



interview with

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Has the irregular migration phenomenon aggravated following the changes in the Arab region?

Irregular migration is not a new phenomenon, in other words it existed before the developments that had taken place in the region between 2010 – 2011, the latent motives behind it already existed before the revolution, but the post-revolution period may have provided objective circumstances and security conditions that paved the way for large waves of migration in the region.

As for Tunisia, these waves have already existed since 2000, But the ruling political system was naturally used to obscure information, especially that at this time the system was bragging about its economic successes, but these successes were impugned by the social crisis which is one of its reflections is irregular migration, therefore, the motives for this phenomenon existed before the revolution but it was further deepened by the security, economic and social conditions resulting from the

situation after the Arab uprisings, as the economic trajectories didn't significantly change and the revolution has produced new economic and social pressures.

After 2011, the speech in Tunisia focused on the young generation and their problems, but the youth were fully aware that the economic change will be delayed, which led to a big migration wave between 2011 and 2012 where more than 35,000 Tunisians arrived to the Italian coast. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognizes only 22,000, but we estimate that the real number is much higher, as official numbers are usually based on migrants who arrive to Italian coasts through official Italian or international authorities, but we know that many Tunisians succeed in reaching Italy without passing through these official gates.

We made a study in 2016 about the desire of young Tunisians to emigrate, and the ratio of young Tunisians that wanted to migrate was around 35% before the revolution, During the revolution between 2011 and 2012 the number was reduced to 31%, This period was characterized by freedom especially freedom of expression, the right to assemble and freedom of association, and the political speech focused on responding to the youth's demands, all that was considered an opportunity for better future, but in contrast there is another part of the youth was seeing that the transition will be delayed.

What are the most important characteristics of social categories that resort to irregular migration?

The irregular migrant characteristics has gradually developed. Today, we find among irregular immigrants those who are unemployed and have high degrees or those who are in a vulnerable employment position. There is also a small percentage of women, that wasn't the case before, but it changed after the revolution, this percentage is between 3 and 5%, and it is possible to have families as irregular migration became a family project.

There is a social class that has maintained its existence among migrants, It is the category of unemployed and marginalized folks and there is a new category that joined them lately those

who are highly educated. In some situations, we find families as well as some who has a vulnerable employment position and work but their job does not achieve their aspirations.

This is what represents a change in irregular migrants' characteristics

These social protests and the change in the factors driving migration after the revolution have an indirect relationship to irregular migration. There were very pressing social demands, which led to the intensification of the protests in Tunisia. Since 2014 and Tunisia witnesses many protests, according to the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, between 4900 to 10,000 social protest in 2010 occurred. These protests have an indirect relationship to the issue of irregular migration as successive governments did not handle or respond positively to the demands of protesters after the revolution and it establish any channels of dialogue or communicate with them, despite the fact that the right to work was not the only requirement there were many others. Such as the right to health, the right to education, the right to local and regional development and the right to water and sanitation but the role of the State had a setback in several aspects leading to give a greater motivation for those who want to migrate.

The state dealt with social protests as a matter of security. Protesters were subjected to repression, prosecutions and referral to courts, especially in interior affairs, which led to irregular migration.

There is another phenomenon became widely spread after the revolution, the phenomenon of school dropout. No body was talking about it until official reports were issued in 2013 there were 100,00 drop outs annually, no body know what is their fate.

The Tunisian Forum examined the phenomenon of school dropout in 2014, according to the study, more than half of the dropouts are attracted by networks of irregular migration in addition to similar trade networks, smuggling and even radical groups.

Each year, there are around 100,000 are added to numbers of unemployed, Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment employs about 27,000 people, this is its full capacity and it can't take on any more, so around 70,000 are left for these phenomena. One of the important factors also is the general political climate and the state of frustration in the country, as the political speech is limiting the concept of democratic transition to elections only and marginalized economic and social aspects despite their importance, we have been participating since the end of 2015 in a path that got along with the International Monetary Fund and forced the government to take several measures especially freezing hiring in public office for youth and other actions that contributed to further gestation and persistence of the crises. There has also been a loss of confidence among young people in civil and political activities. We have conducted a study showing that only between 2 and 3% of young people have civil or political activity, and even those who engage in civil and political activities are marginalized as they only play logistic and tactical roles, therefore, it appears to be a process of systematic exclusion of young people from civil and political life.

