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**COVID-19 and Labor Shortage in France: Exploring the Contribution of Tunisian
Migrant Workers in bridging the Labor Shortage**

A Thesis Submitted by
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Dedication

To every Tunisian away from home.

To every migrant worker seeking a better life.

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Abstract

This thesis employed a qualitative approach, combining both desk research and in-depth interviews with 11 participants: nine Tunisian migrant workers and two Tunisian migrant experts. The thesis examined labor shortage in France during the pandemic and the extent to which Tunisian migrant workers managed to bridge the labor shortage relying on the Segmented Labor market theory which was originally developed by Piore (1979), and the two concepts: System Effects and Systemic Resilience. Findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled several weaknesses in the French labor market system including the acute labor shortage. Faced by labor shortage, France turned to migrant workers to meet its labor demand which became problematic with border closures. Tunisian migrant workers, the focus of this thesis, contributed to bridging the labor shortage in France. They actively participated in labor shortage affected occupations and in essential occupations. Findings indicate that due to the high labor demand which was experienced in the French labor market during the COVID-19 pandemic, Tunisian migrant workers who worked in essential occupations had facilitated recruitment procedure while the Tunisian migrant workers who worked in non-essential occupations had an accustomed recruitment procedure. Findings also highlight that migrant workers including Tunisian migrant workers contributed to building systemic resilience in France through offering flexibility in terms of employment and supporting the growth of networks that facilitate meeting the labor demand.

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List of Abbreviations

ANETI	Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi et le Travail Indépendant (Tunisian Agency for National Employment and Self-Employment)
APS	Autorisation Provisoire de Séjour (Temporary Resident Permit)
ATCT	Agence Tunisienne de Coopération Technique (Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation)
CMRS	Center for Migration and Refugee Studies
DARES	Direction de l'Animation, de la Recherche, des Études et des Statistiques (Directorate of Research, Economic Studies, and Statistics)
EMN	European Migration Network
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
HIMS	Household International Migration Survey Tunisia
ILO	International Labor Organization
INSEE	Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)
INS	Institut National de la Statistique (National Institute of Statistics)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFII	Office Français de l'Immigration et de l'Intégration (French Office for Immigration and Integration)
ONM	Observatoire National de la Migration (National Observatory of Migration)
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter 1: Research Rationale and Overview

Introduction

In May 2023, InfoMigrants published an article, titled “*You get thrown out once they no longer need you’: Tunisian doctor in France threatened with deportation*” (InfoMigrants, 2023). Although this is just a title of an article, its hidden message can never be ignored as it reflects the reality of several migrants who have been employed in developed countries to better their lives, but they end up getting “trapped” in situations of uncertainty and temporality. Regardless of their educational backgrounds, their employment, and legal statuses, in many cases, migrants find themselves stuck in uncertain and temporary situations as their migratory experiences continue to be influenced and shaped by the changing contexts in the receiving countries. Policies on and perceptions of migration continue to change throughout time and space which places migrants in an unending circle of uncertainty. What’s considered a migrant in the present time might not be considered the same in the near and long-term future. Countries of destination determine who is a migrant and who is “not”, but why is this the case? Why do they welcome certain categories of migrants while they reject others? and What determines their eligibility?

In fact, the need for labor is the predominant answer. However, the fear of the European countries to limit labor migration to the categories whom they wish to admit has pushed them to sign agreements with sending and transit countries to curb the flow of the “unwanted” migration and allow only for legal migration through which the “needed” category is secured. Recently, the European Union (EU) offered a promising financial package to Tunisia, worth €1 billion (European Commission statement, 2023), while France offered Tunisia 25.8 million Euros (Reuters, 2023) to address the root causes of migration and stop irregular migration. This package came amid the spread of criticisms against Kais Said’s regime for mishandling the

situations of sub-Saharan migrants in Tunisia (Reliefweb, 2023). While the EU package aims to address the root causes of migration, it seeks to open more legal doors for Tunisians to study and work in the EU (The European Commission, 2023). This indicates that the EU cannot close its borders completely in front of the flow of migrants from Tunisia and the Global South, but it aims to restrict it to the “eligible” category. It is worth noting that this argument is not new, but it resurfaced with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global health emergency (WHO Europe, n.d.), which pushed several countries to introduce exceptional measures to contain the spread of the virus. These measures included restrictions on movements within and between countries as well as access to workplaces (Anderson et al., 2021). However, these restrictions had resulted in complete or partial shutdowns of certain economic sectors, which created disruptions in the local labor markets and affected the dynamics between migration and external labor markets. In Europe, countries were forced to shut down large sections of their economy to protect their national health systems (Fasani & Mazza, 2020a). During the first six months of 2020, most sections of the European economy worked between 25% and 30% of their capacity (Sommarribas & Nienaber, 2021). The disruption in the European labor market involved large declines in labor supply and rapid increases in labor demand for certain sectors including health and agriculture (Anderson et al., 2021). This situation was compounded by border closures and lockdowns that were taken as measures to curb the spread of the pandemic, resulting in restrictions on human mobility.

As a result of these measures and the labor market changes, several European countries whose economies rely heavily on migrant workers were put at risk which necessitated additional exceptional measures to be taken to ensure the provision of the basic services. To secure the

provision of the basic services, the EU introduced specific guidelines concerning the exercise of the free movement of workers during the COVID-19 outbreak (2020/C 102 I/03). These guidelines lifted restrictions on the mobility of certain individuals working in sectors which were seen as necessary to keep the European economy functioning and necessitated their presence. These individuals were the frontliners who had to carry out different functions including highly skilled jobs such as doctors and medical specialists and low skilled jobs such as delivery drivers and transporters (OECD, 2020) and were referred to as key workers (Fazani & Mazza, 2020a).

In their scholarly work, Fazani and Mazza (2020a) and Anderson et al. (2021) confirm the valuable contribution of key workers to continue the operations of key functions of the European economies and keep the provision of the basic services going. However, 14% of these key workers were migrant workers who contributed to the continuation of the essential services during the pandemic (OECD, 2020). Migrant workers were represented in different functions in the European labor market. In fact, migrant workers from outside the EU were represented in large numbers in low-skill essential jobs including agricultural jobs and personal care functions (Fasani and Mazza, 2020a). It is not surprising that migrant workers were strongly present in the European economies as labor shortage has historically been the driving force behind the perpetuation of migration. Anderson et al. (2021) define labor shortage as “the demand for labor exceeding supply at prevailing wages and employment conditions.” (p.3).

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic reignited the labor shortage issue as the European economies struggled to bridge the labor shortage when the supply of labor became problematic due to border closures and the imposed restrictions on human mobility. Accordingly, to address labor shortage in certain sectors, European countries resorted to exceptional measures aiming to cover the foreign labor demand. For instance, France and Italy extended the validity of

residence permits and period of authorization to allow seasonal workers to stay longer and work in agriculture related activities (Sommarribas & Nienaber, 2021). In doing so, countries like France and Italy intended to meet their labor needs in sectors experiencing labor shortage. It should be noted that the EU has always secured most of its foreign labor demand through the continuation of migration from the Global South, from countries like Tunisia and Morocco for a variety of reasons including the aging population in Europe (Hogarth, 2021). Migration of North Africans to Europe goes back to the colonial era and was further increased during the decolonization period (Kassar et al., 2014). In fact, European countries have been dependent on the countries of origin, with which they maintain traditional migration systems. De Haas (2010) defines a migration system as “as a set of places linked by flows and counter-flows of people, goods, services and information, which tend to facilitate further exchange, including migration, between the places.” (p.1593). A migration system between two countries or regions is built when there is a continuous exchange between both places and could be maintained when different infrastructures, including migration related agreements, exist to ensure the continuation of the flows. Taking Tunisia as an example, the continuation of the Tunisian-European migration system is linked to the signature of several cooperation agreements between Tunisia and the European countries such as the 1963 bilateral labor agreements with France. Until today, Tunisians still perceive France as their primary destination of migration. According to the Household International Migration Survey conducted in Tunisia (HIMS) (2021), 52.5% of Tunisian migrants in Europe are located in France. In six years, between 2014 and 2019, 17435 Tunisians had been admitted in France for economic reasons and the number of admissions of Tunisian migrants had doubled between 2016 and 2019 (Boubakri and Abbassi, 2023).

That being said, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic did not only impact the dynamics in the European labor market, but it reinforced the strong interconnection between labor shortage, international migration, and economic growth in Europe. Although European policymakers have advocated for the imposition of restrictions on migration from Global South including North African countries, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled certain weaknesses in the European labor market and confirmed the continuing need for foreign migrant workers.

The existing literature indicates the important role that migrant workers from the Global South played to bridge the labor shortage in essential sectors such as agriculture and health during the pandemic period. However, it should be noted that both highly skilled and low-skilled migrant workers contributed to the continuation of the functioning of the European economy in times of COVID-19 in different ways; even if some categories of migrant workers were privileged to use remote work to continue their work, they still played an essential role in helping the European economies to bounce back. Thus, it is important to further explore this contribution and shed light on the different experiences of migrant workers from the Global South. This thesis explores this dynamic through delving deeper into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on labor shortage in France during the period of 2020-2022 and how migrant workers, focusing on Tunisians, contributed to bridging this labor shortage.

