Local workshop: Samuel Hall delivered a half-day workshop in Sfax in February 2023 on the subject of multi-stakeholder partnerships for urban migration governance. The workshop was attended by 14 participants selected with the support of the Sfax municipality. The participants included local and national governments, NGOs, CBOs, community leaders/representatives, and academics. A general workshop agenda was developed in the context of the Equal Partnerships in Urban Migration Governance project – designed for workshops in six cities but adjusted to the context of Sfax. An anonymized list of workshop participants is presented in the Annex section.

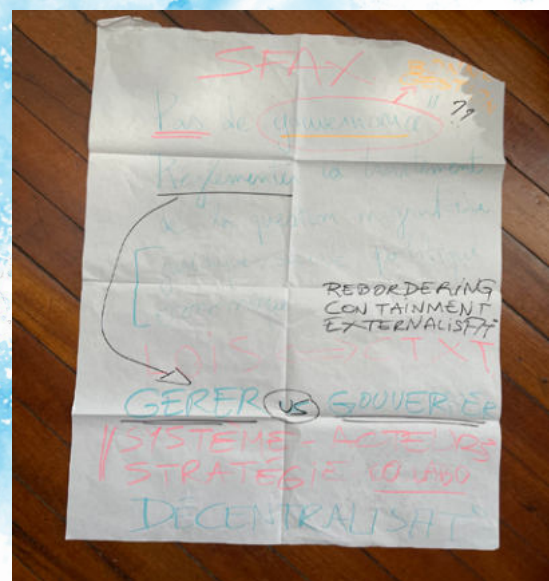
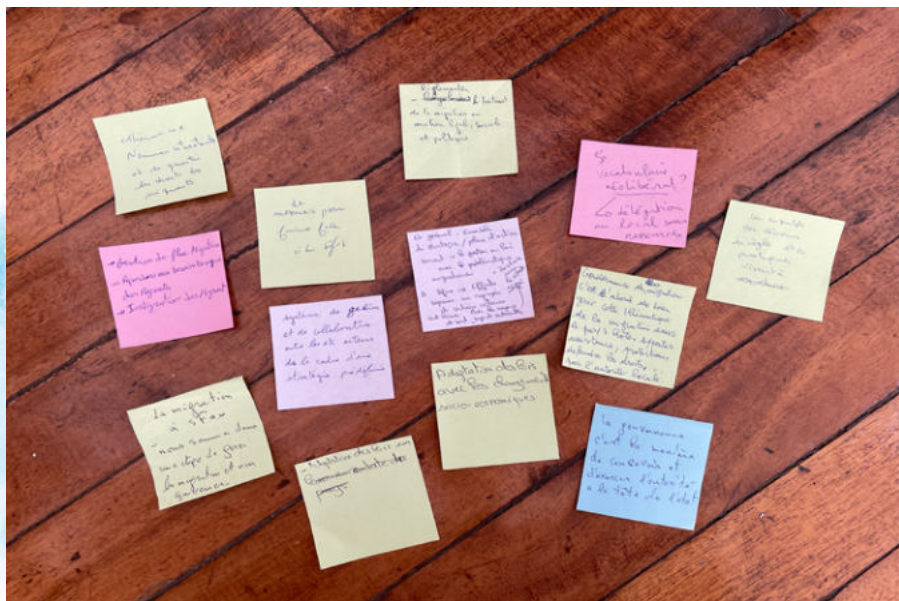
¹² <http://www.ins.tn/statistiques/153>

¹³ <http://www.ins.tn/statistiques/153>

¹⁴ The acronym NEET refers to young people who are not in education, employment, or training. See World Bank (2014) Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion, Chapter 3. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/MNA/tunisia/breaking_the_barriers_to_youth_inclusion_eng_chap3.pdf

Semi-structured interviews: Given the complexity of current mobility dynamics in Sfax and the region, particular attention was paid to interviewing: 1) twenty (20) sub-Saharan male and female migrants encountered near the Medina by the research team (photo below); 2) eight (8) young Tunisians wishing to leave for Europe and Italy (5 hours by boat in good weather); 3) six (6) Sfax merchants and businessmen directly involved in the migration economy (as direct beneficiaries of the presence of sub-Saharan labour); 4) finally, four (4) members of openly racist and anti-migrant groupuscules, which are strongly reinforced by the recent narrative spread by Tunisian President Kais Saïed, who declared in February 2023 that “hordes of illegal immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa” had flooded into Tunisia, causing “violence, crime and unacceptable acts”.¹⁵

Figure 3 & 4. Questioning “good governance” and “migration governance” (Workshop in Sfax, February 2023)



¹⁵ Le Monde. (2023). Tunisia’s President Saïed claims sub-Saharan migrants threaten country’s identity (https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/02/23/in-tunisia-president-kais-saied-claims-sub-saharan-migrants-threaten-country-s-identity_6016898_124.html).

3

Regional and city-level migration dynamics

3.1 Genealogy of migration

To talk about migration dynamics in Tunisia and Sfax, it's important to think in genealogical terms, not just historical ones, as genealogy informs our understanding of contemporary mobility issues, both for young Tunisians wishing to leave their country and for sub-Saharan migrants in transit in Sfax. Tunisia's geographical location has made it a land of immigration and passage: i) vertically, between the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa, and ii) horizontally, between the West and the East of the Arab world.

- Since the 19th century, the country's pre-colonial and colonial past has made it a crossroads of immigration, settlement, and asylum for populations from France (the metropolis from 1881 to 1956), Italy, Spain, and Malta. According to Boubakri (2015), on the eve of independence in 1956, Tunisia was home to 180,000 French nationals, 57,000 Italians and 6,000 Maltese, i.e., 10% of its population at the time.¹⁶
- From independence to the 1990s, Tunisia went from being a country of net immigration to a country of departure and emigration. In 1954, no more than 20,000 Tunisians lived or worked abroad. Their numbers rose from 170,000 in 1970, to 540,000 in 1990, 1 million in 2007 and 1.3 million in 2014, i.e., 12% of the total population. Over 55% of them live in France and 30% mainly in Spain, Italy, and Germany; the Gulf countries account for 4.5%. Women account for 37% of Tunisians living abroad.¹⁷
- From the end of the last century until recently, Tunisia has gradually become a transit and immigration zone, particularly for nationals of sub-Saharan African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Cameroon, etc.). In the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, four major migratory trends left their mark on the country:

¹⁶ Boubakri, H. (2015). Migration et asile en Tunisie depuis 2011 : vers de nouvelles figures migratoires ? *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 31, 17-39.

¹⁷ Source: Office des Tunisiens à l'Étranger.

1. Directly after the Revolution, almost 28,000 Tunisians headed for the Italian island of Lampedusa, against a backdrop of chaos and social uncertainty;
2. The endemic conflicts in Libya, following the fall of Gaddafi's regime, led to an influx of around 200,000 refugees from Libya and the return of 137,000 Tunisian migrants;
3. More recently, we have seen a twofold movement, contemporaneous with the COVID-19 pandemic: the political and economic crisis in Tunisia has led to an explosion in the number of young Tunisians leaving for Italy;
4. Economic crises and galloping inflation, political insecurity, household diversification strategies, and the consequences of climate change in sub-Saharan Africa are leading to a significant increase in so-called transit migration (to Europe, via Tunisia) as well as immigration (mainly to coastal cities, like Sfax).

3.2 *Institutional and policy framework*

The complexity and diversity of migratory flows arriving in, transiting through or leaving Tunisia, against a backdrop of regional instability, have led the Tunisian authorities to draw up a National Migration Strategy (NMS) since 2012 and to revise it from time to time (2015, 2017) to ensure good governance of migration while including representatives of the Tunisian diaspora.¹⁸ In the aftermath of the 2011 Revolution, the formulation of a strategy appeared to be a political priority, in order to regulate the variety of migratory flows and profiles: irregular migration, migrant smuggling, human trafficking, asylum and international protection, emigration, immigration, transit, rescue at sea.

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.

However, to date, the NMS has still not been adopted. At first, some 'experts highlighted that this is partially because there is no 'leadership' or 'primary agent' working on migration in Tunisia'¹⁹ while 'repeated change in governments has prevented the political confirmation and support of successive drafts of the NMS.'²⁰ In the current context, the vagueness surrounding the national strategy allows migration issues to be exploited in a piecemeal fashion for the benefit of central government. Based on two assessments conducted by ICMPD in

¹⁸ Natter, 2015.

¹⁹ Ensari, P., Kasavan, C. and Thenot, E. (2023) Migration-relevant policies in Tunisia. MIGNEX Background Paper (v2). Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo. Available at www.mignex.org/tun

²⁰ Natter, 2021.

2021²¹ and MIGNEX in 2023²² on the status of migration governance in Tunisia, the table below gives a non-exhaustive overview of the international conventions, national laws, and regulations applicable to migrants in Tunisia. The right-hand column also shows the perception of the practical applicability of each of these laws in the Sfax context.

Table 1: Status on ratification of international conventions on mobility in Tunisia

Legal dimension	Legal reference	Commentary in the Sfax context
Entry and stay in Tunisia for foreigners	Law no. 68-7 of 8 March 1968, relating to the status of foreigners in Tunisia and decree no. 68-198 of 22 June 1968, regulating the entry and residence of foreigners in Tunisia. Articles 2, 3, 7 and 9 regulate the entry and duration of stay: “Nationals of States that have concluded agreements with the Tunisian State to waive these formalities are exempt from transit and entry visas for Tunisia.” (Article 2, applying to Ivorians, for instance)	Visas for many sub-Saharan African countries since 2008–2009. Visa-free entry means that many foreigners can arrive in the country by regular means. After three months, if they do not find another status, they become irregular and start accumulating fines, calculated on a weekly basis. Most irregular migrants are unable to pay the fines or return to their country of origin. With no social security cover and no means of accessing private health establishments, falling ill is a damnation for migrants, a situation of fragility that pushes them into a state of vulnerability. In theory, an entry visa for a maximum of three months is issued by the consular authorities. Beyond this period, a residence permit is required, except for foreigners under 16 years of age and those whose stay does not exceed three months or six consecutive months within the first year.

²¹ ICMPD (2021) MC2CM City Migration Profile of Sfax, Mediterranean City-to-City Migration: The MC2CM project, Towards improved urban migration governance, June 2021. The project was implemented by a consortium led by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), in partnership with the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) network and the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT).

²² Ensari, P., Kasavan, C. and Thenot, E. (2023) Migration-relevant policies in Tunisia. MIGNEX Background Paper (v2). Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo. Available at www.mignex.org/tun

<p>Access to residency</p>	<p>Law n°68-7 of March 28, 1968, and decree n°1968-198 of June 22, 1968. Article 44 requires all foreigners to carry documents allowing them to stay in Tunisia.</p>	<p>In practice, it is virtually impossible for non-Europeans to obtain a residence permit. “The problem is with the residence permit and the regulation of the situation. However, for other foreigners, especially non-Europeans, it is almost impossible to obtain a card. The Interior Ministry sees this as a security problem. They consider any non-European foreigner a security problem.” (NGO, Sfax) As for sanctions, they are unenforceable because of the increase in the number of migrants: “We’re trying to be legalistic when it comes to immigration, so that any illegal foreigner, particularly sub-Saharan, will be arrested, brought before a judge and punished. This was done 7-8 years ago. We penalized them for 6 months, then 3, 2, 1 month, then a fine, and now we let people circulate freely without even daring to arrest them. No more courts, no more prison cells. Jurisprudence has adapted to reality. We go from prison to freedom with a suspended sentence. The courts simply don’t have the means and resources to deal with today’s migration flows, which have increased tenfold.” (Municipality, Sfax)</p>
<p>Birth registration</p>	<p>Law No. 573, enacted on 1 August 1957, introduces universal registration requirements regardless of ethnic or religious background.</p>	<p>The situation of migrant children can be complicated, given that many fathers do not accept to recognize the child to avoid any legal exposure or risk of deportation: “in the case of migrant children who are born in Sfax, in order to register them the Tunisian law requires the child the father and the mother, and this implicitly indicates that the couple should be married. So, the institution of marriage cripples the registration of migrant children. But I don’t think there is a law that explicitly forbids anyone from having a child. It is just that having a child out of wedlock is not well seen in Tunisian society.” (NGO, Sfax).</p>

Right to work	Law no. 68-7 of March 28, 1968, on the working conditions of foreigners in Tunisia. Labor Code amended by Law 96-62 of July 15, 1996: legally resident foreigners “enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same obligations resulting from labor relations as Tunisian workers”.	Tunisian legislation does not recognize all the international instruments protecting the rights of migrant workers. Tunisia has not ratified Convention 97 on Migrant Workers of 1949, which deals with the working conditions of migrant workers. In addition, Tunisia has not acceded to Convention 143 of 1975 on migrant workers, which provides, among other things, for the fight against illegal employment and guarantees fundamental rights to irregular workers. Nor has Tunisia signed the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. According to ICMPD (2021), corroborated by testimonies in Sfax, the exercise of civil service and liberal professions is in fact restricted to nationals. Access to salaried employment is subject to drastic rules. The only possibility of temporary employment for irregular migrants after three months is therefore informality - with no social protection and very precarious employment. In Sfax, the construction, olive and almond harvesting sectors “survive solely on the presence of underpaid sub-Saharan migrants with no legal documents” (NGO, Sfax). The situation of women is particularly worrying, as they are often subjected to modern forms of slavery.
Right to health	Law n°91-63 of July 29, 1991.	The right to healthcare is granted to foreigners under the same conditions as Tunisians. The nuance underlined by the ICMPD study (2021), according to which “care and hospitalization free of charge or at a reduced rate in public health structures are reserved for indigent nationals” ²³ allows a wide freedom of interpretation, which is used and abused by certain doctors and hospitals to avoid the obligation to provide care. “The obligation to provide care should not be open to discussion. Legally, public hospitals must treat migrants, whatever their status. But in practice, it depends on the individual. Most hospital managers know nothing about the legal framework; some consider migrants to be patients like any others; others refuse.” (Municipality of Sfax).

²³ ICMPD (2021) MC2CM City Migration Profile of Sfax, Mediterranean City-to-City Migration: The MC2CM project, Towards improved urban migration governance, June 2021. The project was implemented by a consortium led by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), in partnership with the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) network and the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT).

