

# TUNISIA



Nearly a decade after Tunisia's democratic transition, a struggling economy still threatens to erode fragile political progress—30% of rural Tunisians are impoverished, and up to 75% are struggling to afford food. In addition, instability in neighboring Libya threatens to cause an influx of refugees.

## Country Context

Eight years since the Arab Spring, Tunisia is at a crucial juncture for its fledgling democracy. In October 2019, Tunisia elected a new president, independent candidate and former constitutional law professor Kais Saied. He inherits an ailing currency, unemployment rates of up to 30% in rural areas, mounting foreign debt, and a crucial tourist economy that is still struggling to recover from terrorist attacks between 2014 and 2016.

## How is the U.S. Involved?

In 2019, the U.S. and Tunisia signed a five-year bilateral Development Objective Agreement for USAID to provide up to \$335 million to support increased private sector employment and democratic consolidation. The U.S. has invested more than \$1.4 billion since 2011 to strengthen democratic institutions, build the capacity of civil society and political parties, and support economic growth.

## Key Figures



**30%**

cost of living increase since 2016



**15.5%**

unemployment as of 2019



**35%**

of 15-24-year-olds are unemployed



**73%**

of the population lives in extreme poverty (approximately 61 million)



**2,729**

refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR in Tunisia

## On-the-Ground Perspective

- Tunisia's state of emergency—which has been in place since 2015 and extended several times—was renewed again on August 30, 2019, in response to several terrorist attacks. According to Amnesty International, the state of emergency emboldens security forces to carry out thousands of arrests and raids and impose curfews, restricting citizens' movement.
- Increasing numbers of refugees are entering Tunisia, stretching the country's absorption capacity. This stress is exacerbated by the stalled adoption of a national protection system for refugees, leaving them in a "fragile legal and socio-economic situation."

## Responses and Actions

- The World Food Program supports the government-run National School Feeding Program that reaches 260,000 primary school children, almost a quarter of all primary-age children in Tunisia.
- Donors and NGOs support sustainable economic development through programs focused on increasing employability and entrepreneurship for young people. Mercy Corps ran 'Entrepreneurship Clubs' for young people in Tataouine, Médenine, Gafsa, and Kasserine, training youth to develop their own businesses.

References available at [interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport](https://www.interaction.org/2020globalsituationreport).