Problem Statement, Research Objectives and Justification

The available literature acknowledges the important role played by migrant workers in helping the European economy during the pandemic, but there is a lack of research exploring the experiences of different categories of migrants from the Global South in-depth. When addressing

non-EU migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, most literature addresses them as a group of “third countries” nationals without taking into consideration the different experiences of migrants having different nationalities. In fact, this scholarly approach overlooks the individual voices of migrant workers who have been key actors in the improvement of the European economies during and after the pandemic. Hence, there is a need to highlight the voices and experiences of different categories of migrant workers who come from different countries of origin. In this context, this research aims to contribute to the available literature by focusing on the individual experiences of migrant workers during the pandemic. For this research, Tunisian migrant workers in France are the center of the analysis. Thus, the core objective of this thesis research is to examine the experiences of Tunisian migrant workers during the pandemic in the French labor market. The focus on Tunisian migrant workers, and specifically on France originates from the consideration of several elements which have positioned Tunisia as an important actor in the Euro-Mediterranean migration system and as a key labor-sending country to Europe, specifically to France. The insistence of the EU to include North African countries including Tunisia and Morocco in their policies to manage migration indicates some form of interconnectedness between the EU and North African countries (Cassarino, 2005). Moreover, as De Haas (2007) highlights, North Africa has become both a sending and transit region. Hence, this element further solidifies the role of North African countries including Tunisia in the Euro-Mediterranean migration processes. Historically, migration from Tunisia to France began to grow following the country gaining its independence in 1956 and has become a labor provider to France with the signature of the “Grandval” bilateral agreement in August 1963 which aims at addressing the recruitment and the stay of Tunisian migrant workers in France (Gabrielli, 2015). It should be noted that this agreement and other labor related agreements stemmed from the need

for labor in European countries including France following the Second World War to “restore agricultural and industrial production, remove the rubble of war, and rebuild the torn cities” (McDonald, 1969, p. 117). Furthermore, migration from Tunisia to France has always been dominated by labor migration which elucidates the number of labor and social agreements that tie Tunisia to France. According to a study titled “*Study on Bilateral Labor and Social Security Agreements in North Africa*”, conducted by CMRS, and commissioned by ILO¹, Tunisia signed several labor agreements with France including the November 2005 Agreement on Labor and the April 2008 Tunisian French Agreement on the Joint Management of Migration and Development as well as a bilateral social security agreement with France, signed in December 1965 to guarantee the rights of migrant workers. Recent data on labor migration from Tunisia to France indicates that this type of migration has been continuous. According to recent data from the Tunisian Agency for National Employment and Self-Employment (ANETI), in 2018, France received 70% of the total Tunisian migrant workers (5264) sent by the agency (Boubakri & Abbassi, 2023). Accordingly, this research examines the situation of Tunisian migrant workers in France and their contribution to the French labor market during the pandemic. Considering the limited timeframe, this research focuses on one national group of migrant workers in France, hoping that future research continues to explore the situation of other national groups of migrant workers in France.

Literature Review

To examine how the existing literature has addressed the impact of COVID-19 on the European labor market and labor migration, this section provides a thorough review of the

¹ Chapter 4 “Foreign Labor in the French Labor Market in Times of COVID-19: Experiences of Tunisian Migrant Workers” addresses some of these agreements.

available literature related to this topic, highlighting key themes that have been mentioned by scholars in relation to labor migration, COVID-19, and the European labor market, specifically, the labor market in France. Accordingly, this literature review section is divided into the following four themes: Labor Migration to Europe (Section I), Labor migration facilitated by the European borders' selectivity (Section II), The European Labor Market in Times of COVID-19 (Section III), and The French Labor Market in Times of COVID-19 (Section IV).

Labor Migration to Europe

Labor migration to Europe is not a recent phenomenon, but rather it has existed for decades for several reasons including socio-economic and political reasons. The existing literature highlights key dimensions of labor migration to Europe including the history of labor migration to Europe (Bade, 2003; Balch, 2010), the drivers of migration from North Africa to Europe (Kassar et al., 2014; Lidak, 2014), and the drivers of migration in the context of the labor market (Ruhs & Anderson, 2010).

In Chapter 2 “*Migration in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth century in Europe*” of his book “*Migration in European History*”, Bade (2003) highlights trends of labor migration to Europe. The author outlines that during the period of nineteenth century and early twentieth century “employment of foreigners served various supplementary and substitute functions. It offered additional and replacement labor in employment areas whose working, wage, and living conditions were less accepted by local laborers in view of the availability of better alternatives.” (p.71). On the other hand, Balch (2010) provides a more focused analysis of labor migration to Europe and its trends. Focusing on the UK and Spain at the end of the 20th century and into the first decade of the 21st century, the author highlights that labor migration and the demand for

foreign labor depends on the prevalent ideas and knowledge at a specific time span. For instance, in the case of the UK and Spain, policies regarding labor migration in Europe were impacted by several intervening variables and factors. Both nations' approaches to managing migration go beyond the security concerns and aim to serve the interests of the growing economies, the creation of more employment opportunities, and the growth of more flexible labor markets (Balch, 2010).

Although Bade (2003) and Balch (2010) wrote in almost two different timespans, their work still focuses mainly on countries of destination, highlighting the history of labor migration to Europe and its changing trends without the incorporation of the countries of origin. On the other hand, some scholars, focusing on labor migration from African countries to Europe and North African countries to Europe tend to focus on the countries of origin, outlining factors in the countries of origin and the various historical relationships that have contributed to the perpetuation of labor migration to Europe. For instance, several scholars focus on examining the history of migration from Africa to Europe and the different patterns of the African migration. Lidak (2014) outlines that migration from developing countries including Africa and the Middle East could be traced back to the late 1960s. To explain the reasons behind the shift in migration patterns from Africa to Europe, Lidak relies on the macro neo-classical theory, which argues that international migration is caused by differences in supply and demand for factors of production including capital and labor, and the microeconomic neoclassical theory which argues that individuals decide to migrate based on a cost-benefit analysis. Kassir et al. (2014) highlight that historical relationships and dependencies have been the underlying reasons behind the movement of people. According to the authors, migration from North Africa to Europe originated from the direct results of colonization and economic need. The authors also indicate that the year 1974

was a turning point in migration patterns as allowing family reunification in Europe supported migration from North African countries to European countries. It should be highlighted that the year 1974 was also the year during which the Guest Worker program in Western Europe came to an end (Castles, 1986). Hence, the development of migration from Africa has been influenced by both individual interests to seek better opportunities and previous European policies that initiated and facilitated migration from North Africa and other countries, like Turkey and Yugoslavia, to Western Europe.

It is important to reiterate that labor migration from the Global South, including North African countries, is primarily driven by economic interests and also by certain characteristics of the European labor markets. Relying on the segmented labor market theory which was originally developed by Piore (1979), scholars like Massey et al. (1993) provide an additional explanation of why migration to Europe and other industrialized countries was initiated. One of the models that apply to the characteristics of the European labor market is the Segmented Labor Market theory as the segmentation of the labor market into capital-intensive primary sector and labor-intensive secondary sector drives migration from the developing countries to the industrialized ones to fill the needed jobs in the labor-intensive secondary sector (Massey et al., 1993). Along the same lines, scholars like Ruhs and Anderson (2010) argue that labor migration can be driven by other characteristics in the labor market such as the acute labor shortage. According to the authors, certain employers might resort to recruiting more migrant workers as their labor and skills' needs cannot be met by the domestic labor force. The authors also provide an interesting explanation to why labor shortage arises by introducing the concept of "System Effects". According to Ruhs and Anderson (2010), the different institutional and regulatory frameworks,

not only those related to the labor market but also to the public audience, produce domestic labor shortage.

Furthermore, in the introduction of his book *“The Political Economy of Border Drawing: Arranging Legality in European Labor Migration Policies”*, Paul (2015) confirms that due to labor shortage and the need for labor, labor migration to Europe remains perpetual despite the changing visions of European countries towards migration and the drawing of borders. To examine the different ways through which labor migration to Europe has been sustained, several scholars focus on understanding labor migration to Europe in the context of borders. As such, the following section reviews the literature that conceptualizes borders in the context of labor migration to Europe.

Labor Migration Facilitated by the European Borders’ Selectivity

One of the key themes that continue to dominate the scholarly work on migration in general and labor migration to Europe in particular is the theme of the changing nature of borders and the selectivity of the European borders. As highlighted by Del Sarto (2021) “The meaning of borders is historically contingent, and since borders are social and political constructs, their nature and meaning may also change over time.” (p.14). Although borders may seem easy to comprehend, the different political, economic, and social factors that keep shaping them and attributing different meanings to borders render their meanings complicated. Scholars like Del Sarto (2021) and De Genova (2017) address the complexity of borders focusing on the European borders which continue to influence and shape migration to Europe.

In his book *“Borderlands”*, Del Sarto (2021) examines the relationship between Europe and its Southern Mediterranean neighbors through the adoption of a borderlands approach. In

general, “borderlands” are the southern neighboring countries where Europe may extend its practices and rules to control migration (Del Sarto, 2021). Thus, the concept of “borderlands” assumes that the European borders are not merely limited to the European territories, but they move beyond Europe to include the territories of other sovereign countries. On the other hand, De Genova (2017) portrays Europe as an empire that continues to redraw its borders to build a new Europe that is reserved only for Europeans and limited to the boundaries of Europe. Thus, according to this scholarly understanding, the continuation of reshaping the European borders has a primary objective of protecting the “European” borders and to push those who do not fit the criteria of the European identity away. Hence, understanding borders depends on the situation, time, and the perception of the European identity.

In fact, bordering and identity are interlinked concepts as in the case of Europe. The perception of what constitutes the “European identity” is a key determinant of the meaning of borders and the types of borders that should be implemented which Del Sarto (2021) touches upon in his work “borderlands”. As Del Sarto (2021) highlights:

Perhaps the best way to understand the nature of borders is to think about them as institutions that govern inclusion and exclusion through the establishment and maintenance of different modalities of transboundary movement. Through processes of bordering, debordering, and ‘othering’, borders create categories of ‘us’ and ‘them. (p.15)

This perception confirms De Genova’s (2017) idea that like all borders, the European borders tend to continuously produce the separation between the “*inside*” and “*outside*”. Although the work of Del Sarto (2021) and De Genova (2017) provides a valuable insight on the concept of borders and the categorization of the “us”, their work does not specifically focus on how borders

shift and change in relation to the different types of migrants and their socio-economic characteristics.

Nevertheless, Scholars like Tsianos and Karakayali (2010) address this gap by addressing the concept of the porosity of borders. The concept of the porosity of borders means that certain categories of people might be able to navigate the European borders (Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010). It is worth noting that the concept of the porosity of borders provides a good analysis of how migrants find their ways to reach Europe despite the strict European border controls. The concept helps in understanding how borders could be permeable for certain categories of migrant workers who are seen as eligible to enter the European countries, specifically, those who are needed and significant including labor migrants with specific socio-economic statuses, but not for others. In fact, borders are not of general applicability; they exist for certain categories of workers but not for others.

