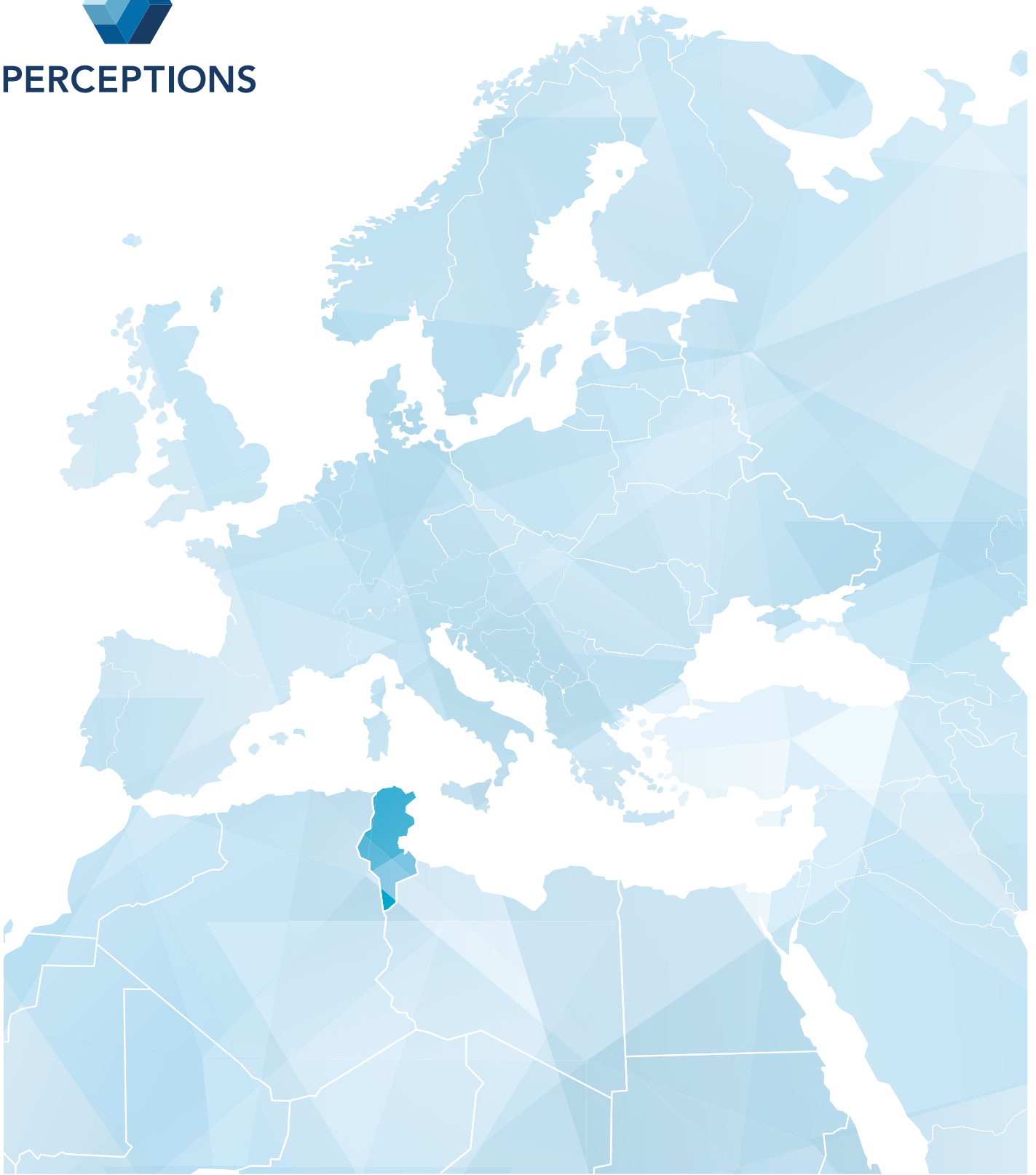




PERCEPTIONS



Tunisia

PERCEPTIONS
Country Report

PERCEPTIONS RESEARCH:

Literature, studies, projects, stakeholders, solutions, tools and practices

DISCLAIMER:

Disclaimer: This report is based on desk-research conducted between 2019 and 2022 and covers major development between the period of 2015-2019. For more updated information on the country profile, please check the additional institutional links at the end of the document.



