

N°113



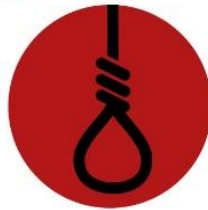
REPORT February 2023

423



Collective protests

17



Cases of suicide
and attempted suicide

770



Migrants

Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux

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February 2023 report on migration and social movements



Introduction

In terms of economic and social indicators, February 2023 did not differ from the previous month, ushering in a year that seemed difficult from all points of view. The National Institute of Statistics had issued a statement indicating an economic growth rate of about 1.6% for the last quarter of the year 2022 and a slight decrease in the unemployment rate for holders of higher degrees estimated at 0.3% (24%), against an increase in the unemployment rate of job seekers in the age group 15/24 years estimated at 38.8% at the end of the year 2022. The national unemployment rate is 15.2%.

The institute also announced an estimated increase in the poverty rate to 15.2% during 2015 and 16.6% in 2021. The NIS confirms that the volume of GDP has not yet reached its level recorded at the end of the year. 2019, that is, before the pandemic of COVID, which undoubtedly means the continued increase in the poverty index in parallel with the decline in purchasing power due to rising prices, and thus the increase in inflation rates to more than 10% at the beginning of this year.

Thus, there is no difference in terms of unemployment, poverty, and employment indicators between the first two months of 2023. However, the social movement and protests during February recorded a decrease of about 18.6% compared to January, which can only be explained by the political and security developments that the country experienced throughout February. A month that was marked by a wave of mass arrests of businessmen, political figures, former ministers, former deputies, trade unionists and journalists for "plotting against state security. The official institutions did not provide any clarification on the nature of these charges. These events were accompanied by violent, hateful, and accusatory rhetoric against human rights organizations and activists, both in official discourse and on social networks broadcast by activists affiliated with the existing authority or its supporters.

Thus, during the month of February, a human rights crisis was added to the economic and social crisis accompanied by a deepening of the existing political crisis, so that the climate became unfit for the citizen to express his demands for two reasons: because of the increasing rhetoric of intimidation, threats and accusations, and the fact of considering the protest as a form of conspiracy, especially since the wave of arrests was based on the charge of aggravating the social peace. Secondly, the absence of an official party that can react positively with the protesters and understand their demands.

The decrease in the number of protests due to intimidation and threats implies the use of alternative solutions. As explained in our previous reports, these solutions for individual salvation are based on violence, either against oneself, such as suicide or irregular migration, or drug addiction, smuggling and parallel work in all its forms, or against the other, such as robbery, hold-ups, violence and the integration of criminal networks and networks of interests and influence.

Thus, the calm observed does not mean contentment and acceptance of the current situation or truce until a solution is found, but rather it is a kind of isolation and disconnection due to the lack of clarity and horizons in relation to the resolution of the economic and social crisis.

Current indicators indicate that the authority is moving strongly towards the criminalization of the social movement, especially after having pushed the social situation into a storm of destabilizing events.

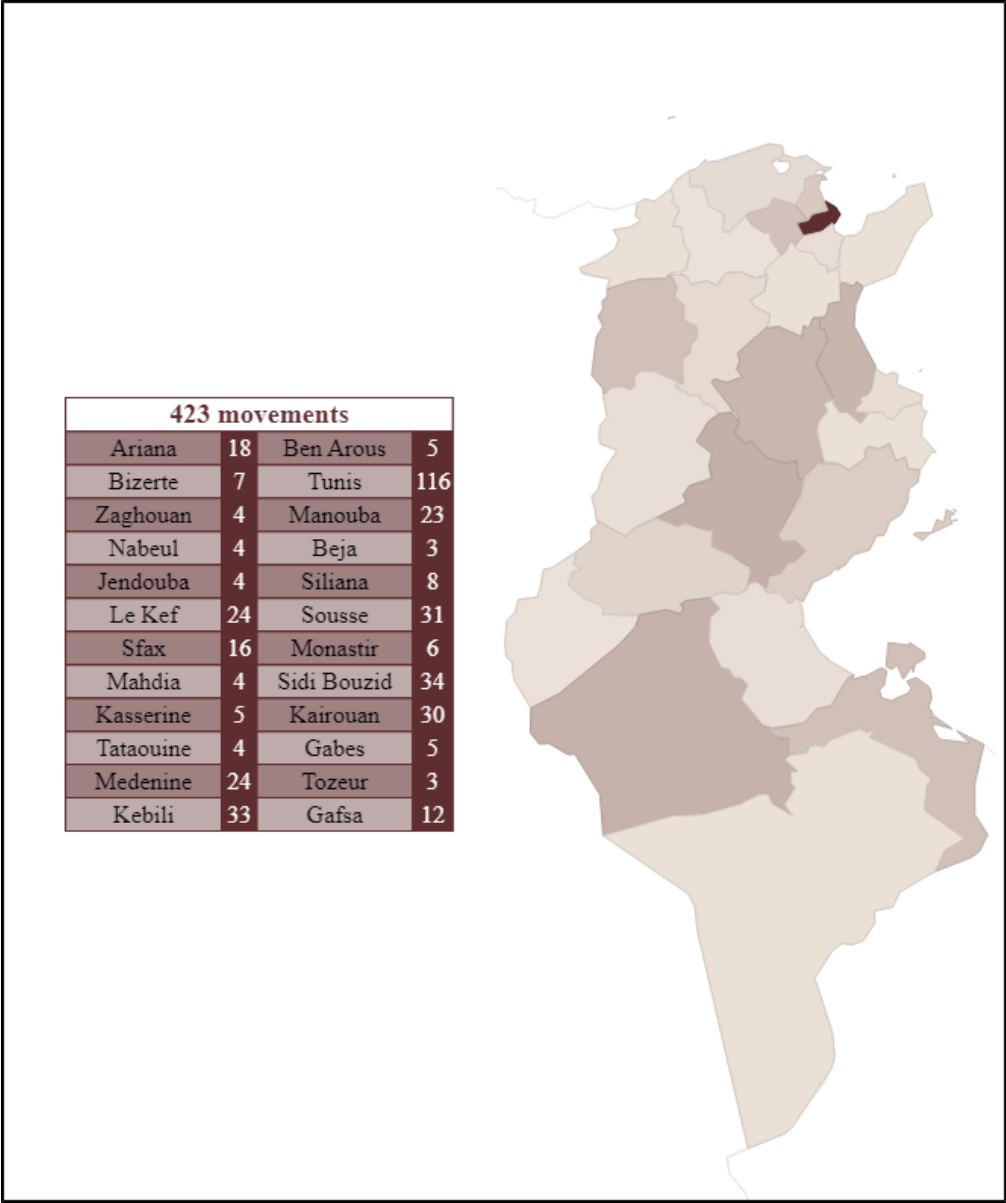
It is worth noting that the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, since the launch of its project, the Tunisian Social Observatory, at the end of 2013, has been working to observe spontaneous social protests, i.e. those that do not act under any union or political cover, but rather led by marginalized and needy citizens living an existential crisis in the various regions of Tunisia. The Forum has succeeded through its experience in mapping the social movement and identifying the demands of the protesters, the nature and forms of the protests, and has continued to publish this important data on a monthly basis without noting any interaction of the authorities with these protests.

The FTDES considers that intimidating the social movement by adopting the security solution, or defaming it in the official discourse, or prosecuting the social actors cannot be a solution to impose a social truce. Rather, the approach adopted pushes social actors to find alternative solutions outside the organized and regular frameworks, thus deepening the social crisis and encouraging

negative behaviors such as addiction, de-schooling, crime, parallel trade, and irregular migration. Especially since the social movement has accumulated experience in recent years in organizing, defending its demands, making proposals, and finding alternatives, but has only been met with neglect and refusal to negotiate, criminalization and prosecution.

