

KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT – TUNISIA 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 17 December 2022, Tunisian citizens will be called to vote in the parliamentary elections. These are the first elections under the new constitution that came into force on 16 August 2022. Elections are taking place in a challenging socio-economic context, with the country still struggling with the multiple effects of the economic, financial and health crises. The decisions that led to the dissolution of the parliament and the subsequent revisions of the Constitution and the electoral law were taken following a series of protests across the country. The new government and parliament will be faced with serious challenges, in particular concerning the major economic downturn, high levels of unemployment, including among young people, illegal immigration and frustration among the population, which may lead to new protests.

Tunisia is a lower-middle-income country. Mainly as a consequence of COVID-19, the country entered a critical and protracted financial crisis. As mentioned above, this has led to social and political unrest and uncertainty, which has further impacted on the geographical disparities and on the country's capacity to create decent jobs and a strong recovery.

Education was and remains a universal right: as stated in the constitution, it is compulsory up to 16 years of age. The education law makes education an absolute priority for the country and it is considered a fundamental right, offering better social opportunities and development. Considerable efforts and financial resources have been invested into education, primarily to increase access and literacy. However, significant challenges remain in the area of quality, efficiency and early school leaving.

Vocational Education and Training has been placed under the Ministry of Employment, after a short period during which it was moved under the responsibility of the Ministry of Youth and Sport. The Ministry of Employment and VET is leading consultations to update the 2008 VET law, together with other related laws and by-laws. The intention is to inject new dynamism into the system, increase quality and equip young people with the necessary skills for the current and future needs of the labour market. To do this, the already formalised tripartite social dialogue in VET should be further strengthened and skills needs identified and analysed regularly.

The Ministry has also made important progress in the development of an entrepreneurial mindset through a process that has led, in 2021, to the labelling of nine VET centres as Entrepreneurial VET centres. Much effort has also been placed into reforming the qualifications and quality assurance systems.

Despite the demand for continuing education, skills upgrading and retraining, comprehensive policies for continuing VET are lacking, and the system remains fragmented.

The labour market in Tunisia has been severely affected by COVID-19, which worsened pre-existing challenges and has hit economic sectors that have historically contributed to growth, such as tourism.

Activity rates among the population aged 15+ remain low, with only slight improvements for women. For young people aged 15-24, an important decrease in activity rates has been observed since 2020, as a consequence of the economic impact of the pandemic, which has discouraged young people from actively looking for a job.

The number of people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) is also growing, although in Tunisia the phenomenon appears to affect both women and men to a similar extent, unlike in other countries in North Africa and Mashreq countries.

1. KEY POLITICAL, DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Political developments

On 17 December 2022, Tunisian citizens will be called to vote in the parliamentary elections. This will mark 18 months since the President suspended the parliament and subsequently formed a new government headed by the first woman Prime Minister in Tunisia's history. These are the first elections under the new Constitution that came into force on 16 August 2022, followed by a new electoral law in September 2022. The higher independent body for elections (*Instance supérieure indépendante pour les élections – ISIE*), supervises the fair and transparent implementation of elections.

The elections are taking place in a challenging socio-economic context, with the country still struggling with the multiple effects of the economic, financial and health crises. The decisions that led to the dissolution of the parliament and the subsequent revisions of both the Constitution and the electoral law were taken following a series of protests across the country. The new government and parliament will be faced with serious challenges, in particular regarding the major economic downturn, high levels of unemployment, including among young people, as well as illegal immigration and frustration among the population, which may lead to new protests.

Demographics

The total population of Tunisia in 2020 was 11 935 800, showing an increasing trend over the past 10 years. The relative size of the young population was 20.1% in 2020, in constant decrease since 2010 (27%), which projects Tunisia from being a 'youth-bulge' country to having a transitional age structure, with a longer average life expectancy (77 years in total, 75 for men and 79 for women), (World Bank database, 2020a) and decreasing fertility rate (World Bank, 2020b). This demographic structure and forecast change put severe pressure on policymakers in the short to medium term regarding adequate schooling and job creation. In the longer term, expenditure on health and pensions will become the main challenges.

Migration rates have increased in the last 20 years, from 5% in 2000 to 7.6% in 2022 (UN DESA, 2020). Remittances have increased since the mid-1990s, reaching 5.4% of GDP in 2020. The percentages of male and female migrants have remained relatively stable over the past 20 years, but with a persistent increasing trend in female migration since 1990 (reaching 44.3% of total migrants). This is true especially for women with a higher education degree (OECD, 2018 and ETF, 2022a).

