

# Policy Perspective

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## CAN LABOR MOBILITY SPARK EMPLOYMENT IN TUNISIA?

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### **I**ntrouction

In Tunisia the number of graduates increased at a very high pace in the last decade but was not followed by a similar increase of high skilled job opportunities. This resulted in high unemployment rates for educated youth which were among the main reasons of the Tunisian revolution in December 2010. Labor mobility through migration or mode 4 trade in services is often presented as a way to relieve the burden on sending countries' labor markets.

However, with the economic crisis, the public opinion in Europe has been growing hostile towards immigration and free movement in the Euro-Meditereanean area is looking less and less feasible. Despite this setback, the European need for skilled labor and the excess skilled labor in MENA countries are realities that go beyond the economic crisis.

While most studies focus on host countries, empirical analysis on sending countries is often lacking. To bridge this gap for the MENA region, we conducted a research on the interactions between labor mobility and employment outcomes in Tunisia. The first link is through the evolution of receiving countries' demand for foreign workers, which has a direct impact on sending countries' labor markets. For instance, the global crisis reduced the demand of foreign workers and thus

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reduced the opportunities of mobility. The evolution of receiving countries' wages also has an impact on the decision to migrate and may affect the supply of migrants in terms of volume and duration (Stark et al., 1997). Remittances can also have an impact on labor market outcomes in Tunisia. If we assume following Rapoport and Docquier (2006) that the remittance rate increases with migrants' incomes and decreases with their families' incomes, an asymmetric variation of economic conditions will affect labor participation in Tunisia. A differentiated evolution of exchange rates and inflation can have a similar impact (Yang, 2008). Thus, a relative decrease of foreign wages can affect unemployment in Tunisia through a lower labor demand and a higher labor supply.

Moreover, there is a recent tendency of developed countries to attract skilled migrants rather than unskilled ones (Katseli et al., 2006). Beyond the brain drain effects discussed widely in Beine et al. (2001) and Clemens (2009) we raise here the issue of the impact on the sending country's labor market. What are the effects of such a policy on skilled labor demand and supply, on unskilled labor and on aggregate labor market outcomes? The increase in the demand for skilled workers could result in higher relative wages and thus in a substitution of skilled workers by unskilled ones (Glytsos and Katseli, 2005). Finally the last issue raised in this contribution is the effects of labor mobility on education through its impact on relative wages between skilled and unskilled workers (Stark et al., 1997). We developed a framework allowing for such an assessment on the effects of labor

mobility on employment levels by skill, sector and age. Tunisia is an interesting case study because of its high unemployment rates, mainly for graduates, and also because of its significant migrant population. To illustrate the framework, we first simulated what would have been the migration and employment outcomes in the absence of the global crisis and the Tunisian revolution to highlight their effects on the Tunisian labor market. In the second experiment we simulated the impact of an increase of the demand of exports of services intensive in mode 4 sectors. The third scenario consisted in simulating the impact of an increase of migrants' wages in host countries relatively to local wages. Finally the fourth simulation consisted in implementing the previous simulation but only for skilled workers.

### Some Basic Facts about Employment and Migration in Tunisia

The working age population represents 75% of the population in Tunisia and its growth rate is the double of the total population's growth rate (Mahjoub, 2010). The labor participation rate was estimated to be 47% in 2010, but important disparities are to be found concerning women (whose participation rate is 25%) and youth. Indeed, for those aged between 15 and 29 years, the participation rate falls to 34% and this can be partly explained by the high enrolment rates and the lack of job opportunities. Tunisians are becoming more and more qualified and this is reflected by the share of the highly educated labor force that went from 6.5% of the total labor force in 1994 to 20% of the total labor force in 2011.

Despite a slight decrease from 15.6% in 1994 to 12.4% in 2007 the unemployment rate has been stubbornly high in Tunisia, with a peak of 18.9% in 2011. The share of medium and highly educated unemployed increased significantly during the same period with the noticeable rise of highly-educated which went from 2% in 1994 to 32% in 2011. In other words, unemployed individuals with a university diploma represent one third of total unemployment. In 2011, the unemployment rate among graduates was 30.5% while it is 9.3% for those who have no education. Furthermore, there seems to be a correlation between age

and unemployment, with high unemployment rates for the young (28.7% for those between 15-19 years old and 29.7% for those being 20 to 24 years old) that decline with age, reaching 3% for those aged 45 years and above.