<p>Access to justice</p>	<p>Article 29 of the 2014 Constitution: “no person may be arrested or detained, except in cases of flagrante delicto or by virtue of a judicial decision”.</p>	<p>While respect for the rights of the defense and the right to a fair trial are guaranteed by domestic law and by international conventions ratified by Tunisia, in practice, migrants have no right to justice, due to the very provisions of article 45 of the “Law of February 3, 2004, amending and supplementing law no. 75-40 of May 14, 1975, relating to passports and travel documents”. This law imposes a duty to report irregular migrants, including on persons bound by professional secrecy (lawyers, pharmacists, doctors). Depending on how the law is interpreted and the context, irregular migrants can be denied access to justice: “I can be legally robbed or raped, and no one will say any better. At worst, they can put me in prison for lodging a complaint” (M. femme, Guinean migrant, aged 23).</p>
<p>Right to education</p>	<p>Law n°68-7 of March 28, 1968, and decree n°1968-198 of June 22, 1968.</p>	<p>Access to public primary and secondary education for foreigners is subject to parents residing in Tunisia and submitting a written request to the Regional Director of Education. Foreign students are admitted to Tunisian public universities under quotas agreed with their country of origin. After the expiry date of study permits, students coming to Tunisia are required to have a residence permit; in practice, they often find themselves in an irregular situation, given the complexity of obtaining or extending a permit.</p>
<p>Citizenship rights and non-discrimination</p>	<p>Articles 13 and 14 of the Nationality Code limit the acquisition of nationality by “a foreign woman who marries a Tunisian man” according to the national laws of the country of origin.</p> <p>Organic law no. 2018-50 of October 23, 2018, relating to the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination.</p>	<p>Access to Tunisian nationality is restricted for foreigners based on length of stay and gender. In fact, in Sfax, the increase in migratory flows, particularly visible around the Medina and the port, and the legitimization of the Tunisian President’s openly xenophobic speeches, have generated a rise in racism towards “Africans” (= sub-Saharan migrants).</p>
<p>Asylum application and refugee status</p>	<p>Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) and 1967 Protocol.</p> <p>Paragraph 3 of the Preamble to the 2014 Constitution and Article 26.</p>	<p>In the absence of national laws, Tunisia still delegates the recognition of refugee status on its territory to the UNHCR representation in the country. “For the government, this is a convenient way of not dealing with the problem and denying the existence of refugees, but also migrants, on its soil” (NGO, Sfax). Instead of confronting the issue of migration through policy making, issues surrounding human mobility have been politically instrumentalized, feeding into populist narratives.</p>

Prevention of human trafficking and smuggling	Organic law no. 2016-61 of August 3, 2016, on preventing and combating human trafficking.	Proposals to improve the applicability of these laws have already been formulated and submitted, notably by Civil Society Organizations. ²⁴ In the reality of Sfax, the de jure and de facto precariousness of sub-Saharan migrants exposes them to all types of trafficking, and even in some cases to modern slavery.
Prevention of irregular migration	<p>Law of February 3, 2004, is the most repressive legislation. Entitled «Loi modifiant et complétant la loi n° 75-40 du 14 mai 1975 relative aux passeports et aux documents de voyage».</p> <p>United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime of November 15, 2010, and Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.</p>	The law of February 3, 2004, penalizes both smugglers and illegal immigrants, which raises several human rights issues for migrants. Migrants can therefore be doubly victimized by smugglers and by the judicial system when they are arrested or intercepted. On the other hand, the Tunisian authorities had justified the promulgation of this law by the need to comply with the country's international commitments.
Emigration to Europe	Bilateral agreements include Tunisia's obligation to readmit Tunisians who reach Europe by irregular means. Tunisia has signed readmission agreements with Italy (1998), France (2008), Switzerland (2013), Germany (2016) and Belgium (2017).	For the representatives of public and private institutions interviewed in Sfax, the approach to European governance of migration is profoundly extractive: 1) on the one hand, FRONTEX aims to prevent migrants from landing irregularly in Europe, while externalizing responsibilities onto neighboring states; 2) on the other hand, The EU is developing a "Partnership for Mobility" with Tunisia to select highly qualified people (brain drain) or useful, underpaid hands for its agriculture.

²⁴ Notamment par le Centre de Tunis pour la Migration et l'Asile (CeTuMA) et EuroMed Droits (2015) Plaidoyer pour une réforme des lois relatives aux migrants, aux étrangers et à la nationalité en Tunisie.

3.3 Migration patterns and dynamics in Sfax

Tunisia is a country of intersecting migrations: emigration, immigration, and transit. Voluntary migration is by far accounting for the majority, even if the country has had brief experiences of hosting refugees, following forced population movements in modern times (Syrians, Libyans, Palestinians, as well as Ethiopians and Somalis). In this context, faced with the complexity of migration patterns in the region and the city of Sfax, one expression often came up in interviews with institutional players to describe the central government's relationship to the reality and urgency of the phenomenon in the region: that of denial. For example, an NGO representative interviewed in Sfax stated that:

“

*I think we cannot deny further the issue of migration. In Sfax, for example, there are young Tunisians who migrate as well. Is this fact thought of or treated differently at the level of the city of Sfax? Because, on the same boat, there can be Ivorians, Guineans, and Tunisians.*²⁵

(NGO, Sfax)

This sentiment was echoed by another informant, working with a local CSO:

“

How long can the government continue to deny the reality of the phenomenon, stigmatize some and ignore others? We are in denial.

(CSO, Sfax)

In presenting a typology of the different migratory profiles encountered in the city of Sfax during the research, the aim of this section is neither to abstractly distinguish between often plural backgrounds (in the words of a key informant:

“

We should be careful with categories and labels. An asylum seeker might be perceived as an economic migrant by crossing an administrative border. But she's still the same person” - Municipality, Sfax) nor, on the contrary, does this section seek to homogenize the complexity of individual journeys under the same vague notion of mixed migration (per an NGO worker: “Mixed Migration” is something I have never quite understood. On the one hand, it shows how discrete categories are irrelevant; on the other, it can be used to delegitimize individual claims and stigmatize the figure of “the migrant.

(NGO, Tunis).

The aim is to present types that cannot be reduced to an identity, to understand that mobility in Sfax cannot be reduced to a homogenous population (sub-Saharan) and unilateral dynamic (transit).

²⁵ Throughout the report, all the KIs led by the research team will be highlighted with the source in brackets. Here we use “NGO, Sfax” to preserve anonymity of NGOs, CSOs and associations that were interviewed. Regarding migrants or host community individuals that were interviewed, we add their first name initial, age and profession to give more background details while also preserving their anonymity.

3.3.1 Emigration of young Tunisians

The flow of young Tunisians leaving the country irregularly is fairly recent in terms of its scale but is now well established as a socio-economic reality and an alternative solution is openly discussed in Tunisian society. According to official statistics, around one in five (20%) of the non-migrant population aged 15 and over declare that they intend to emigrate to live, work or study abroad. The intention to emigrate varies significantly according to gender, age, and education variables:

- 25.6% for men compared with 14.7% for women.
- 39.5% for 15-29 years old to 2.2% for those aged 60 and over.
- 2.7% among the uneducated to 29.5% among those with higher education and 32.5% for young people with vocational training.²⁶

Among this population, once the decision to emigrate has been taken, if the process of obtaining a visa is unsuccessful, irregular emigration by sea remains a preferred option for around 10% of 15-29 years-old (6% of the total). While this phenomenon seems to affect mainly “*working-class neighborhoods in large coastal towns, rural areas and inland regions*” (NGO, Sfax), interviews with a local NGO paint a more nuanced picture: “*Here, all young people are thinking about it, whatever their level of education, whatever their social background, and families are included in the debate*” (NGO, Sfax). In the Centre-East region (Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia and Sfax), almost 23% of residents say they intend to emigrate (compared with 26% in Tunis).

According to the data gathered by Opérations de veille de la Migration Non-Règlementaire, quoted by the FTDES²⁷, a comparison of the first five months of the years 2020 to 2023 shows a sharp rise in arrivals of young Tunisians registered on Italian shores: +400% between 2020 and 2023 and 800% for female migrants only. The number of accompanied and unaccompanied minors is also increasing every year. Families are banking on the fact that minors can't be deported until they turn 18, according to the clinical psychologist Wael Garnaoui:

“

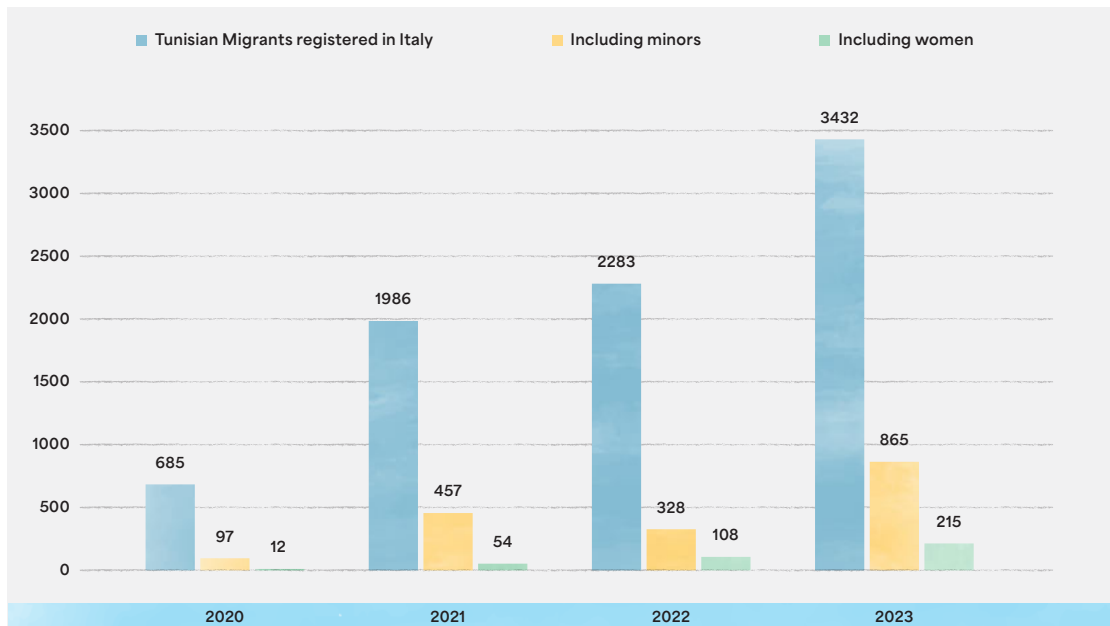
*For teenagers who come to France, there's the hope that they can regularize their situation once they're here, but the reality is that they are then taken into care by the child welfare system and can't work or integrate into society.*²⁸

²⁶ INS (2022) Enquête Nationale sur la migration internationale 2020/2021 (Tunisia-HIMS)

²⁷ Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Économiques et Sociaux (2023). Opérations de veille de la migration non-règlementaire. Available at : <https://ftdes.net/statistiques-migration-2023/>: “The watch is based on reports from the Ministry of the Interior and statements by National Guard spokesmen in the various media. In most cases, they do not include detailed data (gender, age groups, country of origin, etc.). Invisible figures: these are the number of migrants who reach European shores without going through local authorities or international structures and are not included in a census. These figures are significant and vary according to the tactics of the networks of migrant smugglers. It also includes departure operations from the Tunisian coast that manage to escape strict security control, or those whose passage is intercepted without issuing reports or announcing them.” The other invisible or phantom component is, of course, those who die at sea, whose numbers can only be extrapolated.

²⁸ Quote from Le Monde (22 Septembre 2022) En Tunisie, « partir clandestinement est désormais un projet collectif et assumé », Lilia Blaise. Available at https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/09/22/en-tunisie-partir-clandestinement-est-desormais-un-projet-collectif-et-assume_6142664_3212.html.

Figure 5. Numbers of Tunisian migrants having reached Italy (broken down by gender and age) over the first 5 months from 2020 to 2023



Box 1: Youth burned alive (harka)

“You know, I studied at the University of Sfax, but there’s no work that corresponds to what I studied (social sciences). So, yes, I’m starting to think about leaving and I feel that my family is pushing me, even if they don’t say anything. (...) In cafés, people say that we’re burnt, that young people are burnt. Sometimes they say that to make fun or because they don’t understand why you risk your life crossing, but I think they understand deep down. We have no other choice”. (S. Young Tunisian man from Sfax, 22 years old, Sfax February 2023). Harka means “to burn” in Arabic, but in Tunisian slang, the word also refers to Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian street vendor who immolated himself on December 17, 2010, initiating the 2011 Revolution. Harka also refers to the crossing of the Mediterranean by a migrant. The young man or woman who feels burned and attempts the crossing is first and foremost burned by the reality of today’s country, with no prospects for a youth who sees success only outside the country and the community of origin.

3.3.2. Returning migrants

The phenomenon of Tunisian returnees seems a priori secondary to understanding migration dynamics in Sfax, but it plays a dual role – firstly in terms of flows, but also as a driver or disincentive. The few existing figures date from 2017 but give an idea of the scale of the phenomenon: 29,300 Tunisians returned from abroad in five years (2009-2014), an annual average of around 6,000 people.²⁹ The reasons for return are linked to five categories of factors: retirement, expulsion after an irregular stay, family support, project creation, and disillusion regarding the potential to succeed abroad. In the specific case of Sfax, the people

²⁹ INS (National Institute of Statistics) (2015) Recensement général de la Population et l’Habitat 2014. Tunis : INS. INS (2017) Recensement général de la Population et l’Habitat 2016. Tunis : INS.

interviewed all confirmed a marked increase in this phenomenon, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic:

“

However, because so many people return here, we are beginning to realize that it is also very difficult to leave without the professional capacities or tools to ensure this success.

(Municipality, Sfax)

From this perspective, returns, traditionally associated for decades with economic success and a certain ideal of success through migration, are now also associated with uncertainty and the risk of failure and trauma:

“

At that time, people who left certainly succeeded, but now, with the crisis and the accidents, it is not obvious that they would succeed.

(CSO, Sfax)

3.3.3.

Immigration of asylum seekers from conflict zones

With no real law on asylum seekers and refugees, Tunisia delegates this responsibility to the UNHCR: “It’s not the responsibility of Sfax or Sousse, it’s the responsibility of the UNHCR, period” (Governorate, Sfax). In the Sfax region, however, people displaced by conflict from conflict zones (Syrians over the last decade, Somalis, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Central African Republic, Eritreans, Ethiopians more recently) are a reality that the municipality must deal with on a daily basis. Although the United Nations considers these people to be automatically eligible for refugee status, the vast majority of them do not generally seek to acquire refugee status or leave for Europe irregularly.³⁰ From neighboring Libya, a quasi-cyclical flow has also been established between southern and central Tunisia and Libya. The volume and duration of these flows vary according to the security situation in Libya:

“

Am I a refugee? I don’t know. I had refugee status years ago. Through the UNHCR. Now I go back and forth, depending on the danger and the war (sic). So, I’m Sfaxian and Libyan. My life is here most of the time.

(M. Libyan man from Sfax, 44 years old, Sfax)

In the medium run, the increasing porosity between the statuses of asylum seekers (based on conflict or persecution, according to the UNHCR), economic migrant and “climate refugee”, which is likely to be highlighted by the security situation in West Africa. As many KILLS in Sfax point out, “those we call economic migrants in transit today will soon be climate refugees or refugees from the growing conflicts and insecurity in West Africa” (Municipality, Sfax). Similarly, Médecins du Monde has confirmed that sub-Saharan migrants arrive with many traumas from Algeria or Libya, which should suffice in law to make them refugees:

³⁰ Boubakri, H. (2015). Migration et asile en Tunisie depuis 2011 : vers de nouvelles figures migratoires ? Revue européenne des migrations internationales, 31, 17-39.

“

They are real refugees; they are not just economic migrants. They come from countries where there are more and more civil wars, and the number of migrants can grow exponentially in Sfax because there are more and more conflicts, especially in Mauritania, Mali, etc.

(Médecins du Monde, Sfax).