The main reasons for migration are economic, driven by the hope of seeking better economic conditions, together with the opportunities offered by labour markets abroad, particularly for highly qualified Tunisians (ETF, 2022a).

Key economic developments

Tunisia is a lower-middle-income country. Mainly as a result of COVID-19, the country entered a critical and protracted financial crisis. leading to social and political unrest and uncertainty.

This has further impacted the geographical disparities and the capacity of the country to create decent jobs and a strong recovery. In the latest edition of the World Bank's Tunisia Economic Monitor, economic recovery appeared weaker than forecast (3.3% in 2021). This is coupled with the budget deficit and higher inflation arising from the global increase in commodity prices. The war in Ukraine is expected to have a further detrimental effect on cereal shortages on the domestic market, leading to higher prices. The government is looking into providing cash to vulnerable households instead of subsidised food prices, to strengthen food security in case of future shocks (World Bank, 2022a).

The contribution of the different sectors to the GDP shows the dominance of the service sector, with a slight decrease from 2020 (from 60.1% in 2020 to 59.9% in 2021, National Institute of Statistics - INS).

The share of the industrial sector in GDP increased slightly from 21.6% in 2020 to 22.9% in 2021 (INS), while the share of agriculture decreased.

The vast majority of large enterprises remain state-owned, and public administration is dominant. Outside the public sector, there is a high level of informality and a large number of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises. They offer either no jobs or low-skilled jobs and have little capacity to grow and innovate, with low levels of job creation even in periods of sustained growth.

Informality is widespread. According to the Economic Research Forum (ERF, 2022a), 44.8% of employed people work informally, 42.5% are either independent entrepreneurs or employers, and the remaining 6% are unpaid family workers. The likelihood of working informally depends on people's marital status, age and education levels (ERF, 2022b). The sectors that are most characterised by informality are agriculture and fisheries, followed by construction and public works.

Key social issues

Tunisia has been experiencing social disparities and unrest since before the revolution of 2011, mainly linked to economic factors. The reforms implemented after the revolution, unfortunately, failed to address the persistent social challenges, which resulted in more protests and social unrest. The socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, almost brought the country to collapse.

Tunisia still suffers from socio-economic disparities, including in terms of local human and business development. The National Development Plan 2016-2020 set specific objectives and targets to remediate the economic situation. However, this proved unrealistic, coupled with the downturns linked to COVID-19.

The coastal regions are much more developed and account for 80% of urban areas and 90% of employment. Access to services, including education, reflects these disparities. It is estimated that the poverty rate increased from 14% in 2020 to 21% in 2021 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021). This comes after a period when poverty decreased from 20.5% in 2010 to 13.8% in 2019, not least thanks to a decrease in rural poverty (World Bank, 2022b).

Tunisia has also seen significant migratory flows, not only out of the country, often illegally and with great risk to life, for better socio-economic prospects abroad, but also from Sub-Saharan African countries, with migrants transiting through or moving to Tunisia as their final destination (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.1 Trends and challenges

Education strategy and legal framework for education

Education remains a universal right and is compulsory up to 16 years of age (article 44 of the new Constitution). The education law (No 2002-80 of 23 July 2002) makes education a priority for the country, offering people better opportunities for social and professional development.

The education sector includes the primary and secondary cycles, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. Many sector ministries and agencies are involved in managing the different educational subsectors, while interinstitutional cooperation remains a challenge. This makes it difficult to develop an overarching vision and strategy for lifelong learning and unlock the full potential of human capital in Tunisia.

The latest available education sector plan covered the period 2016-2020. In this period, considerable efforts were taken to increase levels of access and literacy. However, important challenges remain in the area of quality, efficiency and early school leaving.

Education expenditure

With 6% of its GDP and 22.7% of its state budget allocated to education, Tunisia is fully on track with the 2015 Incheon Declaration. The latter recommends that national governments allocate between 4 to 6% of their GDP and/or 15 to 20% of their total public expenditure to education, with a focus on basic education. The political priority given to education is also reflected in the fact that public spending on education is the highest among the social sectors, with an average of 22% in the last decade, and approximately 28% in 2021. The main funding source of education is the government, with less than 1% of the total budget allocated to education coming from external funding since 2012 (UNICEF, 2021, p. 2).