Venturini et al. (2009) point out that job creation in Tunisia does not manage to keep up with the increase in labor supply. In a survey on the Tunisian youth's willingness to migrate, Fourati (2008) stresses the importance of this phenomenon and how it evolved between 1996 and 2005, as a result of both economic and political factors. If only one quarter of the skilled youth wanted to migrate in the mid nineties, they were more than three quarters willing to leave their home country in 2005. Along the same lines, a joint ETF (European Training Foundation) and World Bank survey shows that Tunisian have high expectancies to migrate, higher than the potential migrants in the other surveyed countries.

Moreover, the intentions to migrate are high not only for the unemployed (81%) and the casual workers (75%), but also for those who have a stable job (56%) (Sabadié et al., 2010). Even though these intentions do not reflect the reality of migration flows, they highlight the problems and the frustration encountered by the Tunisian youth.

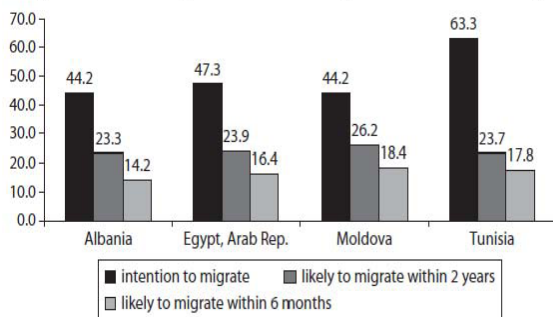
An analysis of the actual flows shows that the most important share of Tunisian migrants (48.1%) has a secondary education while university graduates represent 14.1% of migrants. Remittances play an important role in the Tunisian economy. In 2010, they amounted to 1.970 million US\$, representing 4.4% of GDP and 30 to 40% of the trade deficit. In terms of stock, the number of Tunisians residing outside their home country amounts to slightly more than 1 million, with the majority (almost 83%) living in Europe. The most popular destination is France, receiving around 40% of all Tunisian migrants, followed by Italy with 25%. Tunisian migration to France goes a long way back, with the first labor agreements signed in the sixties.

The emigration policy, developed by the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs and Solidarity, has different social, cultural, economic and information aspects. These policies are implemented by the Office of Tunisians Abroad and the National Social Security Fund. Furthermore, there are two institutions that govern controlled emigration: the National Employment and Self-Employment Agency (Agence Nationale de l'Emploi et du Travail Indépendant - ANETI) and the Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation (Agence Tunisienne de la Coopération Technique - ATCT). The former organizes and ensures placement of the Tunisian labor force abroad, mainly in France (62.2%), while the latter deals mainly with promoting Tunisian skills and favors the placement in Arab countries. On average, these two agencies ensure the placement abroad of 3000 Tunisian workers per year.

**Table 1: Unemployment Rates by Education Level**

	2005	2007	2009	2011
Illiterate	6.3	4.4	6.1	9.3
Primary	14.3	11.5	10.4	13
Secondary	13.3	13.5	14	19.9
Vocational training and university	14	18.7	21.9	30.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>12.4</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>18.9</b>

**Figure 1: Potential Migrants: Intention to Migrate and Likelihood of Migration (%)**



Source: Sabadié et al. (2010)

Tunisia has two main labor migration agreements, one with France and one with Italy. They both allow work related migration of Tunisians within quotas of 9000 workers per year for France and 4000 for Italy. Nevertheless, only a limited list of jobs is concerned (for Italy, mainly engineers, doctors and paramedical staff are allowed) and the requirements in terms of qualification are quite high, resulting in unattained quotas in both countries. Due to historical ties, Tunisia hosts an office of the French Agency for Immigration and Integration (Office Français d'immigration et d'intégration) that aims at facilitating and regulating migration flows. Despite the bilateral agreement<sup>1</sup> on concerted management of migratory flows, signed in 2008, only 25% of demanded visas have been issued in 2009.

### Trade in services

Trade in services grew rapidly between 2004 and 2008, with an average annual growth rate of 13.8% according to the Tunisian Central Bank (BCT), but slowed down after 2008 as a result of the decrease in tourism services, which is partly due to the economic crisis in the European Union, but also to structural problems faced by the Tunisian tourism industry. Nevertheless, export of services related to public works, technical services and communication services grew steadily with an average annual growth rate of 23.9% between 2008 and 2010.

