



Migration and development dynamics in Redeyef, Tunisia

Redeyef is a marginalised mining town; decades of job cuts and corruption have made local people feel resentful and pessimistic about future livelihood prospects. Migration is seen as a beacon of hope, though the risks and costs of migration can be high.

Most people in Redeyef have family, relatives or friends abroad and a third of households receive remittances.

Most young adults would legally migrate abroad if given the chance, but with regular migration pathways becoming less available, unfulfilled migration aspirations remain high.

Irregular migration journeys have become more common, despite the risks. Half of young adults know someone who was deported or forcibly returned to Tunisia.



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Photo: Camille Kasavan for MIGNEX.

Located close to the Algerian border, Redeyef is a town centred around the mining company Compagnie de Phosphate de Gafsa (CPG). Developments in Redeyef have intimately reflected the rise and decline of the company. Significant job cuts by the CPG in 2008 led to massive protests in Redeyef – part of the run-up to the Tunisian revolution that unfolded three years later.

Compensation through the form of 10,000 positions in the gardening and environmental protection sectors has not calmed tensions.

In practice these are essentially ghost jobs for those lucky or well-connected. The botched scheme has led to further resentment among the local population. The majority of our survey respondents (80%) say that corruption is a serious problem in Redeyef.

There is a general atmosphere of stagnation in Redeyef. More than three quarters of young adults (83%) say that the town is changing in mostly bad ways. Moreover, most (63%) consider it very difficult to find a good job in Redeyef. Indeed, half of young adults are either unemployed (30%) or studying (20%).

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also did research in Enfidha and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Tunisia¹

Migration from Redeyef

Redeyef has a long history of international out-migration. As a result, most young adults (77%) have family, relatives or friends living abroad. Historical destinations are France and Germany, particularly the French town of Nantes, sometimes referred to as ‘Little Redeyef’. Regular migration to the Gulf for specific work contracts is less common.

With limited prospects in Redeyef for young people, emigration continues to be an important strategy. Yet, the ways in which people are migrating are changing.

