

Number 79

Report of the month April 2020

Social movements, Suicides and Violence

254 collective protests and 30 cases of suicide and attempted suicide



Introduction

Tunisia continued to live in total confinement during the entire month of April 2020. This confinement was decided by the authorities since March 22, 2020 and extended twice by two weeks, within the framework of preventive procedures against the general spread of the SARS COVID 19 pandemic, of which international contaminations were, until the end of April 2020, in the order of three million including 200 thousand deaths.

In Tunisia, this global pandemic has struck about 994 people by April 30, 2020, 66 of whom have been hospitalized, 24 cases have been treated in intensive medical care, 41 people have died and the number of cases in recovery has reached 305.

Figures from the National Observatory of New and Emerging Diseases throughout the month of April indicated that the daily rate of contamination is 18 cases, that the average age of death is 67 years and that the age group of 15-44 years is the most affected by the pandemic.

This pandemic revealed a structural social crisis throughout the month of April 2020, reflected in the official figures of poverty indicators disclosed for the first time by the authorities and also in the different types of social demonstrations that took place. This revealed both the legitimacy of the claims but also exposed a social crisis in the country characterised by stigmatisation, violence, exclusion and social discrimination.

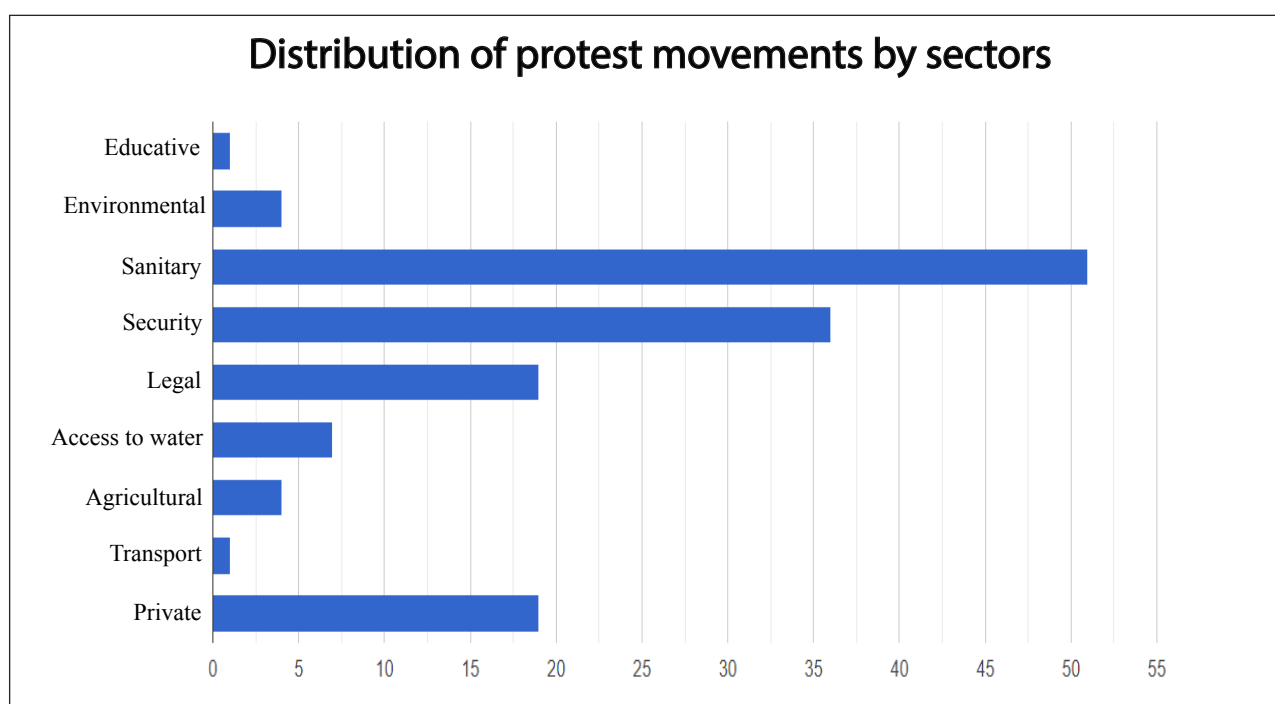
Protest movements in April 2020


The almost total paralysis of economic life in Tunisia due to total containment throughout the month of April has emptied the streets, closed work spaces, markets, shopping malls, cafes and restaurants, stopped traffic in and between towns and forced everyone to stay at home until the epidemiological situation of the pandemic is under control.

On the other hand, the pandemic did not stop the voices of demonstrators demanding their fundamental rights, mainly economic and social rights. These voices emerged in the traditional spaces of protest, namely the streets and headquarters of the local and regional centres, and also used alternative protest spaces such as Facebook to publicize their struggles and demands.

Most of the demonstrators' demands were related to the right to water and food, as thirst and hunger reigned in a number of regions, particularly in the rural areas of Kairouan, where essential foodstuffs such as semolina, flour and cheap oil were totally unavailable.

This situation forced the inhabitants of the areas of El-Jaoumiya and El-Brahmiya (El Alaa delegation), the areas of El-Choueihya (Chrarda delegation) and the areas of El Ksour, Chrartiya Sud and Bir El Ouessfene (Omar Bouhajla delegation) to protest in order to claim access to food.






In the area of Bir El Msikin in Bouhajla, the inhabitants also demonstrated because of thirst caused by the interruption in the supply of drinking water tanks as suppliers could not move because of the confinement.

On the other hand and in some regions social protests for semolina and flour tended to use force through the blocking and seizure of trucks carrying these foodstuffs by citizens living in a situation of famine in many regions, as in the case of the inhabitants of the El-Fariouet region in Sbikha who seized the semolina load from a transport truck and the recourse of the inhabitants of the Siseb El-Dhriaat region, Sbikha to blocking the road due to the refusal of the shop owners to supply them with semolina, with a limitation of 5 kilograms, knowing that the main food supply for the people of this region is none other than semolina.

In addition, the messages of reassurance that the Ministry of Commerce sent out daily throughout April confirming the availability of these two goods and the existence of a government strategy for their equitable distribution among the regions under the control of the national army, came up to a different scenario, as the shortage of the two articles is persisting in almost all the regions. Later, information was made public about the prosecution of local government officials (mayors) for speculating on these two goods according to the National Anti-Corruption Commission.

In addition, some regions have experienced a state of social tension calling for the acceleration of the provision of government-approved social assistance to help people whose activities have been directly impacted by the pandemic, such as workers, artisans and marginalized people. This social grumble in the delegation of Makthar in the governorate of Siliana evolved into suicide attempts committed by three young men inside the delegation's headquarters.



On the other hand, the government has adopted social measures in favour of the needy and marginalized, who represented the vulnerable group most affected by the Corona pandemic. This action has revealed that their number is close to three million Tunisians living at or below the poverty line, namely, needy families, those without assistance, pensioners who receive a subsidy lower than the subsidy obtained by poor families estimated at 180 dinars and other vulnerable groups that have been generated by the failure of the economic strategies of successive governments.