Among migrants interviewed in Sfax from Libya, specific cases of abuse by armed groups, militias, and networks of smugglers, themselves linked to criminal or terrorist networks, were frequently reported. From Algeria, precise descriptions of convoys of migrants in transit brought back to the Algerian-Tunisian border by the army or police, after weeks of detention, have also been reported to us: "Once we arrived at the border, they told us 'It's straight ahead', so we walked." (I. Ivorian Man, 21 years old; Sfax).

These refoulements, often carried out at night, are part of the "denials of reality operated by the government, we don't talk about it on either side of the border" (NGO, Sfax).

Box 2: Economic migrants or refugees?

While administrative labels are necessary for legal reasons³¹, rigid or politicized categorizations can lead to migrants who are victims of violence, rape and brutality being denied access to rights. These issues were discussed with humanitarian and assistance organizations present in Sfax:

"Actually, Ivorians come by plane thanks to the 2010-2015 policy that give access to free visas. There are other west-Africans who come from Libya, but these are people who have experienced horrible things. There are also victims of torture, and rape, but we still receive very vulnerable profiles. Sometimes we receive a pregnant woman because she was raped. Imagine, she was raped, got pregnant, and despite that, she carried on till the end. It's a difficult journey since they are in the desert, and she comes here to Tunisia in the 8th or 9th month, she gives birth, and she has nothing. We receive very, very vulnerable cases, especially in terms of profiles, there is a very rapid change, and now we even receive unaccompanied minors, etc. In fact, the number of minors is increasing tremendously." (NGO, health sector, Sfax).

"Besides the socio-economic aspect, there has always been a problem related to the severe measures imposed by the Algerian police. Indeed, our association, "Afrique Intelligence," has beneficiaries who say that Tunisia, more precisely Sfax, is better than Algeria when asked why they chose to be in Tunisia. In Sfax, they can have a shelter, they can work, they can be on the street, etc. However, in Algeria, the situation is much more complicated, especially with social and political instability. As a result, there are arbitrary arrests and a forced return to the desert. Moreover, there are groups of young Algerians who pick up fights with migrants for nothing." (CSO, research, Sfax).

³¹ Zetter, R. More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2007, vol. 20.

3.3.4.

Economic migrants in transit

The term “economic migrant” does not correspond to a category in international law, and as such suffers from a vagueness that opens it up to various instrumentalizations. According to the UNHCR, it is “persons who leave their countries purely for economic reasons unrelated to the refugee definition, or in order to seek material improvements in their livelihood.”³² In southern and coastal Tunisia, the term generally refers to young people who have fled poverty and unemployment in their home countries, mainly from sub-Saharan Africa, with the aim of reaching European shores.

A non-linear but fast-growing dynamic

According to INS data, if we look at the number of foreigners resident in Tunisia by region of origin, the number of African nationals, outside the Maghreb countries, has risen sharply since 2014 (from 7,200 to 21,466) to now represent 36.4% of a total of 58,990. If we look at the structure by gender (65.7% of sub-Saharan migrants are men vs. 41% for other countries/regions) and average age (26.6 vs. 41.7), we see clear distinctions between sub-Saharan migrants and other migrants present in Tunisia (i.e., in terms of age and gender characteristics).³³ However, these data largely underestimate the real numbers of sub-Saharan migrants present in Tunisia, as highlighted by the representative of a Tunisian NGO working in the health sector:

“

Sfax, by itself, has 20,000 migrants. To say that the total number of migrants is 20,000 only serves to minimize the damage. During Covid, we counted nearly 15,000 migrants just in the Sfax agglomeration, but now they live everywhere, even at 80 or 90 km. They can be found in farms, in the fields, etc. That's why it's important to have a real overview of the issue. We already have problems because the flow has increased. Even in terms of aid, our resources are limited, so I'm forced to choose who to help. We now prioritize women over men. Before, we balanced it, but now we prioritize women over men.

Battles over figures aside, it is important to stress two major points. Firstly, the trend is not linear and is strongly correlated with factors of macroscopic uncertainty. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, NGOs reported a “steady flow of people to Sfax” (NGO, Sfax), even though “the pandemic had blocked the flow to Europe, and migrants were unable to return to their countries of origin” (NGO, Sfax), creating a bottleneck in the town and surrounding area. Similarly, economic, inflationary, climatic or security crises can influence the composition and dynamics of migration from sub-Saharan African countries.

“The most important thing to remember is that there are migrants in Tunis, Sousse, Agadez, and other cities, and their numbers are increasing.”

Afrique Intelligence, February 2023, Sfax

Secondly, all the institutional players we met agreed in their analysis that these flows are unlikely to decrease, and that we can't rule out “a scenario where Sfax has 100,000 sub-Saharan migrants wishing to reach Europe by 2020” (NGO, Sfax). The real problem has more to do with the lack of reception, care, and service infrastructures for these migrants in transit – whether

³² UNHCR (2005). UNHCR Global Report, p. 444

³³ Source : INS, Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2020/21.

temporary or prolonged. With this in mind, associations such as Ifriqiya and Afrique Intelligence agree that “a biased approach to the problem, since it focuses on the macroscopic phenomenon of migration” should be avoided in favor of “a microscopic approach that focuses on the individual in relation to the community, on the presence of the migrant in his or her environment”.³⁴

European externalization of border control and the « Sfax terminus »

In 2023, Tunisia became the main departure point for migrants wishing to cross the Mediterranean, ahead of Libya. Between January and March 2023, the Tunisian police intercepted 15,000 people, five times more than in 2022. With increasing restrictions on access, against a backdrop of rising populism and the wider issue of governance of migration³⁵, Europe as become out of reach for many migrants. Tunisia has in this regard become a terminus.³⁶ In practice, for economic migrants transiting through Sfax, it is impossible to find declared work and they are forced to multiply precarious jobs in the informal sector (construction, domestic work, manufacturing in export, service or tourism zones, or agriculture – olives and almonds). The situation of “bonnes couchantes” is particularly worrying, lured by promises of employment and easy income from their country of origin, they are often handed over directly to the family of residence on arrival, deprived of identity papers and reduced to a situation of slavery and sexual servitude. Other types of trafficking were mentioned during the interviews and seem to affect Tunis as much as Sfax: fake recruitment companies operate in the vicinity of Abidjan’s private and public universities, relying on visa exemption and academic partnerships with Tunisia, and promising university stays in Tunisia before swindling students who find themselves with nothing once they arrive.

In this logic, it is essential not to have a simply linear, rational, and mechanistic approach to economic transit migration to Sfax, but to understand mobility as an individual human experience of doubt, decisions, hope, expectations, fear, and aspirations, made up of intersubjective realities with local communities and other migrants, and always haunted by the memory of families left behind and the dead lost along the way. The migrants we met in Sfax did not all express the desire to continue the adventure. Some have been in Sfax for several months or even years, either because they had to or because they wanted to:

- **Choice** (“I have been here for 4 years now. We can have a better life here, better than the one we have today in my home country (Ivory Coast) but also better than in Algeria. As for Europe, our brothers tell us it’s a pipe dream.” – I. Male migrant from Ivory Coast, 32 years old),
- **Weariness** (“I feel stranded, I even forgot why I am here. But life goes on.” – A. Female migrant from Ivory Coast, 25 years old),
- **Feeling trapped** (“I will not make it to Europe, but I cannot go back home as I have not succeeded.” – F. Male migrant from Mali, 26 years old).

³⁴ Final Workshop with participants, February 2023.

³⁵ Pécoud, A. (2010) “La bonne gouvernance des frontières ?”, dans *Plein droit*, n° 87, décembre 2010, pp. 24-27.

³⁶ We borrow this word from Nawaat, *Subsahariens en Tunisie: Transit ou Terminus?* (November 2022, Hors-série #4).

Figure 6. Essadi cemetery (near Sfax) - graves built to house shipwrecked migrants May 4, 2023
(Photo: Nissim Gasteli for Le Monde, May 2023)



Box 3: Economic migrants or refugees?

The recent **National Survey on International Migration**, published in 2022 and carried out by the **Observatoire National de la Migration** and the **Institut National de la Statistique** in collaboration with the **International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)**, offers a revealing panorama of migration dynamics in Tunisia. According to the definition used for this study, **almost 60,000 individuals can be considered immigrants (or foreign residents in Tunisia) at the time of the survey.**

The disadvantage of such a definition is that it does not allow for any real distinction in status between the wealthy European expatriates living in upmarket areas of Tunis and the irregular migrants working in the olive groves or on construction sites. The latter category is probably grossly under-represented by the study methodology, as suggested by the institutional representatives we interviewed. While the figures were undoubtedly skewed by the pandemic situation, which prompted a massive departure of European nationals to the other side of the Mediterranean, several points are worth noting.

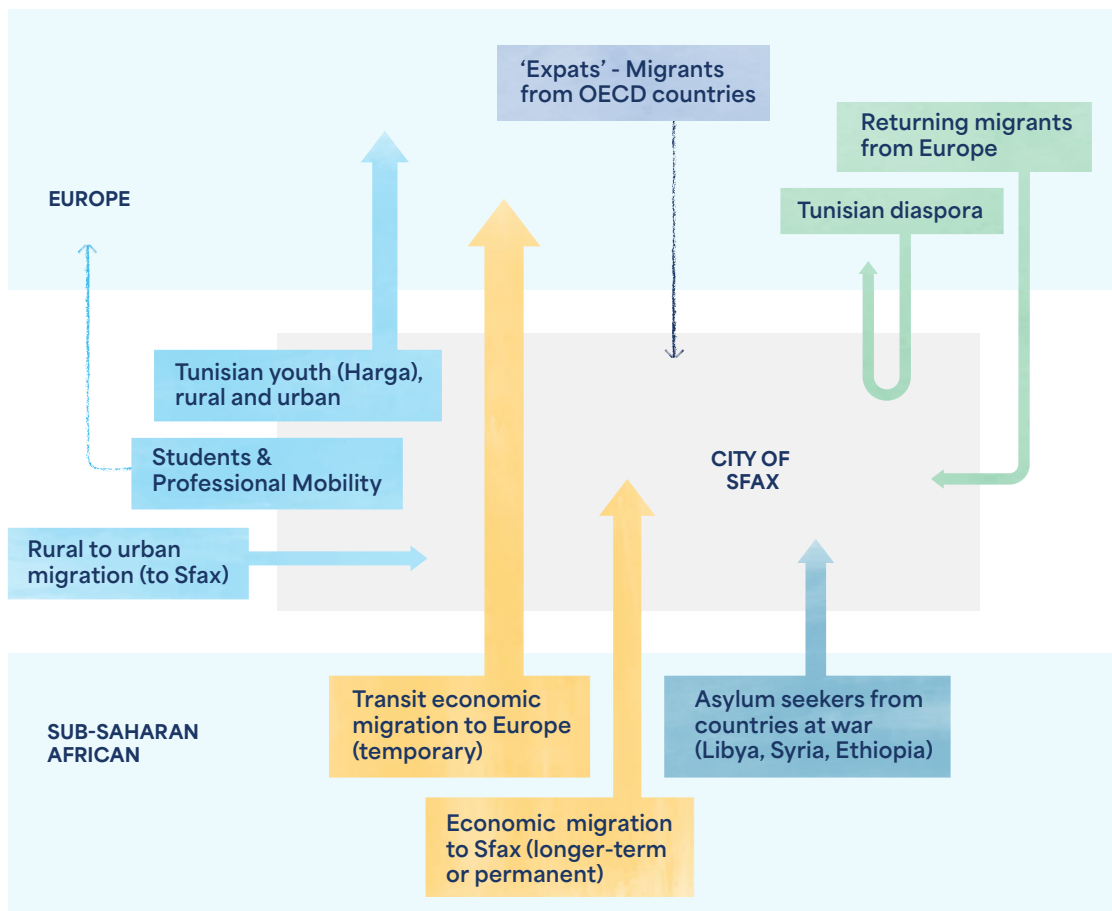
Three regions of origin dominate: **Europe (19%), North Africa (37%) and other African countries (36%).** The dynamic of immigration from sub-Saharan African countries is strongly positive, **rising from 7,200 individuals according to the latest census to 21,500 at the time of the survey.** The regions of residence are mainly coastal, with **Greater Tunis (80%)** and the **Center-East**, characterized by a more modern infrastructure, more open and diversified labor markets, better access to services (health and education), as well as direct access to the sea for transit migrants wishing to attempt the crossing to Europe. Immigrants who have come to Tunisia say they came mainly for three reasons: **marriage or family reunification in 37% of cases, employment and improved living conditions in 35% of cases, and studies in 16% of cases.** Finally, **six out of ten migrants plan to stay in Tunisia.** Among those who say they intend to leave, two-thirds intend to return to their country of origin, a quarter want to leave for other countries, and a tenth are undecided.

37 ICMPD, Institut National de la Statistique et Observatoire National de la Migration (2021). Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale (<https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/56690/file/Rapport%2520de%2520l%2527enqu%25C3%25A4te%2520nationale%2520sur%2520la%2520migration%2520internationale%2520Tunisia-HIMS.pdf>).

3.3.5. Visualization of Sfax's migration dynamics

The graph below is of course not exhaustive, but its purpose is to illustrate the main migration dynamics in Sfax, as reported by the participants in the study. The size of the arrows is intended to indicate volumes or flows in a non-proportional and purely indicative manner; the labels (asylum seekers, returnees, economic migrants; temporary or permanent; rural or urban, etc.) are not mutually exclusive.

Figure 7. Visual representation of Sfax' migration dynamics (Interviews and workshop)



3.4. Drivers of mixed migration in the region

To better understand the dynamics of migration in the city of Sfax, it is important to distinguish between the case of young Tunisians – whether from Sfax or neighboring locations – and that of transit migrants, who are often sub-Saharan. Although certain causes are common, they are expressed differently, even though the two groups “*very often find themselves on the same boats arriving in Lampedusa or sinking in the Mediterranean*” (I. Tunisian student, aged 20, Sfax).

3.4.1. A common explanatory variable: the definition of Tunisia as a ‘transit country’

Before describing these differences in detail, however, it is important to emphasize an important driver of migration in Sfax, a driver which constitutes a key explanatory variable and a compounding factor, influencing the overall orientation of migration governance in Tunisia. Tunisia is a signatory to all the treaties and agreements with the European Union over the last twenty years in the field of migration management. It is also one of the main beneficiaries of the funds released since 2015 following the Valletta Summit. The obligations stemming from these legal and financial bonds therefore make it one of the key players in the fight against irregular immigration in the Mediterranean: 1) in the purely legal field, Tunisian legislation on migration (2004 law) has been “strongly influenced by European demands” (UN agency, Tunis); 2) in the development field, Tunisia’s participation in the fight against irregular migration has truly become “a sine qua non condition for cooperation and development.” (Former EU representative, Brussels). In practice and at the individual level, this new immobility paradigm has imposed a game of heads or tails on young Tunisians and sub-Saharans wishing to find a new life. Containment policies have created a form of mystique that responds – paradoxically – to the despair or aspirations of many would-be migrants. The quasi-spiritual dimension of the migratory journey (baptized “adventure”) is constantly evoked by young sub-Saharans, who speak of a duty and put their trust in God (Al Hamdoulillah); for their part, young Tunisians who told us of their intention to emigrate by sea speak of “it’s do or die”, of “we have no other choice”, or of a “test of truth”.³⁸

On a more structural level, the near-continuous rise and “organized precariousness” (NGO, Sfax) of sub-Saharan migrants and the Tunisian and sub-Saharan deaths in the Mediterranean call for a rethink of current security policy assumptions. The countries on the southern coast, such as Tunisia, but also Libya, Algeria, and Morocco are encountering the same difficulties in their dealings with the European Union since the majority of these migrants intend to make their way to European shores.