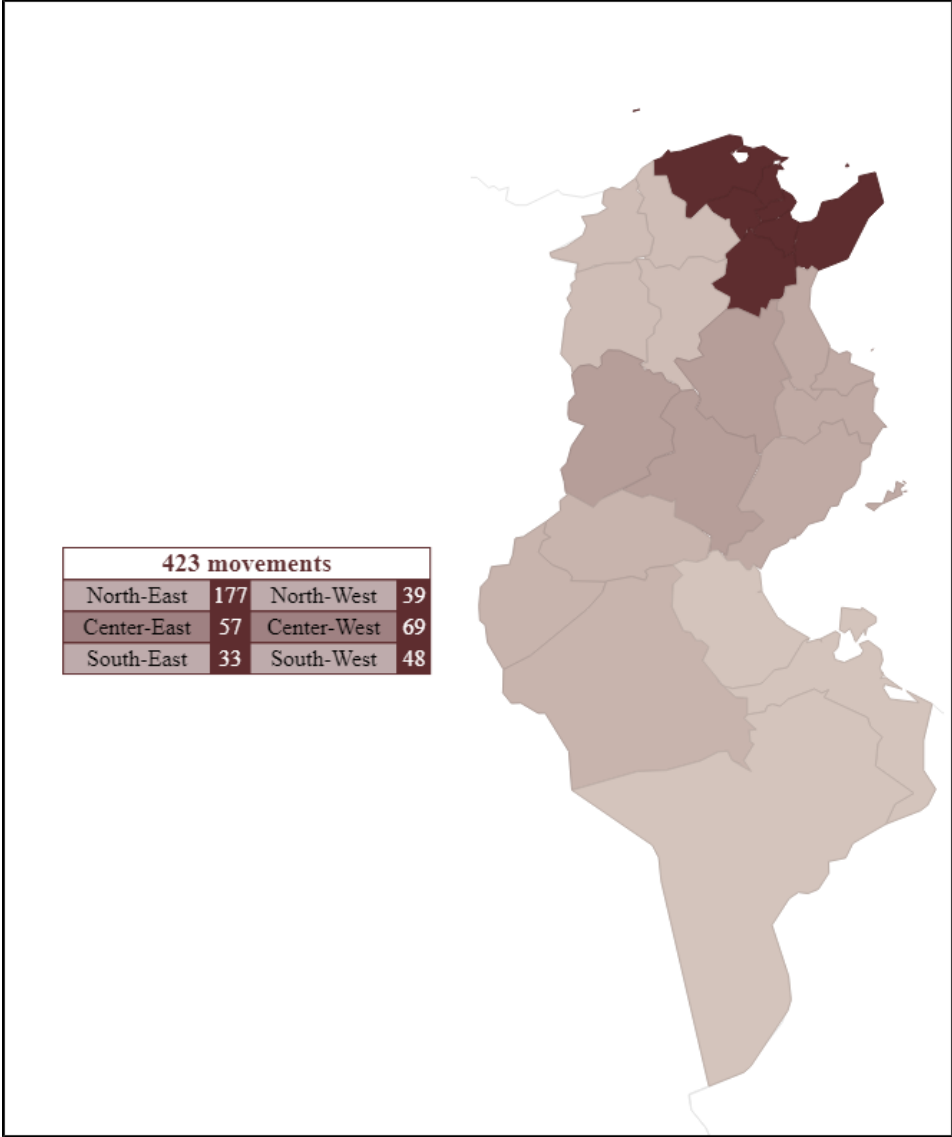
Geospatial Distribution

Greater Tunis ranked first in terms of the angriest and protesting governorates throughout February, recording 27% of the total number of protests observed (116 protest movements).



Greater Tunis is the political capital of Tunisia, where protests broke out against a backdrop of political and human rights developments throughout February.

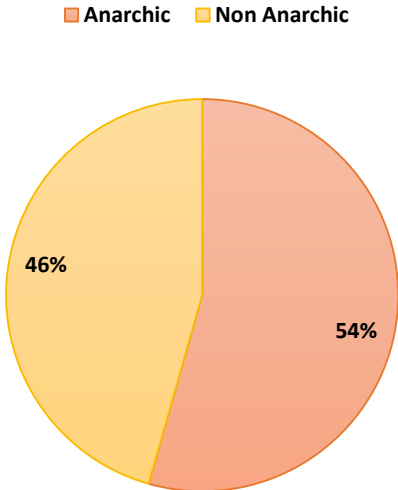
Protest rates were comparable in the rest of the regions, ranging from about 30 protests in Sidi Bouzid, Kebili, Sousse, and Kairouan, to about 24 protests in Kef, Medenine, and Manouba, and about 12 protests in Gafsa.



The northeast region, which includes the states of Greater Tunis, Nabeul, Zaghouan and Bizerte, recorded 41% of the total number of protests observed in February. At the same time, this region recorded the lowest percentage of random protests at 22.5%. Random protests are those that tend to violence, disrupt the interests of citizens and paralyze the administration.

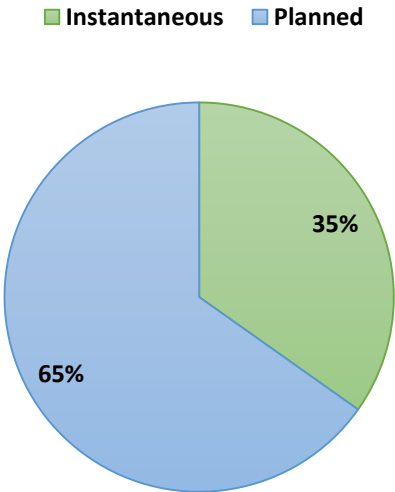
In the Center-West region (which includes Kairouan, Sidi Bouzid and Kasserine), the situation is reversed, which shows the extent of the existing tension. This region has recorded 69 protest movements, the rate of random protests is 75%.

In the Center-East region, ie the cities of Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia, and Sfax, this percentage rises to 78.9% and in the south-west region (which includes Gafsa, Tozeur and Kebili), it rises to 77, %. This percentage reaches 76.9% in the northwest region (which includes the governorates of Beja, Jendouba, Kef and Siliana) and reaches 78.7% in the southeast region (which includes the governorates of Gabes, Medenine and Tataouine).



The rate of random protests nationwide reached 54.4%. This percentage is lower than the percentage recorded during the past month, but it shows clear differences in its composition between regions.

It should also be noted that many of the protests are organized, that is, announced in advance and did not break out as a momentary reaction to protest a demand or express anger.



In Sidi Bouzid, for example, 34 protest movements were recorded throughout February, 32 of which were organized and then turned into random demonstrations. In Kairouan, 17 organized demonstrations turned into random demonstrations. In Kef, 100% of organized demonstrations became random, and in Medenine, 96% of organized demonstrations became random. This transformation is undoubtedly an indication of the extent of the anger latent in the citizen protests and the social movement.