These measures were not exempt from inconsistencies either, as the Ministry of Social Affairs was forced to review the list of beneficiaries after it became clear that thousands of people receiving social assistance were not eligible.

The mapping of protest movements

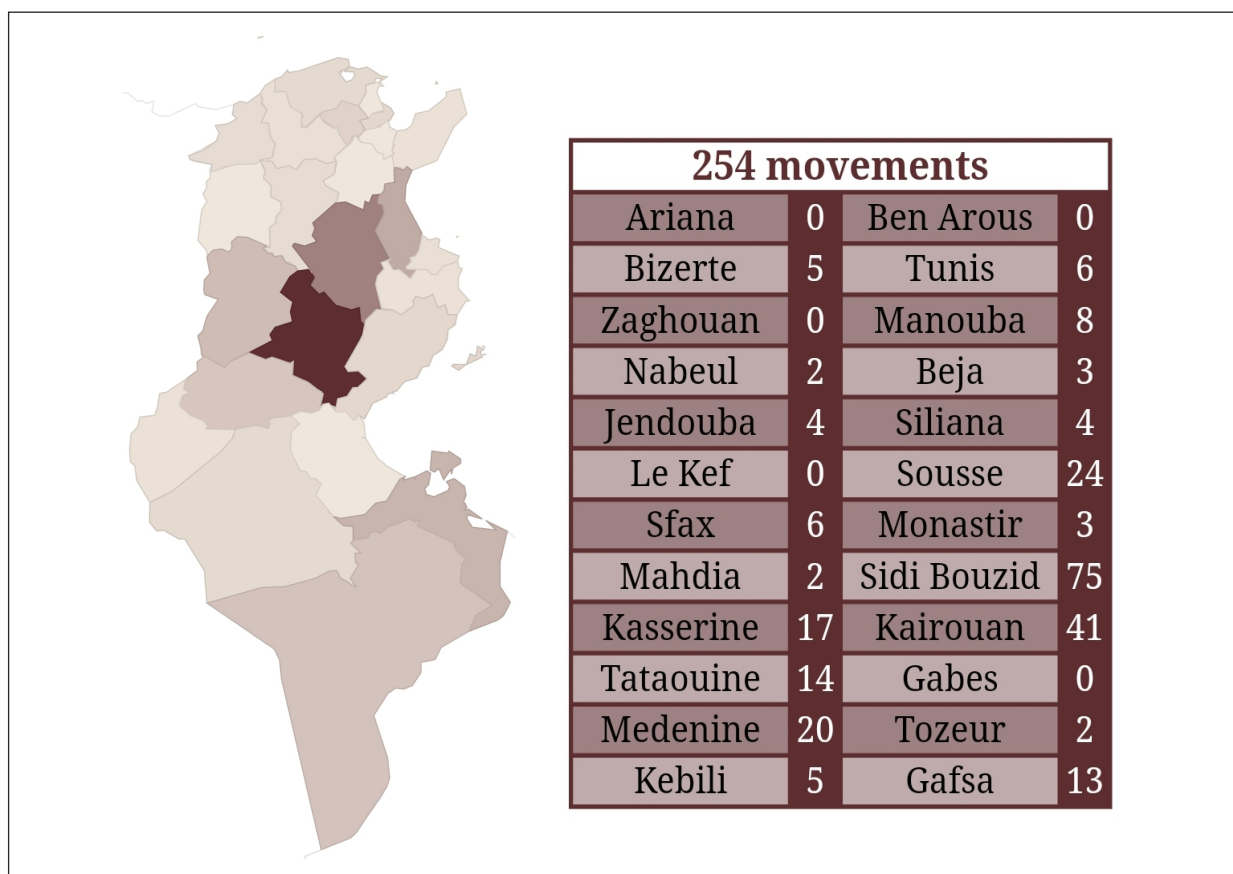
The demonstrations in April 2020 did not stop at demanding basic foodstuffs and drinking water, but also included a number of demands representing the consequences of the Corona pandemic.

The number of social protests recorded during the month of April reached 254 protest movements according to the monitoring sample on which the watch unit worked and made electronic copies of newspapers and their websites as well as on broadcast sites and Facebook.

The protest mapping has changed for the first time since the start of the activity of the Tunisian Social Observatory, the project of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights since the governorate of Sidi Bouzid moved to the top of the most protesting areas during this month of April with 75 protest actions (a daily rate of about 2,5% protest movement) and thus the weight of the protest has shifted from the governorate of Kairouan, which monopolized the protest scene for months and years.

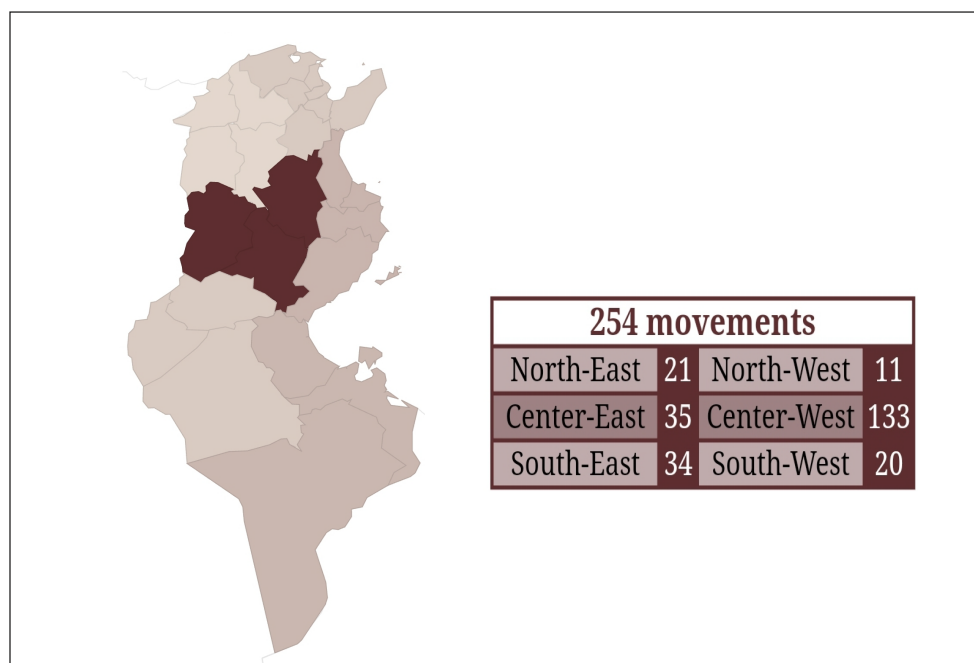
The governorate of Kairouan came second with 41 protest actions, followed by Sousse (24 protest movements), then Medenine (20 protest movements), Kasserine (17 protest movements), Tataouine (14 protest movements) and Gafsa (13 protest movements); while the number of social demonstrations in the rest of the governorates was less than 10 protest movements throughout the month of April. The governorates of Tozeur, Mahdia and Nabeul, experienced only two movements per governorate this month.