³⁸ It should be noted that the association of the water test with truth is present in many civilizations. In the Mediterranean basin, in archaic Greece, anthropologist Marcel Détiéne has shown that the truth of facts could be established in court cases by a spiritual water test. The accused were subjected to the risk of drowning: if they survived, they proved their good faith. Lire Détiéne, M. (1967) *Les Maîtres de Vérité dans la Grèce archaïque*, Le livre de Poche.

These points were highlighted by the representatives of organizations frequently invited to tripartite meetings with the EU and the Tunisian governments:

“

Yesterday we had a tripartite meeting between the European Union, the Tunisian government and civil society to discuss social issues and migration. We discussed an agenda dictated by both the European Union and the Tunisian state, each defending its position, but the proposed agenda was far from reality. (...) It was more of a wish than a reality, and this wish ruined this desire to present the situation as it is. But we tried to show the reality and share what we thought was best in the Tunisian context.”

(CSOs, Sfax and Tunis).

So, in terms of local governance and migration management, the European Union is having a significant impact, whether through multilateral relations with these states or through funds and programs to support civil society. During an interview with two young Tunisian students, the issue of mobility came to the fore in all its problematic dimensions. According to them, in the face of an economic crisis, migration has always been a solution in every country in the world:

“

It's true in Europe in the 1930s, in the United States throughout the history, etc. Look at the Protestants who left for North America, the Italians, the Poles, the Irish, at different times. They left because of political crises, but they created what they could no longer do at home (...) But young people here are blocked. You can't move around as easily, and that leads to frustration and to people committing suicide and taking to the sea.”

(I and M, students, aged 20 and 22, Sfax).

3.4.2.

Drivers of emigration among young Tunisians

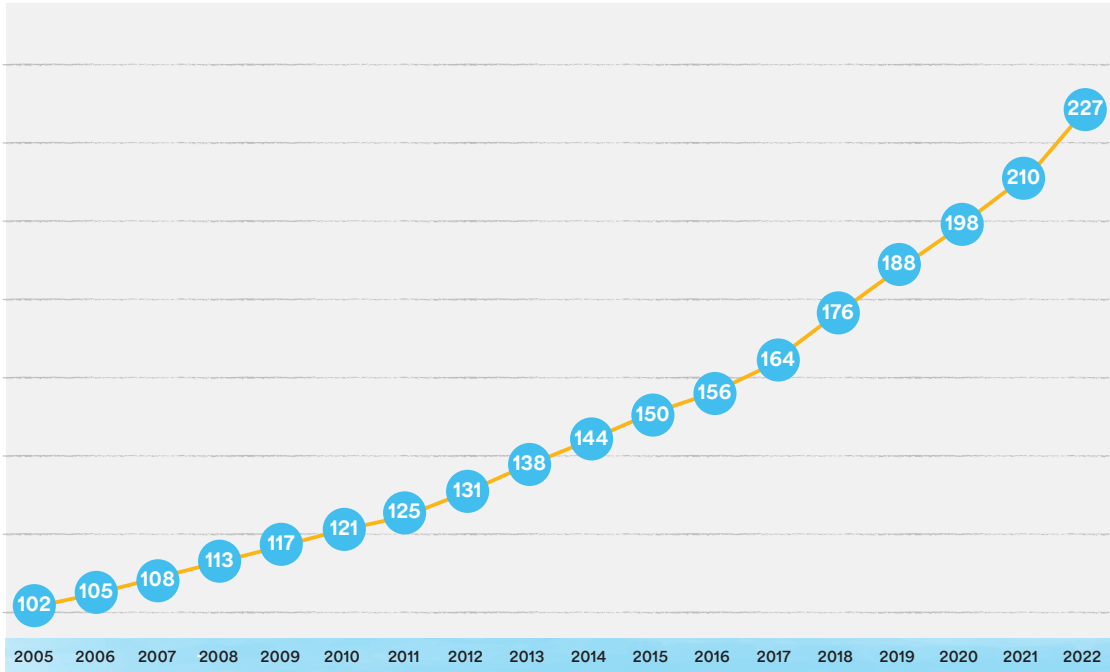
Stagnant economic and employment perspectives

According to the INS 2021 survey, reasons linked to work and working conditions are the main reasons why young Tunisians want to emigrate (52%), followed by the search for better living conditions (27%). Social reasons (education, family reunification, marriages and divorces or separations, desire to travel) account for around 20% (28% for women).³⁹ The biases inherent in this official study underestimate the phenomenon, which has taken on unprecedented proportions in Sfax and its hinterland: *“We're not the worst off, compared with the south of the country for example, where there's really nothing to do. But the country has changed and become authoritarian. Hopes have been dashed. Young people want something different.”* (W. Tunisian student, aged 21, Sfax). According to most workshop participants and individual interviewees in Sfax, the economic slump is the main reason why young people choose to emigrate. The country, which has been in recession since the Covid-19 pandemic, now has to contend with inflation of over 8%, fueled by the repercussions of the

³⁹ Source: INS, Enquête nationale sur la migration internationale 2020/21.

Russian-Ukrainian conflict.⁴⁰ This multidimensional crisis has put the country's finances in jeopardy. As shown in the graph below, everything is on the increase: housing prices (up 8% year-on-year), food prices and fuel prices, which have already risen four times since the start of the year.

Figure 8. Inflation, consumer prices (indicator = 100 in 2004) – Sources: World Bank and IMF



Increased generational and societal fragmentation

However, unemployment is no longer the only reason young people leave, as explained by researcher Wael Garnaoui: “The worsening economic situation and the inability to plan for the future with the country’s political instability are driving people from all socio-professional backgrounds to flee. There are now people with jobs, women, and even families with children.⁴¹” In this regard, the situation in Sfax is emblematic of this new reality, insofar as the city is known for its dynamism in the employment, craft creation, agriculture, phosphate, and fishing sectors – for its economic opportunities and relatively low unemployment rate. However, the feeling of being “ostracized” (NGO, Sfax) by the capital, Tunis, and of being under-represented in political decision-making is very frequently mentioned by the municipality, as well as by socio-economic leaders and local shopkeepers. Such a lack of representation and influence in decision-making is reflected in the views of many young people in Sfax towards central government, from which they say they expect nothing. Some young people express “a feeling of political and societal disaffiliation”, as if nothing could come from the political community anymore (CSO, Sfax).

From a generational point of view, many young people talk about a gap in terms of expect-

⁴⁰ World Bank (2023). The World Bank in Tunisia. Tunisia: Country Overview (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/tunisia/overview>)

⁴¹ Garnaoui, W. (2022). Harga et désir d’Occident au temps du djihad. Recherches en psychanalyse, 33, 81-95. Cité par Le Monde (22 Septembre 2022) En Tunisie, « partir clandestinement est désormais un projet collectif et assumé », Lilia Blaise.

“We cannot say the problems of young people can be solved by a particular choice, and in Sfax, people have been managing for a long time. That is to say, it is not like other cities. Here, there is a lot of family support that transmits the shops and skills from Sfax (carpentry, art, manufacturing, etc.). The unemployment rate is the lowest in Tunisia. But our young people do not accept having an arbitrary job, especially those who are educated. They want a valuable situation. So, they end up leaving.”

(Municipality, Sfax)

tations and language with previous generations, who are accused of wanting to hold on to their positions, locking up opportunities and not wanting to give the new generation a chance. This criticism applies to the country as much as to Sfax, and extends to the Tunisian political class, “employers”, even “teachers” or family. This generational misunderstanding has societal repercussions in terms of transmission and cohesion. Above all, it comes after the immense hopes raised by the 2011 Revolution, whose “fruits turned out to be tasteless, because the worm of the

old generation was in the fruit” (M. Tunisian student and poet, aged 24, Sfax).

‘Désir d’Occident’

Finally, talking to young Sfaxians and the city’s cultural associations, we realize that the ‘causes’ or ‘drivers’ that can be described as negative (lack of economic prospects, unemployment, social fragmentation) are not enough to explain the departures and the risk-taking involved in crossing to Lampedusa. One hypothesis put forward by Wael Garnaoui is that of a desire for the West (Désir d’Occident) an imaginary attachment to the European elsewhere, which permeates Tunisian youth through language, clothing, consumer habits and cultural references, while remaining de jure and de facto inaccessible to the vast majority of young Sfaxians. “And for those who do apply, a visa refusal means that they are denied access to the dominant European civilization. So, their only solution is to leave illegally, to give themselves access on their own.”⁴²

“The majority of sub-Saharan migrants leave their countries based on more tangible causes (climate change, poverty, instability, etc.), and they may be seeking to escape this reality. Here in Tunisia, our youth see things differently. It is true that there is a crisis, but we are still able to live. At least, for a young person, even a graduate, if he has the will to work, he can work, it is more and more difficult, but it is not impossible. We cannot compare a Tunisian to a sub-Saharan who comes from Mali or the Ivory Coast.”

(Afrique Intelligence, Sfax, February 2023)

3.4.3.

Drivers of immigration for sub-Saharan migrants

Economic factors in Tunisia and Europe as a compass

Economic attraction is a driving force for the men and women who migrate from sub-Saharan countries to the North, in the hope of making their way to Europe. Some will try the travel all the way, others will stop along the way, which can also contribute to their economic well-being, as well as that of the cities and communities in which they come to reside (e.g., through ability to maintain livelihood, and support certain sectors particularly dependent on migrant workers, notably the construction and agricultural industries in the case of Sfax). According to triangulated sources (migrants themselves, Afrique Intelligence), in Sfax itself,

⁴² Propos de Wael Garnaoui dans une interview pour TV5 en avril 2023. <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/migrations-clandestines-des-tunisiens-pour-les-jeunes-qui-veulent-partir-la-tunisie-est-une>.

after upward adjustments in the informal sector and following massive inflation, daily wages are around 25 to 35 DT, depending on the level of qualification and the difficulty of the task, for a working day (between 8 hours and... 15 hours). This represents a 30% discount on Tunisian wages.

This immigration thus represents a considerable competitive lever for the Tunisian economy, which is focused on exporting agricultural products in particular. This also explains why the Tunisian state has so far failed to take positive steps towards addressing this issue through legislative means, even while President Saïed's recent statements have cast a harsh and xenophobic light on the subject. For many would-be crossers, the objective will be to raise the 3,000 to 3,500 DT that will allow them to cross.

But given that they are not able to use Western Union or other banking systems because of their clandestine status, migrants are obliged to keep all their money on them or at home. This entails risks because:

“

... racist groups or small criminal gangs know this and sometimes come and smash up our place to steal money and phones” (A. Male migrant, Ivory Coast, aged 32, Sfax). And while this dominant economic motive brings sub-Saharan migrants closer to young Tunisians, there is one major difference that participants in the workshop felt was important: “For migrants, we also need to talk about the reasons why migrant girls and women want to settle in Tunisia or go to Europe. For boys, they leave because they are responsible for the family; they leave to have new resources; but for girls, it’s almost the same thing; they have to be responsible and send money to their family.”

(NGO, Sfax).

On the other hand, more societal and aspirational aspects (see box 1 on the harka phenomenon) seem to prevail among young Tunisians.

Box 4: Disenchantment and racism at the football stadium

We interviewed young supporters of the city of Sfax's flagship football club, Club Sportif Sfaxien (CSS), which will be celebrating its first century of existence in a few years' time. The club is one of Tunisia's biggest, having won eight national championships, seven Tunisian Cups and frequently reached the final of the CAF Champions League or Confederation Cup. Without obviously linking the club or its supporters to xenophobic or racist narratives, this interview transcribes some of the amalgams that are now commonplace among young people lacking a sense of direction and supported by the political rhetoric at the top of the Tunisian state. Here are a few extracts from a 90-minute conversation in the Jardins Publics de Touta, next to the Stade Taïeb Mhiri, where CSS have made their home:

Question: Why do you call sub-Saharan migrants 'Africans'? Don't you define yourselves as 'Africans'?

Respondent 1: We are Tunisians. Africa isn't just maps, countries or... I don't know... names. It's also a color. And they're African because they're black. Their skin is black.

Question: What about black Tunisians?

Respondent 3: They're something else... but they're also black, like former Africans. They are slaves. Everyone knows that but you mustn't say it, we don't care, we say it.

Respondent 2: You cannot say they take your job. You cannot say there are too many. We say these things and we tell them.

Question: But in the team you support, CSS, there's Naby Camara, Mohamed Kanté or Balla Moussa Conté... They're Africans too, they're black to you. But you support them? I want to make sure I understand...

Respondent 1: A football team is something else. It's what you love, it's your passion. So, we support them as long as they're playing for us! (Laughs)

Respondent 4: In fact, what he (the researcher) says isn't wrong. We know all that. It's a bit weird. At first, we didn't support them but now we do. Because they're good sometimes, and often quite athletic too. And when they're good, we accept them. But if you want to know what we respect about Africans is that they too have football teams that they support in Senegal, Mali or Africa (sic). And I respect that because I share it."

Figure 9. Mural graffiti by CSS supporters

Figure 10. CSS supporters near the city center



Internal economic demand as a key motivation for Sfax-bound migration

The populist discourse on the presence of migrants, which claims that they represent a security risk, take up shares of the local employment market and encourage informality, is not shared by those involved in the economic life of Sfax. Many stakeholders explain that the construction and agricultural sectors would find it very difficult to survive without the presence of sub-Saharan workers. And while the presence of migrants in transit facilitates recruitment, there is no doubt that the almond and olive harvests, as well as the construction sector, would probably resort to hiring ‘seasonal migrants’ without it. There are three main reasons for this: 1) there are huge seasonal needs, particularly in the agricultural sector; 2) the cost of raw materials makes it prohibitively expensive to hire young Tunisians; 3) Tunisians are also less and less inclined to accept certain jobs and the associated working conditions (working hours, minimum pay).

However, a shopkeeper in the Medina of Sfax, who himself hires migrants to redo part of his house, reminds us just how unequal this market is:

“

Tunisians are benefiting from foreign labor illegally. But if the employer is caught, it is the migrant who suffers the consequences, and the employer only has to pay a fine. If the employer is imprisoned, the company may close, which will have an impact on the Tunisian economy. So, it never happens. In return, the migrant risks deportation and imprisonment because he works irregularly, in addition to having to pay a fine. So not only is he exploited and working in risky conditions, but if he has a work accident, he has no insurance. We have had many cases of work accidents, especially among carpenters, who have injured their feet and lost their hands, so it is always the migrant who suffers the consequences.

(W. Shop owner, 52 years old – olive oil and dry fruits, Medina, Sfax).