In 2021, recurrent expenditures absorbed 93% of the public education budget, leaving merely 7% for investment expenditure. The majority of the recurrent budget goes into salaries (83% in 2019, UNICEF, 2021), leaving little financial space to support quality and governance. Secondary education receives most of the budget allocated to education, compared to primary education (which remains below the recommended amount of the Global Partnership for Education).

Access, participation and early school leaving

Net enrolment rates are available only for primary and higher education. No decrease has been noted since 2012, calculated at 98.4% in 2021 and 32.8% for higher education (Unesco Institute for Statistics - UIS, 2021).

Medium and higher education attainment levels of the population have been increasing, while they have decreased slightly for low education levels. In the case of women, higher education attainment remained relatively stable, with 19.2% in 2020 and 18.2% in 2021, after having jumped from 11.9% in 2010 to 18.1% in 2019. Since 2016, this rate has constantly outweighed that of men (INS).

As mentioned above, early school leaving remains a critical issue for Tunisia, with 29.7% of early school leavers in 2021 (INS). Although there was a major improvement compared to 2010 when it was 51.3% (INS), it remains an issue of concern. Males represent the majority of early school leavers (35.2% in 2021, INS) compared to the female population (23.9% in 2021, INS).

The relatively high expenditures on education do not have a major effect on the quality of outcomes, as reflected by PISA and TIMSS results, as well as the high unemployment rates of graduates including, those with higher education.

PISA results

Tunisia last participated in PISA in 2015. Therefore, the data do not provide sufficient updated information to provide an analysis.

Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET)

The NEET rate in Tunisia has shown a steep increase over the last ten years. While this rate reached 25.2% in 2010, it reached 41.2% in 2021 (15-to-24-year-olds, INS). This mirrors the country's limited job opportunities and deteriorated socio-economic conditions.

Contrary to other countries in the region, there is little difference between men and women not in employment, education or training. The lack of prospects and opportunities has particularly hit men (another striking difference from the other countries in the region), for whom the NEET rate has increased from 19% in 2010 to 41.7% in 2021 (INS).

2.2 Initial VET and adult learning

Strategic and legal framework for initial VET and adult learning

The key strategic framework for initial VET was the reform strategy that expired in 2020. It aimed, through specific projects and with the support of the donor community, to address critical issues and challenges of the VET sector, including attractiveness, professional development of teachers, improving the entrepreneurial mindset, and further strengthening monitoring and evaluation.

These challenges, including quality assurance of the system and a streamlined, more transparent qualifications system, remain high on the agenda of the Ministry of Employment and VET.

In October 2021, the new minister for Employment and VET launched a consultation on the strategic framework and on the need to modernise the legal framework. The 2008 VET law is being revised, together with other related laws and by-laws. The intention is to inject new dynamism into the system, increase quality and equip young people with the necessary skills for the current and future labour market. To do this, the already formalised tripartite social dialogue in VET should be further strengthened, and skills needs identified and analysed regularly.

The development of an entrepreneurial mindset can rely on the important achievements in the development and labelling of entrepreneurial VET centres. In November 2021, nine VET centres received the label as a result of a seven-year process, supported by the strategic reform process of the Ministry and by the European Training Foundation (ETF).

Although there is a demand for continuing education, skills upgrading and retraining, comprehensive policies for continuing VET are lacking, and therefore the system remains fragmented.

Continuing vocational training is coordinated by the National Centre for Continuing Training and Professional Promotion (CNFCPP). The National Agency for Independent Work (ANETI), Tunisia's public employment service, in turn is responsible for training unemployed jobseekers as one of the active labour market measures.

Non-formal adult learning opportunities are offered mainly in the area of literacy and digital literacy, primarily by civil society organisations. DVV International is active in Tunisia to promote the social and economic participation of adults, particularly women. Adult education has only recently gained importance in Tunisia, which is also linked to the ageing of the population and the shortage of skilled workers. The 2022 CONFITEA conference provided some orientation for further reflection and policy work in this area.

VET governance and financing arrangements

VET represents a sub-sector within the overall education system. For about 18 months between 2020 and 2021, the sector was under the responsibility of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. However, it moved back under the Ministry of Employment, now called the Ministry of Employment and VET (MEFP). The Ministry also took back responsibility for all related agencies, which include:

1. the Tunisian Agency for VET (ATFP), which manages 136 VET centres and covers 300 fields of study;
2. the National Centre for the Training of Trainers and the Development of Training (CENAFIFF), which is responsible for pedagogical and curriculum development;
3. the National Centre for Continuing Training and Professional Promotion (CNFCPP);
4. the National Agency for Employment and Independent work (ANETI),
5. the Observatory for Employment and Qualifications (ONEQ), which supports the Ministry in strategy and policy design and monitoring and produces studies and analyses.