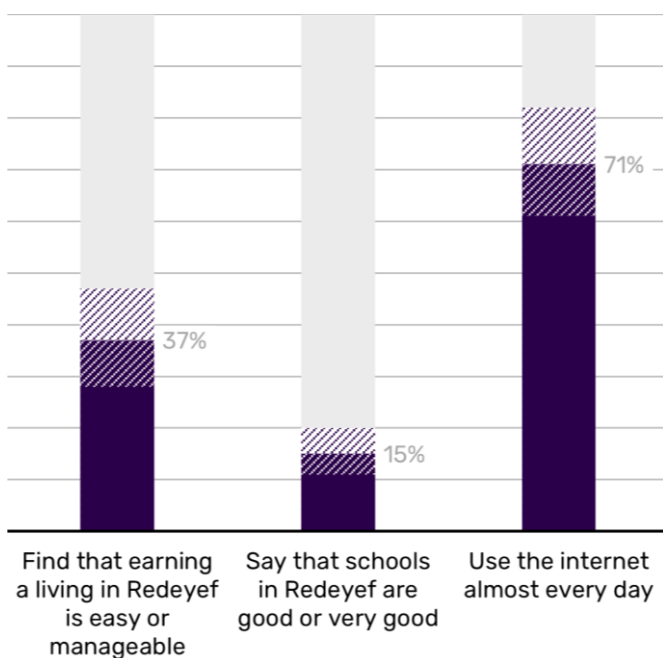


Figure 1. Indicators of development

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

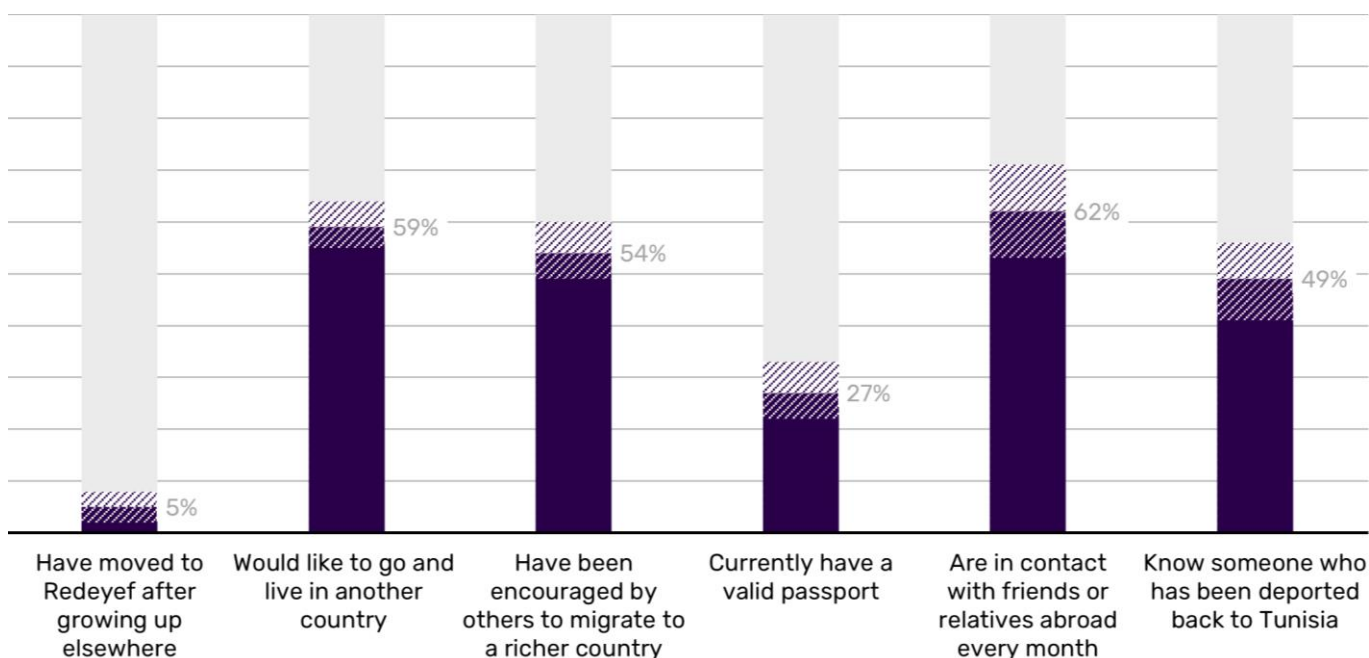


Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Regular migration is less feasible compared to previous decades. The vast majority of young adults (88%) say that if someone from Redeyef wanted to go to live or work in a richer country, it would be difficult or very difficult.

While irregular migration pathways have gained popularity as regular options have diminished, these have also become more costly and risky.

People in Redeyef are very aware of the physical risks and costs of migration. Around one in five young adults (17%) know someone who died en route to another country and a significant number (25%) know someone who has been detained in another country.

In spite of this, migration is consistently described in positive terms. People in Redeyef still see migration as worthwhile, with virtually all young adults (98%) agreeing that migrants support their families when they leave.

Women migrate less often than men, especially irregularly. For women in Redeyef, the most common migration route is to study abroad. However, the survey finds that an equally low number of young men in Redeyef (7%) as young women (6%) have lived abroad for at least one year.

Migration aspirations

Despair, pessimism and hopelessness are prevalent sentiments in Redeyef.

Yet, despite the difficulties and risks, the opportunities that migration can offer is seen as a source of hope and a way to counter the stagnation of Redeyef. Every second young adult (59%) would prefer to leave Tunisia in the next five years. Migration information campaigns are not common in Redeyef, but around half of young adults (44%) stated they had seen information on migration on social media.

Indeed, most young adults (72%) would migrate to a richer country if given the necessary papers and many (38%) have seriously considered going abroad in the past year. However most do not expect this to happen, instead seeing themselves as still living in Redeyef in five years' time (59%).

We do not want to live in this country because we have no role here. They announce some vacant posts, but when we apply, they reject us with the claim that we are overqualified.

Focus group participant

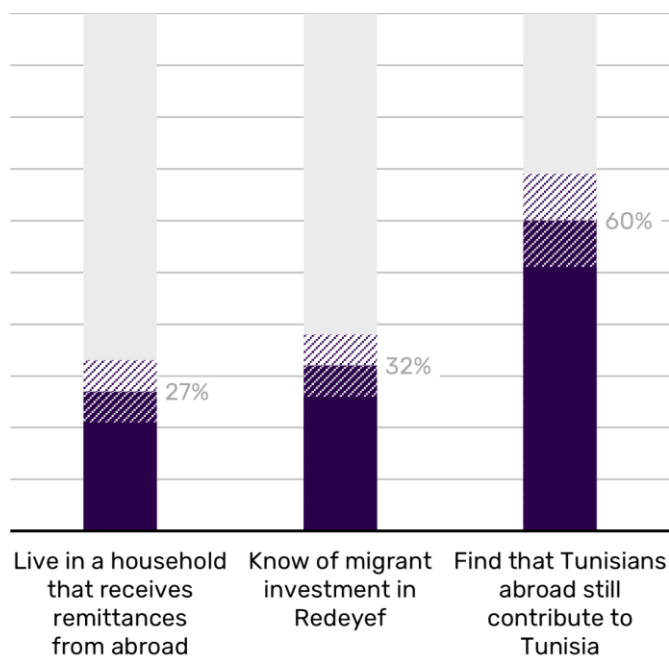


Figure 3. Migration–development interactions

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Return migration

A quarter of young adults (24%) in Redeyef have family, relatives or friends who have returned from abroad.

Return migration takes different forms. Some emigrants come back permanently while others come back on a short-term basis: every summer, the town’s population grows with visiting emigrants. These summer return visits have both an economic and psychosocial impact on the town, as visiting migrants spend money on goods, restaurants, and activities, ‘treating’ their families.

To a lesser extent, there are also returns of those who have been deported, or forcibly returned. Almost half of young adults (49%) know someone deported from abroad, or have themselves been deported, in the past five years.

Links between migration and development

Transnational ties between those from Redeyef who have left and those who have stayed are strong. People keep in close touch with friends and family who have migrated, and the phenomenon of recurring summer visits ensures that those ties are kept close and have a wider impact on the town as well.

While regular contact with migrants abroad is common, a relatively small proportion of households in Redeyef (35%) received remittances, and for less than 1% are remittances the most important income source in the household.

Migrants are generally seen as ‘taking care of their own’. Collective remittances are rare and do not seem to have had an impact on Redeyef’s development.

They do help their families and their relatives, but land they buy elsewhere. Places like Nabeul or Sousse. They do not come back here, because they always remember what happens around here.

Focus group participant

Notes

Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Camille Kasavan and Safouen Azouzi in February 2020. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents was conducted by One to One for Research and Polling and ODI in June – July 2021.

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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration-Development Nexus – is a five-year research project (2018–2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners: The Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, the University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

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