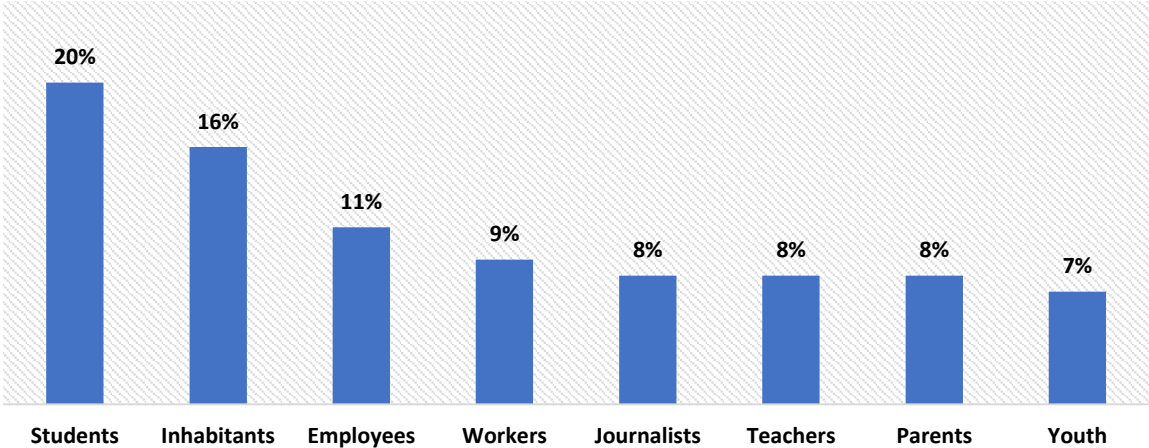
Actors and claims

Those involved in the February protests were of both sexes, with a mixed rate of 86.3%, while protests involving exclusively men accounted for 12.5%.



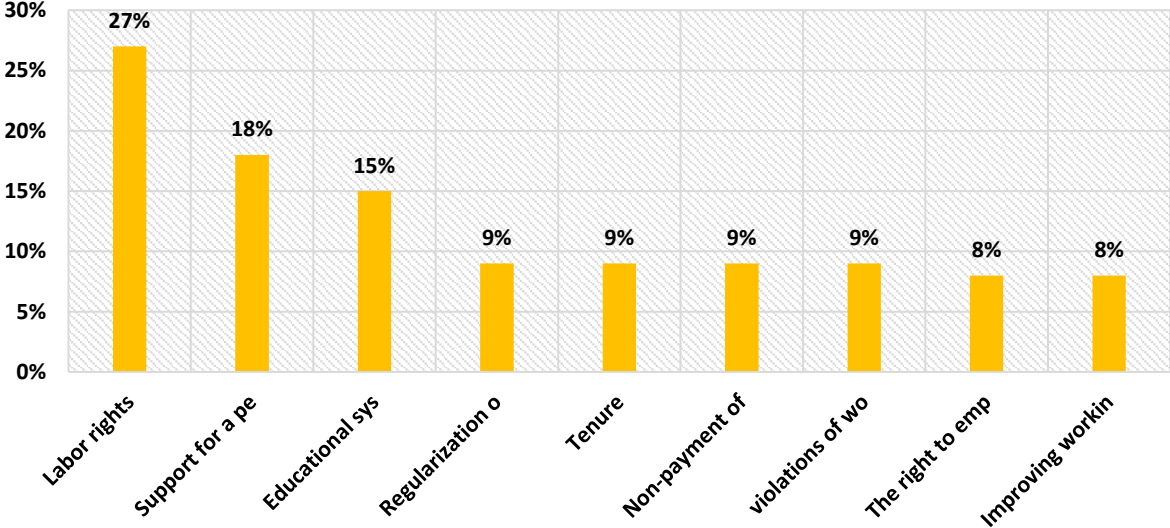
Students lead the way in terms of protesters, followed by residents of cities and regions with deficiencies in basic services or their total absence, with employees and workers coming last, confirming the crisis in the professional climate. In the table below is an indication of the different actors who protested throughout the month of February.

Actors



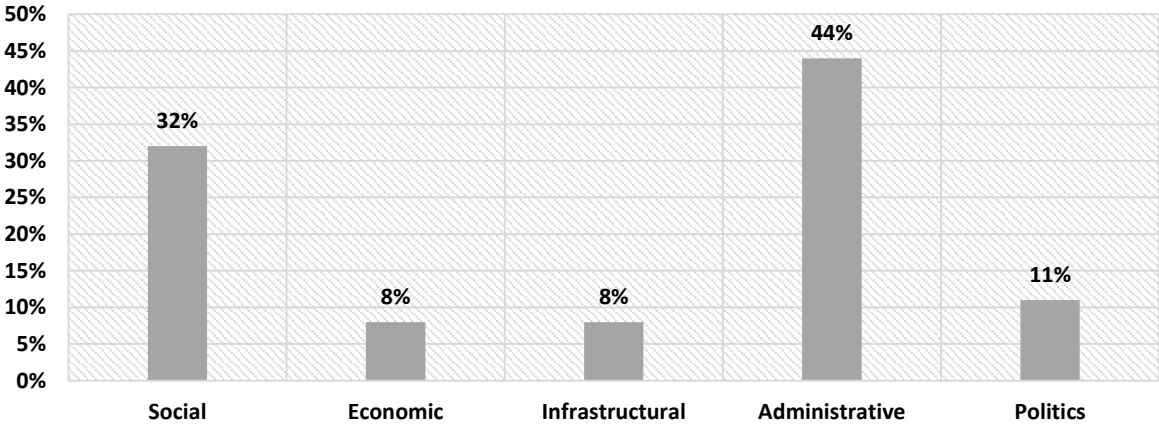
As for the claims, they are old and renewed, and concern professional rights, including the settlement of situations, obtaining financial contributions, the right to employment, assignment, and other renewable claims.

Reasons



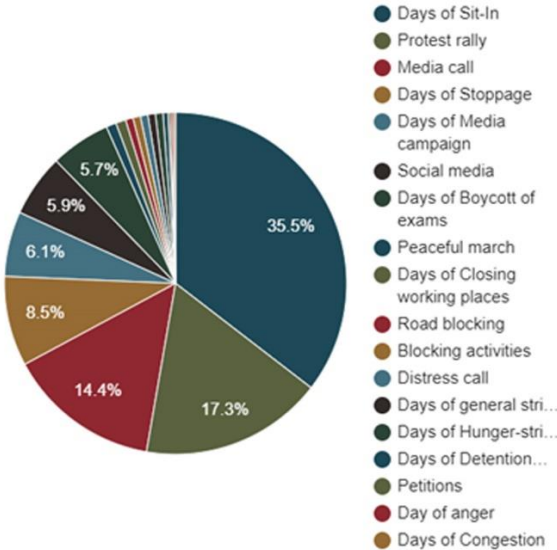
Demands of economic and social origin accounted for 40% of the total demands raised by the demonstrators throughout the month of February, followed by demands of administrative origin, including public service, in first place at 44%, and political demands in third place at 11%, and then the demands related to infrastructure of 8%.

