

Mayors Dialogue on Growth and Solidarity

City profile: Tunis, Tunisia



Population: 638,845 (2014)

GDP per capita: \$4,725 (2017)

Major industries: services, manufacturing (aeronautics, automotive parts)

Percentage of migrants: <1%

Mayor's name: Souad Abderrahim | **Next election date:** 2023

Socioeconomic profile

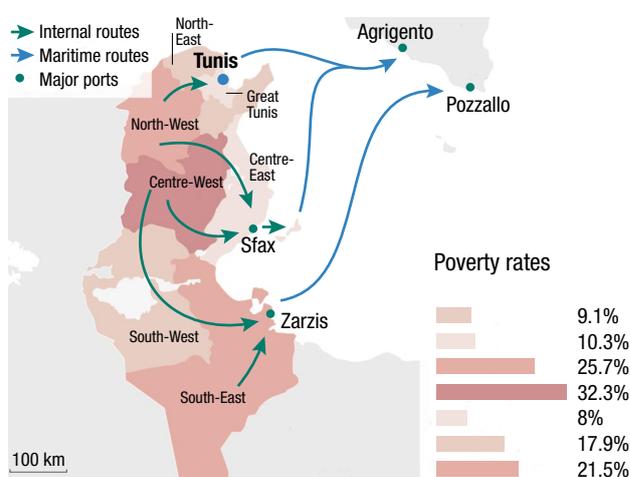
Tunis is the capital and largest city in Tunisia. It is one of eight municipalities that make up the Tunis governorate (province). The city itself is home to 638,845 individuals spread over 213 km².¹ Over the past half century the total metropolitan area around Tunis has expanded rapidly, taking up the Tunis governorate as well as the neighbouring governorates of Ariana, Ben Arous and Manouba. This wider metropolitan area encompasses 2,668 km² with a population of 2,815,100 (as of 2018) (Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie, 2019). Although the city proper has grown only 2.6% since 2004, the metropolitan area saw growth of nearly 18% over the same period with the expansion of suburbs and exurbs (Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie, 2014). These expanding peri-urban communities include both informal settlements and wealthy enclaves (Byrne, 2014). Tunis' population mirrors the older age structure of the broader population, with a quarter of residents between the ages of 15 and 29 (Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie, 2014).

Economic activity in Tunisia is concentrated along the coast. Almost all industrial firms are located close to the three coastal cities of Tunis, Sfax and Sousse (Oxford Business Broup, n.d.), making Tunis one of the most affluent parts of the country. GDP per capita in the city is approximately \$4,725 (Metropolis Project, 2017). The majority of the workforce in Tunis work in the service sector (76%), with manufacturing another important source of employment (13.5%) (Statistique Tunisie and World Bank, 2020). Several important and growing industries, such as aeronautics and automotive parts manufacturing, are clustered in Tunis governorate. The poverty rate in Tunis in 2015 was low at 4.6%, with 6.1% living in poverty in the wider metropolitan area (ibid.). However, the city struggles with unemployment; 19.5% of the workforce are unemployed compared with the national rate of 15.6% (ibid.).

Migration profile

Tunis has not traditionally been a major immigrant destination, although this began to change after the Arab Spring. Between 2009 and 2014, the city attracted approximately 5,000 international migrants (one-third of all immigration to Tunisia), mainly from Algeria, Libya, Morocco, France and Italy, making up less than 1% of the population (Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie, 2014). While foreign residents in Tunis were historically elite students from sub-Saharan Africa, recently the demographics have shifted to include high-income individuals from Libya, as well as Syrian refugees. The number of individuals seeking humanitarian protection in Tunisia has increased dramatically over the past few years, from 770 in 2017 (UNHCR, 2020a) to 5,202 in August 2020 (UNHCR, 2020b). The majority are from Syria (37%) and Côte d'Ivoire (30%). More than 2,000 were residing in the Grand Tunis metropolitan area (ibid.). Approximately

Migration, poverty and unemployment around Tunis



Source: European Council on Foreign Relations (2018)

1 This figure is the sum of the relevant 'delegations' that make up the city proper, extracted from the 2014 population census. See Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie (2014).

70% of migrants arrested in Tunisia had transited through Libya; while some stated an intent to move on to Europe, the majority intended to seek asylum in Tunisia (UNHCR, 2020c).

In contrast to this international immigrant inflow, native Tunisians have moved out of the capital in large numbers. Approximately 22,000 left between 2009 and 2014, many to the city periphery (Institut National de la Statistique Tunisie, 2014). At the national level, immigrants are more likely to be employed and have a higher level of education than native Tunisians. They also tend to be young, with 40% of immigrants between 20 and 35 years of age (ICMPD, n.d.).

Governance structures

The municipal council of Tunis has 60 members, 40 directly elected and 20 assistants, which are elected by the council. The council is elected by closed lists: parties put forward a list with as many candidates as

the number of council seats (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2018). Tunisia's moderate Islamist party Ennahda currently has a majority over the main opposition party, the secular Nidaa Tounes. The council elects the city mayor as its president; Souad Abderrahim became the first female mayor of Tunis in 2018. These were Tunisia's first democratic municipal elections and were intended to be a cornerstone of the recent movement towards decentralisation. However, most municipalities have neither the authority nor the budget to build on these democratisation efforts (Yerkes and Muasher, 2018).

Tunis municipal council is responsible for public services, including education, health, culture and sport, and urban development. The municipality has four priority areas: social affairs, cultural affairs, youth and sports and urban planning (ICMPD, n.d.). Tunis participates in multiple international partnerships on migration and skills development, and is seeking to develop capacity in waste management and clean energy.

References

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