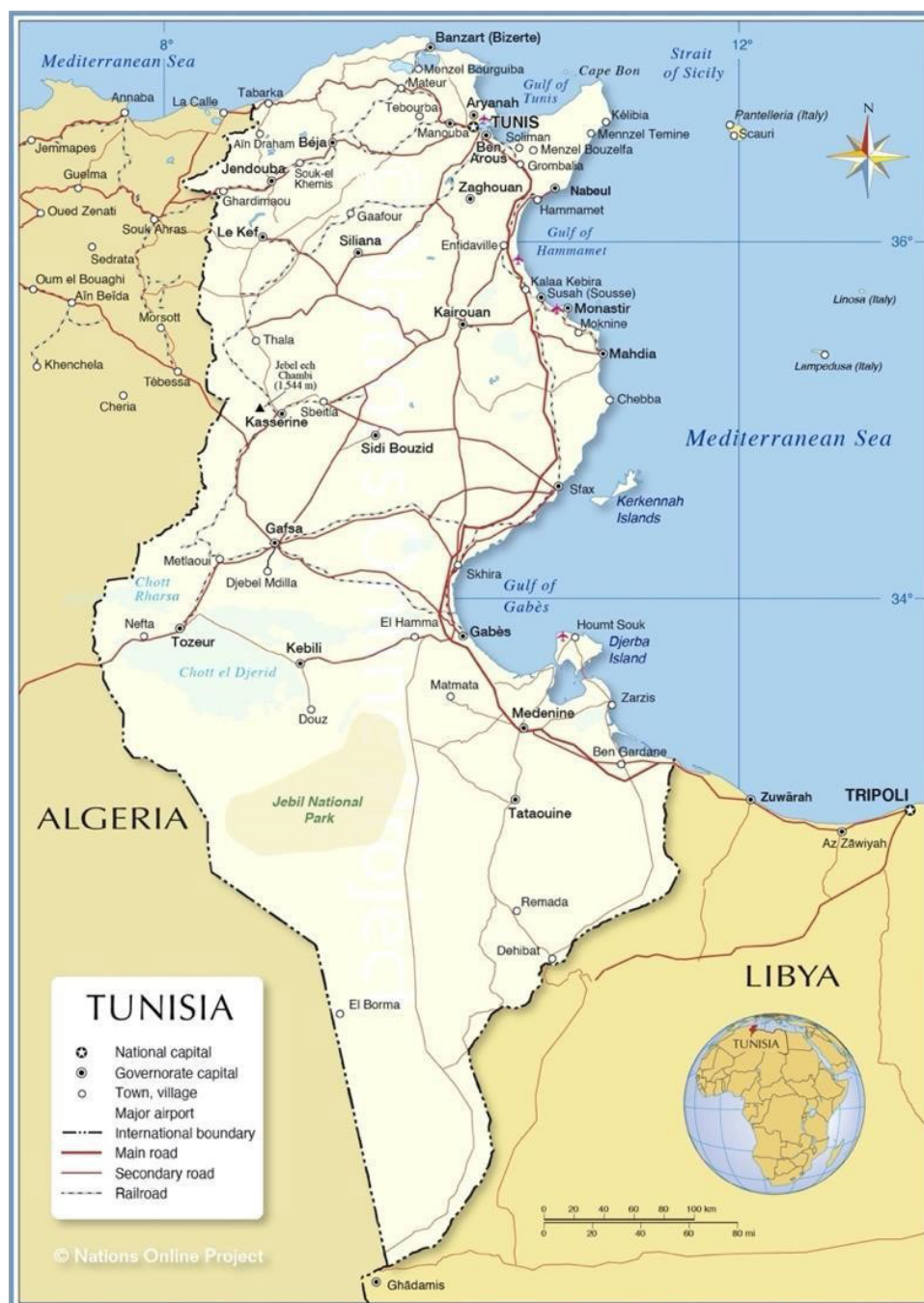
This project has received funding from the European Union's H2020 Research & Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement No 833870.