Triandafyllidou (2021) highlights that “national borders become more permeable despite the efforts of many national governments to erect fences and barriers.” (p.208). In fact, as mentioned in her chapter “*Migration and the Nation*” migrants can be looked at as “a special type of ‘Significant Other(s)’ for nations” (p.208), if they are seen as significant to the receiving countries. As such, the European borders are designed to be permeable to the type of migrants that are considered significant for the European countries.

As mentioned above, the existing literature on the European borders emphasizes the changing nature of the borders and the concept of bordering. It shows that the European borders have been relocated from the internal borders to the external borders. Thus, their meanings have become “blurry” and unclear as the meaning of the European borders does not only encompass

the borders of Europe, but also the “outsourced” borders to other neighboring countries which render the meaning of borders complex. However, despite their complexity, scholars like Tsianos and Karakayali (2010) and Triandafyllidou (2021) argue that borders are designed to be porous and permeable, only to the categories of migrants that are seen “eligible” to enter Europe. In fact, these categories include mainly labor migrants with specific socio-economic characteristics. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that this permeability has always existed, but it has taken on different forms throughout the years, depending on the needed category of migrants: highly skilled or low-skilled.

In addition to addressing the European borders and labor migration, some of the existing literature focuses on the macro-structure and the impact of pandemic through addressing the theme: European labor market in times of COVID-19.

The European Labor Market in Times of COVID-19

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 heavily impacted the European labor market and unveiled some of the weaknesses in the European labor market that need to be addressed in Europe to avoid future disruptions in their economies.

Some of the existing literature highlights the macro impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the European labor market, focusing on labor market’s vulnerabilities in terms of supply and demand (Dumitrescu, 2021). Other literature focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the European labor market in the context of labor migration and mobility (Papademetriou & Hooper, 2020).

Additionally, other literature focuses on the protection of migrant workers, specifically seasonal workers in Italy and in Europe in times of COVID-19 as well as the vulnerabilities that were exacerbated and unveiled by the crisis (Fasani & Mazza, 2020; Passalacqua, 2022; Lange et al., 2020; Cramarenco, 2020). It is worth noting that although this scholarship intends to highlight the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrants and address some of their vulnerabilities, it does not provide an in-depth analysis of the situation of migrant workers from the Global South. It just provides a generic overview of the situation of migrant workers as a group including EU mobile citizens and migrants from outside the EU.

Furthermore, to understand the impact of COVID-19 on migrant workers, some of the existing literature focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mobility of migrants in Europe. Sommarribas and Nienaber (2021) analyze the different measures that were taken by the EU Member States and Norway regarding third-country nationals during the COVID-19 pandemic by looking at how these measures had impacted their legal situation.

Other literature examines the European labor market in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic by focusing on the contribution of migrant workers in key industries in Europe. Taking the agricultural model in Southern Europe, specifically in Italy and Spain, as an example, Molinero-Gerbeau (2021) examines agricultural production in Southern Europe and how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the sector in relation to labor migration. The author highlights that there is an excessive dependence on migrant workers in agriculture in Italy and Spain. Hence, the pandemic unveiled how agricultural production in these countries continue to rely on migrant workers. The author also outlines that the agricultural production in Southern Europe is based on an exploitative model that relies on migrant workers to meet the food demand. Bossavie et al. (2022) examine the relationship between migrant workers in the European labor market and the

exposure of nationals to health and labor market risks during the pandemic. The authors argue that migrant workers are, in effect, “protecting” the native worker by virtue of taking on the jobs that turn out to be the riskiest during the pandemic” (p.1479). The findings of Molinero-Gerbeau (2021) and Bossavie et al. (2022) show that migrant workers were relied on to perform jobs that required face-to-face interactions during the pandemic and in the presence of mobility restrictions.

Other scholars such as Fasani and Mazza (2020a) focus on the contribution of migrant workers during the pandemic and their positioning in the European labor market. Fasani and Mazza (2020a) found that migrant workers were essential to keep the provision of the basic services in the European Union. Furthermore, the authors found that migrant workers, especially from outside the EU, are over-represented in low-skill key professions such as personal care in health service, transport, and food processing. On the other hand, other scholars such as Anderson et al. (2021) stressed the important role of migrant workers in keeping the European economies functioning in times of COVID-19 by offering a new theoretical basis to encourage policymakers and researchers to incorporate it into examining the vital role which migrant workers play in the continuation and the recovery of economies. The theoretical basis centers around the application of the concept “systemic resilience” in the field of labor migration to examine migrant workers’ contribution to building resilient economies.

Nevertheless, despite the existence of the extensive literature on the European borders, labor migration to Europe and the European Labor Market in times of COVID-19, there is a few scholarly sources examining the situation of migrant workers from outside the EU during the pandemic period and their participation in labor markets in countries like France. The available literature highlights that the European labor market relied on migrant workers to keep the basic

services going during the pandemic, however, the focus is always on the Southern European Countries, specifically, Italy and Spain. In other words, there is a lack of research addressing migrant workers from outside the EU and their situation during the pandemic in countries other than Italy and Spain, such as France. Consequently, the following section tends to focus on reviewing the available literature on the French labor market which includes both: a few scholarly work and a number of official reports published by international organizations, to have a thorough understanding of the most recent findings in relation to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the French labor market and migrant workers.

The French Labor Market in Times of COVID-19

This section provides a review of a few academic sources and several official reports that were published by government agencies and international organizations to understand how scholars and researchers studied the labor market in France during the pandemic. One of the key themes that the available literature addresses is the participation of migrants in the hospitality industry during the pandemic period. Gough and Mac Con Iomaire (2022) address the experiences of migrant cooks in Paris, focusing on the period following the pandemic. The authors stress the important role that migrants have been playing in the hospitality industry. According to the data provided by the authors, approximately 17% of cooks in France are migrants, of which 14.4% are migrants from outside the EU. Furthermore, Gough and Mac Con Iomaire (2022) highlight that the hospitality industry had witnessed a downturn during the pandemic period.

Another key theme that has been addressed in the literature is the direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the French labor market and the economy. It is worth noting that the

onset of the COVID-19 hit certain sectors in the French labor market badly. These sectors include construction, agriculture, and the hospitality industry (OECD, 2020). Along the same lines, Ducoudre et al. (2020) and Dauvin et al. (2020) address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the French labor market by examining the disruption of the economic activities in certain sectors in France due to the imposed movement restrictions. The authors highlight that as a result of the pandemic several sections of the economy were shut down and several economic activities were disrupted including the hospitality and tourism sectors. This was also confirmed by several reports published by The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE). According to data from INSEE (2022), accommodation and food service activities were affected heavily by the COVID-19 pandemic as they plummeted during the different lockdowns imposed by the health restrictions; the economic disruption led to a significant drop in labor demand in the first few months of the pandemic. However, when the economic activities resumed, the demand for labor increased.

Moreover, existing data addresses the recruitment difficulties that these sectors and other sectors have faced as a result of the pandemic. For instance, data on the labor market information in France, published on EURES website (n.d.), indicates that following the economic stimulus plans, different occupations including personal care, domestic cleaners, winegrowers, and crop-pickers were the most in-demand occupations in 2021 and in which employers had recruitment difficulties in varying degrees.

Another key theme that has been addressed throughout the literature is the different policies that France has taken to reduce the impact of the pandemic including the provision of assistance to the impacted sectors. Cahuc (2022) highlights that the onset of the pandemic pushed France to implement strict lockdowns which slowed down the economic activities of

certain sectors and led the state to introduce several policies to overcome the economic impact of the pandemic. These policies include financial assistance to protect households and firms (Cahuc, 2022) and short-time work programs to sustain employment and consumption (Albertini et al., 2022).

The existing literature on the impact of the pandemic on the French labor market provides a general overview of the different dimensions related to the topic, but it fails to provide a comprehensive analysis of how this impact influenced labor shortage and how this labor shortage was met by migrant workers from different backgrounds.

Hence, this research aims to contribute to the available literature by examining labor shortage in France during the pandemic and the different ways through which migrant workers contributed to bridging this labor shortage in the affected sectors and in essential occupations using Tunisian migrant workers as the center of analysis.

Conceptual framework

Migration from Tunisia to France has always been dominated by labor migration and it has been sustained throughout the years. However, when faced by the world's greatest challenge, COVID-19, most migration systems linking countries of origin to the countries of destination crumbled. So, what does this mean for the migration system between Tunisia and France? and what can this challenge, COVID-19, tell us about this system and the role of Tunisian migrant workers in the French labor market and in keeping the French economy functioning? In answering these questions, I turn to the **Segmented Labor Market Theory** and the two concepts: the **System Effects**, and **Systemic Resilience**, to understand the impact and

implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Tunisian French labor migration system and on Tunisian migrants.

Drawing on the Segmented Labor Market Theory, which was originally developed by Micheal Piore (1979), I aim to examine the relationship between COVID-19, labor shortage in France and the need for Tunisian migrant workers. The theory assumes that international labor migration is demand-driven where foreign labor markets' characteristics drive international migration (Massey et al., 1993). It helps in understanding how the demand for high and low-skilled migrant labor is embedded in the structure of the developed nations' economies. As highlighted by Massey et al. (1993), the labor market of the developed nations is characterized by their segmented market; the primary capital-intensive sector where wages are higher and secure, and the secondary labor-intensive sector where wages are low and less secure. Hence, migrant workers are relied on to fill the labor shortage in the secondary labor-intensive sector, which native workers avoid (Massey et al., 1993). It is important to highlight that in the context of this thesis "secure" refers to the stability of terms of employment and contracts. Furthermore, I draw on this theory throughout the thesis to explain the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the French labor market, focusing on labor shortage and how this was reflected in the demand for labor with the focus on the Tunisian labor force.

