



# DRIVERS AND IMPACT OF RURAL OUTMIGRATION IN TUNISIA: Key findings from the research “Rural Migration in Tunisia” (RuMiT)

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## THE RuMiT RESEARCH

The Rural Migration in Tunisia (RuMiT) research project was undertaken in the frame of the FAO project “Youth mobility, food security and rural poverty reduction: Fostering rural diversification through enhanced youth employment and better mobility” (GCP/INT/240/ITA) – in brief, the Rural Youth Migration (RYM) project – implemented in Tunisia and Ethiopia between 2015 and 2017, and funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation.

The main objectives of the RYM project were to:

- ▶ offer alternatives to migration, addressing youth unemployment and poor working conditions in rural areas, especially among young people;
- ▶ maximize the positive nexus between migration and rural development; and
- ▶ contribute to policy coherence between migration and rural development.

In this context, the RuMiT research aimed to analyse the determinants of migration and mobility in Tunisia and their relative influence on the likelihood of rural youth to migrate. It also aimed to highlight the principal migration patterns and their impact on rural areas of origin.

## Key findings

- ▶ Migration from Tunisia is increasingly composed of highly educated individuals, students (21.7 percent of respondents who had migrated after 2011 used “education” as a channel to entry in Italy) and women.
- ▶ Although most migrants are men, migration is becoming more feminized.
- ▶ Women register a significant increase in study-related reasons for migration and a decrease in marriage-related reasons.
- ▶ Key reasons for migrating, especially within Tunisia, are connected to the search for better job opportunities and the improvement of living conditions. Sustaining the family and changing lifestyle are also considered important by international migrants.
- ▶ Internal migration is often connected to and prepares for international migration.
- ▶ Recent Tunisian migrants in Italy are more likely to be irregular.
- ▶ Both international and internal migrants have higher employment rates than those left behind. Migrant women who left in 2011 or later show higher activity rates than those who did before 2011, which mirrors the decrease in marriage-related reasons for migration.
- ▶ Households with migrant members have higher access to social security and are increasingly feminized, due to the departure of men. Women in these households have a higher participation in the labour market, compared with women from households with no migrants; nevertheless, levels of female unemployment remain high.
- ▶ Remittance sending and receiving behaviours change sensibly according to internal and international migration, with higher rates of receivers (47.8 percent) and remitters (54.1 percent) among households with migrants residing abroad and international migrants, respectively.
- ▶ Agriculture is the preferred sector for investment on return.

## THE BACKGROUND

### Increasing internal disparities and declining economy

The 2011 Revolution in Tunisia, which led to the downfall of Zine El Abidine Ben-Ali's after a 24-year reign, is considered a political landmark for the country in the twenty-first century. The growing economic ills and disparities that led Tunisians to take to the streets in protest against the former Government, were compounded by the Revolution, which had adverse immediate impacts on the economy, associated with a protracted period of uncertainty and instability (African Development Bank, 2012).

From 2000 to 2010, Tunisia registered relatively strong GDP growth compared with other MENA countries. Over the same period, the total population living below the poverty line decreased from 32 percent to 16 percent. In the same period, per capita income of the lowest 40 percent of the population improved by one-third (World Bank, 2014). However, this decline in absolute poverty rates at national level has masked persistent regional disparities in living standards between "leading" regions (coastal areas) and "lagging" regions (non-coastal areas) and between urban and rural areas, with extreme poverty more likely to occur in the latter.

Since the 2011 Revolution, the Tunisian economy has remained fixed at a low level of performance. In 2017, the World Bank referred to "few tangible economic dividends of political transition" with economic growth at 1.0 percent in 2016, compared with 1.1 percent in 2015. Reported unemployment remained high at around 15 percent of the working population. Youth employment was more than double this rate. Low economic growth and a sharp rise in public spending including wages, combined with delays in implementing key reforms, have led to high fiscal and current account deficits.