VET is delivered at initial and continuing levels. Initial VET under the auspices of the MEFP covers four levels (*Certificat de Compétence, Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle, Brevet de technicien professionnel, Brevet de technicien supérieur*). It is delivered at upper-secondary and post-secondary education levels. Furthermore, it plays a role in the upskilling and reskilling of adults. Higher education offers both academic and non-academic professional education.

Public training centres in fields such as agriculture, tourism, handicrafts, and health or defence report to different sector ministries, which makes the management of each subsector highly complex. Furthermore, numerous private training centres operate in Tunisia.

The fact that VET is not well embedded in the overall education system, having limited links with the other subsectors of education, restricts the pathways of VET students allowing them to flexibly move horizontally and vertically from one level to another (ETF, 2021b).

Based on a preliminary analysis of the Budget Law 2022, the budget for employment and VET allocated to the MEFP amounts to almost 2% of the total national budget. This amount does not include financial resources earmarked for training under each sector ministry or their agencies or institutions working in this area. Allocations to VET and employment policies are significantly lower than the amounts provided for general education, at 14% of the national budget, and to higher education, at 4%.

Within the MEFP, more than 45% of financial resources are dedicated to the Vocational Training programme, followed by operations (39%), engagement with the private sector (12%), and capacity building (almost 3%). It is worth mentioning that an additional 0.4% of the total budget also goes into direct support for youth under the Ministry of Youth and Sports (Decree, 2021-21).

Qualifications, validation and recognition

In 2009, Tunisia adopted the National Classification of Qualifications (CNQ), a reference framework aiming to link the certificates and diplomas awarded by different institutions to the corresponding qualification levels (Presidential Decree 2009-2139 of 8 July 2009). Implementing the CNQ covers the separate pillars of the education and training system, but with limited success so far in linking up the different pathways.

For a few years now, the MEFP has been developing a register of qualifications as part of the overall qualifications reform process, including the operationalisation of the CNQ. The works are at an initial stage.

The validation and recognition of skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning have been piloted for some sectoral qualifications. Although the Ministry attaches a high priority to this, in connection with the higher number of migrants, related schemes are not yet implemented on a broader scale.

Tunisia is also part of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF). The CNQ and the qualifications register could be linked to the ACQF and the European Qualifications Framework.

Quality and quality assurance

The MEFP's Directorate for Evaluation and Quality in Education is responsible for quality assurance in VET. It includes a 'product', i.e. the compliance of learning outcomes with related descriptors in the national classification of qualifications, as well as a 'process' that ensures a quality approach in training institutions. The latter is based on the national quality standard for vocational training (RNQFP). This standard was developed in digital form a few years ago but never fully used and it requires revisions now.

The quality assurance mechanisms of training providers vary according to whether they are public or private institutions. The Tunisian Agency of Vocational Training (ATFP) encourages public institutions under its umbrella to use the RNQFP. However, this process is voluntary. ATFP started to update its eight quality assurance process standards, introducing a digitalisation process, in order to be able to position its VET centres within the RNQFP standards.

It is important to extend the use of the RNQFP to all public and private institutions and this is one of the priorities of the Ministry for the coming years. Also, it should be noted that private institutions are free to adopt their quality assurance procedures and processes (ETF, 2021a).

The Ministry monitors performance indicators, the diploma and certificate system, the quality of training providers and the training of trainers. Performance indicators include the number of learners and their pass rates, the employment of graduates according to their qualification levels and the business sector in which they are employed, and unemployment rates according to education/qualification levels. The ministerial unit in charge of budget management by objectives publishes these data in annual performance reports (GBO, 2022).

Qualifications and their quality are also monitored through a specific system that was further developed by the EU PEFESE¹ programme. In order to enhance the quality of certificates awarded following an initial training course, a project was launched to standardise the diploma recognition system, including the areas of training and certification of learning outcomes. (ETF, 2021a).

Work-based learning arrangements

The Tunisian system includes three types of work-based learning (WBL) schemes: apprenticeships, alternance training and internships. Alternance training represents the higher share of students in the WBL modality (79%), followed by residential training (15%) and apprenticeship (6%) (ONEQ and MEFP, 2018).