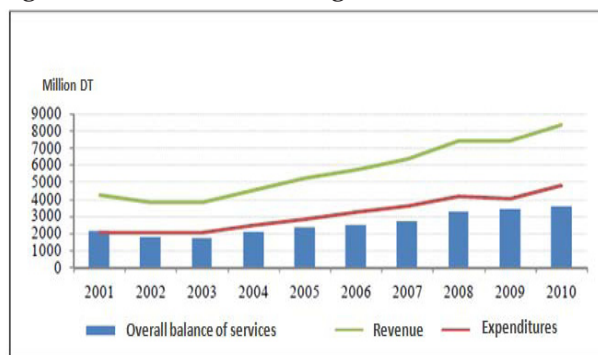
Tunisia has a Free Trade Agreement with the EU (implemented progressively between 1996 and 2008). However, this FTA does not yet include services. Negotiations started in 2006 but are still ongoing. Tunisia is also member of the Pan Arab Free Trade Agreement<sup>2</sup>, which was created in 1997 and foreseen a dismantling of custom duties and other fees by 2005 and the elimination of non-tariff barriers, whether they are administrative, monetary, financial

or technical. Despite mentioning trade in services, no negotiations have been launched up until now. Tunisia is a member of the Agadir Agreement, a FTA that includes Egypt, Morocco and Jordan, that was signed in 2004 and was finally implemented in 2007.

Finally, Tunisia is also a member of the Maghreb Arab Union, a political and economical organization involving Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Mauritania. Its aim was to establish a deeper interregional integration through trade agreements, but it has been inactive since 1994. The EU is the main destination of Tunisia's exports and its intra-Arab share of non-oil exports reaches less than 5% of the total (Hoekman and Sekkat, 2010).

Building on these stylized facts, we perform an analysis based on a dynamic general equilibrium model, with a focus on migration and labor market issues. We discuss here the impact of various shocks on labor supply and demand, unemployment, emigration, remittances and other variables. The results presented are in comparison to the baseline scenario. Four experiments are run: Simulation (A): What would have been the situation without the global crisis and the Tunisian revolution? Simulation (B): What would

Figure 2: Evolution of Foreign Trade in Services



Source: BCT

<sup>1</sup> The agreement also includes financial aid for development programs in areas such as vocational training and support for young entrepreneurs.

<sup>2</sup> PAFTA members are the following: Egypt, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Jordan, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Yemen



be the effect of a Mode 4 agreement? Simulation (C): What are the effects of an increase in all foreign wages? Simulation (D): What happens if the increase in foreign wages only concerns the skilled workers?

### The Impact of the Global Crisis

The objective of this experiment was to try to identify the impact of the global crisis and the Tunisian revolution on our main variables of interest. For that purpose we rely on a counterfactual scenario where the economic growth rates characterizing Tunisia and its main partners would have been those forecasted by the IMF before the subprime crisis exploded and the social uprising in Tunisia.

The main results at the macroeconomic level are summarized in Table 2, show clearly a differentiated impact before and after the Tunisian revolution. In the 2008-2010 period we notice a decrease in investment, in labor demand and a reduction of Tunisian migrant remittances which has a positive effect on the labor force participation rate. The combined effect of lower labor demand and higher labor supply results in higher unemployment. However emigration decreases since the shock is more severe on Tunisia’s partners (mainly the EU) than on Tunisia.

After the revolution, Tunisia’s economic growth rate plunges due to much lower investment and the result is a sharp decrease in labor demand. Lower growth also means a lower depreciation of the exchange rate given that Tunisia has a structural deficit in its trade balance. This amplifies the negative impact on migrants remittances which then accelerates the increase of the activity rate. It results in an increase of the average unemployment rate by 4.8%. There is also a reversal in migration flows, resulting in an increase of emigration intentions since the situation in Tunisia is deteriorating considerably more than in its main partners’ economies.