### Limited employment opportunities in agriculture

In 2015, the share of Tunisia's GDP derived from agriculture was 10.5 percent, while in 2013, employment in agriculture as a share of total employment was 15.3 percent (World Bank, 2017). In line with regional trends, farming productivity is limited by structural constraints: scarce natural resources (e.g. water), inadequate access to new technologies and financial resources, and uneven distribution of land (Boughzala and Tlili, 2014). Government subsidies and public policies supporting market-oriented large farmers have helped to improve the added value of agriculture, while labour demand and the wage level in this sector have not consequently increased, affecting youth in particular. As in other Southern Mediterranean countries, underdevelopment of the agricultural sector forces rural households to integrate their income from agricultural activities with revenues from off-farm sources, including emigration (Nori et al., 2009)

## THE RUMIT RESEARCH

Given the existing data and evidence gaps on migration from Tunisian rural areas, and the need for informed policies and targeted interventions to improve the management of rural labour mobility and enhance agricultural and rural development in migration-prone rural areas, the RuMiT research addressed:

- ▶ the determinants of migration and mobility in Tunisia and their relative influence on the likelihood of rural youth migrating;
- ▶ the patterns and types of rural youth outmigration in Tunisia, including temporary and circular migration; and
- ▶ the impact of rural youth migration in Tunisia on rural livelihoods and societies in origin regions and the material and non-material contributions made by migrants to the development of origin regions.

The study focused on three rural areas in Tunisia: the Makhtar delegation in the Siliana governorate, the Ain Drahem delegation in the Jendouba governorate, and the Benit Kdech delegation in the Médenine governorate. The study areas were selected on the basis of their level of urbanization, rate of outmigration and percentage of rural migrants aged 15–34 years in the total outmigrant population. Field data collection took place in 2017.

A mixed-methods approach was applied combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative research was based on focus groups conducted in the three governorates and in the urban part of Médenine. The quantitative research component focused on:

- ▶ **international migrants, internal migrants and non-migrants** (i.e. currently resident) – to compare the profile and outcomes of the three groups;
- ▶ **pre- and post-2011 migrants** – to observe the effect of the 2011 Revolution on the profile and outcomes of migrants; and
- ▶ **households without migrants, with internal migrants and/or international migrants, and with pre- and/or post-2011 migrants** – to study the impact of different kinds of migration on households at origin and to compare households both with and with no migrant members.

With this aim, two surveys were undertaken:

- ▶ A **household survey** in migrant-sending rural areas in Tunisia, in the three targeted delegations. Both migrant and non-migrant households (i.e. with or without migrant members) were interviewed to collect information on the household and on their (migrant and non-migrant) members.
- ▶ An **individual survey** of migrants in urban areas in Tunisia (internal migrants) and Italy (international migrants).

## KEY FINDINGS

*International migrants are increasingly highly educated and leaving for study reasons.*

- ▶ According to the survey, the **majority of migrants** are men, especially among international migrants.

International migrants, including those who migrated after 2011, are more likely to have higher education levels than non-migrants: respectively, 24 percent and 30 percent have a university degree and are more likely to originate from highly educated origin households. This suggests a link between education and migration, with **positive self-selection effects of migrants according to the level of education of qualification**, especially among international migrants. At the same time, this result may be driven by an **increase in study-related reasons for migration**: recent migrants are indeed more likely to have migrated for study reasons. "Education" was declared as a channel for entry in Italy by 21.7 percent of respondents who had migrated after the 2011 Revolution, confirmation of the increasing relevance of student migration from Tunisia.

**Migration from rural areas is a strategy to find better employment and living conditions.**

- ▶ Together with problems within the agricultural sector, the key reasons for migration, especially internal migration within Tunisia, are linked to the **search for better job opportunities and the improvement of living conditions**. For migrants that moved to Italy, additional important factors are **sustaining the family and changing lifestyle**. Remittance sending and receiving behaviours change sensibly according to internal and international migration, with higher rates of receivers (47.8 percent) and remitters (54.1 percent) among households with migrants residing abroad and international migrants, respectively.