On the other hand, I rely on the concepts of System Effects and Systemic Resilience to explain why the demand for labor in the French market was met by Tunisian migrant workers and how they contributed to bridging the labor shortage in the affected sectors and in essential occupations in France. The concept of System Effects assumes that the existence of certain institutional and regulatory frameworks of the labor market along with the existing public policies produces labor shortages (Ruhs & Anderson, 2010). Hence, the thesis intends to unveil

these frameworks to understand how they impacted labor shortage in France and how they resulted in the reliance on migrant workers during the pandemic with the focus on Tunisian migrant workers.

The concept Systemic Resilience, as defined by Anderson et al., (2021), is “the ability to withstand, recover from, and adapt to unexpected external shocks”. The authors highlight that the main features of a resilient system are flexibility, strong networks, and policies. To understand the contribution of the Tunisian migrant workers to the French economy during the pandemic and to building systemic resilience, I rely on the flexibility and strong networks of Tunisian migrant workers. As highlighted by Anderson et al., (2021), migrant workers can contribute to building resilient systems through offering flexibility in terms of employment conditions, and commitment and through relying on their strong networks to cover the labor need. Through drawing on the two main features that arise directly from migrant workers’ characteristics, I try to study how Tunisian migrant workers contributed to bridging the labor shortage and building systemic resilience in the French labor market.

Research Questions

The core question which this research aims to explore is:

How did COVID-19 affect labor shortage in France between 2020-2022? How did Tunisian migrant workers contribute to bridging this labor shortage in the affected sectors and in essential occupations?

To address the different sub-components of the main research, using a comprehensive and holistic approach the following sub-questions are thoroughly addressed throughout the thesis research:

1. What kind of sectors and occupations experienced labor shortage?

2. In what sectors and occupations were Tunisian migrant workers employed?
3. What was the migratory timeframe of the Tunisian migrant workers to France?
4. How was the recruitment process for new flows of Tunisian migrant workers during the pandemic?
5. What were their legal statuses?
6. How did border closures and the imposed restrictions during the pandemic impact Tunisian migrant workers' migratory journeys?
7. How did Tunisian migrant workers overcome border closures and the imposed restrictions?
8. How did the Tunisian migrant workers contribute to building systemic resilience in the French labor market?

Proposition

Drawing on Paul's (2015) argument that migrant workers play a central role in covering structural labor shortages and keeping the economy of the countries of destination functioning, this thesis assumes that Tunisian migrant workers contributed to covering labor shortages in France during the pandemic through their participation in different economic sectors experiencing labor shortages and in essential occupations. It is assumed that despite border closures and restrictions on movements imposed by the pandemic, Tunisian migrant workers were actively involved in supporting the French economy to overcome the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, whether through their involvement in the primary capital-intensive sector or the secondary labor-intensive sector.

Methodology

As the main research aim is to examine labor shortage in France during the pandemic and the extent to which Tunisian migrant workers managed to bridge the labor shortage and due to the limited literature on Tunisian migrant workers in France during the pandemic, the research

employed a mixed qualitative research approach, combining both desk research and in-depth interviews. The research relied on Desk research analyzing the existing literature and the available reports on migration to France, labor shortage, and migrant workers including Tunisian migrant workers in the French labor market, complemented with in-depth interviews with nine Tunisian migrant workers who had participated in the French labor market in times of COVID-19, specifically from 2020 to 2022. The researcher also interviewed two prominent Tunisian migration experts to enrich the thesis research with experts' insights and experiences.

Desk Research

To better explore the main research question, it is important to provide a thorough analysis of the available data on migrant workers in Europe and France during the COVID-19 period, their participation in the labor market and bridging labor shortage in times of COVID-19. Hence, relevant reports published by government agencies and international organizations such as OECD, ILO, and governmental institutions such as INSEE, Ministry of Interior-General Directorate for foreigners in France, Directorate of Research, Economic Studies, and Statistics (DARES), Pôle Emploi, and National Observatory of Migration Tunisia (ONM) were consulted and analyzed throughout the thesis research to answer the main research question and its sub-research questions. Furthermore, scholarly work that is relevant to the main purpose of this research was used to further investigate the research questions and employ a theoretical lens to explore and better analyze the findings, considering the different dimensions that this research is based on. The desk research provided the researcher with a better understanding of the main concepts, and ideas that could help in exploring the research topic and cover the different aspects that were needed to build a holistic understanding of the main research questions. The analysis of

the findings was based on the triangulation of secondary and primary data collected by the researcher.

Primary Data

To complement the existing data and the scholarly understanding of the different dimensions relevant to the research topic, in-depth interviews, specifically semi-structured interviews were relied on to disentangle different meanings and concepts related to the research topic. For the purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews were used to complement the findings of the desk research and hear the voice of the target participants in the French labor market, Tunisian migrant workers, and understand their experiences during the COVID-19 period as well as their connection to the French labor market and its needs. As described by Galletta and Project Muse (2013) “the semi-structured interview is sufficiently structured to address specific dimensions of your research question while also leaving space for study participants to offer new meanings to the topic of study.” (p.13). Thus, the semi-structured interviews were employed to comprehend the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the French labor market and how Tunisian migrant workers contributed to bridging the labor shortage and the labor market’s needs. They also served as tools to investigate how Tunisian migrant workers had been recruited and explore their migratory journeys to France as well as the conditions and terms of their employment in France. In-depth interviews helped the researcher identify key concepts, patterns, and dynamics that contribute to better explore the research topic while giving the target group of this research the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and learn about their insights on different dimensions related to the main research question. During the summer of 2023, the researcher conducted nine interviews with Tunisian migrant workers who participated specifically in the French labor market during the pandemic from 2020 to 2022. The

researcher also interviewed two Tunisian migration experts who provided valuable information to enrich the research. Due to the geographic distance, all the interviews were conducted online. The researcher obtained the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before starting the data collection and obtained the consent of the interviewees to conduct the interviews. For the sake of the participants' privacy, the researcher uses initials of participants throughout the research except for the two Tunisian migration experts who explicitly permitted the researcher to mention their names in the thesis research.

Sampling

The selection of the sample was purposive and based on convenience and snowball technique. Purposive sampling is referred to as the process of targeting research participants with specific characteristics that are relevant to the study (Turner, 2020). Convenience sampling is referred to as the selection of the target populations based on convenience of accessibility (Turner, 2020). As for the snowball technique, it is referred to as the process through which study participants introduce other potential participants (Turner, 2020)

The researcher used her own network of contacts and acquaintances to reach out to the target population. The target population included mainly, Tunisian migrant workers and Tunisian experts working on migration from Tunisia to Europe. The sample selection was a sample of convenience, which depended on the accessibility to the participants. The researcher started contacting participants from her own network including Tunisian migrant workers in France in early June 2022 and used the snowball technique to reach out to other members of the target population to gain more in-depth information from a variety of sources and ensure the credibility of the provided information. The age of participants ranged from the age of 18 to above 60. The below table highlights the occupations of the participants.

Tunisian Migrant Workers' Profiles

Interviewees	Gender	Age	Year of Migration	Occupation/Sector
Interviewee 1: A. W	M	30	2018	Crop Picker/ Packaging Agriculture
Interviewee 2: H. J	M	29	2014	Worker Public Works
Interviewee 3: S. H	F	35	2019	Receptionist/Bakery Manager Hospitality and Catering
Interviewee 4: A. L	F	31	2020	Civil Engineer Public Works
Interviewee 5: Y. Z	M	30	2018	Engineer Manufacturing Industry
Interviewee 6: R. Z	M	28	2014	Energy Trader Energy Supply Sector
Interviewee 7: Y. M	M	25	2019	Painter and Decorator/ Delivery Construction/ Food Distribution
Interviewee 8: R. M	F	28	2017	Clinical Researcher Health Sector
Interviewee 9: A. B	F	27	2017	Research Engineer Health Sector

Tunisian Migration Experts

Interviewee	Occupation
Interviewee 1: Ali Belhaj	Tunisian Migration Expert
Interviewee 2: Hassen Boubakri	Tunisian Migration Expert

Limitations

Considering that the research employed in-depth interviews in addition to the desk research, the researcher faced several limitations including the inability of the researcher to travel to France to conduct the interview in-person due to the geographic distance and also due to financial challenges. Another limitation is that during the initial proposal of this research, the researcher envisioned interviewing a number of Tunisian migrant workers who specifically migrated to France during the pandemic, but unfortunately, due to the limited research timeframe, the researcher was unable to find this target population to interview. So, in order to enrich the research, the researcher relied solely on secondary data.

Furthermore, the pool of Tunisian migrant workers is very diverse. In this research, the researcher tried to hear about the experiences of different categories of Tunisian migrant workers who participated in the French labor market during the research period from 2020 to 2022. The researcher ensured the involvement of highly skilled workers, low-skilled workers, regular and irregular workers who worked in the French labor market during the pandemic. However, the researcher was not able to interview more than nine Tunisian migrant workers which cannot be representative of the pool of the Tunisian migrant workers. In order to overcome this limitation, the researcher tried to shed the light on the experiences of different categories of Tunisian migrant workers throughout the research using both a combination of real stories, told by the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers and secondary data, available online to show other dimensions that the interviews were not able to cover.