Gender-specific functions and risks as new variables

While transit migration has always been mixed, evidence gathered from both associations and migrants who have lived in the city for several years suggests an increased feminization of both economic migration and asylum seekers in Sfax. But this trend is also accompanied by increased intersectional risks. The interviews conducted in Sfax confirm what the NGOs and women’s aid associations are saying locally: the socio-economic situation of sub-Saharan women places them in the role of designated victims, with virtually no recourse to deal with aggression or denial of the law. Because of their illegal residence status, they only have access to informal work, like men, but very often in secrecy and in the shelter of houses or workshops that make them “vulnerable to potential abuse by their employers - insults, sexual touching, salary deductions, etc.”⁴³ - according to the Terre d’Asile study, which points out that 80% of women have suffered economic exploitation at work.

In Sfax, specifically, the women interviewed also mentioned: 1) the risks incurred during the journey to Sfax, with in particular accounts of rape in Libya, police violence in Algeria and theft by gangs of young Tunisians; 2) humiliation, ambiguous behavior, intimidation and even cases of rape in the workplace, with no possibility of a complaint; 3) navigating the public

⁴³ Terre d’Asile (2020) Parcours de vie de femmes migrantes en Tunisie. Entre inégalités, discriminations et ambitions, Juin 2020.

space in Sfax, the violence of certain police officers who frequently hold them to ransom during checks, “because they know we have to carry the money with us” (F. Female migrant, 22, Sfax). The case of the “femmes couchante”, who are domestic workers housed by families, is emblematic of the organized and intersectional vulnerability that often prevails, according to scenarios described by Terre d’Asile, Afrique Intelligence, the Municipality and migrants themselves: recruited in Côte d’Ivoire by a network of traffickers, the young women are then handed over to a family or employer, who will wait for them at Tunis airport or in Sfax directly, confiscate their passports and take them to the house or workshop where they will often spend several months before being able to leave, subject to the orders and abuse of their hosts. Some end up escaping, while others are sent back without pay and accused of “theft”. Without support or financial autonomy, they are forced to join prostitution networks on the outskirts of the city.

Although more than two thirds of the sub-Saharan migrants in Sfax are men, according to estimates by some of the NGOs interviewed, but also according to the migrants themselves, the role of women has changed significantly in recent years, which is why the representative of an NGO working in the health sector says that they are not “a minority, they are there, you can see them in the Medina even more than the men sometimes, because the male migrants are visible on the road or they spend their time waiting for job opportunities or hiding from the local authorities (...), but the women have a clear economic role, they sell food, they cook” (NGO, Sfax). So, there is a clear gendered division of professions and roles. The significant increase in the number of single sub-Saharan women taking to the road reflects a twofold driver:

- On the one hand, like men, they often have (or feel they have) the role of breadwinner and see it as their duty to find a source of income abroad, in North Africa or Europe. For many of them, Sfax will be the final destination of their trip, allowing them to save enough money before returning home. This is not without danger of prostitution or modern slavery (“sleeping maids”);
- Secondly, in Sfax itself, women play a pivotal role in the economy of migration and are key players in the parallel economy that contributes to supporting local informal businesses. And informality is essential to support an economy like Sfax’s, which is exposed to multiple crises. From a social standpoint, Médecins du Monde also points out that “women are more inclined to consult health services for their children and themselves, whereas men are more reticent” (Médecins du Monde, Sfax). This often gives them a role as intermediaries and liaisons between the assistance services and migrant communities.

To conclude on the drivers of female economic migration, we can say that the reasons are quite gender-specific: 1) because women are exposed to gender-based violence and specific abuses that persuade them to flee their community and often their country (see testimonies in Annexes 2 and 3); 2) because there is a demand (push and pull factor) for specifically female employment in care and domestic jobs and in the informal sector; 3) because women play an essential socio-economic role, and all the more so as migrant communities become more structured, more complex and experience greater flows in Sfax. But if these specific drivers exist, they are also accompanied by specific intersectional risks that need to be diagnosed and remedied.

Figure 11. Sub-Saharan women selling dried fruit at the Medina (Samuel Hall - February 2023)



4

Partnership approaches in Sfax

4.1. *Stakeholder mapping*

Existing stakeholders relevant to the topic of urban migration governance in the city of Sfax are specified into specific categories, which all interact and participate in the political management, humanitarian support and socio-economic integration of migrants passing or settling in the city.

4.1.1. *European Union: a clear containment agenda*

Given its location on the border with Libya and bordering the Mediterranean Sea, Tunisia is under a lot of pressure from the European Union to manage migration. On 11 June 2023, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced that the EU would consider a major aid package for Tunisia to stimulate the economy and deal with a “migratory crisis”: €900 million in macro-financial aid, plus €150 million in immediate budgetary aid could be made available “as soon as the necessary agreement has been reached”.

More specifically, the EU will also provide Tunisia with €100 million this year for border management, search and rescue, anti-smuggling operations and returns “based on respect for human rights”.

The EU, like other major donors to Tunisia, has so far made its support conditional on the country finalizing a loan program with the IMF, but Tunisia has rejected the key reforms required by this plan. Given the EU’s containment program, this precondition may no longer even be necessary. This announcement confirms a structural approach on the part of the EU towards neighboring countries, and Tunisia in particular, with regard to so-called transit migration: the aim is to contain and externalize the Schengen border to neighboring states, by making development aid conditional on the introduction of reinforced security measures. In a political context where many European countries are subject to the pressure of populism and opinion hostile to migrants (particularly Italy, the main destination country for young Tunisians and sub-Saharan migrants alike), it is unlikely that things will change, which means that the EU’s privileged dialogue partner will continue to be a highly centralized Tunisian state, with little inclination to include municipalities – like Sfax – in the dialogue and an unequivocal discourse of ‘crimmigration’.

4.1.2.

The Tunisian State: the 'deep bureaucracy', centralism and authoritarianism

International migration has not been high on the Tunisian government's political agenda. Indeed, interviews with experts conducted as part of the Mignex 2023 study and this study have both confirmed that there is no official migration policy or national road-map in Tunisia, as highlighted in our assessment of institutions and policies. In Sfax, most interviewees described a central state without many differences from the mental, institutional frameworks in place since the 1960s and 1970s: "Governments have changed, but the deep administration has been in charge since 2011. It represents the spirit of the administration. We're talking about the deep state, which believes that migration equals insecurity. The state was never committed, because when we say 'disengaged', it implies that the government was committed" (Local administration, Sfax). In practice, it has several implications.

- The revived xenophobic narrative, which equates sub-Saharan migration with crime or terrorism, is not simply a matter of aligning with the EU's containment approach;
- Tunisia has delegated the responsibility to deal with migration to the UNHCR and IOM, "whereas it is the government's duty to manage the situation" (Municipality, Sfax). Similarly, local NGOs are highly critical and frustrated by the way in which the central government has disengaged itself from the issue of immigration, before exploiting it with the EU: "They have always denied this reality, they don't want to accept the fact that there are migrants who feel comfortable here and want to settle down (...) Similarly, the causes of emigration among young Tunisians have always been ignored" (NGO, Sfax).
- As far as municipalities are concerned, the approach is twofold. On the one hand, there is denial, with virtually no financial or technical resources made available to the municipalities and very little inclusion in debates at Tunis level: "*they tell us that it is not up to us to deal with migration and that we cannot therefore have resources for that, because that is the role of the HCR*" (Municipality, Sfax). Secondly, the local governorates play a role in controlling the local level, in order to ensure that central government strengthens its hold over the municipalities. The governor is appointed by the president of the Republic: "*It is a sub directorate of the Ministry of Interior and all the regional directors depend on the governor, who depends in turn on the Interior Ministry and other ministries (each has its own concerned department). This is camouflaged centralization.*" (Local administration, Sfax).

4.1.3.

Directorates: thematic collaborations on an ad hoc basis

“Anyway, now, honestly, there is great flexibility in these procedures, and I allow myself to say it because we have worked a lot on this aspect. Apart from the training, we maintain a very good relationship with the partners and institutions, and we try to involve them in everything we do, literally everything, so that they feel that it is among their responsibilities to be interested. Also, we have worked a lot with the DCP on the aspect of minors and education and have also worked on many aspects with the regional director of education.”
(Municipality, Sfax)

Despite reservations about government centralism, it should also be emphasized that dialogue exists between local administrations and organizations and the Sfax delegations of the Ministries of Health and Social Affairs, which are often cited as examples of their willingness to work together. Many key respondents insist on the possibility of collaborating and developing initiatives with the Directorates, in the various fields of action and assistance for migrants - whether sub-Saharan or Tunisian. The Directorates seem to be less

politicized and more directly in touch with the social, economic, and societal issues facing the city of Sfax.

However, the focus is more on individuals than on the institutions themselves:

“

In this context, we have always advocated, we have tried to convince, and succeeded in spreading the message, at least to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Affairs. We explained to them that the government must deal with the issue of migration as a reality that is not necessarily negative. (...) They have formed a cell of experts and executives (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, etc.) to give ideas to decision makers. (...) It depends on the people you speak to, but Ministries are often more pragmatic and less politicized. Then we also found solutions for the birth certificate, which was a problem before with the directorate of Health and the regional social affairs directorate” (NGOs, CSO, Sfax).

The lack of coherence and institutional follow-up is often seen as an obstacle to longer-term collaboration and intervention. Very often, directorates suffer from high turnover, with no real handover, which creates tensions between players and means that they have to start from scratch very frequently. This inertia is “part of the deep bureaucracy (...) and it’s not by chance, because this inefficiency leads to a lack of collaboration and decision-making, and to a stagnation that is part of the State’s mechanisms” (Local administration, Sfax).

4.1.4.

Municipality of Sfax: limited resources despite an essential frontline role

According to the recommendations of the Global Compact on Migration, municipalities are supposed to play a key role in “managing migration issues”.⁴⁴ The case of Sfax validates this conclusion, as the city is at the heart of complex migration dynamics. However, the financial and technical resources and the legal knowledge are still very limited, if not virtually

44 Pacte mondial pour des migrations sûres, ordonnées et régulières (2018). Résolution adoptée par l’Assemblée générale le 19 décembre 2018. Pacte mondial pour des migrations sûres, ordonnées et régulières, p 33.

non-existent, compared with what is needed to deal effectively with an increasingly complex migration issue, with ever greater flows of sub-Saharan Africans. In the current political context, the municipality of Sfax cannot take any measures, even if it can welcome and build shelters, it does not have the prerogatives to do so.

But, if there were an independent authority in Tunisia, it would be the municipality, because the municipal council is elected locally. However, at the local level, there are no real resources or autonomy. This proves problematic when it comes to exercising such independent authority at the local level, as real independence can only come with financial and decision-making autonomy. “So, the municipality doesn’t have the skills, they don’t have the resources, and above all, they don’t have a general framework, a law on migration, a strategy, a vision from the State they can contribute to implementing” (Municipality, Sfax).

Similarly, the coordinating role so often emphasized by the institutional players involved in mobility in Sfax depends on the mayor and his staff - “but if people change, migration may be relegated to a point on the security agenda (...) instead of being considered from the angle of protection, health, integration, etc.” (NGO, Sfax). The municipality remains involved even when there is disagreement with central government, because it considers migration to be a key priority. But the needs exceed their capacity “because the flow, the numbers and the problems are enormous.” (Municipality, Sfax). Accordingly, the municipality has realized that it needs to create partnerships through its own initiative. It succeeded in influencing and convincing local services such as education, health, social affairs, and trade unions to get involved with and offer assistance. With limited resources, it has generated or contributed to a number of projects, including ACMAS with Terre d’Asile (to improve the coordination of migration policy actors in the city); it also works regularly with Afrique Intelligence, Terre d’Asile Tunisia, notably as part of the MC2CM project.

“We received a note from the Ministry of Interior that says we must stop contact with any foreigner and inform the ministry if they ever request a meeting, a visit, or anything. There were three pages of “the governorate should be informed” and “the security service should be informed” of anything. This is nonsense at a time of confusion, uncertainty, and crisis, which is everywhere. You can’t talk about migration without knowing the realities in the cities.”

Municipality, Sfax

4.1.5.

UN agencies, NGOs, CSOs and Unions: a limited and controlled field of action

Historically, there has been good coordination and collaboration between the various migration stakeholders present locally in Sfax - between the municipality, Terre d’asile, IOM, Afrique Intelligence, or Médecins du Monde, and other key players. However, the United Nations agencies and the NGOs still have a very restricted role in the Tunisian context, and in Sfax in particular. The former, for example, are still players operating on a national scale. The Tunisian state has delegated responsibility for asylum applications and the administrative and social management of migrants - which is made possible by mechanisms such as assisted voluntary return, integration schemes and awareness-raising sessions. But by delegating responsibilities that are theoretically its own, the State has nonetheless defined the political limits within which NGOs and UN agencies can work. As Cassarini (2022) points out, the real objectives of NGO and UN programs and interventions are “*not to regularise their*

situation and fight for their rights, but to manage it within a well-defined legal and political framework”.⁴⁵

Likewise, when the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) gave symbolic membership cards to several migrants, they tried to help migrants and shed light on the vicious circle of informality and abuses, with the support of the municipality and several other organizations (Municipality, Sfax). But this initiative remains dependent on the absence of any constructive initiative from the central government. In this political context, which is highly unfavorable to any real change in the legal and socio-economic status of migrants (whatever their label or origin), the stakeholders mentioned are content to contribute to a managerial approach (NGO, Sfax). Operating in a political context which precludes addressing migration in terms of rights, they are reduced to thinking in terms of assistance and needs. To take the case of women’s aid associations, associations defending the rights of LGBTQI+ people, associations fighting against all forms of discrimination or racism, players as diverse as Terre d’Asile, Beity, Avocats Sans Frontières, Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l’Homme (LTDH), UGTT and Mawjoudin may offer listening and legal defense services in the event of problems with employers, police officers, or with reception services for asylum seekers or refugees, but as long as nothing is done to change the law, these interventions can only contribute to resolving or alleviating the situation of individual cases – with a limited systemic contribution.

4.1.6.

Police: a player viewed with suspicion by migrants and institutional stakeholders

The police have already been defined in the previous sections as a complex player. However, there is a wealth of research, studies and anecdotal evidence of extortion, theft, and violence by national or municipal police forces. For example, clear cases of denial of rights have been mentioned by both civil society actors and migrants themselves: the right to have a translator, the right to call a lawyer or relative, forced signing of papers in Arabic by people who do not speak the language, etc.⁴⁶ But if the police generally only have a role of repression and security, this is also due to: 1) A xenophobic national political narrative and often openly racist discourse in the city of Sfax; 2) The fact that irregular migrants put themselves at risk by lodging complaints and have no rights or protection from the police or gangs. Both of these factors have contributed to increased mistrust and a loss of confidence in the police on the part of irregular migrants, but also the black population (including Tunisians).

4.1.7.

Academia, research, and independent journalism: a shrinking space

It is increasingly complicated to obtain authorization to carry out research, particularly on topics deemed politically sensitive (gender, radicalization, migration, etc.). In addition, many actors who often responded to requests for interviews in the past are now more cautious in a context where institutional actors have received strong pressure (internal memos) to stop talking to Tunisian or foreign researchers. Similarly, the demonstrations against censorship and in favor of freedom of the press organized in Tunis have caused a stir and aroused a great deal of fear in Sfax too. Academic researchers and independent journalists are there-

⁴⁵ Cassarini, C. (2020). L’immigration subsaharienne en Tunisie : de la reconnaissance d’un fait social à la création d’un enjeu gestionnaire. *Migrations Société*, 179, 43-57.