The mapping of protest movements by gouvernorate (April 2020)

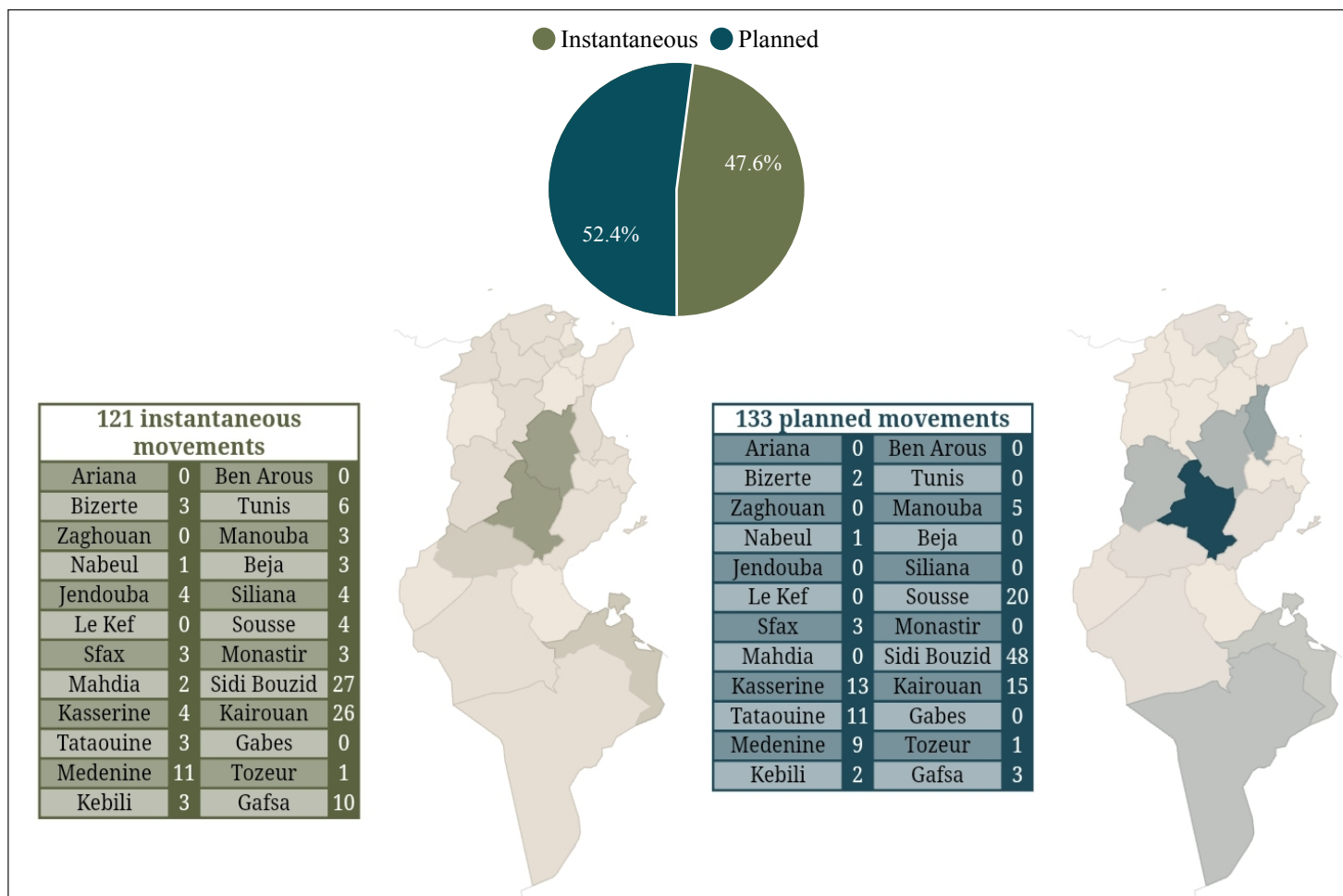


The central-western region represented a hotbed of protest with 133 protest movements, followed by the eastern regions (central, southern and northern) with 90 protest movements, the south-western region with 20 protest movements and the north-western region with 11 protest movements.

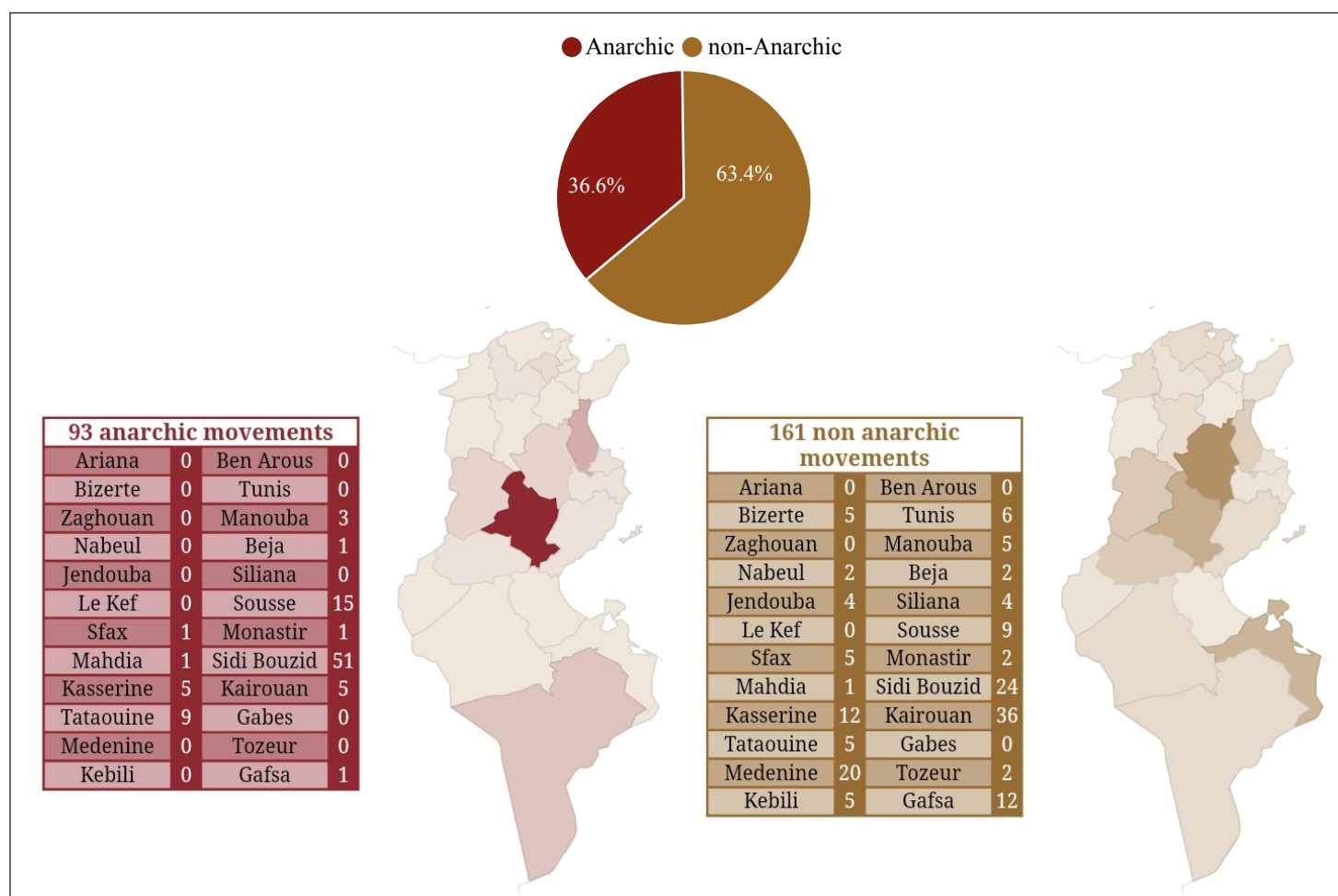
Regional protestation movements



Immediate demonstrations represented 47.6% of the total observed demonstrations, including 22.3% recorded in the governorate of Sidi Bouzid alone (27 protest movements).