Conclusion: Structure of the Thesis

The rest of the thesis is divided into three main chapters. Chapter 2 “*Features of Tunisian Emigration to Europe Over the Years*” gives an overview of the evolution of Tunisian emigration to Europe, specifically France, the drivers of migration for Tunisians, the development of the Tunisian emigration infrastructure and the different profiles of Tunisian migrant workers residing in Europe and France. Chapter 3 “*A Segmented Labor Market, COVID-19, and Labor Shortage in France*” provides an in-depth understanding of the issue of labor shortage in France, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the French labor market and the segmented nature of the labor market that explains the reliance on migrant workers in France. Then, Chapter 4 “*Foreign Labor in the French Labor Market in times of COVID-19: Experiences of Tunisian Migrant Workers*” addresses the recruitment of foreign labor in France before and during the pandemic, focusing on the different measures that France introduced to ensure meeting labor demand, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Tunisian migrant workers in the French labor market, and the contribution of Tunisian migrant workers in building systemic resilience in France. Lastly, the conclusion chapter highlights some key findings from the thesis and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Features of Tunisian Emigration to Europe Over the Years

Introduction

Migration from Tunisia to Europe has always been characterized by labor migration. According to HIMS (2021), in general, the main purposes of emigration among the actual Tunisian migrants are employment (45.0%), followed by family reunification (32.0%) and education (11.5%). It is worth noting that the family reunification path is usually chosen by some Tunisians to reunite with migrant workers residing abroad. The study also shows that the same purposes are also reported by the actual Tunisian migrants who are residing in the three traditional European destination countries for Tunisians: France, Italy, and Germany. For this pool of Tunisian migrants, searching for work opportunities (44.1%), family reunification and marriage (34.0%) as well as education and training (11.5%) were highlighted as the main reasons behind their migration (HIMS, 2021). It is important to highlight that although emigration for education is not considered as a feature of labor emigration, it is usually the main channel that several Tunisian migrants take to find work opportunities in the countries of destination in the future. In fact, several Tunisian students find job opportunities after the completion of their studies and end up not leaving the countries of destination. Migration from Tunisia to Europe has taken different shapes and forms over time, but labor migration has always been its prominent feature. This chapter provides an overview of the Tunisian emigration to Europe, including France, over time and how it has developed throughout the years.

Tunisian Emigration to Europe Overtime

Dynamics of the Tunisian emigration to Europe, specifically France have evolved over the years and have undergone different changes with regards to the profiles of migrants, their

socio-economic characteristics and volume of migration flows. Tunisian emigration to Europe is characterized by four main waves that reflect the evolution of the Tunisian-European migration system, the shift in migration drivers, and the diversification of destination countries. Pouessel (2017) identifies four important periods of emigration from Tunisia to Europe. The first period was from the 1950s to early 1960s, the second period from early 1960s to mid-1970s, the third period from mid-1970s to early 1980s, and the fourth period from mid-1980s to the 2000s. According to the author, the first period from the 1950s to early 1960s was mainly directed to Europe to meet the demand of the European labor market. Hence, during this period, the increased labor demand in Europe was the key driver behind the different migration journeys that took place. This period was also characterized by the supply of the Tunisian low-skilled labor to cover the needs for the reconstruction of Europe. As highlighted by Natter (2015), during this period, Tunisian emigration to Europe was dominated by men and regulated through private agreements with employers.

The second period took place from early 1960s to mid-1970s during which the first labor bilateral agreements were signed by Tunisia and European countries resulting in an increase in labor mobility. Examples of labor bilateral agreements include the 1963 bilateral agreement between Tunisia and France, the bilateral agreement with Germany in 1965 and with the Netherlands and other European states at a later stage (De Bel-Air, 2016). This period also marks the emergence of a new destination for Tunisian migrant workers. In the 1970s, Libya became another important destination for Tunisians because of its growing petroleum industry and the available work opportunities (OECD, 2018). It was estimated that around 25.000 Tunisians emigrated annually to Europe, specifically to France during this period (Natter, 2015). Most of

the Tunisian migrant workers emigrated to work in low-skilled occupations in construction, industry, and agriculture (Natter, 2015).

The third period took place from mid-1970s to early 1980s and was dominated by migration for family reunification purposes. Mainly women and children, moved to Europe during this period to reunite with their family members (Pouessel, 2017). The domination of family reunification migration stems from the restrictions that were put by the European countries on labor migration. It is worth reiterating that during this period, specifically in 1974, the Guest Worker program in Europe came to an end (Castles, 1986). Moreover, with the 1973 oil crisis, temporary work arrangements were stopped with the hope of pushing migrants including Tunisians to return to their countries of origin. Nevertheless, these actions to stop migration led to the development of new types of migration, specifically irregular migration (De Bel-Air, 2016). Furthermore, this period was not only characterized by the domination of family reunification as a pathway of Tunisian emigration and the development of irregular migration, but it was also characterized by the emergence of new destinations for Tunisians as new destinations started dominating the Tunisian migration flows. According to Pouessel (2017), the period between mid-1970 and early 1980s marked a shift in the Tunisian migration system. In the 1970s, political tensions emerged between Tunisia and Libya which impacted the flow of Tunisian migrants to Libya and led to the return of a number of Tunisian migrants (Pouessel, 2017). This situation led to the emergence of a new type of Tunisian emigration that was directed to the Gulf states and new European countries such as Italy (Pouessel, 2017). It is worth noting that during this period kinship ties and networks played an important role in facilitating the migratory journeys for Tunisian migrants (De Bel-Air, 2016). This was confirmed by the Tunisian Migration Expert, Hassen Boubakri who stressed the crucial role of the kinship ties in

the continuation of emigration from Tunisia before the introduction of the visa regimes (Hassen Boubakri, Personal Interview, September 20, 2023)

Nevertheless, despite the emergence of new destination countries during the third migration wave period, Europe remained the dominant destination for Tunisian migrants, even after the introduction of visa regimes and tightening of the border controls in the 1980s. According to Natter (2015), there are three main factors that contributed to the maintenance of the Tunisian-European migration system during this period. These factors include high unemployment rate in Tunisia and the demand for labor in Europe which helped in the continuation of migration, the use of different channels for emigration such as family reunification and education as well as through overstaying the visas. Further, tightening of the border policies pushed several Tunisian migrant workers to settle in Europe including France and abandon their circular movement that was characterized by its seasonality (Natter, 2015). In fact, this was highlighted by the Tunisian migration expert, Hassen Boubakri, in an interview with *Orient XXI* in 2022. In the interview, Boubakri highlighted that during this period the European countries stopped recruitment and tended to reduce the number of low-skilled migrants, however, Tunisians found new channels to migrate through family and also through education.

Lastly, the fourth period was from the mid-1980s to the 2000s. During this period, specifically the 1980s, Italy became another important destination that attracted Tunisian workers due to several reasons including its geographical proximity and its large informal economy (De Bel-Air, 2016). This period was also characterized by the changes in the profiles of Tunisian migrant workers. From the mid-1980s to the 2000s, the education levels of Tunisian migrant workers and the number of highly skilled Tunisian emigrants started to increase (OECD, 2018). Up until the 1990s, the majority of Tunisian migrants were either family members or low-

skilled migrant workers (OECD, 2018). However, this has changed over time, an increasing number of Tunisians with high education degrees are emigrating to seek better economic opportunities. In general, the share of the current Tunisian migrants abroad with higher levels of education tends to increase, from 17.3% among those who departed before 2000, to 47.4% for those who departed after 2010 (HIMS, 2021). However, according to the 2018 OECD study, 47% of the Tunisian migrants in OECD countries have educational levels equal or inferior to low secondary. It also highlights that this percentage tends to be higher in France where 45% of Tunisian migrants have lower levels of education (OECD, 2018). In fact, this result could be explained by the fact that Tunisian migration to France is older in time and goes back to different periods before the 2000s which were dominated by Tunisian migration flows, characterized by lower levels of education. Furthermore, based on this data, it is possible to infer that despite the changing socio-economic characteristics of the Tunisian migrants and their levels of education, Europe and France still attract a high proportion of Tunisian migrants with low education levels and low skills.

Primary Drivers of Migration: Perspectives from the Country of Origin, Tunisia

Although the availability of labor in France appears to be the main driver behind the continuation of the Tunisian French migration system, there are several factors in the country of origin, Tunisia, that keep pushing Tunisians to make the decision to leave. The Push and Pull factors play important roles in influencing the migration decisions of several Tunisians. In Herbert's article (2022) "*Losing Hope: Why Tunisians are leading the surge in irregular migration to Europe*", a Tunisian said, "If you're under the age of 40, you're trying to leave." This invites us to question the reasons behind the aspiration of several Tunisians to leave Tunisia hoping to find better opportunities in Europe including France. HIMS (2021) stresses the

prevalence of a general desire for emigration among Tunisians. The survey also emphasizes that age and education strongly influence Tunisians' migration decisions. According to HIMS (2021), young Tunisians between the age of 15 and 29 are more likely to express higher intention to leave the country (39.5%) while older Tunisians, 60 and above, are likely to have lower intentions to migrate (2.2%). Furthermore, the survey (2021) highlights that Tunisians with higher education and professional levels tend to have higher intentions to migrate. Intention to migrate remains high among Tunisian youth. The results are not surprising considering the deteriorating situation of the Tunisian economy and lack of opportunities for self-realization among youth. According to the recent statistics by the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics (INS), the unemployment rate across Tunisia reached 15.6% in mid-2023. As for unemployment among Tunisian youth, aged 15 to 24 years old, it is estimated to be 38.1% (INS, 2023). Further, HIMS highlights that unemployment is an important factor in making the decision to leave the country. 35.8% of the unemployed Tunisians expressed their intention to migrate (HIMS, 2021). This proportion is higher among men (48.5%) in comparison to women (22.9%) (HIMS, 2021). The prevalence of the desire for emigration among Tunisian youth reflects the general perception of migration as an avenue to better lives and improve the socio-economic situations. It is worth noting that when an individual decides to emigrate, conditions at home influence their decisions and their aspirations to emigrate. Herbert (2022) argues that "a by-product of the country's economic troubles is the growing unemployment and underemployment, especially among the youth and well-educated Tunisians." (p.15). In fact, the deteriorating economic conditions, the rise in unemployment and underemployment have been the driving forces behind several Tunisians emigrating to France and other European countries to improve their living conditions. Nevertheless, there are other factors that influence the Tunisian emigration such as the restrictive

political sphere and the growing frustrations as well as the positive perception of what seems to be known. The perception of Europe as a better place in comparison to Tunisia has pushed several Tunisians to consider emigration or even decide to emigrate. As highlighted by Maha Yomn Sbaa (2023), Tunisian emigration to Europe is highly influenced by potential Tunisian emigrants' perception of Europe as "prosperous, offering economic opportunities, job security, social benefits, decent working conditions, and opportunities for socio-economic improvements" (p.5). In fact, the perception of what Europe including France can offer to the Tunisian migrants could highly influence aspirations and increase the number of potential Tunisian emigrants. Hence, the decision to embark on migration journeys is never random but it takes into consideration different factors including the personal factors such as the improvement of the economic conditions and the perception of a better life in the countries of destination as well as the available opportunities in the countries of destination. The Push-Pull model explains this aspect as it assumes that there are several factors that push migrants to emigrate from their countries of origin and several factors that attract migrants to the countries of destination (Castles et al., 2014). According to Castles et al. (2014), the push factors include lack of economic opportunities in the countries of origin and political repression. As for the pull factors, they include the demand for labor and the availability of economic opportunities in the countries of destination.