Alternance training is a suitable alternative to full-time studies at training centres to help familiarise students with the working culture and technologies of companies, engage in real-life projects and acquire practical skills. Investing in this system is connected with the hope of investing in future skills. However, in Tunisia, alternance training has remained a weakness despite existing partnership agreements with companies. Depending on the sector, students struggle to get internship places in companies. In a few sectors with generally less attractive working conditions, such as the leather industry, more training places are offered and young people find employment more easily, sometimes even before completing their VET programme (Chelbi, 2017).

In pre-COVID-19 times, there were some positive signals from both the textile and tourism sectors. A decade ago, the textile sector was in sharp decline: materials and equipment had fallen out of use and investments had dropped. With the sector picking up again, it also started to reinvest. Similar trends have been observed in the tourism industry. Recognising the contributions that alternance training can make in producing the necessary skills for future employees, new partnerships with companies were

¹ Support Programme for Education and Training linked to Graduate Employability.

fostered. This included agreements with training centres, the provision of internships, the assignment of company mentors to students and remuneration for their work (Ferchichi, 2019). The recent COVID-19 crisis abruptly halted these positive developments. The ensuing consequences for the alternance training system may be drastic, as economic sectors, especially tourism, face an oversupply of jobseekers and workers and undersupply of income/visitors.

The ETF 2019 study on WBL highlights five areas of challenges: i) the presence of different governance and funding issues; ii) trainers and apprenticeship consultants at training centres are increasingly reluctant to go to the company to monitor young people; iii) communication, an area in which centres made little effort and where public supervisory bodies were not very effective; iv) the absence of trained tutors available to instruct and supervise trainees at companies; and v) mobility, which can be viewed from two perspectives: mobility between regions and mobility between countries (Chelbi, 2017).

Digital education and skills

COVID-19 has accelerated digitalisation, including in education and training, like never before in the country. The Digital Strategy 2021-2025 (*Stratégie numérique 2021–2025*) includes five lines of action, one of which, Smart Tunisia, looks into the potential of human capital to boost Tunisia's digitisation and to make it a talent hub for job creation and growth.

Specific actions on digital education and training started long before COVID-19, although not at such a large scale as recently. The French telecommunications company Orange has established a number of digital schools (*écoles numériques*), which make digital devices available to students.

In October 2020, only 27% of primary school students had internet connections for home schooling, compared to 40% of middle/secondary school students in Tunisia (Statista, 2020). In May 2021, 130 primary and secondary schools were equipped with more than 38 000 devices. Equipment and digital tools are more readily available in private centres and schools, thanks to increased availability of funds. However, the digital divide remains an important challenge for Tunisia, which hampers online and digital education.

Statistics on education and training

Tunisia does not have in place a comprehensive education information system. Certain ministries and related institutions collect specific indicators, such as the number of students and grades. Data are regularly published by the National Institute of Statistics (statistics on education) and the line Ministries or relevant institutions (ONEQ in the case of VET). The short *VET in figures* report (*La formation professionnelle en chiffres*) was last published in 2020, with data referring to 2018.

The importance of monitoring, in particular performance monitoring based on specific criteria and indicators, is a key priority for the country and education and training reforms: it had been, for instance, an integral part of the reform action plan for VET. As indicated above, the VET system has a budget based on results in place. However, it still needs to be fully implemented.

While data exist and are regularly collected, they are not always easily accessible. Furthermore, the absence of digitalised systems and databases makes it difficult to analyse and assess trends and possible issues regarding policy.

3. LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

3.1 Trends and challenges

Labour market characteristics

The labour market in Tunisia has been severely affected by COVID-19, which has worsened specific and persistent challenges and has hit economic sectors that contributed to growth, such as tourism.

Activity rates among the population aged 15+ remain persistently low and have not exceeded 47% for more than 5 years, with only slight improvements for women (increasing from 24.8% in 2010 to 28.6% in 2021, INS). For the young population (aged 15-24), a sharp decrease in activity rates can be observed since 2020, falling from 35.7% in 2020 to 26.5% in 2021(INS). This may be linked to the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, which has discouraged young people from actively looking for a job.