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a) Geographical map

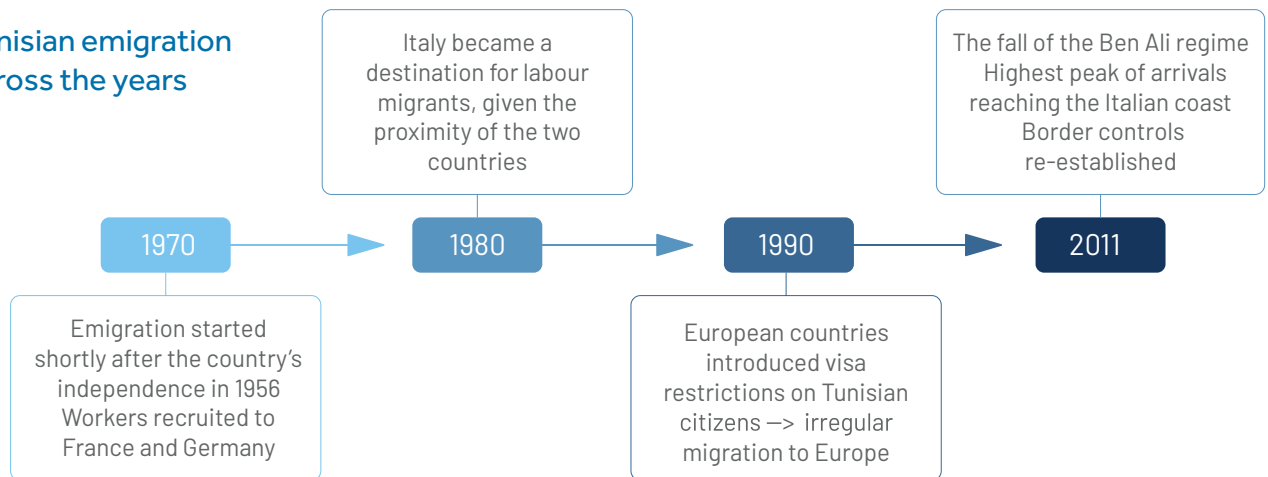


b) Short summary

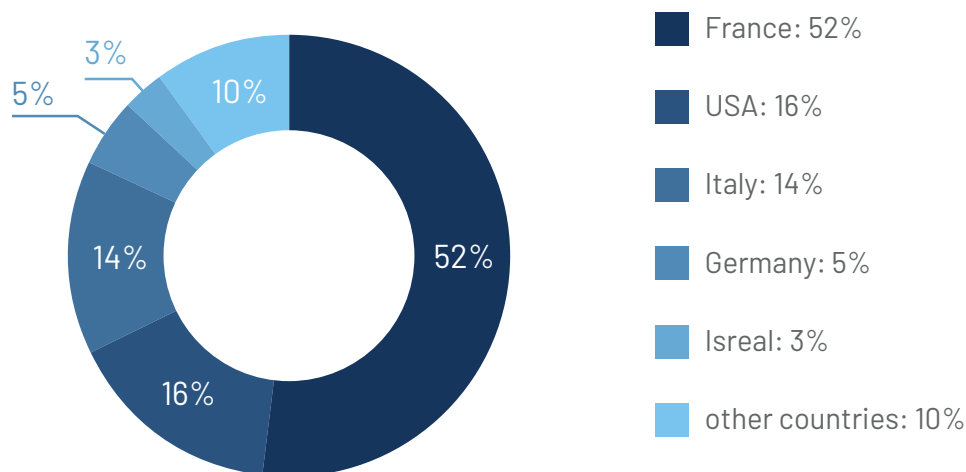
Although the country is a signatory of the Geneva Convention and the new constitution of 2014 guarantees the right to seek asylum, there is no asylum policy or protection legislation in Tunisia (Mixed Migration Hub, 2018). The absence of these legal frameworks translates into hardships for asylum seekers who are often criminalised and refugees, as determined by the UNHCR. In addition, to being a country of origin for migrants through regular and irregular channels, Tunisia is also a country of transit, and to a lesser extent of destination for many migrants seeking to reach Europe through the Central Mediterranean Route. Although there are many migrants who fled the war in Libya and settled in Tunisia, there are no official numbers of how many Libyan nationals are currently living in Tunisia and very few have registered with the UNHCR. It is estimated that more than 10,000 sub-Saharan migrants are living in Tunisia irregularly. The deteriorating economic conditions in Tunisia following the Arab Spring in 2011 and the subsequent unrest and terrorist attacks targeting the touristic industry has affected young Tunisians' aspirations to leave the country in search of a better future: over the last 9 years, more Tunisians have left the country irregularly towards Europe.

c) Facts & figures

Tunisian emigration across the years



Tunisian migrants abroad in 2018



c) Full document

Institutional setting

In Tunisia, municipalities are increasingly playing a more active role in policymaking, but local migration policy remains limited and municipalities have little input in formulating migration policies (ICMPD, 2018). The Secretary of State for Migration and Tunisians Abroad (SEMTE) was created within the Ministry of Social Affairs to elaborate the national migration strategy, in coordination with other institutions, which are involved in different aspects of migration governance (ICMPD, 2018). The Secretariat was a short-living initiative. Other institutions were created to support the drafting and implementation of holistic migration policy, including the National Observatory of Migration, and the Office of Tunisians Abroad (OTE), which underwent a drastic reform (De Bel-Air, 2016).