⁴⁶ Nawaat, (2022) Subsahariens en Tunisie: Transit ou Terminus? (November 2022, Hors-série #4).

fore players for whom resources and authorizations are increasingly scarce. The NGOs and CSOs we met in Sfax all emphasized the lack of any real research to support their work and their funding applications; the same goes for the “lack of funding or budget for advocacy and policy papers” (NGOs, CSOs, Sfax) to disseminate knowledge and create debate. Most of the research funded by the European Union, particularly as part of the research framework program (Horizon Europe and before that Horizon 2020), remains focused on questions of migration ‘drivers’, migration governance and political narratives on mobility issues -⁴⁷ in other words, it remains largely dependent on the perimeter and lexicon of migration management as defined by the European Commission.

4.1.8.

Tunisian diaspora and relations with countries of origin: a virtual and limited role

The Tunisian diaspora is directly linked to the high rate of emigration that Tunisia has experienced since its independence in 1956. Based on discussions with civil society players, it would appear that the initiatives taken to date to influence the volume or conditions of emigration among young Tunisians remain ad hoc. At best, the impact is indirect, through investments made by the diaspora living in Europe - and more recently in North America or the Gulf States - in the city of Sfax. Stakeholders like OTE, SEMTE and CCTE remain punctually active to promote this type of investments and co-development. One of the prerogatives of the municipality, along with the central administration, is to encourage exchanges with the diaspora: Article 26 of the Code of Local Authorities in Tunisia mentions a specific point on collaboration between the municipality and the central administration to better assess and plan the dynamics of diaspora mobility. In Sfax, this is still at the planning stage. Finally, with regard to relations between migrants and their (sub-Saharan) countries of origin, based on the interviews carried out for this study, there are virtually no institutional links with migrants and informal migrant associations in Sfax.

⁴⁷ European Commission (2023). Migration & Mobility, from the website https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/social-sciences-and-humanities/migration-and-mobility_en.

Figure 12. Influence of the euro-Tunisian and national migration management approaches on the macro-meso-and micro migration nexus

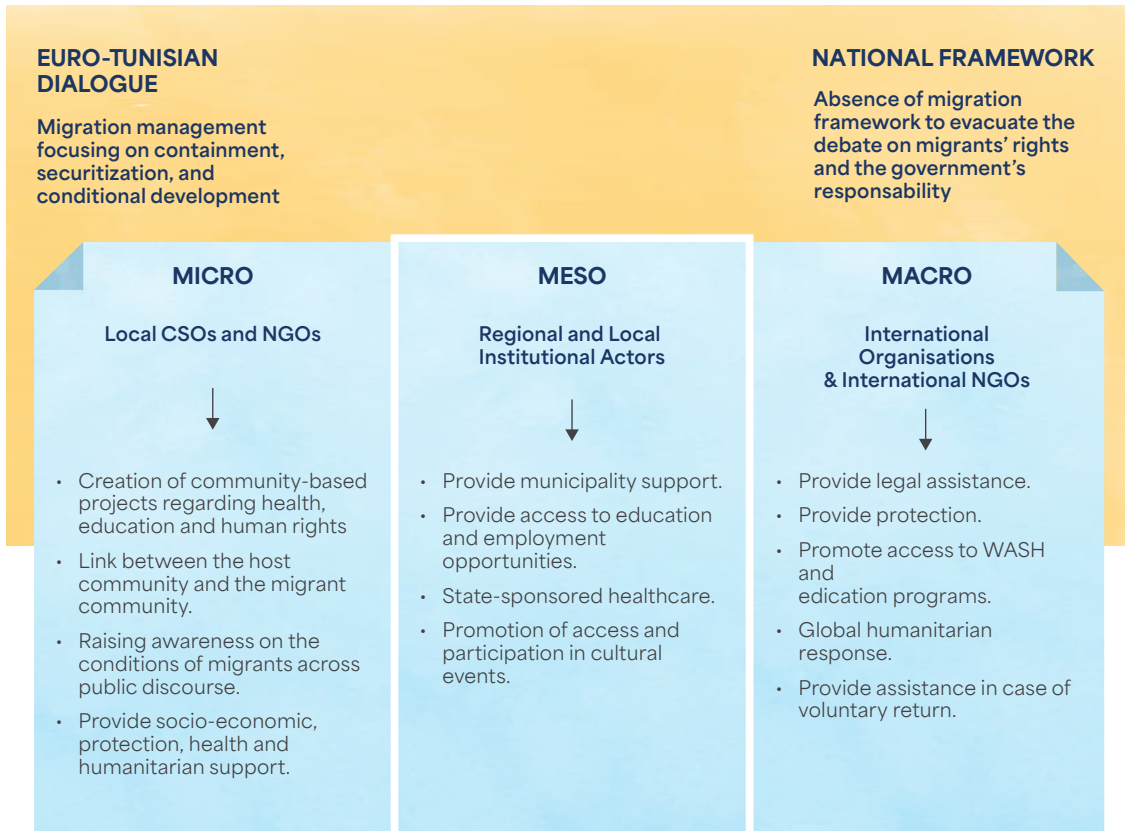
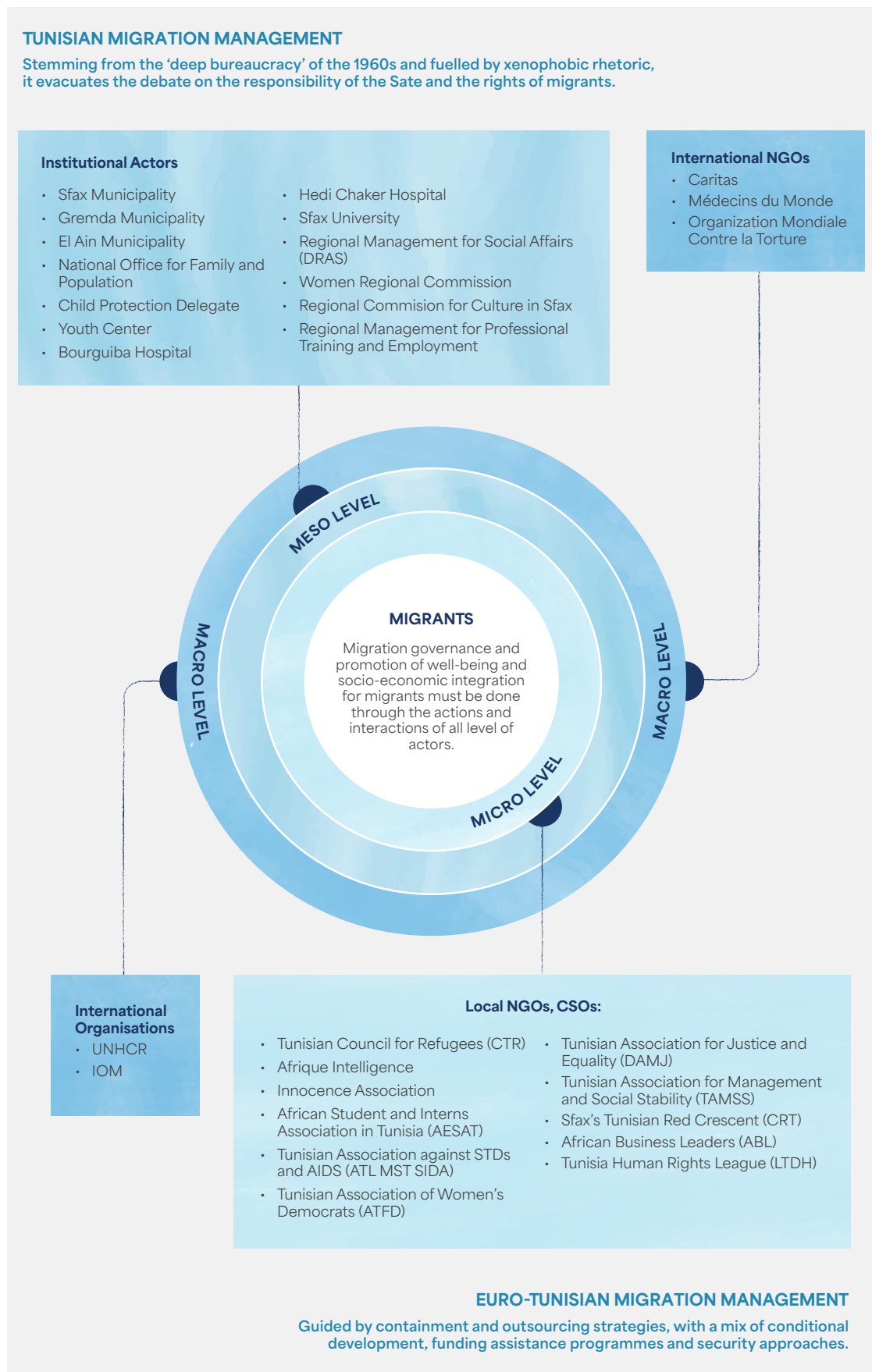


Figure 13. Stakeholder mapping of migration actors in Sfax (2023) – Ecosystemic representation



5

Keys to a better understanding of 'urban migration management' in Sfax

On the basis of the preceding analyses and the final workshop with participants from various organizations and institutions, this section focuses on a few fundamental elements in a thematic way. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the aim here is to identify relevant reading prisms for understanding the 'migration governance' issues of mixed migration in the context of the city of Sfax.

5.1 *Questioning 'migration governance' and 'migration management'*

Interesting discussions took place on the very validity of the concept of "migration governance" or "migration management" at the feedback workshop and during individual interviews. On the face of it, "governance" is similar to a form of "optimized management", "good operation", "good collective practice" or "shared government", according to the definitions given by the participants; but the question remains: what criteria for "good" or "optimal" are we talking about here? What are the underlying objectives? What are the objectives, standards, and indicators of this "good" governance? And finally, who really "governs" in this "good governance"? In the case of Tunisia, the country is a signatory to almost all the treaties and agreements signed with the European Union over the last twenty years in the field of migration management. It is also one of the main beneficiaries of the funds released since 2015 following the Valletta Summit. Its obligations in the field of human mobility therefore make it one of the central players in the fight against irregular immigration in the Mediterranean. Moreover, the migration-oriented financial and legal ties binding Tunisia to the European Union mean that 1) in the purely legal field, Tunisian legislation on migration (2004 law) has been "strongly influenced by European demands" (UN agency, Tunis); 2) in the field of development, Tunisia's participation in the fight against irregular migration has truly become "a sine qua non condition for cooperation and development" (NGO, Sfax).

To speak of “migration governance”, in a context where the European Union wishes both to make its borders more hermetic and to rationalize professional mobility from North Africa, may therefore imply that this “governance” is carried out: 1) according to the logic dictated by the European Union and Tunisia; 2) with funding (for NGOs and United Nations agencies) implicitly or explicitly aligned with this logic. In Sfax, for example, training workshops, the organization of cultural events and the dissemination of calls for projects aimed at “good governance” have formed the discursive matrix around which the Tunisian issues surrounding migration have been woven and formulated. But apart from actions aimed at formulating “advocacy”, “the central element of this “awareness-raising” concerns almost exclusively the identification of migrants’ needs, and the formulation of responses to these “needs” by the humanitarian and voluntary sector”⁴⁸, as researcher Cassarini notes based on her fieldwork in Sfax. Focusing the issue on needs - which are always growing and indefinable - makes it possible to deprioritize the question of the responsibilities of the Tunisian government and the European Union in the field of “governance”.

Table 2. First series of key recommendations

Questioning ‘migration governance’ and ‘migration management’		
Criticize the ‘migration governance’ approach, which focuses on the Euro-Tunisian relationship and overlooks municipalities and the local sphere - the only ones in direct contact with the reality of mobility (flows, characteristics, needs, services, protection, rights, etc.), through innovative transnational collaborations between cities.	Promote the principles of the Global Compact by strengthening the representation of local authorities in international organizations, while including key stakeholders (TA, Ifriqiya, Afrique Intelligence, MdM, etc. for Sfax) to create a genuine voice coming from civil society. Existing networks (e.g., UCLG, Mayors’ Migration Council, Global Alliance for Urban Crises, etc) could benefit the urban migration governance agenda for Sfax.	Systematize the collection, use and sharing of data and evidence on youth migration, disaggregated by age and gender, and their intersections, including socio-economic status and geographic area, gender, race and ethnicity, indigeneity, migrant status, (dis)ability status.

5.2 Rethinking ‘mixed migration’ and ‘transit migration’

As pointed out by Nick Van Hear, “migration can be mixed in several senses, which to some degree relate to stages of the migratory process: motivations may be mixed at the point of making the decision to move; migrants may make use of the same agents and brokers; they may travel with others in mixed migratory flows; motivations may change en route and after arrival; and people may find themselves in mixed communities during their journeys or at their destination.”⁴⁹ Knowing that mobility can be driven by a combination of factors,

⁴⁸ Cassarini, C. (2020). L’immigration subsaharienne en Tunisie : de la reconnaissance d’un fait social à la création d’un enjeu gestionnaire. *Migrations Société*, 179, 43-57.

⁴⁹ Van Hear, N. (2011) *Mixed Migration: Policy Challenges*, The Migration Observatory, COMPAS, University of Oxford. Available at: <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/primers/mixed-migration-policy-challenges/>

at different stages and according to different logics, it is therefore important not to use the concept of mixed migration in a way that negates differences, when its initial intention was precisely to draw attention to the complexity of individual trajectories.

On the other hand, the notion of ‘mixed migration’ can retain a heuristic value if it does not exclude critical work on the differences specific to individual trajectories to account for the diversity of experiences and their possible contribution to local socio-economic structures. One representative of civil society pointed out: “Today, we simplify situations and say that all migrants are the same, without trying to understand. Refugees, economic migrants and students are all stigmatized in the same way. They are dangerous and criminogenic. Tomorrow, we’ll be explaining that the ‘whole’ of migration goes hand in hand with skin color, and that blacks, sub-Saharan and Tunisians are all basically the same thing.⁵⁰” It is therefore necessary to allow for differences while relying on the universality of legal principles; at the same time, it is necessary to use encompassing notions in a critical way in order to avoid reducing differences to the most impoverishing common denominators⁵¹.

Likewise, the notion of ‘transit migration’ can present some ambivalent uses, as this concept tends to disregard both the temporal and spatial dimensions of mobility in exclusive favor of an understanding of the phenomenon as a linear process from A to B with steps, hubs, routes, flows, networks. But there is another reality, which is migration as experienced by migrants. In this case, temporalities are made up of expectations, acceleration and affects; the spaces are completely welcoming or hostile; choices are not rational and mechanical, or driven by ‘drivers’ or causalities. ‘This, we believe, is a biased approach to the problem since it focuses on the macroscopic phenomenon of migration. We, nonetheless, take a microscopic approach that focuses on the individual. As Afrique Intelligence we’re interested in the actual presence of the migrant in the city, we do not know the duration of his stay, only the migrant knows for how long he will be here. The most important thing to remember is that there are migrants in Tunis, Sousse, Agadez, and other cities, and their numbers are increasing’ (Afrique Intelligence, Sfax). Such a critical analysis of transit migration, if it goes hand in hand with a questioning of ‘mixed migration’ (but also of the presuppositions of ‘migration governance’), can propose an approach that better respects migrants’ rights while encouraging their possible contribution to the socio-economic fabric of Sfax.