Employment by educational attainment shows that the employment rate increases with the level of education, ranging from 50.9% for people with a high education level in 2021, to 35.4% for people with a low education level. Although this may also signal that people with low educational attainment may be working in the informal sector, it provides an indication that people with higher education are more likely to be employed. It needs to be assessed whether their job fits their education level and field of study. A recent ETF study on skills mismatch measurement shows that, for 2019, Tunisia registered a high percentage of under-educated employees (45%, ETF, 2022c).

Looking at employment by status, employees represent the majority of the working population aged 15+, with this percentage remaining comparatively stable over the years at around 70% (74.1% in 2021, INS). Self-employed workers account for 17% of the working population (INS, 2021).

Unemployment remains high within the population aged 15+ (18% in 2021, INS) and very high among young people aged 15-24 (42.2% in 2021, INS), with small differences between men and women (42.2% and 40% respectively in 2021).

These data show that young people in Tunisia are facing multiple challenges, with high inactivity rates, especially among men, high NEET rates and very high unemployment. This also reflects the lack of opportunities offered by the labour market and the overall discouragement and disillusionment of young people regarding their employment prospects.

Labour market and employment statistics

Statistics on the labour market and employment are regularly collected and published by the INS (National Institute of Statistics). However, according to anecdotal evidence, the INS is understaffed and lacks sufficient resources. Data are accessible through their website and upon request. The ANETI, (the employment agency), also collects data on the labour market, in particular by analysing data received by the INS. The ANETI produces annual activity reports which are available through its website. The ONEQ also provides regular analyses and reports focusing on skills supply.

There is no comprehensive labour market information system, and there are no systematic sectoral analyses of needs that would support a better matching of skills demand and supply.

The Ministry of Employment and VET has received support from the EU, particularly ONEQ, to pilot a methodology on the anticipation of skills needs, and they are pursuing this pilot study. However, forecasting and foresight analyses, including the anticipation of future skills needs, are not applied systematically and across all sectors.

Recently, the EBRD has supported the major energy company STEG in Tunisia in analysing future skills needs in the sector. Based on these results and with financing from Switzerland, STEG has developed its 2030 plan for human resources development and has signed agreements with training providers to train its staff accordingly.

The ETF has also provided an analysis of future skills needs in the energy sector, on a broader scale and with a focus on skills. The energy sector represents a key economic sector that would offer job opportunities in the future, especially in the context of the green transition.

3.2 Employment policy and institutional settings

Strategy and legal framework in the employment policy field

The Ministry of Employment and VET is in charge of developing strategic political priorities and policy orientations. In 2019, a new vision for employment for the year 2030 was developed under the guidance of a political and steering committee, with the involvement of the social partners as introduced by the tripartite dialogue introduced by the Social Contract (Contrat social).

Vision 2030 is still in the making and will be fully integrated into the national framework to produce growth and added value by leveraging human capital as well as natural resources in an efficient and effective way. According to the Ministry's website information, this vision is still in development and will be used to support the drafting of the five-year action plans through innovative measures, taking into account the digital and green transitions, with a view to overcoming the socio-economic, political and health challenges of recent years.

Initiatives to boost employment

Tunisia has a tradition of active labour market programmes (ALMPs). In accordance with Decree No 2019- 542 of 2019, the programmes financed by the National Fund for Employment have now been launched, which are partly a legacy from the past programmes launched in 2012. These programmes allow young people to enrol and follow training courses to develop skills and competences that should help them to find a job. They can also complement or complete their qualifications and training courses to broaden their skills and provide them with greater opportunities to find a job.

The following three programmes target all unemployed people in search of a job.

- Contract of initiation to professional life (Contrat d'initiation à la vie professionnelle); it consists of a job placement with a contract of 12 months, extendable up to 24 months. All enterprises can have access to this contract.
- Contract dignity KARAMA (contrat-dignité) encourages enterprises to recruit first-time jobseekers who graduated from higher education and helps them to improve their skills.
- The Civil Service Contract (CSC- contrat service civil) aims to support higher-education graduates who are first-time jobseekers by allowing them to develop their practical skills and competencies in a professional setting, and to facilitate their integration into working life as employees or independent workers.

It should also be noted that two of these measures address higher-education graduates only. The ANETI also offers an online training service, called [ANETI Tkawen](#), which offers training on ICT and soft skills, mostly to support job placement.

These programmes are run by the ANETI, the National Agency for Employment and Self-Employment, the main public, non-administrative body under to the Ministry of Employment and VET. Other private agencies, accredited by the State, can also support unemployed people and jobseekers in finding a job placement in Tunisia and abroad.