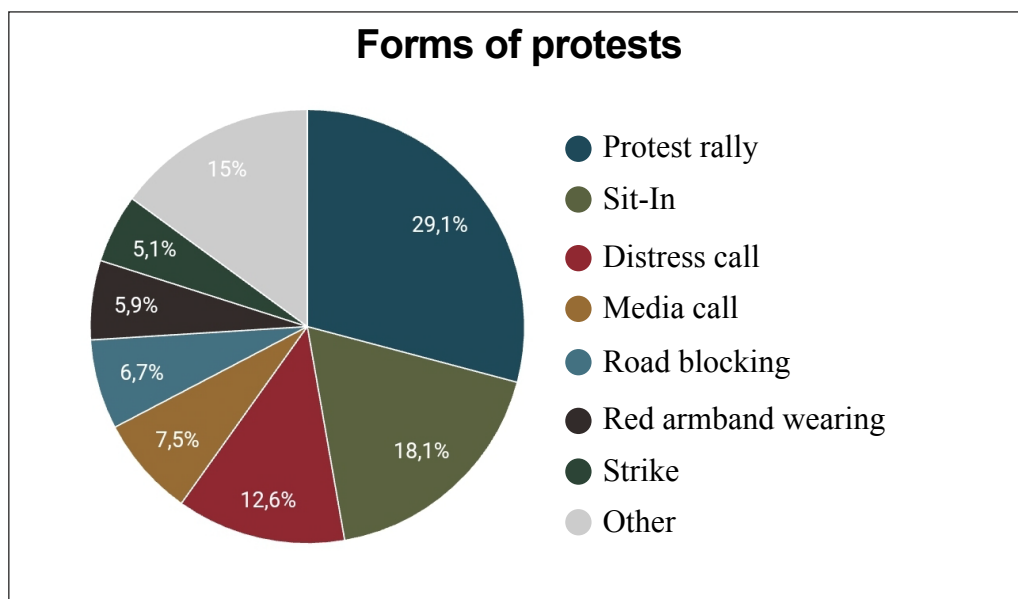
while the percentage of violent movements reached 36.6% of the total observed movements in Sidi Bouzid alone, which constitutes 54.8% of the total observed movements (51 violent protest movements).



Among the demands raised by the demonstrators in the governorate of Sidi Bouzid throughout the month of April, there are basic foodstuffs as well as facilitating the entry of people from the area blocked at the Tunisian-Libyan border. There is also the issue of the " ill-treatment " that these people experienced after the jostling they attempted to force open the border gate of Ras Jedir because of the long wait for its official opening and under the influence of the escalation of armed clashes in Libyan territories.

This governorate has also experienced protests from the medical and paramedical staff due to the lack of necessary protective supplies against the new Corona virus as well as the precarious health infrastructure in the region's hospital, particularly in the area designated for the COVID 19 virus.

In spite of the confinement and the almost total shutdown of the country, the most important forms of protest observed during the month of April were protest rallies with 29.1% of the total means of protest observed, followed by sit-ins (18.1%), distress calls (12.6%), calls through the media (7.5%), not to mention strikes and others.



The demonstrations within the health sector were the most important. The confrontation of the Corona pandemic required the provision of preventive supplies to the various health centres in the country, the provision of appropriate health infrastructures and the availability of doctors specialised in resuscitation and the need to carry out virus screening tests, all of which were the engine of protest from citizens, medical staff and health workers in many regions; Examples include the distress call sent by the medical staff of Sadok Mkadem hospital in Djerba or the protest of the inhabitants of the Ras E Kef region in Gafsa to demand a COVID 19 screening campaign in the region and to demand sterilization.

Activists in Gafsa subsequently demonstrated to demand a testing laboratory that meets its needs for testing for the virus.


Spaces of protests		actors initiating the social movements	
Media, Roads, Work spaces	★★★★	Inhabitants, Citizens	★★★★
Hospitals, Delegations, Governorates, Municipalities	★★★	Employees, Workers, Doctors and Medical Service Employees	★★★
Social networks, Public spaces, Administrative headquarters	★★	Farmers, Activists, Security Agents	★★
Judicial institutions, A.R.P	★	Taxi Drivers, Collective Taxi Drivers, Unemployed	★

In addition, one of the health-related protests, which was widely criticised as "contrary to the message of medical assistance," was the closing of the hospital door to an ambulance as a sign of protest by health workers from the Medenine University Hospital.

Other protests produced by the Corona pandemic include the refusal to bury the victims of the virus in certain regions, such as what happened in the region of Mejaz El Beb, where the inhabitants of the area around the cemetery of El-Rabrabi refused to bury a victim who wished to be buried in the region, but the demonstrators refused to do so on the pretext that he was not a native of the area.

The social stigmatization against the victims of the virus did not stop there but rather affected the infected people as well, the Dar Fadhal region witnessed a state of stigmatization and social violence against the family of a coronavirus victim, the neighbors went as far as changing the names of the family members to call them "Corona". They went so far as to prevent the family members from leaving the house for their food needs that the family continued to eat bread and olive oil for three days.

The protests produced by the Corona pandemic also emerged in the form of the population's refusal to allocate spaces for compulsory quarantine, as happened in the Bni Mtir region in Jendouba. It also involved the people concerned by the compulsory quarantine, many of whom refused the state of these spaces, such as the



approximately 80 people who did not agree to enter a university hostel and preferred to spend the night outside in Sfax, as a sign of rejection of the quarantine space designated by the Authority.

April also witnessed protests for security reasons, including a distress call from residents of the Khzema neighbourhood, who feared that thieves would storm their houses during the day. Among the strange demonstrations that were noted was that of farmers from Kondar who went to the National Guard headquarters to protest and ask to provide barley for their animals, which they did as the security authorities in liaison with the local authorities were able to provide them with this material.