Typologie



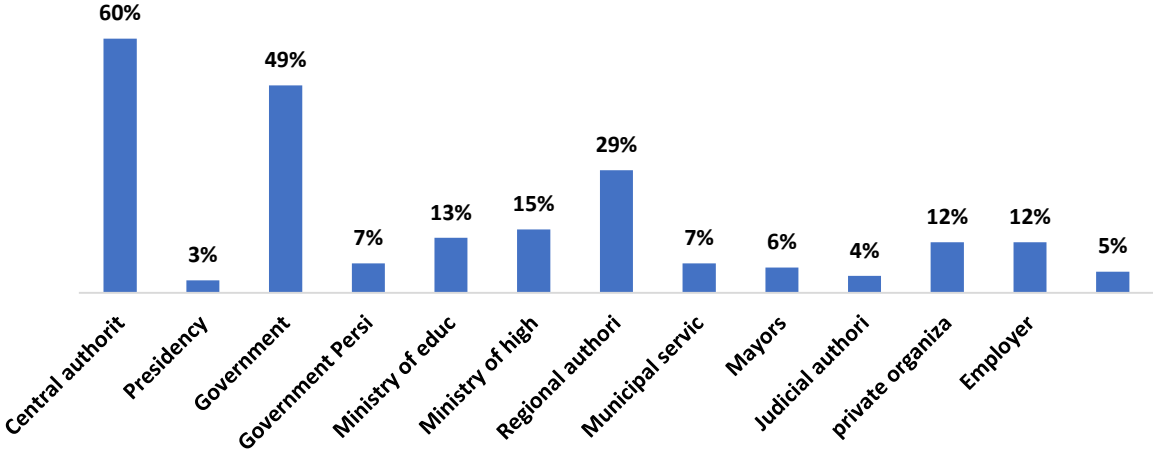
Forms and spaces of protest

The sit-in was the most important form of protest with a rate of 35.5%, followed by vigils with a rate of 17%, and then appeals via the media with a rate of 14.4%. Throughout February, applicants adopted other forms of protest, such as strikes, organizing media campaigns, posting on social networks, organizing peaceful marches, closing roads and other forms.



The central authorities (the government and the presidency of the republic) were the major target of the protesters, at about 60 percent, followed by regional authorities at 29 percent, and then municipalities at 7 percent. Judicial authorities were also targeted by 4 per cent of the protesters.

Targets



It is worth noting that the media emerged as an important space for protesters to express their demands, at a rate of about 20% during February. Educational institutions, roads, workplaces, administrative spaces and social networks were also, to varying degrees, theaters of protest and spaces for the expression of demands.

Conclusion

In conclusion, February was another month of anger and protest, of expressing new demands that are not being addressed, either at the regional or central level. These demands are mostly traditional, related to the improvement of the quality of life, the right to a decent life and the dignity of the applicants. These are almost the same slogans and rights for which the revolution broke out 12 years ago. It is worth noting that the authority, instead of interacting with these demands, reading the map of the protests, diagnosing the demands and looking for urgent and strategic solutions, proceeds, once again, to adopt the same policies of the successive governments to deal with the social movement and the protests, and continues to criminalize and stigmatize them which pushes individuals to look for alternatives for individual salvation.

Irregular Migration in February 2023



February 2023 recorded the highest numbers ever for this time of year, despite unsuitable weather conditions for crossing operations. Many factors contributed to the increase of some figures, including those related to the political, economic, and social situation and the impact of European border outsourcing policies.

Since the beginning of the year, Tunisian authorities have stopped 7,496 migrants along the Tunisian coast, representing a 242 % increase compared to the same period in 2022, and a more than sevenfold increase compared to the same period in 2020. The discriminatory campaign against migrants from sub-Saharan Africa has contributed to deepening the expulsion trend.

We observed at the end of February a phenomenon of massive escape from Tunisia following the events that followed the declaration of the Presidency of the Republic on February 21, and which consisted of security pursuits under the pretext of administrative status, expulsions of workers, evictions from homes and physical and verbal aggression.

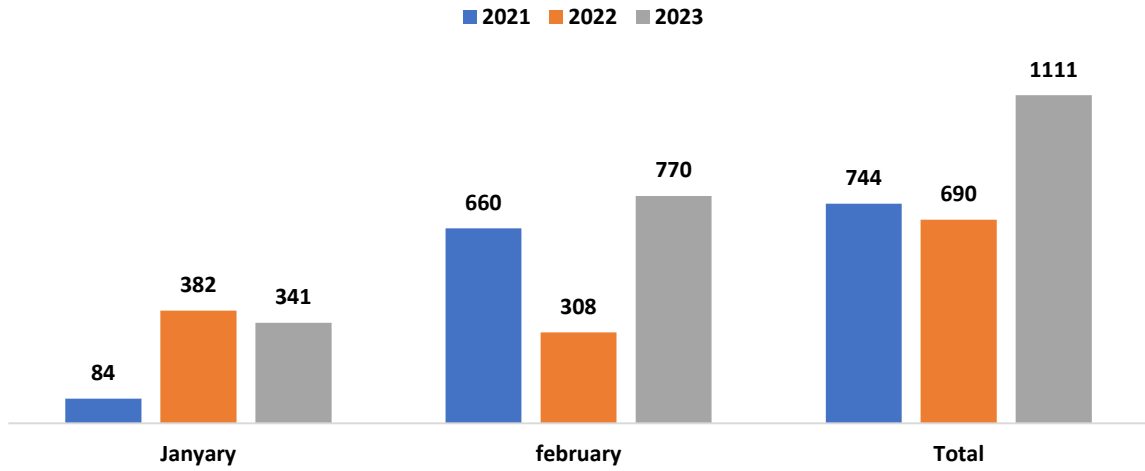
770 Tunisians arrived on the Italian coasts during the month of February, 74.80% of whom were men, 6.6% women and 18.57% minors, which is an increase of 60% compared to February 2022.

European pressure, particularly Italian pressure, has succeeded in pushing the Tunisian authorities to create an unwelcoming atmosphere for migrants and an environment that drives most of them to seek an exit from a country that is becoming increasingly dangerous for them. Migrant smuggling networks are taking advantage of these policies to attract more dream hunters and accumulate profits at the expense of migrants' lives.

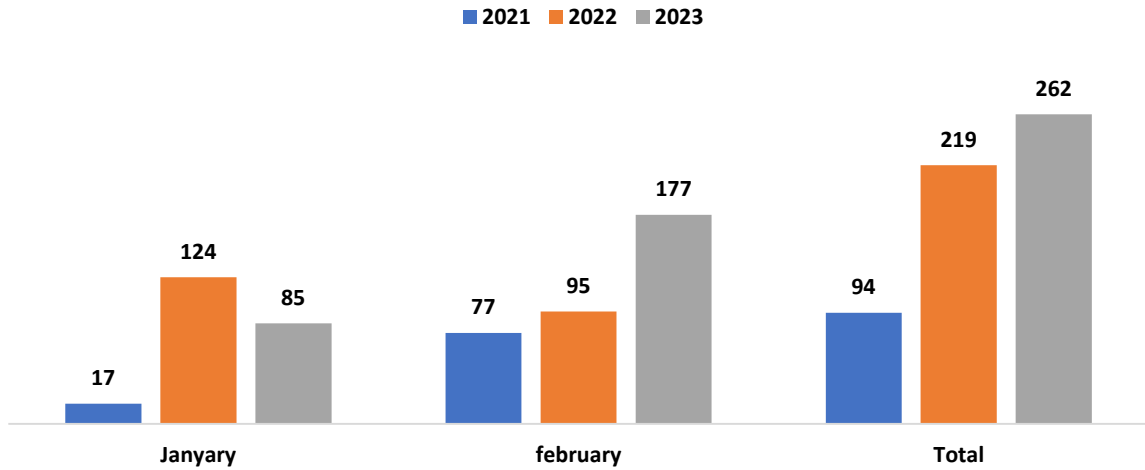
Comparison In the same period during the years 2019–2020–2021 – 2022

The month	2021			2022			2023		
	The number of arrivals to Italy	Number of frustrating passes	Number of passersby suspended	The number of arrivals to Italy	Number of frustrating passes	Number of passersby suspended	The number of arrivals to Italy	The number of arrivals to Italy	Number of frustrating passes
January	84	17	463	382	124	1155	341	85	2322
February	660	77	1273	308	95	1036	770	177	5147
Total	744	94	1736	690	219	2191	1111	262	7469