ANETI also provides support in career guidance, self-employment and entrepreneurship. Encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting start-ups are priorities for the government. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been suffering significantly from the impact of COVID-19; a study by the Institut arabe des chefs d'entreprises (IACE, 2020) in early spring 2020 indicated that 61% of respondent companies had to reduce their number of employees because of the crisis. In response, a

number of support programmes, including the EU-funded IRADA and PAFIP, have reallocated funding to support SMEs and young entrepreneurs with a focus on saving jobs. ANETI also launched a programme to support enterprises in restructuring their activities to address the COVID-19 crisis. The ANETI offers specific support to start-ups ([Start Up Act](#)), in the form of training and loans.

Despite the lack of a systematic monitoring and evaluation system, it is generally agreed that Active Labour Market Programmes in Tunisia have had some positive impact, especially on young people. ALMPs have provided opportunities for first-time jobseekers and young people with business ideas. However, it is also acknowledged that, in view of the huge public investment, outcomes in terms of placements and improved employability of beneficiaries could have been better (ILO, 2018).

The main shortcomings of ALMPs in Tunisia include both their targeting and their geographical distribution. ALMPs are aimed mainly at higher-education graduates, while only a few programmes and services assist low-skilled and disadvantaged individuals. In addition, programmes are more easily accessible in Tunis and the coastal regions. The interior regions are less well covered, so the number of ALMP beneficiaries among the long-term unemployed and low-skilled people remains low.

Because there is no unemployment insurance, this has resulted in a strong imbalance: resources have de facto been distributed unequally between different groups (e.g. women holding secondary or higher education degrees versus women without formal qualifications) and between different regions, which exacerbates existing dichotomies.

Initiatives to increase the capacity of public employment services

The main public body responsible for offering public employment services is the ANETI, the National Employment Agency. Other private agencies are also providing support to jobseekers to find a job placement.

As indicated above, the ANETI is the primary public employment service agency and offers a fairly broad range of services. However, despite this plethora of tasks, the resources assigned to the ANETI are limited, which hampers its role as a fully functioning public employment service. As the main Public Employment Service provider, the ANETI has benefitted from donor initiatives, including capacity building and support with specific projects targeting unemployed people.

The ANETI is currently working on Vision 2030, under which consultations and evaluations of its services are being carried out to re-design its future. This is because the same, or very similar, services have been offered for a long time and the way these services are offered should be modernised. This process includes feedback collected internally and surveys among the enterprises.

An important process of digitalisation is under implementation, with the support of the World Bank and the European Union. The objective is to be closer to the jobseekers and labour market needs. The current administrative burden of employment counsellors should be lightened by digitalisation and automation of registration, matching, etc. Employment counsellors will therefore be able to follow and guide jobseekers in their path towards employment. This should also help in establishing the profiles of jobseekers throughout the country, benefiting from the presence of the ANETI in all regions and offering a service that is less standardised and better tailored to the different profiles of jobseekers. The use of artificial intelligence is also being tested for job matching.

The ANETI is also working on a toolkit for those jobseekers who wish to start their own business.

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STATISTICAL ANNEX – Tunisia

This Annex includes annual data from 2015, 2019, 2020 and 2021 or the last available year, unless stated otherwise in note (7), under which the data are quarterly.

	Indicator	2015	2019	2020	2021	
1	Total Population (in thousands) ⁽¹⁾	11 180.0	11 694.7	11 818.6	11 935.8	
2	Relative size of youth population (age group 15-24 and denominator age 15-64, %) ^{(1) C}	22.7	20.7	20.4	20.1	
3	GDP growth rate (%)	1.0	1.3	-8.7	3.3	
4	Gross value added by sector (%)	Agriculture	9.2	9.6	10.2	9.1
		Industry	24.9	23.3	21.6	22.9
		Services	58.9	60.0	60.1	59.9
5	Public expenditure on education (as % of GDP)	6.2	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
6	Public expenditure on education (as % of total public expenditure)	22.7	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
7	Adult Literacy (%) ^C	79.0 ⁽⁵⁾	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
8	Educational attainment of total population (aged 15+) (%)	Low ⁽²⁾	64.6	63.0	63.1	58.5
		Medium ⁽³⁾	20.7	20.5	19.5	25.1
		High ⁽⁴⁾	14.7	16.4	17.4	16.4
9	Early leavers from education and training (aged 18-24) (%) ⁽⁷⁾	Total	36.9	37.1	34.0	29.7
		Male	41.2	42.6	42.0	35.2
		Female	32.5	31.6	25.8	23.9
10	NET enrolment rates in secondary education (ISCED level 2-3) (%)	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
11	Share of VET students in upper secondary education (ISCED level 3) (%)	9.6	M.D.	M.D.	M.D.	
12	Low achievement in reading, mathematics and science – PISA (%)	Reading	71.6	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
		Mathematics	74.8	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
		Science	65.9	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
13	Activity rate (aged 15+) (%) ⁽⁷⁾	Total	47.1	46.9	47.7	47.0
		Male	68.8	68.0	69.8	66.4
		Female	26.0	26.6	26.7	28.6
	Inactivity rate (aged 15+) (%) ^{(7)(8) C}	Total	52.9	53.1	52.3	53.0