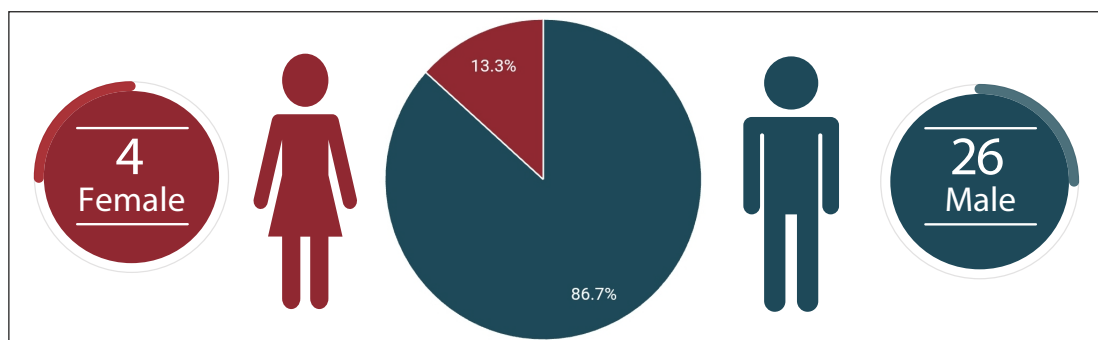
Various other events were recorded throughout April confirming the deterioration in the standard of living, the economic and social situation and the decline in services in various regions. This situation foreshadows the next social explosion that will characterize the post-Corona period.

The fishermen's crisis has reappeared in the fishing port of Teboulba, where sailors have asked for compensation from the biological rest fund.

Similarly, the crisis of small craftsmen seems structural and complex. In the handicrafts sector, for example, the Corona virus has lifted the veil on a shocking figure, namely the presence of 170 000 "artisans" working on the margins, ie not registered with the National Office of Tunisian Handicrafts. The cessation of commercial activity throughout the month of April and the loss of their livelihood has prompted six of them to attempt suicide by ingestion of drugs (case of the death of a craftsman in Sfax) and self-mutilation by cutting the arteries of the hand in Bizerte, Manouba, Tunisia, Kasserine and Gafsa.

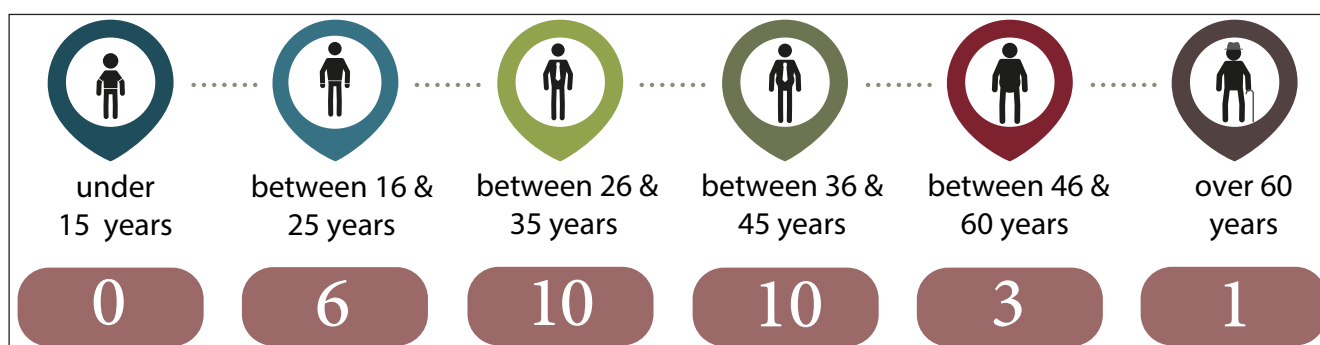
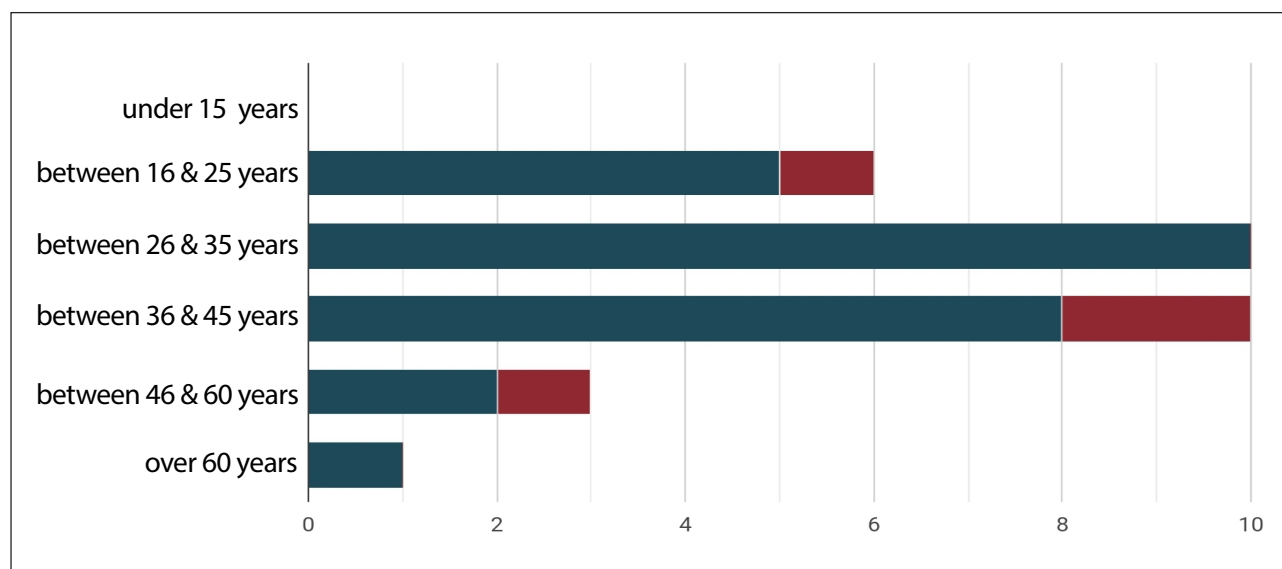
Acts and attempts of suicide

Suicides and attempts of suicide by gender



The month of April recorded 30 acts of suicide and attempted suicide, 87% of which were among men. The 26-35 and 36-45 age group were the most prone to suicide and attempted suicide with a percentage of about 66%.

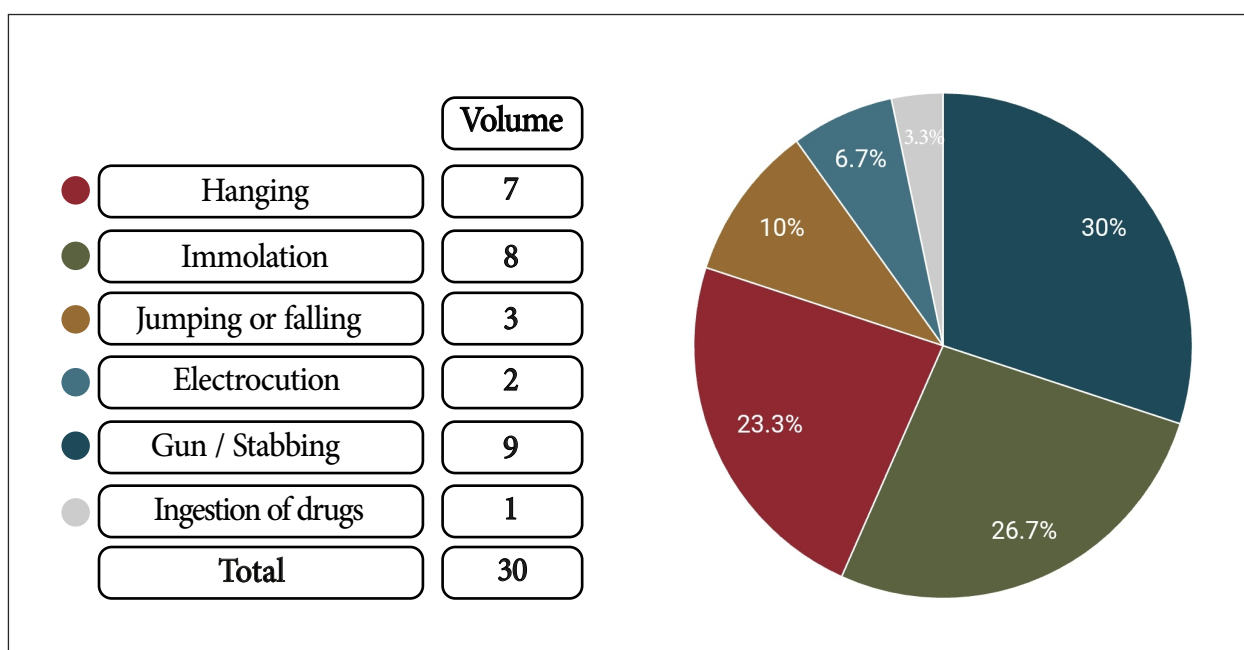
Suicides and suicide attempts by age group