### Employment Implications of Higher Mode 4 Access

Given the limited number of Mode 4 agreements and the lack of data (Panizzon, 2010), we simulate a liberalization in the temporary movement of natural persons as an increase in service exports for the sectors

**Table 2: Average Yearly Variation as Compared to the Reference Scenario**

	2008-2010 (%)	2011-2015 (%)
GDP Growth differential p.p.	-2.3	-3.6
Emigration	-3.3	0.9
Total investment	-4.7	-29.5
Loc. labor demand var	-0.4	-3.6
Total Unemployment p.p.	1.1	4.8
Total activity rate	0.4	1.0
Remittances	-11.5	-21.9
Exchange rate	-1.2	-9.0

potentially intensive in mode 4 activities (such as business services). Indeed, mobility under Mode 4 is not a type of migration, therefore it should not be treated as such.

The main results at the macroeconomic level are a limited positive impact on GDP growth, despite a positive impact on investment and on labor demand. Emigration decreases due to the positive impact of the shock on employment and wages, illustrating the hypothesis of substitution between mode 4 exports and migration. The exchange rate appreciation, induced by the increase of exports, and the decrease in migration flows have a negative impact on remittances, that decrease by 3.1% on average per year. The fall in remittances and the rise in investment, thus in capital income, have two opposite effects on the activity rates, but the capital effect prevails and the activity rate slightly decreases.

An increase in Mode 4 exports has a positive effect on unemployment, that decreases by 0.8 percentage points on average per year. The decrease is most significant for high skilled workers, because the selected service sectors are skill intensive. Moreover, the increase in investment has a positive effect on high skilled labor demand due to the high complementarity between capital accumulation and skill demand. Emigration by skill follows the same evolution as unemployment, with high skilled migration decreasing more than the other categories, thus reducing brain-drain.

**Table 3: Macro Results**

	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)
GDP Growth	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
Emigration	-1.0	-2.1	-3.4	-5.0
Total investment	0.3	0.8	1.4	1.9
Loc. labor demand var	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.6
Total potential active population	-0.2	-0.4	-0.6	-0.8
Total Unemployment	-0.3	-0.6	-1.0	-1.4
Total activity rate	-0.1	-0.1	-0.1	-0.2
Remittances	-1.0	-2.3	-3.7	-5.4
Exchange rate	-0.3	-0.7	-1.1	-1.5

The results also reveal that the non youth benefit more from the shock than the youth. This means that liberalizing mode 4 will increase the gap between the youth and the non youth, both in terms of unemployment and wages. The impact on education is positive for transition rates from primary to secondary (11.2%) and from secondary to tertiary education (1.1%).

## Migrant Wages and Domestic Labor Market Interactions

In what follows we assess the effects of increasing migrants' wages on local labor markets when the increase is uniform across skills and when it is limited to high skilled migrants.

### *A uniform wage increase across skills*

The primary impact of higher foreign wages is an increase in emigration and remittances. This has a negative impact on the local activity rate. Higher emigration and lower participation induce lower unemployment and higher local wage expectations (through the wage curve effect). These expectations have a negative impact on labor demand.

The youth benefit more from the shock in terms of wages and unemployment because their activity rates decrease relatively more than the non youth.

The increase in foreign wages acts as a disincentive for both secondary education and higher education

**Table 4: Macro Results**

	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)
GDP Growth	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Emigration	2.5	5.2	7.8	10.5
Total investment	0.5	0.9	1.6	2.2
Local labor demand	0.0	-0.1	-0.1	-0.2
Total potential active population	0.0	0.0	0.0	-0.1
Total Unemployment	-0.1	-0.3	-0.5	-0.6
Total activity rate	-0.1	-0.2	-0.3	-0.4
Remittances	5.7	11.8	18.4	25.3
Exchange rate	-0.2	-0.5	-0.7	-0.9

(transition rates decreases by respectively 1% and 0.3%) because the average wage of unskilled workers increases relatively more than the average wage of skilled workers.

### *High skilled foreign wages increase*

This scenario could be considered as equivalent to the selective immigration policies that developed countries are increasingly adopting to attract developing countries talents.