	Indicator		2015	2019	2020	2021
14		Male	31.2	32.0	30.2	33.6
		Female	74.0	73.4	73.3	71.4
15	Employment rate (aged 15+) (%) ⁽⁷⁾	Total	39.9	39.7	40.0	38.2
		Male	60.3	59.6	60.4	56.2
		Female	20.3	20.6	20.6	21.8
16	Employment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%) ⁽⁷⁾	Low ⁽²⁾	43.4	36.9	37.1	35.4
		Medium ⁽³⁾	39.6	40.1	42.3	37.7
		High ⁽⁴⁾	23.2	50.0	48.0	50.9
17	Employment by sector (%) ^{(7) (9)}	Agriculture	15.0	13.7	14.6	11.5
		Industry	32.8	34.4	33.4	32.5
		Services	52.2	51.9	52.0	56.0
18	Incidence of self-employment (%) ^C		26.8	26.3	25.9	25.9
19	Incidence of vulnerable employment (%) ^C		20.1	19.0	19.1	19.0
20	Unemployment rate (aged 15+) (%) ^{(7) (10)}	Total	15.2	15.3	16.2	18.0
		Male	12.4	12.3	13.5	15.4
		Female	22.2	22.4	22.8	23.6
21	Unemployment rate by educational attainment (aged 15+) (%) ^{(7) (10)}	Low ⁽²⁾	8.8	9.9	10.8	14.4
		Medium ⁽³⁾	16.3	16.1	15.6	19.5
		High ⁽⁴⁾	26.8	26.9	28.7	24.2
22	Unemployment rate (aged 15-24) (%) ^{(7) (10)}	Total	34.0	34.4	35.7	41.5
		Male	33.5	34.2	35.4	42.2
		Female	35.5	34.5	36.2	40.0
23	Proportion of people aged 15–24 not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (%) ⁽⁷⁾	Total	29.1	32.0	30.2	41.2
		Male	25.3	31.0	29.0	41.7
		Female	32.8	33.0	31.4	40.0
24	Participation in training/lifelong learning (% aged 25-64) ⁽⁷⁾	Total	1.3	2.9	M.D.	1.6
		Male	1.2	2.8	M.D.	1.3
		Female	1.5	3.1	M.D.	3.2
25	Human Development Index		0.729	0.740	M.D.	M.D.

Last update: 4/10/2022

Sources:

Indicators: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11: The World Bank, World Development Indicators database.

Indicators: 7, 10, 11: UNESCO, Institute for Statistics.

Indicators: 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 (2010, 2019-2021), 18 (2015, 2019-2021), 19 (2015, 2019-2021), 20, 21, 22, 23, 24: Tunisian National Institute of Statistics (NIS).

Indicator: 12 – OECD PISA 2018 Results (Volume I) Annex B1.

Indicator: 25 – UNDP.

Indicator: 17 (2015), 18 (2010), 19 (2010): ILOSTAT.

Notes:

(1) Estimation.

(2) Low education: No education, ISCED levels 0-2.

(3) Medium education: ISCED levels 3-4.

(4) High education: ISCED levels 5-8.

(5) Applies to 2014.

(6) Applies to 2009.

(7) Data received, second quarter of the year, 2020 third quarter.

(8) ETF calculation on NIS-LFS (2010-2019; 2020 and 2021 only received).

(9) Totals may not add up to 100% due to those not classified in any economic activity.

(10) 2015 provisional data.

Legend:

C = ETF calculation.

N.A. = Not Applicable.

M.D. = Missing Data.

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