Suicide and self-mutilation attempt by cutting the veins was the most common form used by the victims (9 cases) with 30% of the total forms of suicide observed, followed by suicide by immolation with 27%, suicide by hanging 23% and jumping and precipitating 10% knowing that the head of the orthopaedic department at Rabta Hospital, Dr Maher Barsaoui revealed in a press release at the end of April that the department had received a number of urgent cases requiring surgery which later turned out to be suicide attempts. Dr. Barsaoui stated that "the number of victims of hospitalized suicide attempts increased by 30% in April", a fact that we are cautiously relaying given the absence of a baseline on which this increase was calculated.

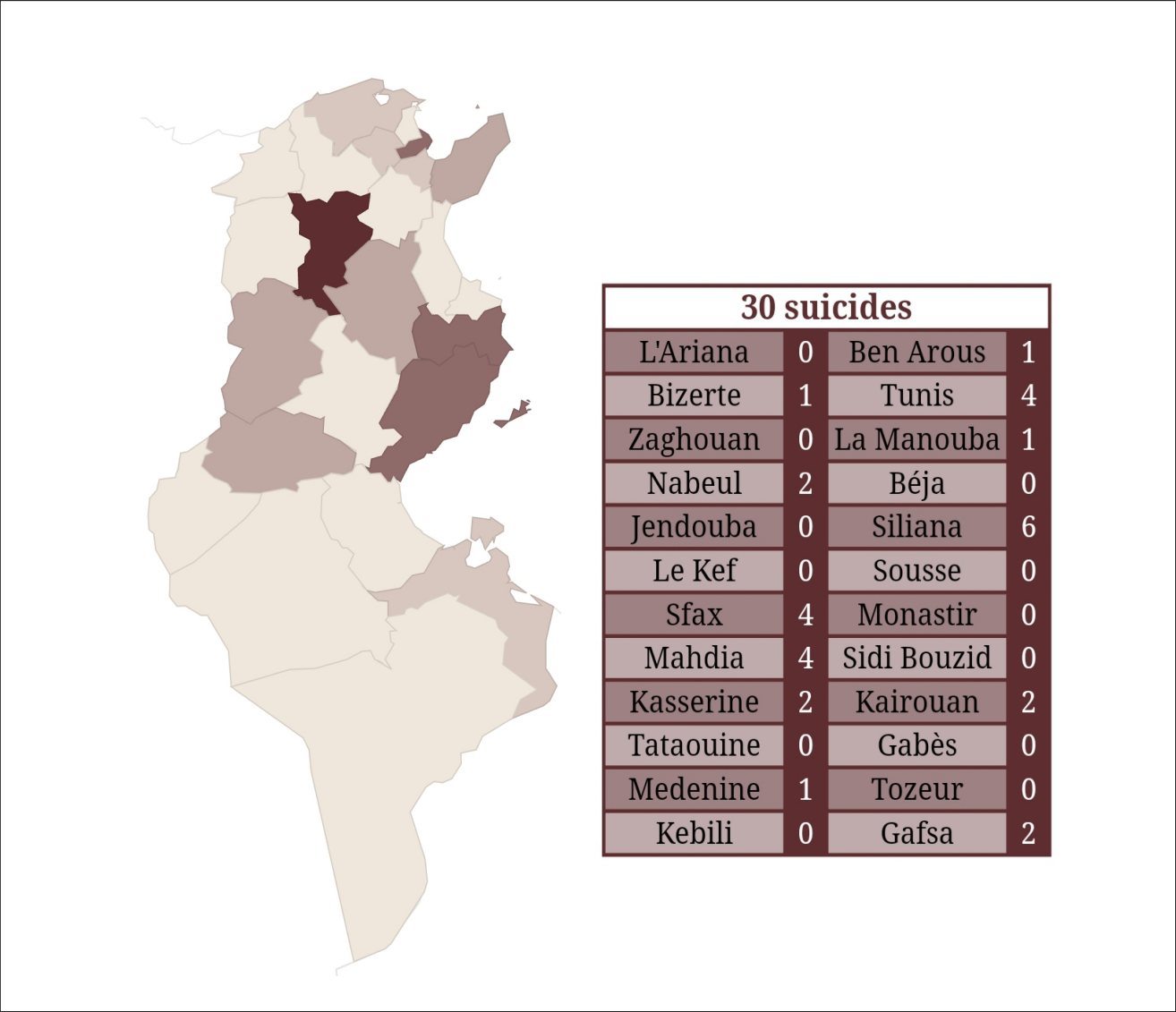
The spokesman also said that most of the victims were in the under 35 age group, the majority of them were women and most of these victims came from the capital's western suburbs, that is, the western working-class neighborhoods such as Sidi Hussein.

means of suicide (April 2020)



With regard to the mapping of suicides and attempted suicides, the governorate of Kairouan no longer occupies the first position with only two cases, while Seliana comes first with 6 suicides and attempted suicides, followed by the governorates of Mahdia, Sfax and Tunis coming third with a total of 12 cases, giving an average of four cases for each region.