Hence, a complexity of factors drives the Tunisian emigration to different destination countries including Europe and France. However, this emigration has been facilitated by an established regular emigration infrastructure that has organized and managed Tunisian emigration to different countries of destination including Europe and France over the years. The following section provides an overview of this regular emigration infrastructure.

Tunisian Regular Labor Emigration Infrastructure

As Tunisian emigration to Europe and other destination countries has evolved over time, Tunisia has tended to strengthen its emigration legal infrastructure. Emigration from Tunisia has evolved to become a policy initiative to support Tunisia's economy either through encouraging emigrants to remit back or simply by easing the pressure on the labor market. Over the years, Tunisia had set up different channels to ensure regular migration from the country. In 1967, Tunisia established the Office for Vocational Training and Employment ('Office de la Formation Professionnelle et de l'Emploi') (De Bel-Air, 2016). In 1972, the Tunisian government established the Tunisian Agency for Technical Cooperation (ATCT) to ensure technical cooperation with receiving countries including France and oil-producing states such as Libya and the Gulf countries (De Bel-Air, 2016). The agency operates under the Ministry of Development Investment and International Cooperation. In 1990, Tunisia created the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment with the aim of promoting employment in Tunisia. The Ministry has different functions including the promotion of employment for Tunisians abroad (Bel-Air, 2016). Furthermore, under the Ministry, there is an important agency which supports Tunisia's efforts to employ Tunisians abroad. This agency is called ANETI, previously called OFPE (De Bel Aire, 2026). ANETI works in different external labor markets with a focus on the Tunisian labor market. It seeks to identify employment opportunities abroad for Tunisians with different skills, and sign agreements with migration destinations to facilitate Tunisians' migration flight. It has international offices to support international placements in response to labor needs and vacancies available in different countries including France (ETF, 2021). It is important to highlight that to secure work opportunities for Tunisians abroad, the work of both agencies, ATCT and ANETI,

relies heavily on the identification of the external labor demand and matching it with Tunisian workers who want to migrate.

In addition to the mentioned agencies supporting the facilitation and management of Tunisian migration, several institutions were established to support Tunisian migrants abroad, but to also ensure the maintenance of ties with Tunisia. For instance, the office of Tunisians Abroad was created in 1988 and has been playing an important role in raising awareness of Tunisians residing abroad and strengthening Tunisian migrants' ties with their homeland through the implementation of several cultural and social activities (Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Social Affairs, n.d.). Additionally, to ensure the inclusion of Tunisians' voices abroad, the Tunisian government created the National Council of Tunisians abroad in 2016 to serve as an advisory body to provide feedback on national policies concerning the situation of Tunisians abroad (Republic of Tunisia Ministry of Social Affairs, n.d.). Other recent crucial public institutions were also created to solidify Tunisia's efforts in the migration field among them is the National Observatory of Migration, established in March 2014. The Observatory seeks to bridge data gaps and strengthen the national capacities in data collection, analysis of migration trends and dissemination of important migration related data (Republic of Tunisia, Ministry of Social Affairs, n.d.)

It is worth noting that despite Tunisia's efforts to strengthen Tunisian migration legal infrastructure throughout the years, Tunisian labor emigration does not only rely on this available infrastructure but there are other avenues that Tunisians have relied on over the years. These avenues include regular and irregular channels. According to Ali Belhaj, the Tunisian migration expert "a study in 2019 confirmed that the number of Tunisians who find jobs through the internet exceeds the number of those who passed through the official channels." (Personal

Interview, August 11, 2023). It is important to highlight that channels of emigration and securing job opportunities for Tunisian migrants have expanded throughout the years to encompass other regular channels such as the internet and in some cases irregular channels through which Tunisian migrants can emigrate and find informal work opportunities. It is important to note that although the internet seems to play a vital role in securing job opportunities for some migrants, it does not necessarily lead to regular migration. Some migrants might find job opportunities through the internet but take the irregular migration routes to reach their destination due to several factors including strict border regimes and financial challenges.

Available Irregular Emigration Infrastructure

With the introduction of the visa regimes in the 1980s and the increasing of border controls across the European states since the 1990s, irregular migration became a growing avenue through which several Tunisians take the risky migratory journeys to Europe. In the context of Tunisia irregular migration is no longer limited to Tunisians with low education levels who face higher barriers to enter Europe due to the selective European immigration infrastructure, but it has also been observed in the recent years among a growing number of Tunisians with high educational levels who take the irregular migration routes to seek better opportunities in what's perceived as the "prosperous" Europe. Over the years, Tunisians with advanced education background or even those who have full-time employment, have started seeking the irregular emigration avenues to better their lives outside of Tunisia (Herbert, 2022). Between January 2020 and mid-December 2021, Italy disembarked 28 124 Tunisians and around 6 000 foreign migrants who left from Tunisia (Herbet, 2022). When addressing irregular emigration from Tunisia, Italy is usually reported as the country of destination due to the geographic proximity. For instance, the Sicilian Island is only about 150 kilometres away from

Tunisia (Africanews, 2023). However, Italy is not often the final destination for Tunisians. Tunisians and other emigrants from Tunisia may try to make their own ways to other European countries such as France. Like the regular emigration channels, it appears that the available irregular emigration channels from Tunisia have developed over the years. According to Herbert (2022), irregular emigration channels from Tunisia have evolved throughout the years. Irregular migration has its own infrastructure that manages and regulates the movement of Tunisians and foreign migrants who emigrate from Tunisia. The key irregular emigration infrastructures that have facilitated the emigration of several Tunisian and foreign migrants to Europe include social networks in general, the smuggling networks and also the social media platforms that facilitate the connection between the different actors involved in the irregular emigration journeys. Under the irregular emigration infrastructure, the internet and social media play an important role in facilitating the communication among prospective migrants or between migrants and smugglers as well as the organization of the irregular emigration journeys. Other important aspects of the irregular emigration infrastructure in Tunisia are the human-smuggling networks. In Tunisia, these networks are small and localized (Herbert,2022), which make them controlled among a certain circle. Moreover, self-smuggling has become another important feature of the Tunisian irregular emigration. Over the recent years, irregular emigration from Tunisia has become relying on self-smuggling through which a group of potential migrants collect their own money and lead their own journeys to Europe without smugglers (Herbert, 2022). Throughout the years, Tunisia emigration to Europe and France has evolved in terms of the emigration infrastructure and the characteristics of the Tunisian migrant workers. As such, it is important to understand how this has been reflected in our contemporary world. The following section provides an

overview of the profiles of current Tunisian migrants in Europe and France as well as their geographic distribution.

Tunisian Immigrants in Europe and France

Tunisian migrants' profiles have changed overtime, but the main intentions and destination have remained the same. Labor migration remains the predominant type that characterizes the Tunisian emigration, and at the same time Europe has remained the main destination for Tunisians throughout the years. 83,3% of the actual Tunisian migrants abroad reside in Europe, of which 52.5% reside in France (HIMS, 2021). The concentration of the majority of the Tunisian immigrants in France could be explained by a combination of historical ties, geographic proximity, and characteristics of Tunisian migrants. According to the Tunisian migration expert, Ali Belhaj, in addition to these factors, the continuation of labor migration from Tunisia to France could be explained by France's knowledge about "the Tunisian worker, their work, their composition, and their mastership of the French language." (Personal Interview, August 11, 2023).

Furthermore, according to HIMS (2021), employment was the main reason behind Tunisians' emigration (45.0%) followed by family reunification (32.0%) and education (11.5%). When it comes to employment it seems that a significant percentage of Tunisian men are likely to migrate to work (58.6%) in comparison to 15.5% of Tunisian women (HIMS, 2021). Despite this argument, it is important not to overlook the Tunisian female emigration for work. Some of them might leave for other reasons including education, but their ultimate objective is often to work abroad after completion of their studies. The majority of Tunisian emigrants choose Europe, specifically France as their primary destination. This is confirmed by the stock of Tunisian migrants who live in Europe and France. Although numbers might change over the

years, the primary destination for Tunisians remains Europe, specifically France. In 2018, OECD released a study titled “*Talents à L’Étranger; Une Revue des Émigrés Tunisiens*” [*Talents Abroad; A Review of Tunisian Emigrants*], confirming the same argument. Between 2015 and 2016, the majority of Tunisian migrants live in Europe (90%), of which 61% live in France (OECD, 2018). Despite the slight decrease in Tunisian migrants’ stock living in Europe and France from 2015 to 2021, the year HIMS was published, it is with no doubt that France still receives the majority of Tunisian migrant workers. The slight difference between the two sources could be explained by the return of Tunisian migrant workers who reached retirement or the attraction of some Tunisian migrants to other destination countries such as the United States of America and Canada. It is worth noting that in addition to the concentration of the majority of Tunisians in France, they are also concentrated in certain regions inside France. France is currently divided into 13 regions, three regions of its regions are known for hosting a significant number of Tunisian migrant workers (OECD, 2018). According to the 2018 OECD study, Tunisian immigrants are concentrated in three main regions in France. These regions include Île de-France, Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur, and Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes. Furthermore, the study shows that Île-de-France region has 145.000 Tunisian immigrants. In other words, 37 % of Tunisian immigrants in France reside in the region (OECD, 2018). In Île-de-France, most of Tunisian immigrants are concentrated in Paris, Val-de-Marne, and Seine-Saint-Denis. Paris alone hosts 40.000 Tunisian immigrants (OECD, 2018). However, what are the profiles of these Tunisian immigrants who are concentrated in France, in particular in the Île-de-France region?