The role of the state in social services has also a major setback as there are problems in basic sectors in Tunisia in health, education and transport, in everything related to Tunisians' life, in addition to the security concern associated with violence and crime not only terrorism but even in working-class neighborhoods. In addition to all that, the image of the state has not changed it still represents the repressive system and there are still clashes between youth and security officers at police stations and security centers in these areas, the repressive image of the state still exists.

The revolution was based upon socio-economic disparities between a lucky part of the nation and an unlucky part, and these differences have their reflections even within the regions that we consider fortunate, as the working-class neighborhoods and poverty belts surrounding large cities and coastal cities complain of the same marginalization and disparities that the interior regions complain about.

Economic and social policies have not changed for 8 years, and the official ratios of poverty and unemployment rates and the re-

gional development index show that public services have fallen. Therefore, those who work in small jobs are considered to be vulnerable and in a situation of insecurity and instability and their small jobs usually become a source of funding for irregular migration in an attempt to change their reality. This is also what we see in organized migration, we see thousands of doctors, lawyers, academics and engineers choosing to migrate despite the possibility of living with their salary. It is not only about material and economic matters, but about insecurity and mistrust in the future.

Has the tightening of migration policies in Europe contributed to the growing phenomenon of irregular migration?

After the rise of anti-immigrant political speech and the rise of US President Donald Trump to power in the United States, right-wing anti-immigrant policies have become more aggressive, these policies have reached its peak stages, that was clear in dealing with the crisis of migrants in Greece and Turkey, especially policies related to Syrian migrants. In the Mediterranean, These policies was applied by harassing humanitarian rescue vessels which plays an important role in rescuing migrants and giving them humanitarian aid as well as changing the image known about the Mediterranean Sea as the largest graveyard in the world.

Harassments to organizations working in the Mediterranean was made so they would give up and withdraw, they even criminalize activists' acts to curtail their work, There are numerous ongoing prosecutions against many of them, especially in Italy. The result is that these organizations withdrew from humanitarian work.

These policies coincided with other Libyan policies as the European governments made a series of agreements with Libyan militias to close the migration route through Libya.

These militias used to consider irregular migration to be their source of funding until another party have come and have given them greater funding with other undeclared agreements in order to close that route. Restrictions on migration by sea have increased after the withdrawal of humanitarian organizations five

times according to the International Organization for Migration.

The European option is clear and it has not changed, and it is the closure of the borders, but the European consider that their borders start from the coast of Tunisia and the Libyan coasts.

The European Union did not succeed in imposing landing platforms in North Africa, but they tried to develop this idea so they made a receipt and accommodation center in Libya, and forced Tunisia to cooperate in border control, Four-wheel drive vehicles were given by Italy to monitor the border. They seek to leave all the problems for transit or host States to bear alone.

The EU also calls on Tunisia to cooperate on the issue of the deporting migrants. In 2017 there are 2,000 Tunisians deported from Italy and forcibly returned to Tunisia without guaranteeing their human rights. Without any social, psychological or economic care, those folks would be an easy target for any group.

What are the possible measures that should regulate the phenomenon of migration, which is considered a humanitarian phenomenon?

Migration won't stop, it is represents a human right which is the right to freedom of movement, but irregular migration cannot be viewed as a humanitarian crisis only. It is a political crisis, a crisis of international policy and national policy that accomplices with it, therefore, any approach to remedy the situation and combat irregular migration should be comprehensive.

Although the humanitarian and human rights approach is Important but it is not sufficient to deal with irregular migration, it must coincide with a political and developmental approach.