⁵⁰ This telephone interview with a representative of a human rights association in Tunis was the only one to take place after President Kais Saied criminalised sub-Saharan migration at the end of February 2023.

⁵¹ Nicolle, H. (2023) The implications of (mis)managing transit migration. MIGNEX Policy Brief. Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo. (https://www.mignex.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/mpb-d084-the-implications_of_mismanaging-transit-migration-v1-2023.pdf)

Table 3. Second series of key recommendations – mixed migration

Rethinking ‘mixed migration’ and ‘transit migration’		
<p>Increase the visibility and inclusion of different forms of human mobility in multi-stakeholder engagements. Similarly, having mixed structures with sub-Saharan economic migrants, asylum seekers, but also return migrants or emigration candidates in discussions on key emigration or transit migration issues in Sfax seems essential. Since 2017, IOM has included transit migrants in its teams; ditto for Terre d’asile recently, which changes the perspective and knowledge of the subject.</p>	<p>Rethink the idea - extremely politically sensitive for both Tunisia and the EU - that migrants in transit are all temporarily in Sfax and are merely passing through on their way to Europe. For many sub-Saharan migrants, this is not the case, and their experience of mobility is much more complex from a temporal, spatial and intersubjective standpoint.</p>	<p>Encourage the civic potential of transit migrants, who are also often very familiar with the socio-economic reality of the communities in which they live. In Sfax, this could take the form of disaggregated citizenship (specific local voting rights) to increase the societal commitment of a population that will soon represent 10 to 12% of Sfax’s population.</p>

5.3

Recognizing written rules and unwritten practices

To speak of migration governance by considering only the institutional framework and the existing rules or laws necessarily leads to a superficial analysis of the reality in Sfax. As representatives of the municipality of Sfax, the governorate, NGOs and civil society actors repeatedly point out, there is a significant gap between written rules and unwritten practices in Sfax. This applies in particular to the way in which services are offered to migrants in transit. The variables of race and ethnicity (for sub-Saharan Africans and blacks), language (for non-French and non-Arabic speakers), religion (for non-Muslims) and gender are explanatory factors here, which combine to maximize or limit effective access to services and rights. The examples of access to formal employment and health are the ones most frequently mentioned by the stakeholders.

On access to formal work, an interesting analysis is presented by the employers themselves, corroborated by the municipality of Sfax. The few employers who wish to offer an employment contract and therefore a residence permit to economic migrants:

“

have problems with tax, the national business register, the border police, the employment agency and other government agencies. It is linked to the legal framework of administrative practice. In other words, the law is both written and unwritten, verbal, and non-verbal. In fact, in administrative practice, there is the verbal aspect of the law, the circulars, and the non-verbal aspect, the attitudes” (Municipality, Sfax). This analysis is shared by the few Sfax entrepreneurs interviewed, all of whom are aware of this reality and confirm the prevalence of the unspoken, the unwritten, institutional inertia and invisible practice over the laws that have been enacted: “Let’s consider a person who comes into an office to ask for a service; despite the fact that

we have a law authorizing it, if the administrative employee providing the service has never done it before, he will say that it is illegal. If the employee is new, he or she will inform an older colleague, and if the older colleague replies that he or she does not deal with this type of case, the new employee will believe that this is what the law says”.

(E., Entrepreneur in construction, 41 years old, Sfax).

Similarly, in access to healthcare, there is a permanent conflict between written rules and actual practice. Advocacy strategies should be developed to ensure health care should be free of charge for migrants in public establishments, a key element of which would consist in raising awareness and developing protocols among healthcare practitioners and within hospitals and other healthcare institutions. Indeed, Sub-Saharan migrants are also the victims of a great deal of discrimination - including against pregnant women - and some healthcare workers refuse to examine them or will rush their work, “often out of xenophobia or racism, but also out of ignorance, because they think they are doing (migrants) a favor when they are legally obliged to do so” (NGO, Health sector, Sfax). The gap between written theory - which, according to certain interpretations, guarantees access to healthcare regardless of nationality of migration status -- and unwritten practice is thus played out in this mixture of institutional inertia, path dependency and routine, but also ignorance, prejudice, and openly discriminatory practices.

Table 4. Third series of key recommendations

Recognizing written rules and unwritten practices		
Advocate for the adoption and operationalization of human rights approaches to migration governance by all relevant stakeholders in Sfax, with the active support of all key stakeholders. Migrants should have the possibility to report discrimination, violence, hate crimes, and other abuse without fear of repercussions, such as being arrested, detained, and deported.	Strengthen the administrative, legal, and technical capacities and skills of institutional counterparts - not only at the governmental or municipal levels, but also among health or education institutions in the city of Sfax to establish a real knowledge base. The development of real common legal and technical references on migration is a crucial challenge.	Align standards in Sfax (and Tunisia) with global standards for the protection of the rights of all migrants in transit (information, personal safety, adequate health care, education and an adequate standard of living) and end the detention of migrants in transit regardless of their status.

5.4 Applying a critical race lens to migration dynamics in Sfax

President Saied’s speech to the National Security Council on 21 February 2023⁵², which focused on sub-Saharan immigration, undoubtedly disarmed commentators by its violence. Certainly, it can be seen as a security pledge given to Europe on the issue of illegal immigra-

⁵² Présidence de la République tunisienne (2023) Communiqué du Conseil de sécurité nationale du 21 février 2023, Palais de Carthage, 21 février 2023. President Saied said that immigration from subsaharan countries was an “abnormal” situation, part of a criminal plan designed to “metamorphose the demographic composition of Tunisia” and transform it “into nothing more than an African state that no longer belongs to the Arab-Islamic world”.

tion from sub-Saharan Africa. But the violence of the message has had the effect of unleashing racist rhetoric and physical violence in Sfax, as in other towns in Tunisia. In this sense, we must undoubtedly “take the speech by the Tunisian Head of State seriously” and see in these unexpected words a “genuine political program aimed at foreigners and African migrants in particular and, beyond that, at all Tunisian citizens from within the country and from the diaspora”⁵³. The crackdown on sub-Saharan migrants is nothing new and is part of a pattern of authoritarian tightening designed to strengthen the central government’s control over society. The designation of a common enemy is a guarantee of unification.

For geographer Ali Bensaâd, such “manifestations of racism are rooted in national identity constructs based on a fiction of ethnocultural homogeneity and a phobia of all diversity, perceived as a threat to the totalitarian exercise of uniformity”⁵⁴. Ostracizing any form of difference from the hegemonic norm desired by those in power (race, religion, opinion), is part of a strategy to consolidate their authority through the identification of the “sedition” (fitna). In recent times, this logic has been applied to Amazigh communities, to black communities descended from slaves in Tunisia, to minority currents of Islam such as Ibadism, and has resulted in the virtual annihilation of the memory of the Jewish presence in the country. Black Tunisians, who make up between 15 and 20% of the country’s population, are “sometimes called chouchane, oussif, or abid, which literally mean “slave” (NGO, Sfax). Similarly, black people (whether migrants or Tunisian citizens) are often commonly referred to as ‘Africans’ in cafés, shops or in the Medina of Sfax, which shows the complexity of post-colonial deconstruction and reconstruction of identity in popular language itself.

Table 5. Forth series of key recommendations – race lens

Applying a critical race lens to migration dynamics in Sfax		
Develop inclusive local narratives to counter xenophobic national narratives, at a time when the Tunisian state has decided to promote a racist discourse that equates ‘African’ migrants, insecurity, and loss of identity. Highlighting socio-economic successes and joint cultural projects between Sfaxians and transit migrants can help reverse the current trend.	Provide online and face-to-face language courses to: 1) facilitate the temporary or longer-term integration of transit migrants - particularly from sub-Saharan Africa - with administrations and everyday situations; 2) overcome the language barrier, which is often cited as the main difference by Tunisians; and 3) avoid situations of administrative or contractual manipulation.	Promote social dividends, focusing on migrants’ existing formal/informal socio-economic and cultural network, to ensure the development of more inclusive and innovative ideas, beliefs and opinions concerning, among other things, politics, institutions, health, culture, society, religion, technology, science, education, and gender issues, both in their countries of origin and in Sfax (and beyond).

⁵³ Geisser, V. (2023). Tunisie, « la chasse aux migrants subsahariens est ouverte » : Comment la pionnière de la démocratie dans le monde arabe est devenue le théâtre d’un racisme d’État. *Migrations Société*, 191, 7-20.

⁵⁴ Bensaâd, A. (2023) Au Maghreb, le racisme contre les Subsahariens met au jour l’ambiguïté des constructions identitaires. *Le Monde* (27 avril 2023).

5.5 Using an intersectional lens to understand vulnerability, violence and agency

As suggested by the stories shared in appendices 2 and 3 of this document, the situation of migrant women exposes them to risks not only during their migratory journey but also in the city of Sfax. Two recent studies, one qualitative⁵⁵ and the other quantitative⁵⁶, have provided remarkable evidence of the violence experienced by migrant women from sub-Saharan Africa. Between abuse, aggression and violence, migrant women's accounts are experiences at the intersection of racism and misogyny. The intersectional issue applies in particular to sub-Saharan migrant women, insofar as Tunisian migrant women, whose numbers we saw were increasing both quantitatively and proportionally in the previous section, often travel with their relatives or friends; by contrast, the women from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, but also Cameroon and Liberia, whom we met in Sfax, generally travel alone and do not always benefit from the protection of a friendly circle of solidarity. They are therefore more exposed and more vulnerable.

Moreover, protection of migrant women, whether rescued at sea or isolated within the community, is also a touchstone of the tensions between the local (municipal) and national (government) levels:

“

The feminization of transit migration is not a new phenomenon, but numbers are on the rise, so we've come up with some ideas. We thought of installing them at the municipal market in the suburbs here on the road to Gabès. We also thought of a shelter for migrants rescued from the sea or sometimes for young boys who can't find shelter; this is a responsibility now carried out by Caritas for a limited number of refugees, asylum seekers or migrants, but we were refused by the central authorities and the governorate, in particular the government representative at local level

(Municipality, Sfax).

⁵⁵ Luceño Moreno, M. (2022) Violences qui migrent avec les femmes, UNFPA financé par COOPI (Cooperazione Italiana).

⁵⁶ Terre d'Asile (2020) Parcours de vie de femmes migrantes en Tunisie. Entre inégalités, discriminations et ambitions, Juin 2020, p. 17.

But migrant women are not only exposed to racist and gender-based violence. Their socio-economic role is also essential to the functioning of the informal economy of migration and the various interdependent circles of migrants in Sfax. They occupy key positions in the economic space, visible in markets and public places alike. Socially, they also help to disseminate certain messages and practices in terms of health, law and information:

“

We're not all the same in this respect, some of us are wary of NGOs or clinics, but I think we play a positive role in spite of everything. Women are more willing to go to hospitals, clinics, and Médecins du Monde, because we put our pride aside when it comes to health. Our own or that of our children. I think that makes men think a bit. And the same goes for paperwork and legal issues. I could easily go and see a lawyer if I think it would help; my brothers would hesitate and say that they are accomplices of the police”

(L. Female migrant, 25 years-old, Ivory Coast, Sfax)

This in-between role, between the informal and clandestine world of migrants and the public and visible world of Tunisian society, is often primarily a female role. In this regard, it is essential to use an intersectional lens to understand the vulnerabilities, violence and agency of migrants in Sfax, given that the nexus of gender, racism and mobility is essential to local social and economic dynamics.

Table 6. Fifth series of key recommendations - intersectionality

Using an intersectional lens to understand vulnerability, violence, and agency		
Faced with the feminization of transit migration to Europe (both among sub-Saharan migrants and among young Tunisian candidates for departure), it is important to develop non-stigmatizing and more specifically female access to information on risks, rights, health, and psychosocial assistance. Issues such as sexual violence, decent work, easier access to contraception and support for pregnant and breast-feeding women were all raised.	Put an end to the trafficking of sub-Saharan women from Côte d'Ivoire (in particular). Deprived of passports, underpaid, and often sexually abused, they are exploited, deprived of their rights, and reduced to a situation of modern slavery as 'bonnes couchantes'. The semi-formality of this human trafficking (since the women enter the country regularly) and the absolute vulnerability of these women make the traffic invisible.	Capitalize on the social role of women in Sfax's migrant communities, by supporting their role as mediators for families in areas such as health information, psychosocial support, legal protection, and education. Those involved in mobility, whatever their field, need to think about their programs in terms of gender - as a social construct and a relationship between masculinity and femininity - at the heart of their programs and interventions.

Annexes

1. *Interview with H. and her brother (Medina of Sfax, Tunisia) 14 February 2023 at 12:18 pm*

H. was sitting near the merchants, who are also migrants. At first, she was not really interested in talking, but after I explained the study and the objectives of our research, she agreed to have this interview with us. Her brother joined us immediately and we started a discussion that was quickly interrupted by the arrival of the police, who asked us to clear the street.

Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

I arrived clandestinely by the land borders. I am of Cameroonian origin. From Cameroon, I went through Nigeria, Niger, Algeria, and then Tunisia. I left Algeria because it is not an accessible country. We don't have a job, and as women, we don't have the freedom to move around freely. At any moment, they arrest us and expel us to Niger.

Did they put you on the Nigerien borders?

Yes, they take us to Assamaka. I arrived in Tunisia in June 2022. Well, Tunisia wasn't any different, I had a lot of misfortunes. I was assaulted by Tunisians, and I was robbed by my black brothers last April. I went to the police station to file a complaint, but they didn't do anything about it, as I don't have identity documents. In a way, they isolated me. Regarding the hospital, recently, I went to the Habib Bourguiba hospital because I have a hormone problem. They took me lightly. They just touched me a little bit without seriously examining me because I don't have an ID. We are all Africans, Tunisia is still in Africa, but they don't care about us, black people. Do you understand? We are not well considered, I don't know... My biggest concern is to leave this place.

In Sfax, how is it going? Where do you live? Are you working?

For the moment, I don't have a job anymore. The woman I was working for, moved, no she travelled. I have a place, I rent a place with my young brother, and we manage day by day. We do odd jobs, like construction work, and cleaning the house for an Arab family. For example, if there's a big cleaning job at an Arab family's house, I do the job and they pay me 30 or 25 or 20 dinars per day.

So it's just jobs here and there to get by. And are you still in touch with your family? Are you still in touch with your country?

(hesitation) We are orphans of father and mother (inaudible sentence) and we are here for a better life.

Did you leave your country for economic and social reasons?

Yes, that's it!

(..) You told me that the police in Algeria turned you back, did the Tunisian police do the same?

Well, once I came back from Tunis, I had my salary on me because I worked for a month for a lady in Tunis. She paid me 650 dt. I took my salary and came to settle here in Sfax. At the police barrier before arriving at Sfax, there was a control. I was robbed by Tunisian police officers. They searched for me and took all my money. They told me that since I don't have any cards to certify that I was working for someone (unfinished sentence) and because I quit that job two weeks ago. They said to me that in Tunisia, you are not allowed to travel with more than 500 dt, and left with my money.

Did you file a complaint?

As we have no papers? IDs, we are a little afraid to go to the police station.