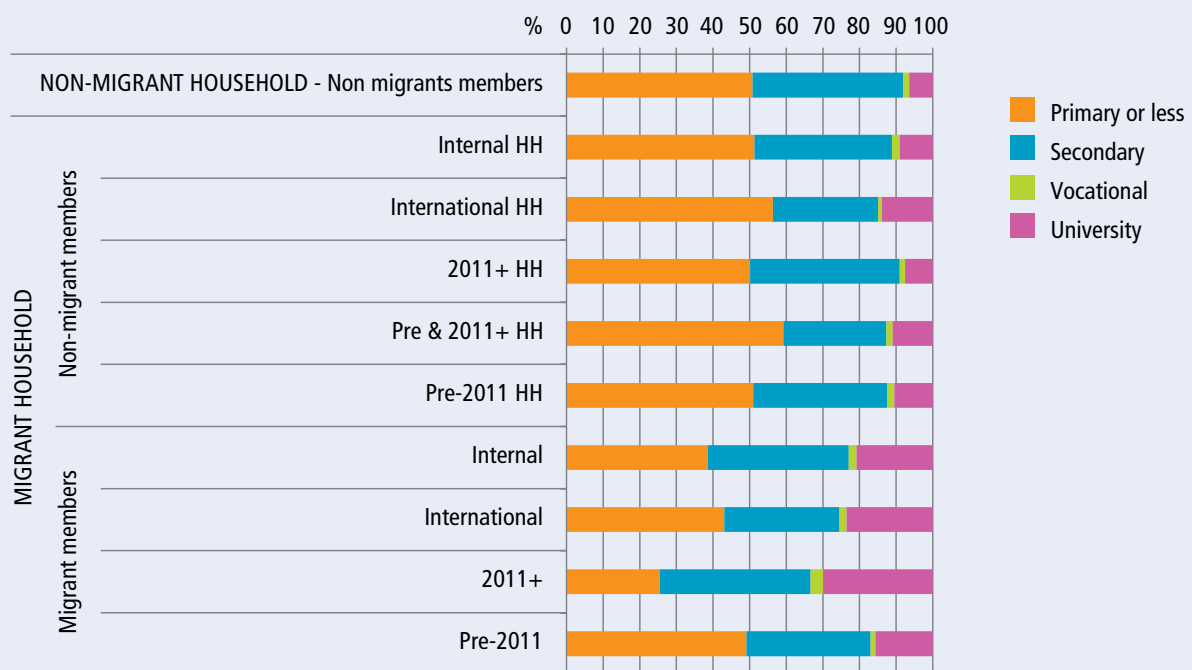
**There is an increasing process of feminization of migration, with emerging autonomous and highly skilled trajectories.**

- ▶ The study provides evidence of a significant process of **feminization of migration**, particularly in the form of internal migration by **young women from rural areas moving to work in other regions**, often on a seasonal basis.
- ▶ There has also been an increase in **female international migration after 2011**. This feminization is likely to be associated with an **increase in the number of highly educated migrant women**. More than half of post-2011 migrant women have a university degree. Moreover, for women, international migration is increasingly aimed at pursuing university education: a comparison between women who migrated before and after 2011, revealed a **significant increase in study-related reasons for migration and a decrease in marriage-related reasons**.

**Tunisians often migrate internally before migrating abroad and international migration is increasingly irregular**

- ▶ Half of international migrants have made at least one internal move before arriving at destination, suggesting that **internal and international migration are often connected**.
- ▶ **Recent Tunisian migrants in Italy are more likely to be irregular**, compared with migrants who left before 2011, reflecting the increasing closure of European borders and the consequent limited availability of regular channels to reach Europe.