Although the country is a signatory of the Geneva Convention and the new constitution of 2014 guarantees the right to seek asylum, there is no asylum policy or protection legislation in Tunisia (Mixed Migration Hub, 2018). The absence of these legal frameworks translates into hardships for asylum seekers who are often criminalised and refugees, as determined by the UNHCR (Badalic, 2019). These challenges affect access to work, healthcare, education, housing and freedom of movement.

The Tunisian authorities in charge of border management are mainly the Ministry of Interior, through two main institutions: (1) the Border Police Directorate under the General Directorate for National Security, and (2) The Border Guard General Directorate of the National G policy remains a low priority for the government and the country remains without an asylum law (Badalic, 2019).

In addition, to being a country of origin for migrants through regular and irregular channels, Tunisia is also a country of transit, and to a lesser extent of destination for many migrants seeking to reach Europe through the Central Mediterranean Route. Although there are many migrants who fled the war in Libya and settled in Tunisia, there are no official numbers of how many Libyan nationals are currently living in Tunisia and very few have

registered with the UNHCR (Mixed Migration Hub, 2018). There are around 57,700 migrants currently living in Tunisia, and 767,200 Tunisians living abroad. The countries of origin of migrants in Tunisia are predominantly Algeria, Libya, France, Morocco, and Italy. Tunisian migrants are predominantly living in France (394,506), the United States (118,931), Italy (109,565), Germany (41,471) and Israel (22,962) (European Commission Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography, 2018). The Customs General Directorate under the Ministry of Finance as well as the National Army are also integral parts of border management (ICMPD, 2018).

Short migration overview

Tunisian emigration started shortly after the country's independence, with workers recruited to France and Germany in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Italy became a destination for labour migrants, given the proximity of the two countries (Lixi, 2018). This movement was largely circular. In the 1990s, when European countries introduced visa restrictions on Tunisian citizens, irregular migration to Europe became a salient issue and was used by regimes before 2011 as a bargaining chip with European countries. In 2011, following the fall of the Ben Ali regime, the highest peak of arrivals reaching the Italian coast was registered. Border controls were eventually re-established and the number of irregular migrants arriving decreased to the hundreds. With the ongoing political instability, migration policy remains a low priority for the government and the country remains without an asylum law (Badalic, 2019).

In addition, to being a country of origin for migrants through regular and irregular channels, Tunisia is also a country of transit, and to a lesser extent of destination for many migrants seeking to reach Europe through the Central Mediterranean Route. Although there are many migrants who fled the war in Libya and settled in Tunisia, there are no official numbers of how many Libyan nationals are currently living in Tunisia and very few have registered with the UNHCR (Mixed Migration Hub, 2018). There are around 57,700 migrants currently

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Key development since 2015

Since the start of the civil war in Libya, the Tunisian government has taken different measures to control movements across borders and counter security threats from the neighbouring conflict. Since 2016, borders with Libya have closed for extended periods of time before reopening and border crossings are more closely monitored. Tunisia has also built a 200-kilometre barrier stretching over half of its land border with Libya to counter attempts of ISIS fighters trying to infiltrate the border (Mixed Migration Hub, 2018).

It is estimated that more than 10,000 sub-Saharan migrants are living in Tunisia irregularly. It is assumed that, following the developments in Libya, more migrants perceive Tunisia as a country of transit to Europe, a claim that is reinforced by the increasing number of sub-Saharan African migrants intercepted off the Tunisian coast while attempting to reach Europe by boat (REACH, 2018a). As far as registered asylum seekers are concerned, UNHCR data indicate that between 2015 and 2017 the number of asylum applications hovered around 700, increasing to 1,330 in 2018 and 1,665 in 2019 with the majority of asylum applicants coming from Syria (UNHCR 2016; 2018d; 2020d).

The deteriorating economic conditions in Tunisia following the Arab Spring in 2011 and the subsequent unrest and terrorist attacks targeting the touristic industry has affected young Tunisians' aspirations to leave the country in search of a better future. Over the last 9 years, more Tunisians have left the country irregularly towards Europe. In 2018, Tunisians became the largest group reaching Italy through sea arrivals (REACH, 2018b). The number of returns has also increased over the years, with forced returns increasing by 133 per cent between 2016 and 2017 (REACH, 2018b). This comes in part

because of increased cooperation between the EU and Tunisia and the conclusion or the readmission agreements with individual countries.

For more information, see:

IOM Tunisia:

<https://tunisia.iom.int/fr>

Foreign Affairs Tunisia:

<https://www.diplomatie.gov.tn/en/nc/>

Interior Affairs Tunisia:

<https://www.interieur.gov.tn/fr/>



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