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# Hidden hardship of an unnoticed workforce

The economic lives of refugees and migrants in Tunisia



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HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG  
TUNISIA

**Refugees' and migrants' skills are often under-valued due to a lack of access to the formal Tunisian labour market. Their contributions to the Tunisian economy and its development remain largely invisible and unrecognised.**



What are their economic situations today? In which sectors do they work and contribute to the economy? What are their specific points of vulnerability and what are possible solutions to improve their lives?

This study provides:

- An updated overview of the economic situation of refugees and migrants in Tunisia, including their access to the labour market and their contribution to the local and national economy;
- Recommendations for the Tunisian authorities (national and local), international organisations, civil society and researchers.

## Key findings

### Right to work

**Tunisia lacks key legislation to protect the economic rights and livelihoods of refugees and migrants.** The country has not ratified international migrant worker conventions and lacks provisions within the national migration strategy to safeguard the rights of migrant workers. A national asylum law has yet to be adopted. At the same time, migration dynamics in Tunisia are changing, with a growing importance attributed to thinking about the labour rights and participation of refugees and migrants in the Tunisian economy.

### Gender and Types of Employment

**While often employed in the informal sector, refugees' and migrants' access to work and types of employment vary considerably by gender.** Women often reported engaging in domestic work, while men often reported working in construction, agriculture, industry and manufacturing. Key informants noted that, particularly in Southern Tunisia, it is challenging for women to find work, as most opportunities are in the construction sector.

### Students and Informal Work

**Sub-Saharan students must often turn to informal work to cover their costs of living.** Grants offered by educational institutions are often not aligned with the costs of living or university fees. This, combined with the fact that international students cannot legally be employed in Tunisia, forces many students and graduates to engage in informal work similar to other refugees and migrants in Tunisia, often not relevant to their studies and skills.

## Remittances

**Most surveyed respondents noted that their income in Tunisia was not sufficient for sending remittances to family members in their origin countries.** Those who did send remittances most often reported using a mobile credit system offered by mobile phone providers.

## Access to Banking Services

**A large majority of respondents reported a lack of access to banking services.** Refugees and migrants noted a lack of clarity around the type of documentation that banks require. Key informants cited that either a residence permit or an official work contract is obligatory, requirements that block access for certain refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants.

## Contributions to Development

**Refugees' and migrants' contributions to the Tunisian economy and its development often go unnoticed, since most engage in informal employment activities.** Refugees and migrants are reported to fill gaps in several sectors by providing manpower and often working in physically demanding, largely low-skilled and informal jobs.



A migrant and his Tunisian employer are restoring a hotel in the South of Tunisia. Zarzis, Tunisia, June 2, 2020. Photo credit: © Morgane Wirtz / Hans Lucas.

**Read more!**  
(available in English,  
French, Arabic)



## About MMC

The Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) in North Africa is part of the MMC global network – a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. MMC North Africa provides evidence and expertise on the mixed migration patterns and dynamics of people on the move, primarily from West and East Africa to and through countries in North Africa. The core countries of focus are Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia.

### MMC in Tunisia at a glance

7,000+ interviews conducted  
15+ on-site enumerators  
20+ Tunisian sites

The MMC is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.



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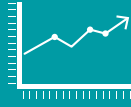


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Advocacy

## About HBF

The Heinrich Böll Foundation is a catalyst for green perspectives and projects. The foundation is affiliated with the German Green Party. It works with partners in over 60 countries and currently has 34 international offices, including the one in Tunis. The foundation works for a healthy and sustainable environment for current and future generations and defends human rights including those of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.



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