Her brother: It was also the police who took her money, so the police officers are accomplices of banditry too.

And why did you choose to come to Sfax?

Just like all the migrants, it's just for crossing to go to Europe.

You do not consider Tunisia can be a host country?

Her brother: We do, but human rights are still violated here. On the other hand, in Europe, it is a little more regulatory. We don't even have Tunisian papers or residence permits, so we don't have a voice in Tunisian law. If the police arrest us, as illegal immigrants, we will go to prison, even for nothing. This means that we have neither the courage nor the desire to stay in Tunisia because our rights are not protected and we are not safe.

Is the rent expensive?

Yes, it is very expensive, we pay 350 dt for a one-bedroom apartment. On the other hand, when we tell that a Tunisian, they do not understand why we pay so much, but we have no choice, we cannot sleep in the street.

Her brother: Even at the store, we realize that even the prices of the items they sell to us are doubling (deafening noise of the police cars). We have to leave. Fortunately, you are here to experience this!

At this moment, a municipal police car arrives, and all the vendors begin to evacuate the streets. Otherwise, the police would confiscate their products. The noise of flashing lights was deafening. A few minutes later, there were no more salesmen. The car stopped and an officer got out shouting "GO HOME" several times.

Figure 14. Female migrant and her baby at the Sfax Medina (February 2023)



2. *Interview with Fatima (City Bahri 3), Sfax, Tunisia 13 February 2023 at 04:26 pm*

I met Fatima in a flea market in a popular neighborhood in Sfax named “City Bahri 3”. City Bahri 3 is one of the most popular cities in Sfax, it is known for its good flea markets and street food restaurants. People there come from different regions and cities. While walking, you cannot notice the presence of migrants (young ones especially) who work there or shop at grocery stores. Fatima was looking for gloves for her kid, we started discussing and I asked her if she is doing good in Sfax, and she responded positively. Honestly, I was impressed, she was really sure about her answer. She was so open to discussion, so I invited her for a coffee. She was moved by the gesture. She is in Tunisia for 3 years and she also gave birth to her 2-year-old daughter. She is a 23-year-old migrant woman from Liberia. Her French is approximate, so we had our interview in English so she can express herself.

You told me that you come from Liberia, can you tell me more about your country?

Liberia is a country on the West African coast. It is actually a good country but somehow it is difficult to live there because it is one of the world’s poorest countries. (...) There are many problems, and difficulties and as a woman, it is not easy there. The people die a lot due to bad nutrition, and plenty of diseases, and it is a very hot country. The president is doing nothing about it. Once there is a complaint, they don’t do anything about it. There are a lot of crises. (...) Socially and economically, there are a lot of difficulties, that’s why we take this risky journey to move forward. We live to flee our country for certain reasons. Sometimes, we have political problems, sometimes religious problems, and a lot of problems. For example, if you decide to change your religion, and your family says no if you force it, some of them can be penned to death. So, some people decide to leave the country to save their life.

Can you tell me more about your journey?

I wanted to live in Guinea but actually, I couldn’t understand the people there. I had some difficulties, I couldn’t find a sleeping place, sometimes I was sleeping on the streets. So, I lived there and met some Liberians. We discussed it together and we decided to leave Guinea for Mali. So, I joined them and from Mali, we went to Algeria. I could have stayed in Algeria. Algeria is a very good country, but the police chase us every night there, we don’t have documents (passport) the police would chase us out and deport us back. I was so afraid to go back to my country and I don’t want to go back, because if I go back (nervous laugh) you know. In Algeria, police chase people who do not have documents, if they know that you are there illegally, they would deport you. That’s why I left Algeria and decided to come to Tunisia. I was afraid they would catch me (the Algerian police), so I did my best. Crossing that border was painful, it was two days in the forest. Once I was here, I have a friend who directed me to an NGO (The United Nations = HCR) so I contacted them to have my documents. The first days were difficult, I couldn’t sleep thinking about the papers. When I went to the NGO, and they welcomed me I felt like a real human being. From that day, I started to feel at peace. After a while, they gave us ID cards and from that time alhamdulillah.

How are you received in Tunisia and particularly in Sfax? How did you find a place to live?

The truth is, it was difficult to find black people who understand me because I don’t speak French very well and Tunisians don’t understand me either, Arabs don’t understand you but still treat you well. I am fine here. When I arrived, I was hosted by a black man with my partner.

And for your child, does he have the health care he needs?

Not that much. Tunisia is welcoming the migrants and they are actually doing their best, but they are not really assisting migrants who are really in need. They could not assist me, but I was grateful because they welcomed me with a smile.

But you had your baby at the hospital?

Yes, I had my baby at a public hospital. I told them my story and they agreed to not take any charges. After giving birth, I stayed there for 3 days. Tunisian doctors were so patient, and kind. While I was there, they were feeding me 3 times a day and cared about me.

Do you want to stay here and raise your baby here?

Yes sure. When she reaches 4 years old, I will send her to school. I'm very interested in her learning Arabic.

...

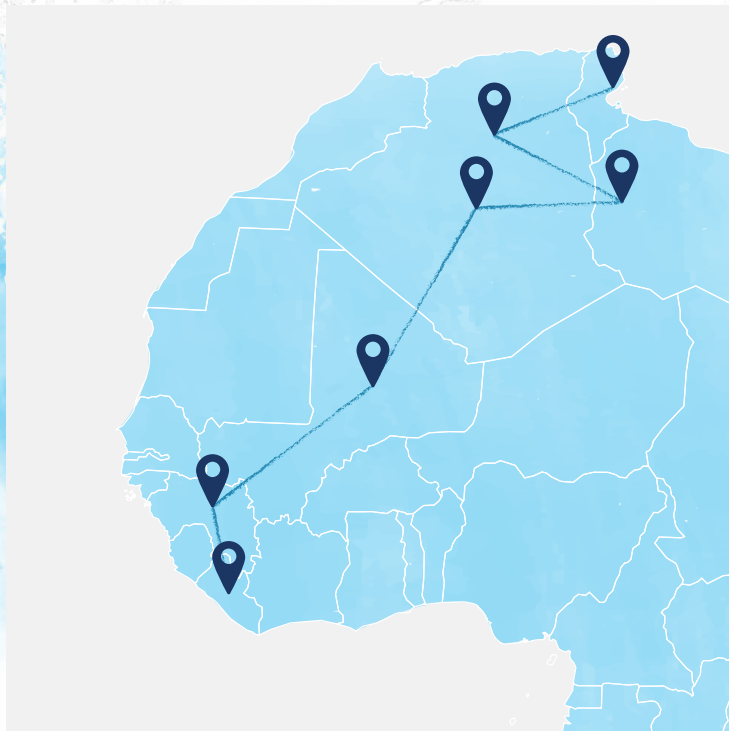
{a long conversation about her baby's feet and how she can fix it, I oriented her to Doctors of the World}

Are you still in contact with your family?

No, I am not. My family hated me so much and I can't live with my family in Liberia again. When I was there, I had problems. I don't have any contact, I have lost them all. I can only talk to my sister, I added her on Facebook and she accepted my request. I don't talk about all of it, some details of the story make me sad, so I don't mention them. If I tell you the reason that made me quit my country, it makes me sad. When I tell my story, I never mention Libya, it's a tough country. I went from Algeria to Libya and then came back to Algeria because conditions there [in Libya] were extremely dangerous for migrants. They would torture you, as a woman, they would rape you and you can be subject to unlawful killings, it is a bad country.

Then, we continued our coffee, we talked more about her daughter, we left the coffee shop and each one of us went her way.

Figure 15. Fatima's journey



3. Actor mapping Sfax

Table 7. Actor mapping Sfax

Actor	Level of Governance	Topic	Target groups	Cooperation
Public / Institutional actors				
Délégué à la Protection de l'Enfance (DPE)	National, representation at regional and local levels	Child protection, ensuring consideration for best interests	Children, parents	Law enforcement actors, courts, Action Innocence
Direction Régionale des Affaires Sociales	Regional	Protection of access to health and social services, risk prevention, awareness raising surrounding these topics	Health and social work professionals, general population	
Direction Régionale de la Femme, de la Famille, de l'Enfance et des Séniors	Regional	Women, family, children and senior population	Women, children, the elderly	
Direction Régionale de la Formation Professionnelle et de l'Emploi (Ministry of Employment and Professional Training)	Regional (links to national)	Education and professional training, employability, delivery of residence cards and work permits	Educational and professional training actors/stakeholders	Indirect collaboration with Afrique Intelligence, TAT

Direction Régionale des Frontières (Interior Ministry)	Regional (links to national)	Mandated with border protection	Tunisian border agencies, individuals crossing borders	Tunisian border agencies, notably the Border Guard General Directorate of the National Guard (DGGF); and Border Police Directorate of the General Directorate for National Security (DFE); indirect assistance from ICMPD and EU (capacity building of border agencies)
Direction Régionale de la Justice (Justice Ministry)	Regional (links to national)	Mandated to prosecute individuals attempting to enter, illegally entering, or residing in Tunisian territory	Individuals attempting to enter, illegally entering, or residing in Tunisian territory	Courts, law enforcement agencies, regional directorate of border protection (interior ministry)
Direction Régionale de la Santé (Health Ministry)	Regional (links to national)	Mandated to oversee the provision of health-related services, including to individuals not covered by Tunisian social security	Regional population	Health care actors and stakeholders, local authorities
Direction Régionale de la Sécurité (Interior Ministry)	Regional (links to national)	Mandated with civilian protection	Civilian population	
Instance nationale contre la traite des personnes	National	Mandated to tackle human trafficking, smuggling	Victims of human trafficking, individuals engaged in smuggling	Council of Europe
Institute National de la Statistique (INS) Direction Régionale de Sfax	National (operationalised at regional level)	Collection of data concerning inter and intra governorate/regional internal mobility (however, no data collected on international migration)		

Inspection régionale du travail (Ministère de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle)	Regional	Labour conditions, employment	Employers, workers	
Municipalité de Sfax	Local (municipal)	No official mandate to address migration issues, works to enhance and support coordination among local actors working on migration governance issues	Civil society, CSOs, NGOs, population on the city of Sfax	Municipalities of Gremda, el-Hain, CSOs, NGOs (e.g. ICMPD via MC-2CM program), and migrant associations in Sfax

Private sector

Tunisia-Africa Business Council - Section Sfax	Local (with links to regional, national, and international levels)	Works to promote "South-South, Afro-Tunisian partnerships" in employment sector	Employers, businesses in the city of Sfax, potential investor	Employers, local businesses
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Union Générale du Travail Tunisienne (UGTT)	Local, regional, national (present throughout Tunisia, with representation in Sfax)	(1) Defend the rights of Tunisian workers, pushing local employers to adhere to labour laws surrounding the hiring of foreigners (including those in irregular situations) - UGTT thought to be considering the possibility of introducing union-type protection for certain individuals working in the informal sector. (2) labour legislation information and awareness; (3) specific trainings (including on protection mechanisms following abuse)	Employers, employees - potential for expansion to informal sector (although no explicit mention of plans to address the working situation of irregular migrants)	ILO, Civil Society
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Local associations

African Business Leaders	National, with local operations	Promotion of economic integration, advocacy surrounding recognition of social and economic rights of migrants / Promotion and support for migrant entrepreneurs in Tunisia	Migrants (with focus on migrant businesses and entrepreneurs)	
Association des Étudiants et Stagiaires Africains en Tunisie (AESAT)	Local operations, national network	Orientation to foreign African students arriving in Tunisia, socio-economic integration and involvement, promotion/presentation of African culture in Tunisia	Foreign African students in Tunisia (mostly from Sub Saharan African countries)	Afrique Intelligence, ATL MST SIDA, TAT, MdM, Tunisian Red Crescent, Sfax municipality

Afrique Intelligence	Local operations, national network	Defend rights of migrants - advocacy, judicial orientation and support, awareness raising	Migrants	MdM, Tunisian Red Crescent, TAT, municipality of Sfax
Association Innocence	Local operations, national network	Protection of and awareness raising surrounding human rights, defending children's rights	Children	Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network / funding provided by European Union, European Endowment for Democracy
Association Tunisienne de Lutte contre les Maladies Sexuellement Transmissibles et le SIDA (ATL MST SIDA)	Local operations, national network	Prevention of spread of STDs, provision of treatment (notably for AIDS and HIV, psychological and psychiatric care, judicial assistance, shelter from violence	Individuals living with STDs, in particular HIV and AIDS	TAT, OIM
Conseil Tunisien pour les Réfugiés (CTR)	Local operations, national entity	Orientation of migrants, assistance with asylum seeker/refugee registration process	Refugees / asylum seekers / migrants aspiring to refugee or asylum seeker status	UNHCR
Croissant Rouge Tunisien de Sfax (CRT)	Local operations, national entity	Accommodation and care services for migrants - including orientation	Individuals in crisis situations, in need of emergency assistance (including international, regional and internal migrants)	State actors, municipal authorities, migrant associations NGOs
Ifriqiya Association	Local operations	Human rights, socio-economic integration, climate change, migrant access to services	international migrants (mostly from Sub Saharan Africa)	GIZ, IOM, TAT, public institutions

Terre d'Asile Tunisie (TAT)	Local operations, national/international network (Tunisian branch of French NGO)	Social and juridical assistance, food security, shelter, WASH	International migrants	MdM, IOM, municipality of Sfax, CSOs
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NGOs

Organization Mondiale Contre la Torture (OMCT)	International, with local representation	Prevention and documentation of torture, direct legal assistance/support to victims of torture	Victims of torture	
Médecins du Monde (MdM)	Local operations, national network	(1) assessment of services offered by other actors, and capacity building; (2) provision of healthcare; (3) psychosocial/psychological support; (4) accompaniment and assistance in accessing health services/care	Migrants, healthcare workers	IOM, TAT, ATL MST SIDA, Afrique Intelligence, Municipality of Sfax, Tunisian Red Crescent

International Organizations / UN Agencies

International Center for Migration and Policy Development (ICMPD)	International, with regional and local operations	Assessment of coordination and partnerships among actors working in the realm of urban migration governance in Sfax (including CSOs, NGOs, IOs, municipal authorities, institutional and private actors); service and actor mapping	Migration governance actors, policymakers	MdM, TAT
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IOM	International (with Tunisian HQ in Tunis)	Promotion of (respect for) migrant rights in Tunisia, legal assistance to migrants, voluntary return	International migrants	National government, UNHCR, ILO, Médecins du Monde, CSOs, NGOs
ILO	International	Promotion of respect for international labour laws and standards, including those of migrant workers	Migrants working in Tunisia, employers, national and regional labour departments / authorities	National government, UGTT
UNHCR	International (with Tunisian HQ in Sfax)	Assist asylum seekers and refugees (protection, legal registration), refugee access to basic services (health, education), respect for fundamental rights of refugees and asylum seekers	Refugees, Asylum seekers	National government, CTR, IOM, ILO

Academic actors

University of Sfax	Local base, regional/international cooperation	Migration research in certain departments, notably the Maison du Maghreb des Sciences de l'Homme (MdMSH)	(international) students	AESAT, Forum de la Méditerranée occidentale sur l'enseignement supérieur, la recherche et l'innovation (which includes Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, France, Italy, Malta, Mauritania, Portugal and Spain)
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Equal Partnerships

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