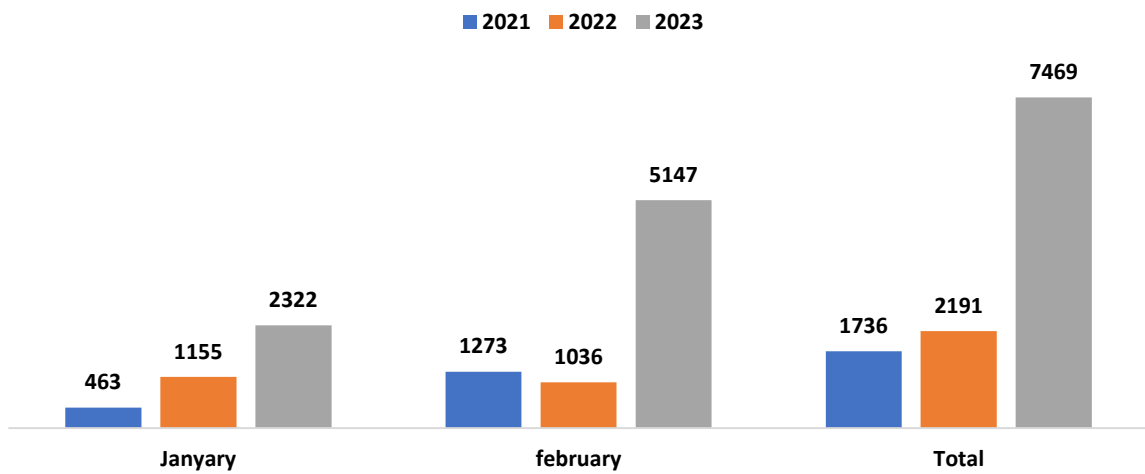
The number of arrivals to Italy



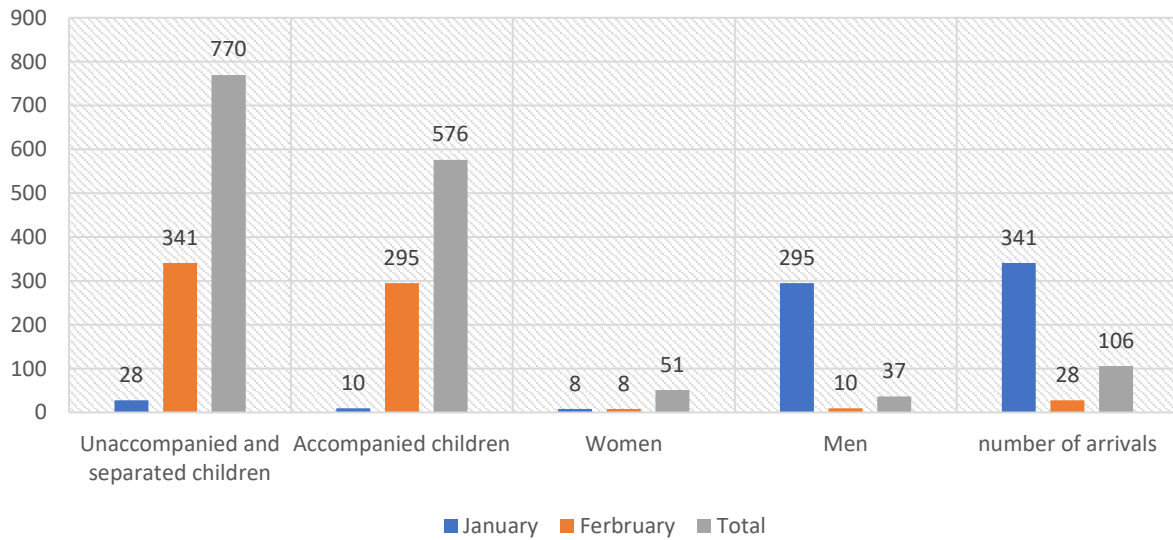
Number of frustrating passes



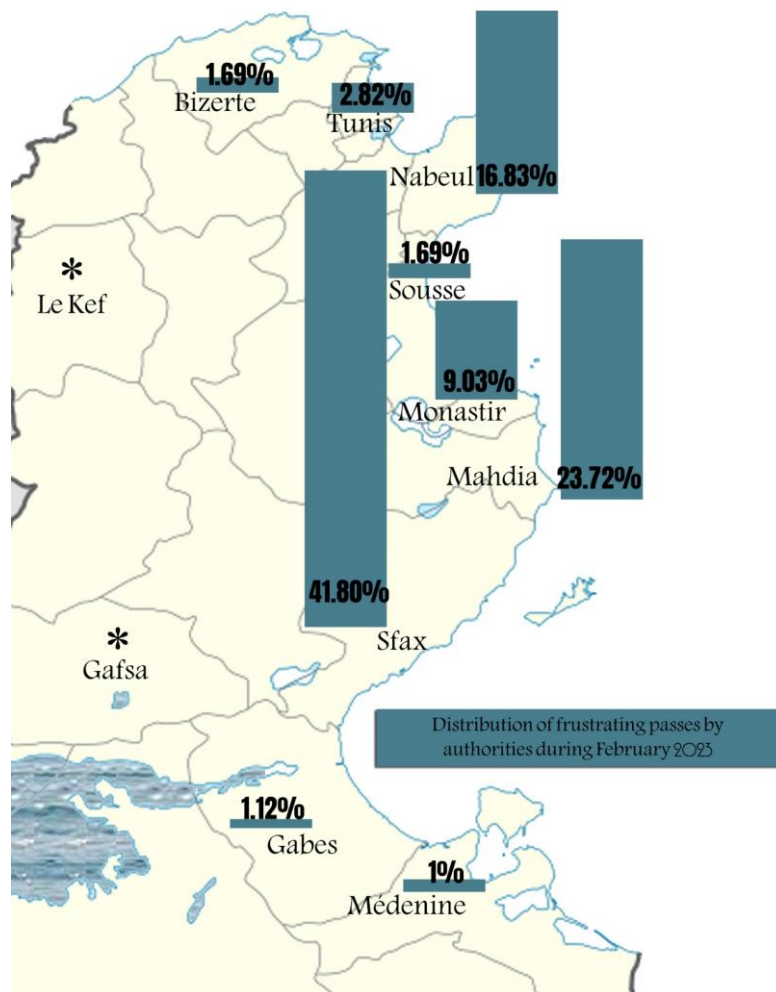
Number of passersby suspended



Distribution of arrivals to Italy by months during 2023

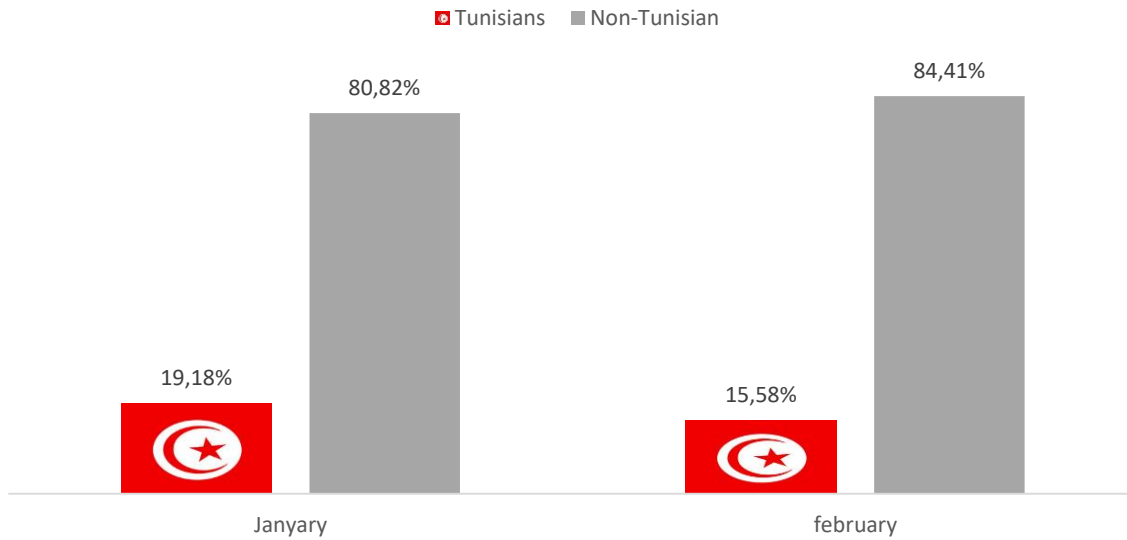


Distribution of frustrating passes by authorities during February 2023

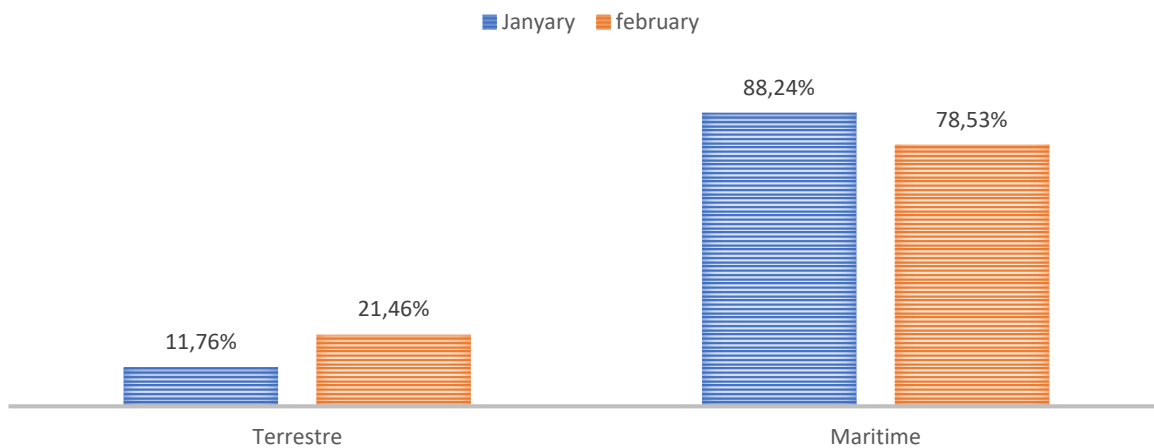


*The presence of this sign does not mean that these authorities do not witness crossings, but the official data published in the notifications did not include frustrating crossings in these bodies.

Distribution of passers-by by nationalities During February 2023



Distribution of frustrating passes during 2023



The tragedies of irregular migration on the Tunisian coasts during 2023

The month	The number of victims and missing
January	28
February	7
Total	35

The number of dead and missing on the Tunisian coast during 2023	The number of dead and missing in the Central Mediterranean Basin during 2023
35	315

violence February 2023



Introduction :

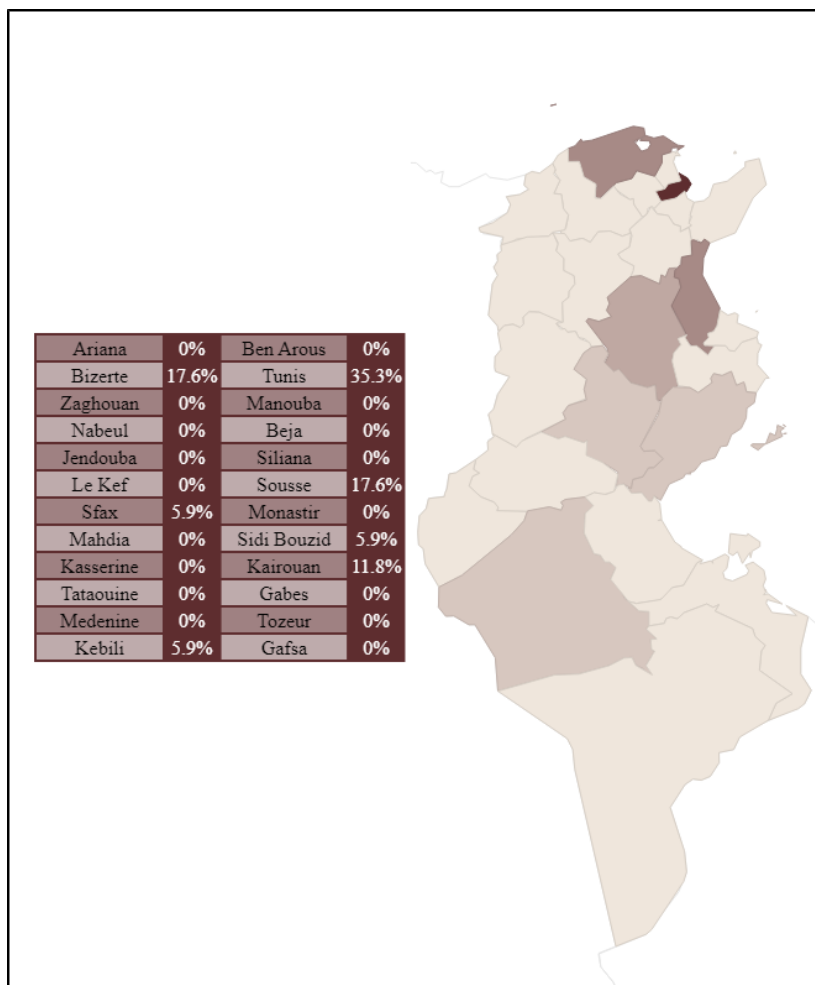
February was marked by a significant increase in the number of cases of violence and a clear spread of violent, hateful, and racist statements, especially in cyberspace. These expressions have invaded social networks and public