Suicides and attempts of suicide by governorate



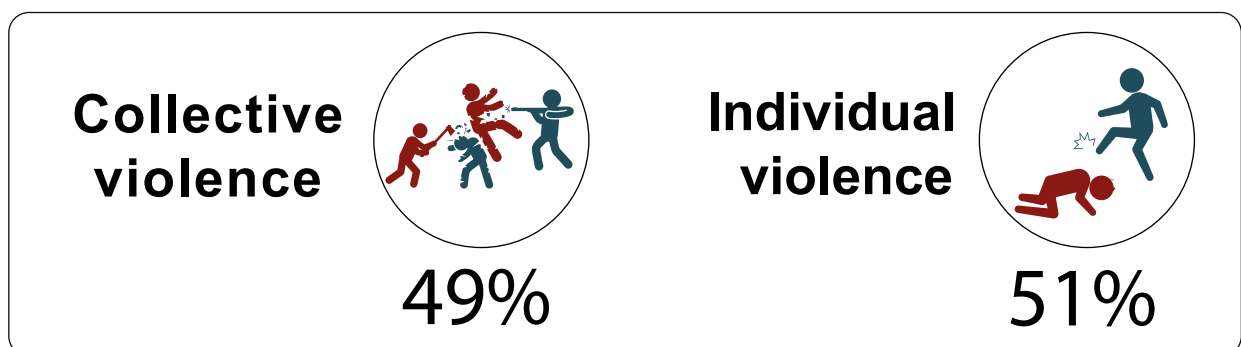
Violence

The various official statements issued by the Ministry of Women, the Family, Children and the Elderly and by representatives of women's and children's associations confirm a significant increase in violence in general during the period of total confinement and, more specifically, in violence against women and children.

While the Minister for Women mentioned that the number of notices of violence registered during the month of April increased by about five times compared to the same period last year, reports from listening centres affiliated to women's associations stated that indicators of violence against women had reached record levels in the last two months and that its rates had increased about eightfold.

Economic violence was the most important form recorded by our monitoring unit, followed by sexual, physical and moral violence.

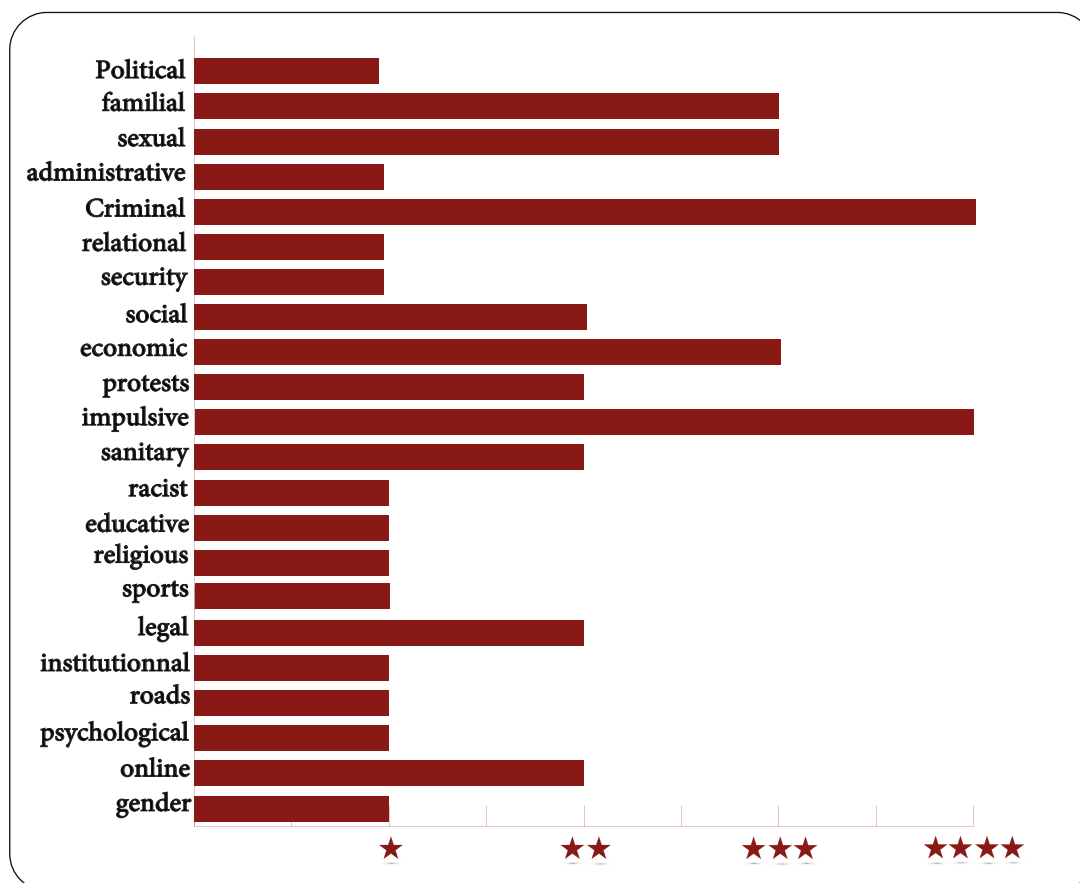
cases of violence



And in continuity with what has been mentioned above, the results of the monthly monitoring of the work of the Tunisian Social Observatory at the Tunisian Forum of Economic and Social Rights showed an increase in sexual violence, which accounted for 18% of all violence recorded during the month of April 2020.

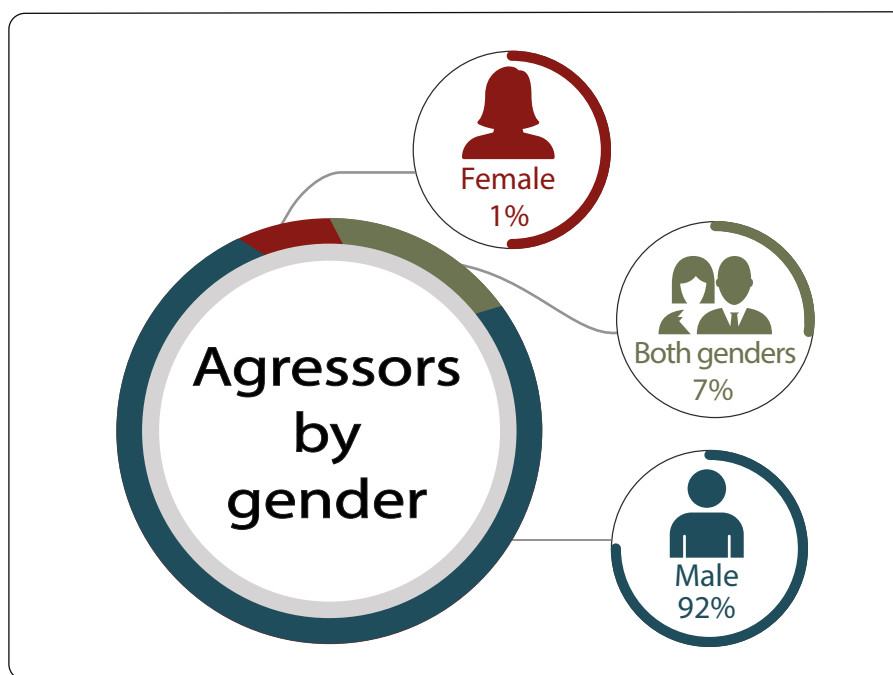
Sociology considers that this rise in sexual violence was foreseeable in a framework of total confinement where the public space is unoccupied and almost totally devoid of social control.

Forms of violence



Those who follow public affairs link the recorded increase in indicators of violence against women and girls to the high level of campaigns recorded during the period of confinement and to the level of legibility and visibility that the problem has enjoyed, the mechanisms for dealing with it and the channels of assistance available to women.

At the same time, this month has seen the economic and social repercussions of the Corona crisis through a sharp increase in violence in its economic form, which accounted for about 14.5% of all acts of violence recorded.