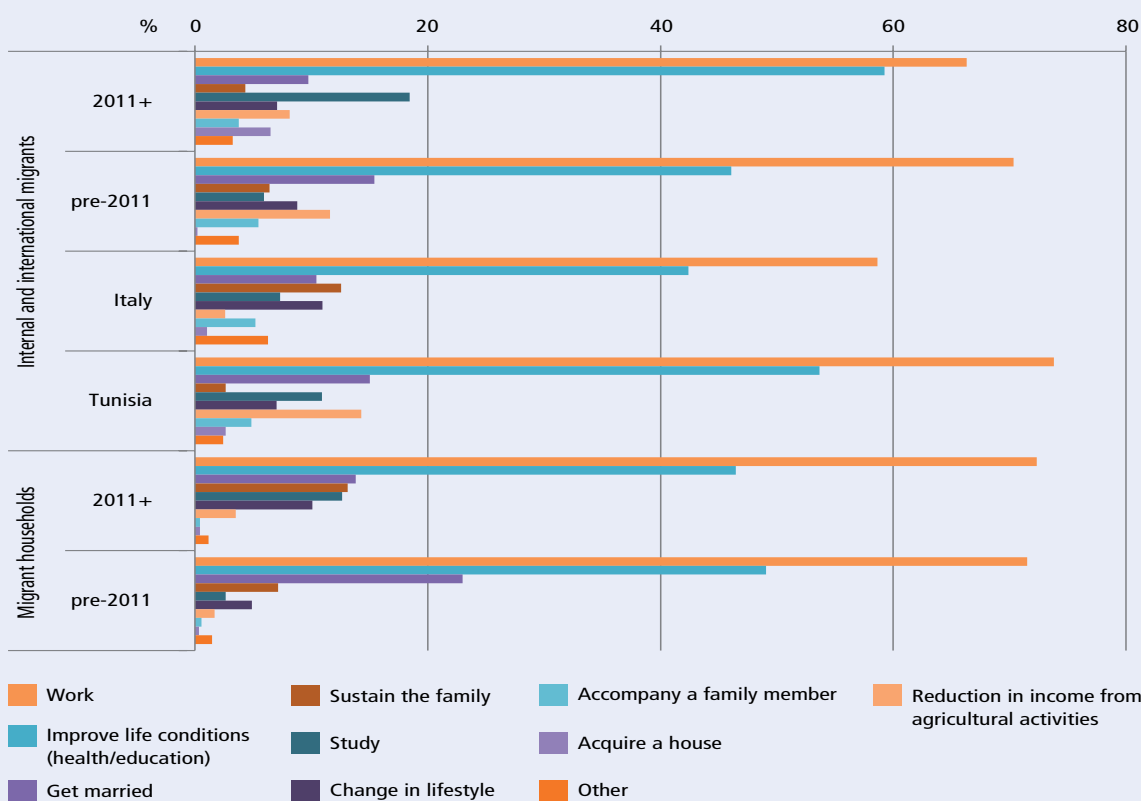
**Figure 1. Level of education for members of non-migrant households and for non-migrants and migrants of migrant households (population ≥ 15 years)**



Source: RuMiT household survey in Tunisia (2017).

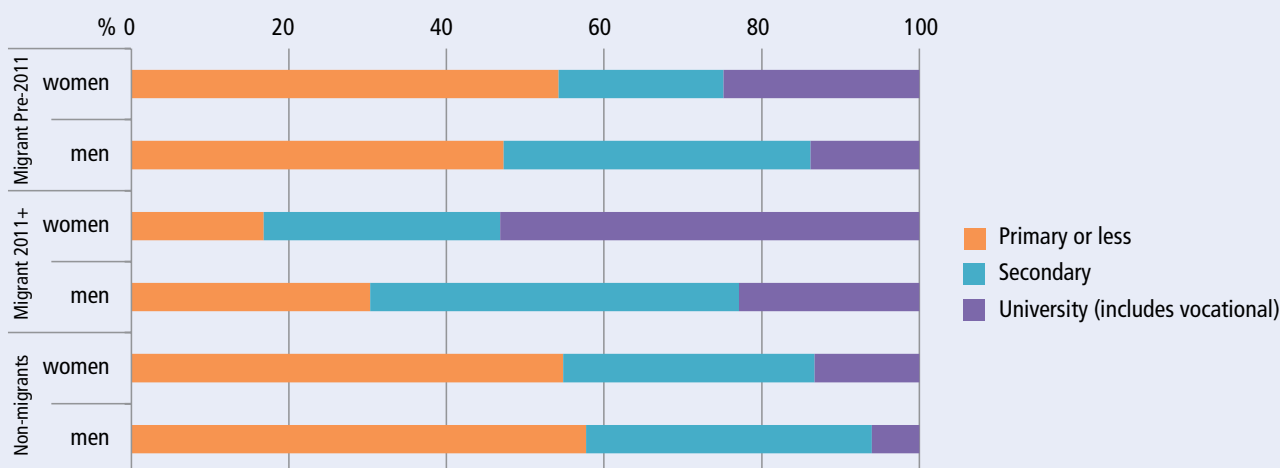
Population: Migrant and non-migrant members of rural migrant households in Tunisia; non-migrant members of non-migrant households in Tunisia.