spaces in the form of campaigns of defamation, insult, and intimidation targeting politicians, businessmen, journalists, activists, rights defenders, and even NGOs and associations, and this was the spark that ignited the powder keg. These campaigns are the main culprits behind an unprecedented wave of racist and discriminatory rhetoric, arrests, and acts of violence and intimidation targeting sub-Saharanans. Large numbers of the African diaspora in Sfax, Ariana, Sousse, and the capital Tunis were subjected to acts of violence, found themselves without shelter and food, and deprived of their right to health and transportation.

According to the media, the cases of aggression observed exceeded 2000 in two weeks, that is, the period following the speech of the President of the Republic Kais Saïd tinged with discrimination against sub-Saharanans.

Geospatial distribution of violence :

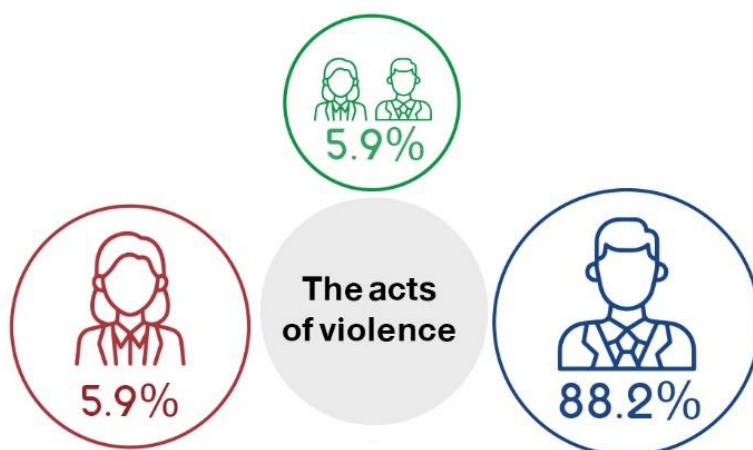
The Greater Tunis comes in first place, recording 35.3% of the cases of violence observed during the month of February, followed by the governorates of Bizerte and Sousse in second place, each with 17.6% of the total number of acts observed. The governorate of Kairouan recorded 11.8% of the cases of violence, while the governorate of Sfax recorded 5.9%, and the same percentage was recorded in the governorate of Kebili.