Economic violence was divided into two types during the month of April: that resulting from the need, precariousness and powerlessness that a large number of Tunisians faced during the total confinement knowing that women, children and the elderly were among the most important victims.

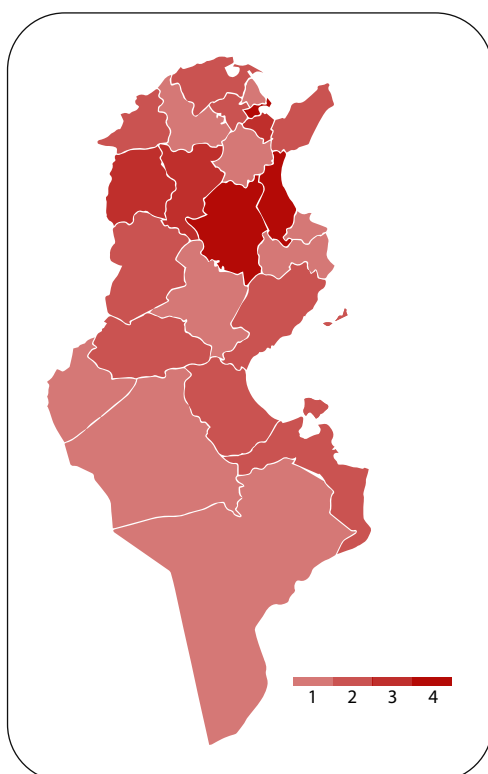
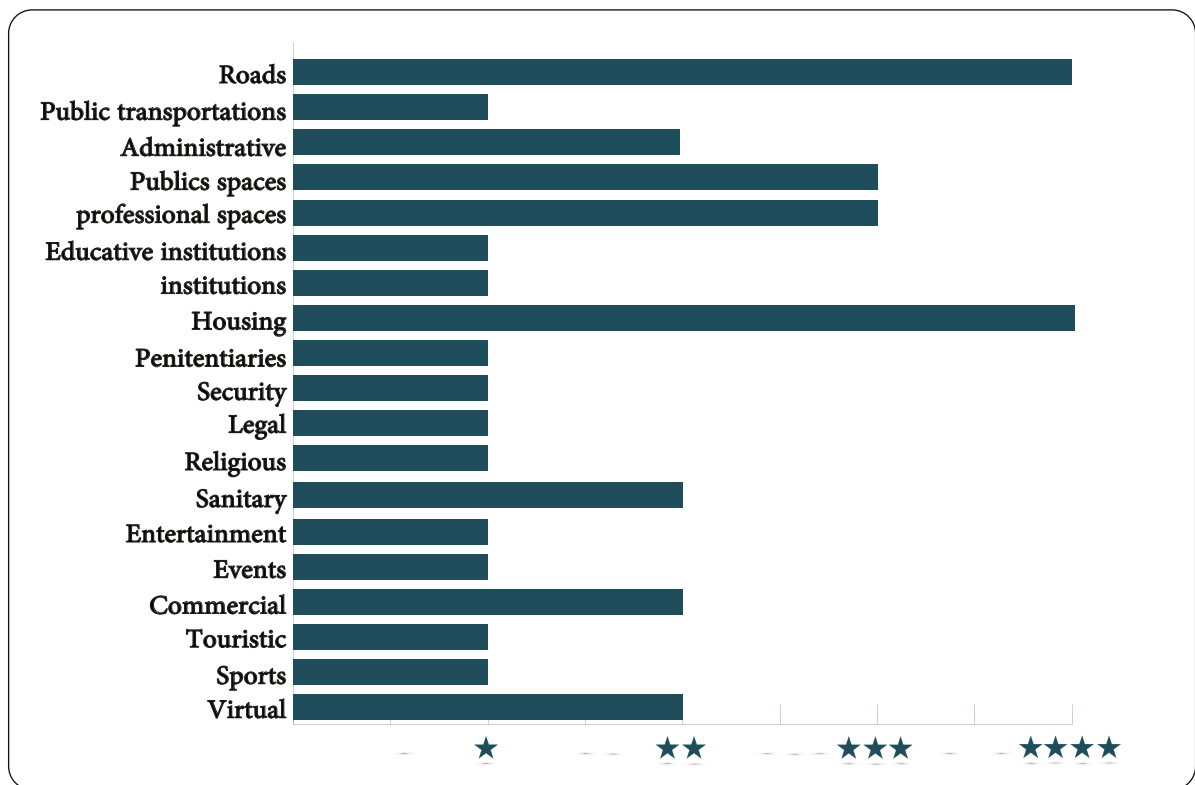
The second type was mainly linked to the wave of speculation, to the price rises recorded on a number of commodities on the market. Since the period of total containment provided a favourable framework for fuelling this opportunistic behaviour, which affected not only traders and brokers, but also mayors and government employees.

For reference, violence in its criminal form has kept the first place in the results of the work of the Tunisian Social Observatory team where more than 45% of the cases recorded during the month of April varied between robberies, thefts and shared violence.

Faced with the confinement imposed in homes, the domestic space was the most recorded in cases of violence, with about 29% of the incidents of violence recorded in April, followed by the public highway with more than 20%, and work spaces, which witnessed about 18% of violent acts.

The remaining cases of violence were divided between commercial spaces (4%) and health spaces, including hospitals (about 2.5%), public transport and virtual space (1.2%).

Intensity of violence by space



The mapping of violence did not change significantly during the period of global confinement, with the governorates of Tunis, Kairouan and Sousse remaining in the vanguard of the governorates that recorded the most incidents of violence, followed by the governorates of Siliana, Ben Arous and El Kef.



Conclusion

The Corona crisis also revealed a structural human rights crisis that affected migrants residing in Tunisia in shelters such as the El Ouardia reception centre. These structural crises will drive a complex trajectory of protests and social tremors in the coming months unless the government manages to anticipate the deterioration of the situation and put in place an urgent economic and strategic rescue plan.

New scientific calculation methodology:

As of March, the Tunisian Social Observatory of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights has adopted a new methodology of scientific calculation, the bases of which are as follows:

Definitions:

Instantaneous movements: characterized by the surprise and speed of movement resulting from the anger of the crowd and the rumble it generates but are limited in time and space. This type of movement seeks to mobilize attention and social mobilization and is characterized by its peaceful nature. However, these movements vary in the parameters of protest development, including the use of violence.

Planned movements: movements which were essentially immediate but which changed and developed mechanisms of action in time and space and were able to acquire the capacity to organize and prepare for and seek to develop counter-mobilization but remain essentially peaceful.

They are distinguished by their organizational means and their capacity to ensure its continuous action and mobilization for the same reasons.

Anarchic movements (violent): these are movements that make use of counter-violence as one of their mechanisms of action and are often direct reactions employing all means for confrontation and the achievement of their objectives, but they often lack clear organisational elements, programs and

The methodology of Calculation:

The uniqueness of a movement is defined by a mode of action, a place and a day.

A protest taking place in several places will be counted as several movements.

A movement taking place over several days will be counted each day.

A protest using different action modes will be counted once for each action.