The macroeconomic results are similar to the ones mentioned in the previous scenario, although characterized by a lower intensity. For instance, emigration increases by 2.3% on average per year, whilst its increase in the previous scenario was 6.5%. The same is true for unemployment, but in lower propor-

**Table 5: Macro Results**

	2012 (%)	2013 (%)	2014 (%)	2015 (%)
GDP Growth	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Emigration	0.8	1.7	2.8	3.8
Total investment	0.2	0.4	0.7	1.0
Local labor demand	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2
Total Unemployment	0.0	0.0	-0.1	-0.3
Total activity rate	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Remittances	2.2	4.7	7.6	10.9
Exchange rate	-0.1	-0.2	-0.2	-0.3

tions - it decreases by 0.1 percentage points on average against 0.4 percentage points before. The situation is different when looking at the disaggregated level and, as expected, those that benefit the most in terms of unemployment reduction are the high skilled workers (2.1% on average). Moreover, migration intentions increase for high skilled workers (16.9%), while they decrease for unskilled and medium skilled in similar proportions (respectively -0.5% and -0.5%).

The increase of high skilled migrants' wages by 10% per year induces a significant increase of the high skilled remittance rate and a moderate decrease in the other categories' remittance rates, resulting in an increase of total remittances. This induces a decrease of the activity rate which has a positive impact on unemployment and wages.

The decrease of the low and medium skilled remittance rates is due to the improvement of the families' income in the home country through a combined effect of lower unemployment, higher wages and higher total remittances. The appreciation of the real exchange rate amplifies this income effect.

Although high skilled youth are the main beneficiaries of the shock in terms of wage increase and unemployment reduction, the other categories are also characterized by a reduction of their unemployment rates. Indeed, the highest decrease of the activity rate occurs for high skilled youth, because they depend relatively more on high skilled remittances.

Finally the impact on transition rates from primary to secondary education is similar to the previous scenario (-0.6% on average), whereas it is the opposite for the transition from secondary to higher education that increases by 0.4% on average, which is consistent with the evolution of relative wages and unemployment rates.

## **C**onclusion and Policy Implications

The crisis scenario showed that we can clearly distinguish a difference in the results before and after the Tunisian uprising. In the first period, despite an increase in unemployment, migration intentions decrease because the Tunisian economy slowdown is moderate

compared to the recession observed in its main trading partners. Starting from 2011, Tunisia's economic growth plunges and this worsens the negative effects on the labor market. There is a reversal in migration flows, with an upsurge in 2011. The simultaneity of the crisis in Tunisia and its partners worsened the employment situation through the labor supply channel. The long-term impact of the crisis will be a higher incentive to invest in secondary education and a relatively lower incentive in pursuing higher education.

The second experiment demonstrates that an increase in services exports has a positive impact on aggregate unemployment reduction since it increases labor demand and decreases labor supply. The exchange rate appreciation, induced by the increase of exports, and the decrease in migration flows have a negative impact on remittances. The fall in remittances and the rise in investment, thus in capital income, have opposite effects on the activity rates, but the capital effect prevails and the activity rate slightly decreases. The decrease in unemployment is most significant for high skilled workers, due to high skill intensity of the considered service sectors and high capital-skill complementarity.

Moreover, we showed that emigration decreases due to the positive impact of the shock on employment and wages, illustrating the hypothesis of substitution between mode 4 exports and migration. Emigration by skill follows the same evolution as unemployment, with high skilled migration decreasing more than the other categories, thus reducing brain-drain. The results also revealed that the non youth benefit more from the shock than the youth. This means that liberalizing mode 4 will increase the gap between the youth and the non youth, both in terms of unemployment and wages. Therefore, policies meant at increasing youth access to Mode 4 activities could accompany trade policies aiming at obtaining higher concessions for workers' mobility. These policies could consist in training (particularly in foreign language acquisition), wages incentives for exporting firms to hire young graduates or incentives for youth entrepreneurship in these sectors.

The increase of receiving countries' wages has a positive impact on unemployment reduction and wages in sending countries. The effects are channeled through increased migration incentives and higher remittances

which reduces the pressure on the local labor market, mainly through a lower labor participation rate. When the wage increases are limited to highly skilled workers, the benefits are lower than those of the previous scenario, including for the high skilled. Migration intentions increase for the high skilled, while they decrease for unskilled and medium skilled. Although high skilled youth are the main beneficiaries of the shock in terms of wage increase and unemployment reduction, the other categories are also characterized by a reduction of their unemployment rates due to lower participation.

To sum up, we find that, given the high stock and limited flows of Tunisian emigrants, the effects of migration on labor market seem to operate more via the remittances-activity rate nexus than via an outflow of job-seekers. Exports of Mode 4 intensive services seem to be an efficient tool to improve labor market outcomes and reduce brain-drain.

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