According to the 2018 OECD study, data from 2015/2016 shows that 45% of Tunisian immigrants in France have low education levels. However, this is not reflected in Canada and the United States as the share of Tunisian immigration with higher education is higher. The study

also links the prevalence of the low education levels among a significant number of Tunisian immigrants in countries like France to the fact that in certain European countries, where the Tunisian diaspora has been residing for many years and where family reunification was the feature that followed the migration of low-skilled labor, the number of Tunisian immigrants with low education levels is high (OECD, 2018). However, over the years this has changed, and France started attracting several highly skilled Tunisians with higher educational levels. In fact, this was reflected in the development of France's policies over the years. What is also interesting in the composition of Tunisia immigrants in Europe including France is the increase in the number of Tunisian female immigrants who have higher educational levels. According to the 2018 OECD study, between 2000/01 and 2015/16, the number of the Tunisian female migrants had doubled. The recent flows of Tunisian migrants also show that more highly skilled Tunisian migrants are leaving Tunisia to reach their destination countries including France. According to HIMS (2021), between 2015 and 2020, 39.000 Tunisian engineers and 3.300 Tunisian doctors left the country to work abroad. The 2018 OECD study indicates that 40% of the Tunisian migrant workers in France are highly qualified and they are represented in certain professions in the OECD countries. According to the findings, Tunisian migrant workers are more represented in the medical and educational sector. Data from 2015/16 outlines that around 2000 Tunisian nurses and 4000 Tunisian doctors exercise their professions in OECD countries including France (OECD, 2018).

The composition of Tunisian migrants in Europe and France reflects the diversification of Tunisian migrant workers' profiles and also the diversification of their skills. It is worth mentioning that despite the increase in the number of Tunisian migrants with higher educational levels, other categories of Tunisians including the low-skilled Tunisian migrant workers with

low-education backgrounds continue to actively participate in the European and the French labor market. HIMS (2021) highlights that Tunisian migrant workers abroad are mainly concentrated in sectors of construction and public works (17%), the hospitality and catering industry (13,7%), followed by trade (8.7%), manufacturing industry (8,1%) and agriculture and fishing (7,0%). (p.29). This was also confirmed in the 2018 OECD study which found that Tunisian immigrants in the OECD countries are highly represented in construction, agriculture, accommodation, and catering activities, as well as in administrative and service activities.

Conclusion

Despite the changing profiles and socio-economic characteristics of Tunisian emigrants as well as the evolution of Tunisian emigration avenues to Europe, namely France, the need for labor and the availability of work opportunities seem to be the main drivers behind the initiation and the continuation of emigration to Europe. It is true that the purposes of emigration might include family reunification and education, but this cannot overshadow that the acceptance of Tunisian migrant workers and other foreign migrant workers serves the interests of France and other European countries. Emigration from Tunisia to Europe and France in the early 1950s was initiated to meet the demand of labor to reconstruct the European nations, however, although the profiles of Tunisian migrants and the purposes of emigration have changed over time, labor migration still dominates emigration from Tunisia to Europe. Over the years, the need for foreign labor, including Tunisian labor in France regardless of their skills proved to be the driving forces behind the signature of labor and social protection agreements with Tunisia and the implementation of several projects by the EU to ensure the supply of the “right” labor. However, it is important to highlight that there has always been a contradiction in European policies. Their migration policies mainly focus on choosing specific categories to enter the “fortress” Europe

despite the local labor market's need for different categories of migrant workers including the low-skilled and highly skilled.

Nevertheless, the dominant policies of the European countries to attract the highly skilled migrant workers overshadowed the reality that was revealed by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following chapter focuses on the impact of the pandemic on labor shortage in France, and the role of foreign migrant workers including Tunisians in bridging the labor shortage.

Chapter 3: A Segmented Labor Market, COVID-19, and Labor Shortage in France

Introduction

Foreign workers are known to assuage structural bottlenecks in specific economic sectors or regions. Be it food processing, agriculture, hospitality and catering, social care work, medical professions, financial services, engineering, or information technology, migrant workers seem to play an important role in keeping entire economic sectors productive and competitive in European national economies. (Paul, 2015, p.1)

The existing literature addressing migrant workers in Europe outlines the vital role that migrant worker played in the functioning of the European economies during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Anderson and Ruhs (2010) argue:

Employer demand for migrant workers has become a key feature of labor markets in high income countries. Employers' calls for more migrant workers are typically expressed in terms of 'labor and skills needs' that cannot be met from within the domestic labor force. (p.15)

The need for migrant workers to keep high-income countries' economies functioning is not recent but rather it is a firmly established reality that has existed for years. The beginning of migration from the Global South to European countries including France, the focus of this research, goes back to post Second World War as migrant workers were needed for the reconstruction of the European countries. Hence, international mobility of labor from countries like Tunisia and other North African countries is neither recent nor new. International mobility has existed for years, but it has taken different forms and shapes depending on different factors including the imposition of admission restrictions such as visa for North African migrant

workers in the 1980s and the changing policies in the European countries to attract certain desired categories of migrants. When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged around the globe and in Europe in 2019-2020, international mobility was challenged and at the same time the supply of the needed labor to Europe became problematic as labor depends on the movement of laborers from outside the EU and access to Europe. The COVID-19 outbreak reignited discussions on the vital role of migrant workers in the European economies and unveiled different weaknesses in the economies of European countries including France. During the pandemic, migrant workers proved to be crucial for the survival of the European economies and the provision of the basic services. COVID-19 unveiled two important dimensions that have been characterizing the European labor market, specifically the French labor. The first dimension is labor shortage and international labor mobility. The second dimension is the role that migrant workers play in times of crisis.

Although the issue of labor shortage resurfaced during the pandemic, it is worth mentioning that the issue did not emerge with the COVID-19 pandemic, but rather it was deepened during the pandemic period as countries like France were rushing to find the needed labor to fill certain crucial occupations such as personal care and health related jobs. Hence, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic invites everyone including officials and policymakers who have regarded migrants as a threat, to reconsider their approaches as the context of the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled another reality. Migrant workers are crucial to the economies of the receiving countries, and they can be relied on in times of crisis. France, the focus of this research, is one of European countries that has disregarded this reality for years and it has only focused on attracting the desired category of migrant workers, the highly skilled, while disregarding the significant contribution of all categories of migrant workers to the growth and

development of its economy. European countries including France have always been struggling with the issue of labor shortage that requires the supply of foreign labor with different skills (highly, medium, low). However, despite their need to all categories of migrant workers, they have been welcoming the desired category while limiting access to the undesired category.

Ali Belhaj, the Tunisian Migrant Expert, says “all the people know that Europe still has a need for foreign labor. However, at the same time everyone knows that Europe is toughening the migration [process] of foreign labor.” (Personal Interview, August 11, 2023). In fact, COVID-19 emerged and revealed this contradiction. This was clearly reflected in the case of France during the pandemic.

As such, to understand the reasons behind the prevalence of this contradiction, it is important to examine France’s policies towards the attraction of a specific category of migrants, the issue of labor shortage in France, in particular during the pandemic, and the segmented nature of the French labor market.

Attracting the “Most” Talented

European countries including France have been focusing on attracting certain categories of migrant workers including migrants from North African countries. Since the late 1990s, policies in the EU have been focusing on attracting highly skilled migrant workers who are perceived as vital to the growth of their economies. This process is best to be described as what Nicolas Sarkozy called “*Immigration Choisie*”, in other words, the selected immigration. In 2003, Sarkozy’s selected immigration framework came to strengthen French’s efforts towards attracting more skilled foreign workers (Paul, 2015). The selected immigration of certain categories of foreign workers was framed as a rigorous approach to ensure the growth of the French economy by accepting the needed category of migrants that respond to the economy’s

needs (Paul, 2015). To attract the needed category of the highly skilled foreign workers from different countries including Tunisian and other North African migrant workers, France has established a system of privileges to attract the most “talented” and highly skilled migrant workers. For instance, the Chèvenement Law exempts scientists who conduct their research in French institutions from the Labor Market Test (RLMT) which is needed to prove that there was no suitable native available to fill the job (Devitt, 2012). In 2006, France introduced the renewable three-year permit for long professional stays (Devitt, 2012). Moreover, foreign graduates who complete their studies in France are allowed to stay in France after the completion of their studies to search for a job under the protection of the Temporary Resident Permit (APS) (Campus France, n.d.). After receiving the APS and finding jobs, foreign graduates can obtain a “paid employee” permit (Paul, 2015). Other important professional pathways that appear to be attractive for highly qualified and skilled migrant workers are the EU blue Card and the Talent-Passport residence permits. The EU Blue Card is regulated by the Directive (EU) 2021/1883. It targets non-EU nationals who are highly qualified to facilitate their entry and residence across the European Union (EUR-Lex, 2023). Across the EU, 29.000 highly skilled foreign workers obtained the EU Blue Card in 2021 (Eurostat, 2022). As for the Talent-Passport residence permit, the permit was introduced in March 2016, and it is valid for four years to attract highly qualified foreign migrant workers. It has certain eligibility criteria to ensure that the most highly skilled category applies for it. One of the requirements for qualified workers is that they have an employment contract of more than three months that provides annual gross earnings equal to or greater than €41,933 (Welcome to France, 2023). In France, the period from 2021-2022 marked a significant increase in the number of highly skilled workers obtaining the Talent-Passport residence permits for the first time (97.6%) (General Directorate for Foreigners in France, 2023).

In 2021, 3521 permits were issued and in 2022, this number almost doubled (6963) (General Directorate for Foreigners in France, 2023).