**Figure 2. Reasons for migration**



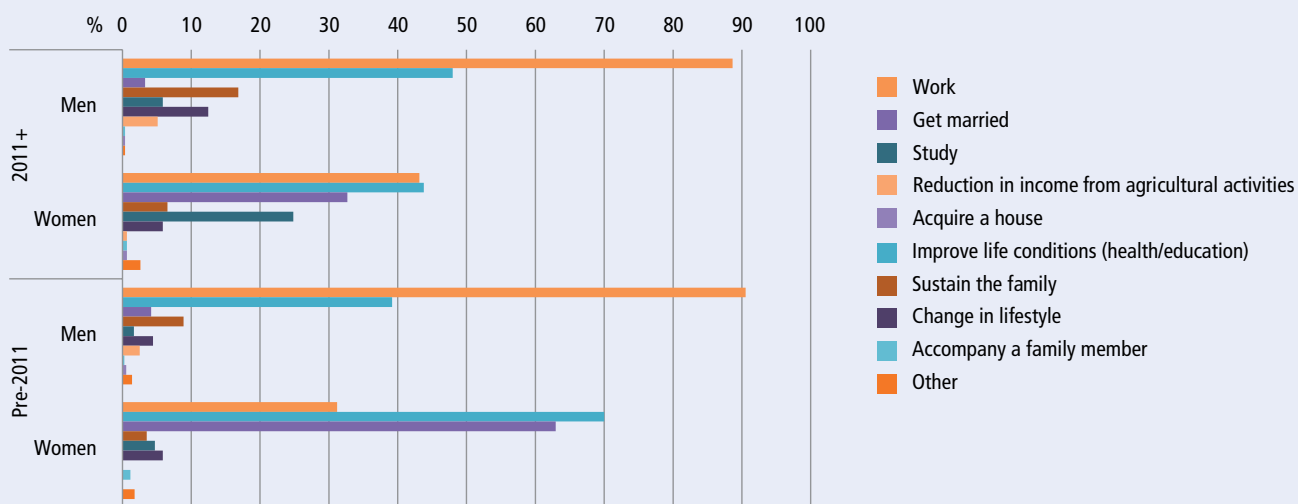
Source: RuMiT household survey in Tunisia (2017); RuMiT individual survey in Tunisia and Italy (2017).  
 Population: migrant household members; internal migrants in Tunisia and international migrants in Italy.