The rest of the governorates did not experience any violent incidents during the month of February.



Gendered distribution:

Women were the victims in 35.3% of the recorded violent incidents and represented 5.6% of the perpetrators. While men were victims in 52% and represented 88.2% of the perpetrators of the registered violent incidents. The rest of the events occurred in a mixed form.

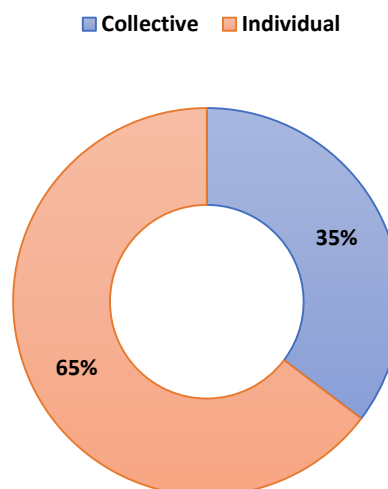


Types of violence :

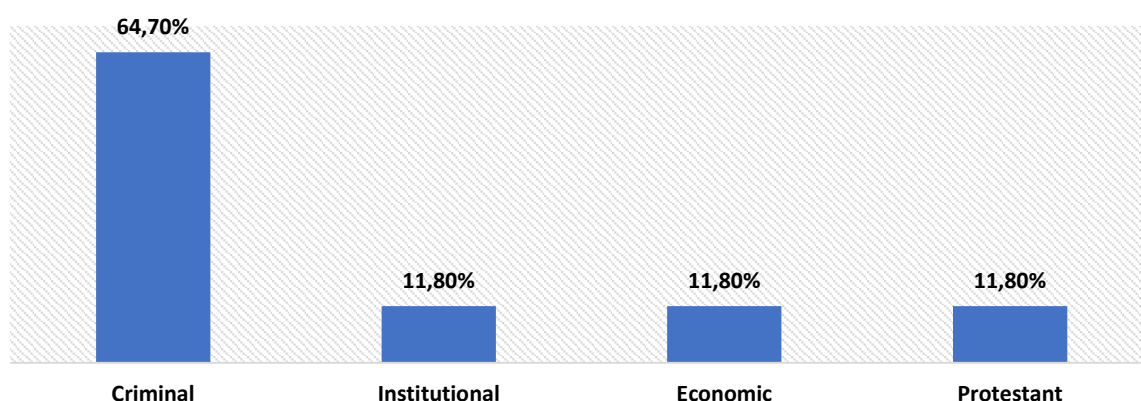
As in the previous month, most cases of violence were individual with 64.7%, while 35.3% of violent acts were collective.

This classification included the months of January, December, and November of last year, when violence was mostly individual.

Criminal violence was the most prevalent form during February, reaching 64.7% of total recorded violence, followed by institutional violence at 11.8%, economic violence at 11.8%, and protest violence at the same rate at 11.8%.



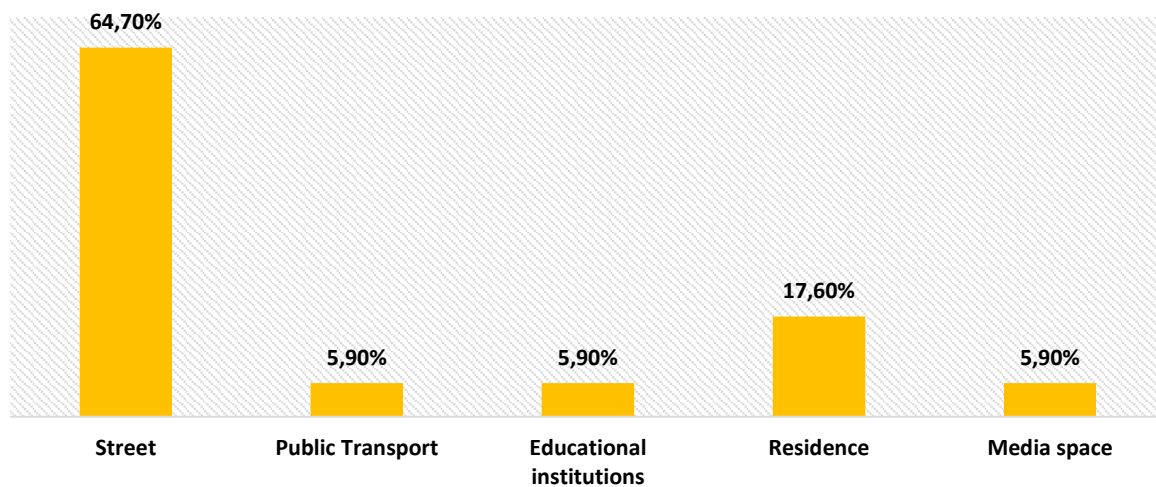
Sector



Spaces of Violence :

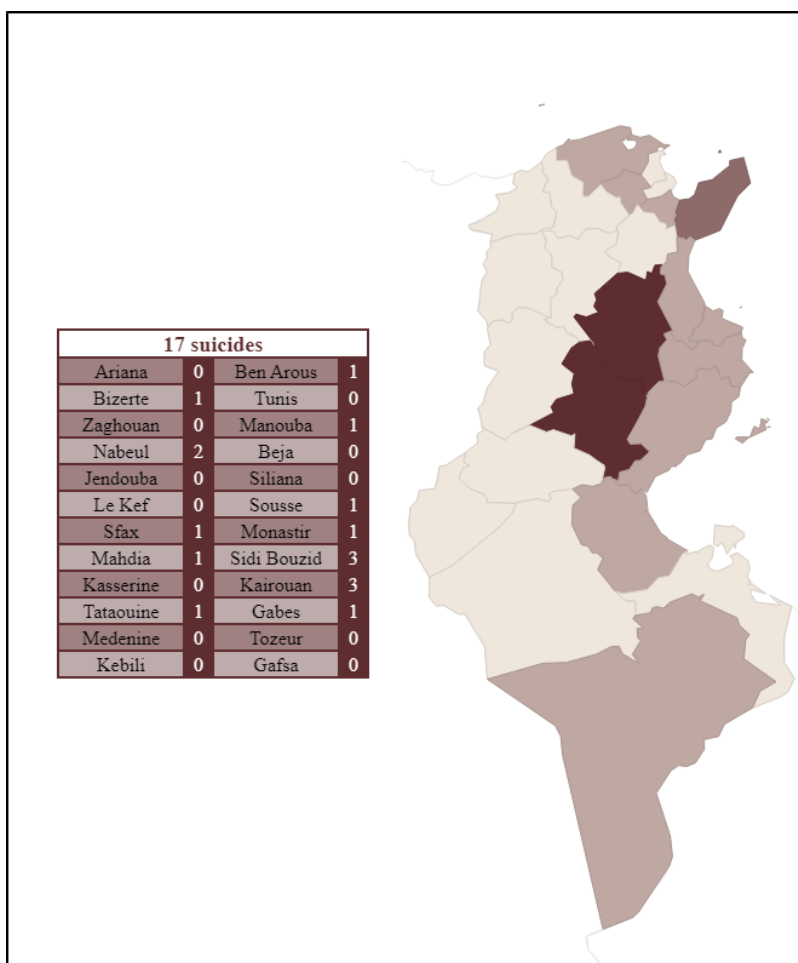
Faced with the upsurge of violence that characterized the month of February, the public space, the street, has once again become the main setting of violent incidents recorded, with 64.7%, followed by the household, which has experienced 17.6% of violent incidents, the means of transport with 5.9%, the educational space with 5.9% and the virtual cyber media with the same percentage, 5.9%.

