

TUNISIA: MIGRANTS DYING IN MEDITERRANEAN, PROTESTING AT UN

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running an anti-immigrant campaign on social media.

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Refugees and immigrants from Tunisia are facing an increasingly difficult situation, resulting in more deaths in the Mediterranean Sea and heightening the social unrest in the country.

More than 100 asylum seekers, mostly from Sudan, have been gathered outside of the UN building in Tunis, highlighting their need for resettlement, *Africanews* [reported](#) on April 1st.

The low-key demonstration coincided with a series of migrant boat accidents off the Tunisian coast at the end of March in which at least 38 migrants died and 67 went missing, [according](#) to Reuters.

Between March 22nd and 24th alone, the Italian Coast Guard intercepted 2,034 migrants, *Africanews* [reports](#).

Tunisia has become the main launching point for Africans trying to reach Europe, and the recent rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in the country—weighed down by inflation, social and economic instability, and severe drought—has only helped push migrants out to sea.

Le Monde [reports](#) that since the summer of 2022, an obscure group called the Nationalists Party has been running an anti-immigrant campaign on social media and through canvassing. In February, President Kais Saied warned that sub-Saharan immigrants may be part of a plot to change the country's demographics and culture.

A rash of arrests of irregular immigrants followed as well as evictions from private rental properties, leaving many immigrants homeless.

"Kais Saied has finally appropriated a far-right narrative on migration that he would never have tolerated if it had been expressed in Europe on the irregular migration of Tunisians," [commented](#) anthropologist Kenza Ben Azouz, a specialist in racism in Tunisia, to the French newspaper *Le Monde*. "By scapegoating the sub-Saharan community without fundamentally addressing the migration issue, he anchors himself in a populist and opportunistic logic."

Le Monde reports that NGOs calculate that Tunisia has between 30,000 and 50,000 sub-Saharan migrants. They provide "a cheap labor force that everyone benefits from and that is tolerated by the state despite the fact that it is illegal," emphasized Ben Azouz.

The country also hosts many university students from other parts of Africa.

Those gathered outside the UN offices told *Africanews* they had experienced hostility towards them from Tunisians and had been waiting for years to be legally resettled.

"The organization's procedures [to give asylum] are very long. I have [been in Tunisia] five years and I have not seen anyone who obtained asylum [for a country] outside Tunisia and travelled. Secondly, we do not have protection in Tunisia, now they have removed our homes and [there are] many other violations against Blacks [lack people coming from other African countries] in addition to the Tunisian state that does not want our presence [in the country]" said Bashir Youssef Alrachid, an asylum seeker from Sudan, told *Africanews*.

Another protester, Saddam Abderrahim, called on the United Nations and European Union to help migrants like himself leave Tunisia to find another country to settle in.

"We are patient and stick together to find a solution. I appeal to the United Nations, the

European Union and all humanitarian organizations to help us evacuate from Tunisia towards any other safe country, and not return to our country from which we fled....." he said.

The African news outlet also reports that following pressure from western countries, Saied announced a series of measures to help immigrants in Tunisia including a hotline for immigrants and new residence cards for students from other African countries "to facilitate their stay on Tunisian soil." Fines will also be waived for sub-Saharan Africans who have exceeded their residency permits and agree to a voluntary return program.

The country is on the verge of economic collapse and in the middle of a severe drought that caused water to be turned off for seven hours during the night of April 1st.