**Figure 3. Level of education of non-migrants and migrants, by sex (population ≥ 15 years)**



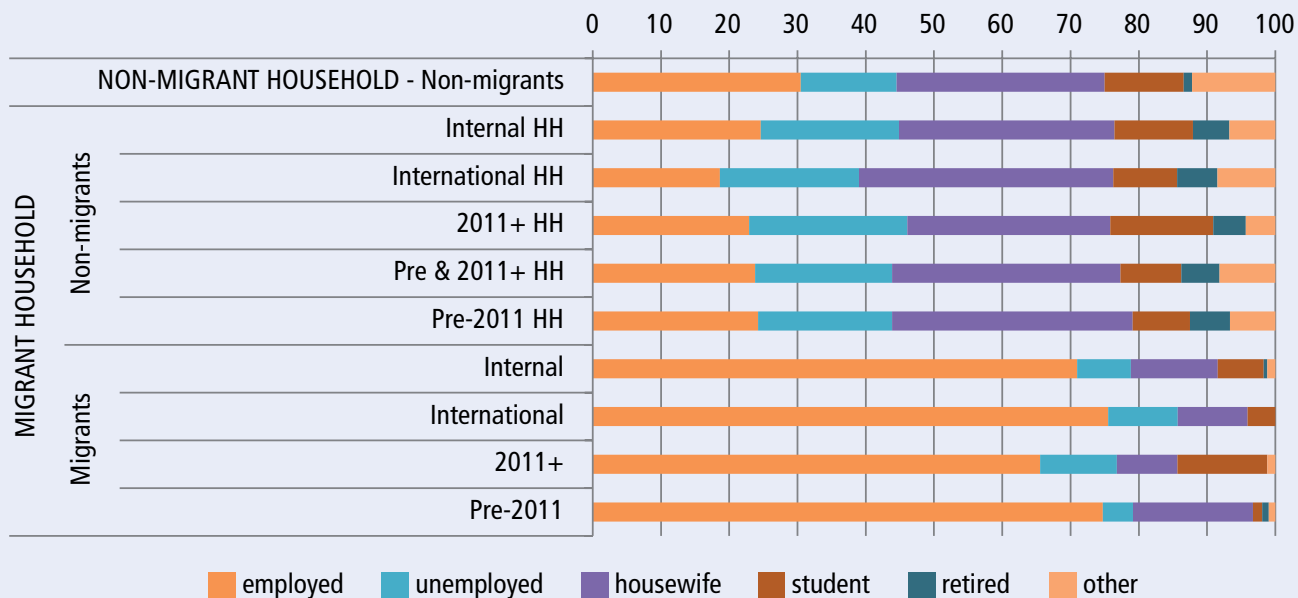
Source: RuMiT household survey in Tunisia (2017); RuMiT individual survey in Tunisia and Italy (2017).  
 Population: non-migrant members of non-migrant and migrant households; migrant members of migrant households and internal and international migrants.

Figure 4. Reasons for migration by gender



Source: RuMiT household survey in Tunisia (2017); RuMiT individual survey in Tunisia and Italy (2017).  
 Population: migrant household members; internal migrants in Tunisia and international migrants in Italy.

Figure 5. Labour market status\* for non-migrants and migrants (population ≥ 15 years)



\* A proxy for the most common situation during the past year.  
 Source: RuMiT household survey in Tunisia (2017).

Population: non-migrant members of non-migrant households; migrant members and non-migrant members of migrant households.

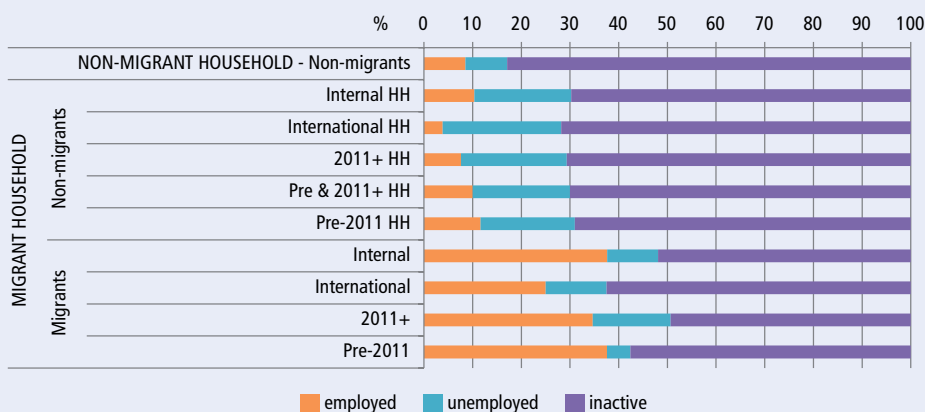
**Migration is rewarding in terms of occupational and social security outcomes, especially for women.**

- ▶ Migration seems to be **rewarding for both internal and international migrants in terms of occupational outcomes**: while 65–75 percent of migrants were in employment at the time of the survey, this was the case

for only 22–30 percent of non-migrants. Furthermore, employed migrants are more likely to have a contract and be registered in a social security system.