Space



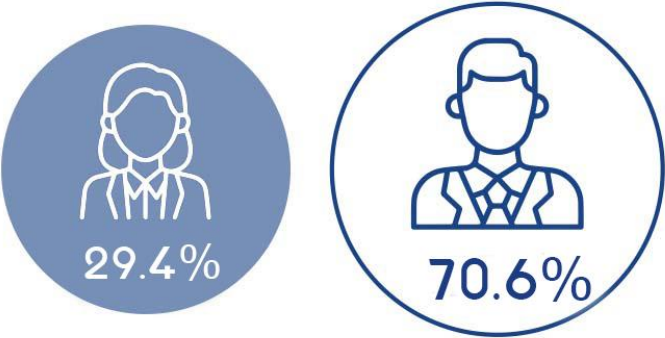
Suicide and suicide attempts :

The month of February recorded 17 cases of suicide attempts and cases, with a relative decline compared to the figure recorded in the previous month, January. The governorate of Sidi Bouzid has witnessed 3 cases, the governorate of Kairouan 3 cases, followed by Nabeul with two cases and the governorates of Bizerte, Sfax, Mahdia, Tataouine, Gabes, Monastir, Sousse and Ben Arous with one case each. No cases of suicide or attempted suicide were recorded in the rest of the governorates.



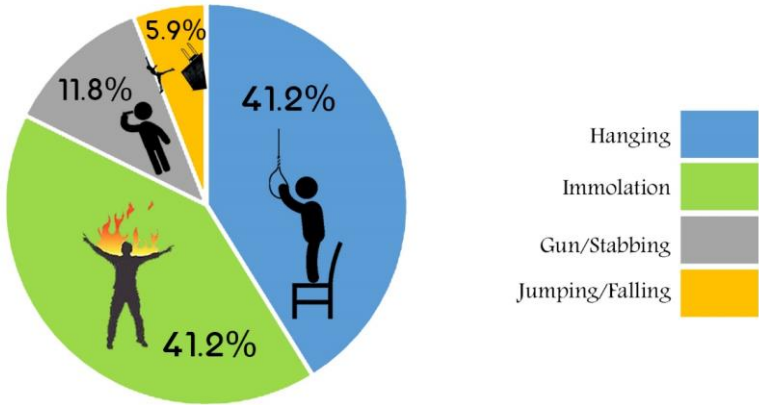
Gendered Distribution :

70.6% of those who committed or attempted suicide in February 2023 were men, while the percentage of women was about 29.4%.



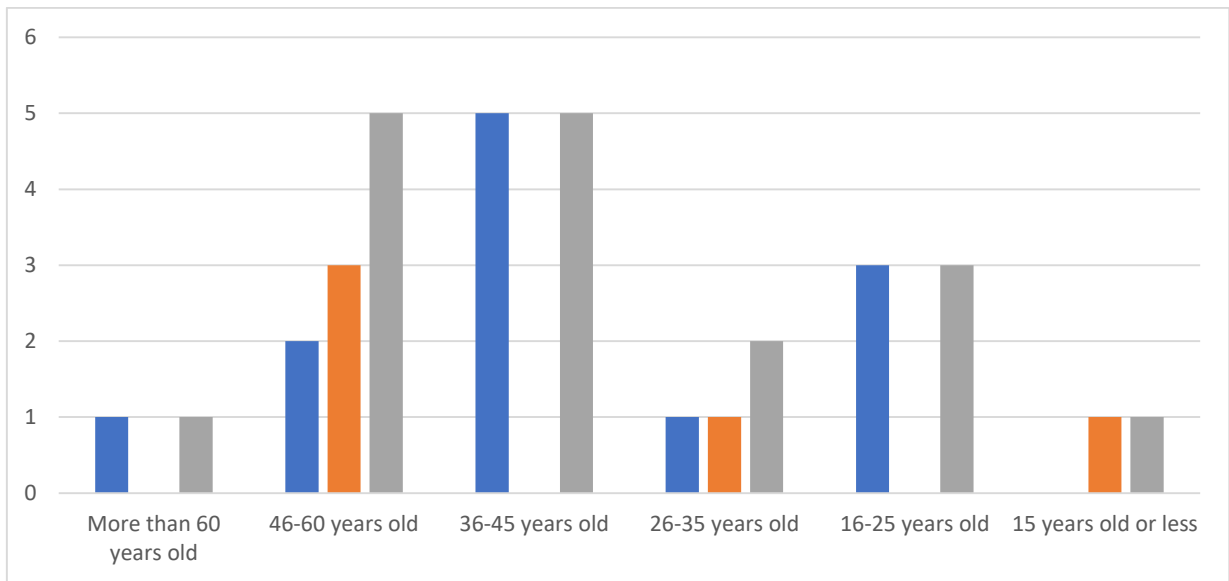
Forms of Suicide:

41.2% of the suicides and suicide attempts recorded were by hanging and 41.2% by burning, 11.8% by use of a weapon or knife and 5.9% by rushing.



Age range of suicide victims and suicide attempts:

The 36 to 45 age group recorded 5 cases of violent suicide and attempted suicide. The 46 to 60 age group registered 5 cases of suicide and attempted suicide. The number of those who committed or attempted suicide between the ages of 16 and 25 years amounted to three cases, while two people aged between 26 and 35 years attempted suicide. Only one case of suicide and attempted suicide was recorded among those under 15 and over sixty years old.



All cases of violence were related either to emotional reactions of protest rejecting the economic and social reality, or to psychological conditions and family problems.

Monitoring methodology for irregular migration:

The totality of the data contained in this report represents what the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights has been able to gather from various sources and by the available means. The digital data remains incomplete, not detailed and subject to updating and may not fully reflect reality, but in the absence of detailed and updated information from the Tunisian official side (number of passes - number Passengers - their distribution according to age groups and gender - defining where they come from - their social status - the number of missing persons...) These data may contribute to a clearer understanding of migration dynamics and significant transformations.

- **Frustrating Passes:** Reliance is placed on the Ministry of Interior's communiqués and the statements of the spokesperson of the National Guard in the various media. Most of them do not contain detailed data (sex, age groups, the parties from which the immigrants come...)
- **Arrivals to European coasts:** Many structures that emit digital data about arrivals to Europe, such as UNHCR, IOM, European countries' ministries of the interior and the European Coastal Control Agency.

The figures provided remain approximate and require continuous updating according to figures from official and civil structures that may be issued in subsequent reports but provide a reading of the evolution and change in the dynamics of irregular migration.

Invisible numbers: It's the number of migrants arriving in Europe across different routes without passing through local authorities or international structures does not have any effect on the census, which is important and varies according to the tactics of migrant smuggling networks. It also includes departures from the Tunisian coasts, which succeed in evading strict security controls, or those that are prohibited from passing them without issuing or without being announced.