- ▶ The main perceived effect of migration on women is increased female labour market participation and access to employment.

**Figure 6. Labour market status\* for non-migrants and migrants (women ≥ 15 years)**



\* A proxy for the most common situation during the past year. Source: RuMiT household survey in Tunisia (2017). Population: non-migrant members of non-migrant households; migrant members and non-migrant members of migrant households. NB: "Inactive" includes housewife, student, retired.

**International migrants are more prone to return than internal migrants.**

- ▶ An analysis of **return intentions** shows them to be **higher for migrants in Italy** than for migrants in Tunisia: 60 percent of migrants in Italy declare they want to return either in the short or in the long term, while only 34 percent of migrants in Tunisia declare this intention. Common reasons for wanting to return are homesickness, family nostalgia and retirement (the latter mostly among those who left before 2011).

**Households with migrants are increasingly feminized and have higher access to social security.**

- ▶ The fact that it is mainly men migrating has an **impact on origin households in term of gender composition**. In households with no migrants the share of men is around 54 percent, while in migrant households an average of 44 percent of current members are men. This results in a feminization of migrant households, where **women are more likely to be active** compared with women in non-migrant households; however, female unemployment levels remain high.
- ▶ Among the stayers, those from **migrant households** (especially those with international migrant members) are **more likely to have a formal contract and access to social security**.

**The reception/sending of remittances applies to around one-quarter of households/migrants; however, this varies according to the location of migrants.**

- ▶ Remittance behaviours change according to internal and international migrants. **One out of four households (24.8 percent) declared to receive remittances**. However, households with international migrants are much more likely to receive remittances (around one-half do so) than are households with internal migrants only. This is mirrored in the results of the individual survey of migrants. Evidence suggests that remittances are used for consumption, education, health and savings, but not for investments.

**Among migrants who have participated in economic activities at origin, the majority did so in agriculture.**

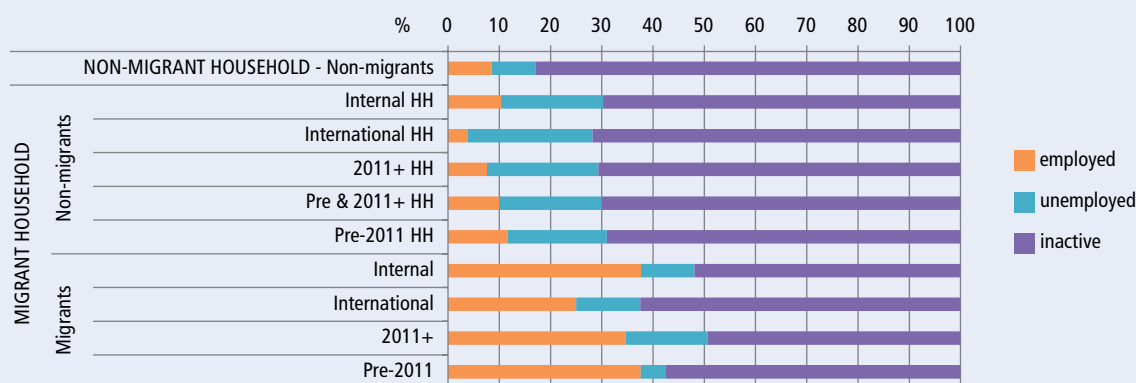
- ▶ While incomes from remittances tend not to be invested in productive activities, evidence from the report shows that 23.4 percent of internal migrants in Tunisia and 33.4 percent of migrants in Italy have an economic activity in origin. Most of these activities are **connected with agricultural production** (for 87.7 percent of internal and 66.7 percent of international migrants) and **livestock activities** (15.2 percent of internal and 20 percent of international migrants).
- ▶ In addition, among those who participated in the economic activities of the household at their place of origin in the previous year, 79.2 percent of internal migrants and 64.2 percent of international migrants did so in agricultural production.

**Table 1. Remittances received and sent**

	MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS		MIGRANTS	
	HOUSEHOLDS THAT HAVE RECEIVED REMITTANCES		MIGRANTS THAT HAVE SENT REMITTANCES	
	With internal migrants only	With international (and internal) migrants	Migrants in Tunisia	Migrants in Italy
%	24.8	47.8	10.9	54.1
N	492	46	414	196

Source: RuMiT household survey in Tunisia (2017); RuMiT individual survey in Tunisia and Italy (2017).  
Population: rural migrant households in Tunisia; internal migrants in Tunisia and international migrants in Italy.

**Figure 7. Use of remittances by receivers/senders\***



\* Multiple responses allowed. Source: RuMiT household survey in Tunisia (2017); RuMiT individual survey in Tunisia and Italy (2017).  
Population: migrant households; internal and international migrants.

- ▶ Data show that an important share (51 percent for migrants in Tunisia and 39 percent for migrants in Italy) of migrants who declared to wish to return to Tunisia, are keen to **work in agriculture**. The intention to invest in this sector on return depends on gender, with both internal and international migrant men outnumbering women (respectively, 59 percent men vs 32 percent women and 42 percent men vs 31 percent women).

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ The increasing relevance of youth migration for study reasons in Tunisia indicates that Tunisian international students are a potential investment for the country of origin and a key target to be sustained by ensuring safe and protected migration. Furthermore, students abroad can act as a bridge between the socio-economic systems of sending and receiving countries, both while abroad and once they have returned to Tunisia. Policies to **maintain connections and engage students while abroad**, including joint research projects, virtual returns, short-term visits and assignments, and to **attract them back to the origin country through permanent or temporary returns** could be implemented by the Tunisian Government to support a positive relationship between migration and development.
- ▶ Remittance flows registered by the study involve one-quarter of households/migrants and are mostly directed to consumption and non-productive investments. **Financial literacy programmes** for migrants and remittance recipients, which result in significant increases in savings and productive investments in the origin households, could be developed targeting rural migrant-sending areas, with the participation of a wide range of actors, including government officials, banks, microfinance institutions, trade unions and diaspora associations.
- ▶ Given the key role of agriculture, both as a preferred sector for transnational engagement of migrants and as a targeted domain of activity and investment on return, policies focusing on migration and rural development could address both these forms of diaspora mobilization. In particular, **measures fostering the return migration of potential agro-entrepreneurs and the reintegration of returnees** into local labour markets should take full account of the scope (retirement or productive return, intention to enter the labour market as an employee or as an entrepreneur, area of return etc.) and nature of return migration (demographic and socio-economic characteristics, educational level, skills acquired abroad, availability of capital to be invested etc. of returnees). Although there is little evidence of the

effectiveness of voluntary return programmes, potential measures to favour the return of migrants to their areas of origin include providing tailored training opportunities

(e.g. in SMAE creation and management) and facilitating access to targeted financial products, start-up grants and equipment at subsidized prices.

**Table 2. Properties and economic activities in areas of origin by migrants in Tunisia and Italy**

	TUNISIA	ITALY
Owns a property in origin (%)	53.5	52.8
Has economic activities in origin (%)	33.4	23.4
<b>Detail of economic activities (% multiple)</b>		
Agricultural production	87.7	66.7
Livestock	15.2	20.0
Sale of animal products	0.0	4.4
Commerce	5.8	13.3
Services (restaurant, transport)	5.1	2.2
Construction	4.3	4.4
Rent	0.0	15.6
Industrial activity	0.0	0.0
Participated in economic activities of the origin household; past year (%)	37.2	50.8
<b>Detail of economic activities (% multiple)</b>		
Commercialization of products	11.1	25.3
Agricultural production	79.2	64.2
Livestock	9.0	4.2
Industrial activity	4.2	11.6

Source: RuMiT household survey in Tunisia (2017); RuMiT individual survey in Tunisia and Italy (2017).  
Population: rural migrant households in Tunisia; internal migrants in Tunisia and international migrants in Italy.



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