Despite France's immigration approach that focuses on attracting the highly skilled categories, its policy disregards the reality that the French labor market does not only rely on highly skilled migrant workers including doctors and engineers, but it also relies on low-skilled migrant workers. In fact, France still accepts seasonal migrant workers who are often low-skilled. The 2020 study "*Attracting and Protecting Seasonal Workers from third countries in France*", published by the European Migration Network (EMN), highlights that more than a quarter of seasonal workers in France work in agriculture and almost half of them work in tourism as well as catering, accommodation, and leisure. However, there is a discrepancy between the privileges provided to attract the highly skilled migrant workers and what is provided for seasonal migrant workers. For seasonal migrant workers, their migration timeframe matters. It has to be short and controlled. France signed different agreements to attract seasonal migrant workers from different countries. For example, France concluded the Franco-Tunisian framework agreement of 28 April 2008 on the concerted management of migration and development and its protocol on the concerted management of migration (EMN France, 2020). However, this agreement places restrictions on seasonal migrant workers' residence periods. Tunisian seasonal migrant workers and the same case for non-Tunisian seasonal migrant workers from outside the EU are allowed to obtain residence permit valid for three years but they have to maintain a place of residence outside the receiving country, meanwhile their work activity cannot exceed six months (EMN France, 2020). According to data from the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII) (2021), the office receives almost 10,000 Moroccan and Tunisian seasonal migrant workers each year to support with the required administrative

procedures for emigration to France. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the difference in treatment between highly skilled and low-skilled migrant workers, stems from France's approach to attract a specific category of migrant workers, the category of the highly skilled. However, the reality in the European and the French labor market confirms France's need for different categories of migrant workers with different skills and qualifications. In fact, this had been unveiled with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in France in 2020. As expressed by the Tunisian Migration Expert, Ali Belhaj:

The European countries started rushing to receive more [foreign] labor, specifically France, Italy, and Germany. For France, COVID emerged and revealed the reality, highlighting the shortage in specific sectors. Until today they haven't overcome it. (Personal Interview, August 11, 2023)

COVID-19 and Labor shortage

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the issue of labor shortage which France has been struggling with for years. The pandemic heavily impacted the French economy. The loss of economic activity was estimated to be 28% during the first period of lockdown in April 2020 (Cahuc, 2022). Some sectors experienced closure due to the lockdowns and imposition of movement restrictions to contain the spread of the pandemic. The lockdowns resulted in the shutdown of different places including restaurants and schools (Cahuc, 2022). They also had a heavy impact on the activities of accommodation, restaurants, transport as well as sports and leisure activities which resulted in sharp decline in tourism in 2020 and continued slightly in 2021 (INSEE, 2023).

For sectors such as hospitality and tourism which experienced a sharp decline in their activities as a result of the pandemic outbreak, the issue of labor shortage was not experienced

immediately, but it was heavily felt when the economic activities resumed. On the other hand, for other sectors, mainly the essential sectors which continued to operate even during the lockdowns, labor shortage posed a significant challenge. Different measures were taken to facilitate the movement of essential workers to meet labor demand in essential sectors. For instance, in 2020, the EU introduced the guidelines concerning the exercise of the free movement of workers which required the EU member states to allow workers in certain occupations to enter other EU host member states including France (2020/C 102 I/03). These workers included health professionals, personal care workers, scientists, and food production operators (2020/C 102 I/03). However, despite the facilitation of the essential workers' movement inside the EU, most essential sectors in France continued to struggle with acute labor shortage due to the high labor demand. Health and agriculture were among the most affected sectors. For the health sector, the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled the weaknesses of the French health system which had been characterized by lack of coordination and poor working conditions for health professionals in hospitals and nursing facilities (Or et al., 2021). During the pandemic, French hospitals received a high number of COVID-19 patients who needed special care and the presence of adequate numbers of health professionals to support. Similarly, the COVID-19 had a heavy impact on the agriculture sector which suffered from lack of workers to save the harvests due to border closures and restrictions on movement. According to data provided by OFII (2021), the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and border closures heavily impacted the agriculture sector and the harvesting of certain crops such as clementine as the supply of seasonal labor from Tunisia and Morocco was challenged.

Hence, the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was experienced in several sectors in France; some sectors experienced partial or complete loss of activities while others

experienced the unavailability of the needed labor to continue the delivery of essential services during the pandemic. Furthermore, the emergence of the pandemic led to the creation of labor market tension. The experienced labor market tension in France was a result of two factors: (1) the unavailability of labor for certain occupations and (2) the mismatch between employers' needs for certain occupations and the available profiles. The French labor market tension was clearly manifested during and following the pandemic period 2020-2022. In the period from 2020-2022 during which the pandemic was still perceived as a threat to different countries, France was struggling to save its economy; the labor market tension and securing the "right" number and profiles of workers were considered as great challenges to the French economy. However, the labor market tension was experienced immediately in certain sectors following the emergence of the pandemic, it was only experienced at a later stage for other sectors when their economic activities resumed. According to the 2020 DARES study "*Les Tensions sur le Marché du Travail en 2020*" [Tensions on the Labor market in 2020], the labor market tension in France decreased in occupations like transport, hotels, restaurants, and industry while it increased in other jobs such as health occupations. In fact, this is expected, as highlighted above, the emergence of the pandemic led to the implementation of lockdowns and the closure of restaurants and other tourism-related outlets which halted their economic activities. The study also confirms that the labor market tension which was experienced in France during the pandemic stemmed from two factors depending on the occupations. For some jobs including care assistance and nurses, tensions emerged from labor shortage. For other jobs such as cooks, the tension stemmed from the mismatch between the needs of the employers and the profiles of the applicants (DARES, 2020). For instance, for health occupations, there were difficulties

recruiting the needed labor and the difference between the number of applicants and job offers was significant (DARES, 2020).

Another report published by DARES in 2021 highlights that labor market tension in certain jobs rose in 2021 and reached its highest since 2011. This rise was observed in occupations like nurses and in sectors such as construction, IT, and telecommunications. According to the study, in total, 7 occupations out of 10 experienced strong or very strong tension in 2021. Between 2020 and 2021, the labor market tension was experienced specifically in certain occupations such as mechanical or electrical-electronic technicians, fitters, skilled metal removal workers, pipefitters, and other low-skilled occupations. For construction, the tension was experienced particularly, in the jobs of designers, technicians, and construction executives (DARES, 2021). Additionally, the study shows that the tension was experienced in 2021 in these following specific sectors and occupations:

- Agricultural and service sector;
- IT and telecommunications: insurance executives, logistics managers, transport administrative agents, trainers.
- Nurses and caregivers;
- Transport: truck drivers and public transport drivers on the road;
- Accommodation and catering industry: hotel managers, employees, waiters, and butlers.

(DARES, 2021)

The study found that a major reason behind the tension in the above sectors and occupations stem from the lack of available labor (DARES, 2021). The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled further the weaknesses in the French labor market particularly sustaining the needed labor. It brought to surface two weaknesses in the French labor market which France has

been struggling with over the years. The first one is that for some occupations, there is not enough labor to meet the demand throughout the years and in times of crisis such as COVID-19. The second one is that for certain occupations labor is available but there are difficulties recruiting because of the mismatch between the available profiles and the needs of the employers.

Data from 2020 until the present time indicates that labor shortage and difficulties in recruitment have been the main issues that have been threatening the French economy, particularly, following the pandemic, which unveiled the need for workers with different skills including low-skilled workers. According to a study published by Pôle Emploi analyzing France's need for labor for 2023, there are ten main occupations where difficulties to recruit are estimated to be high in the French economy. These occupations are highlighted in the following table:

Table: Occupations Facing Recruitment Difficulties in 2023

<i>Occupations With Recruitment Difficulties</i>
1- Qualified Roofer Zinc Workers
2- Pharmacists
3- Home Care Assistance
4-Sheet-metal workers
5- Vehicle Body Builders
6-Medical Equipment Preparers

7-Plumbers, Heating engineers (qualified workers)
8- Medical equipment specialists
9-Public transport drivers
10- Metal Machine Operators

Source: Pôle Emploi (2023)

The study (2023) also highlights that recruitment difficulties have been prevalent in France since 2018 among certain occupations such as nurses, childcare assistants, and hospital service agents. In general, the study reiterates that there is hardship in recruiting workers for the mentioned jobs. It shows that main reasons behind these difficulties include lack of insufficient number of candidates (85%), inadequate profiles of candidates (79%), poor working conditions (37%), and poor image (23%) (Pôle Emploi, 2023).

It appears that acute labor shortage is one of the biggest issues that has challenged France's economy for years. Several employers are not able to secure the needed labor, mostly due to the unavailability of labor.

However, at the same time the unemployment rate in France is still relatively high. According to data from INSEE (2023), unemployment in France is 7.2%. In this context, it is important to note that several employers are suffering from the unavailability of labor but at the same time, unemployment exists in France. The prevalence of unemployment indicates that some people are available for jobs. However, they may not meet the demand in terms of skills, or they may not even be interested in taking these jobs.

Additionally, another issue that faced France's economy is that with the increase in the need for labor, the "Great Resignation"- "Grande Démission" phenomenon emerged in France as a result of the pandemic. Nearly 520,000 individuals resigned at the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022, out of which around 470,000 had permanent contracts (DARES, 2022). Nevertheless, according to authors like Hobijn (2022), "Great Resignation" is a sign of a fast economic recovery and in times of crisis people reconsider their career prospects and seek better work-life balance. This type of resignation might be a normal reaction in certain countries following an economic recovery, however, it is problematic in the case of France as the country is already struggling to supply the needed labor for several occupations and the resignation deepens the struggle because more occupations would be left to be replaced by the needed workers.

It is important to highlight that individuals whether immigrants or non-immigrants have the agency to choose which occupations they can engage in and what working conditions are suitable for their situations. However, this agency gets challenged because of the existence of certain elements in the French labor that continue to influence the positioning of immigrants and non-immigrants in the French labor market and continue to produce labor shortages to some extent. These elements could be theoretically explained by the *Segmented Labor Market Theory* and *System Effects* that directly affect labor shortage.

The prevalence of labor shortage in France could be explained partially by the fact that France has a segmented labor market, which was clearly manifested when faced by the COVID-19 pandemic and border closures.

France: A segmented labor market?

The Segmented Labor Market Theory which was originally developed by Piore (1979) argues that a segmented labor market is divided into two sectors: capital-intensive primary sector and labor-intensive secondary sector. Workers in the capital-intensive primary sector benefit from stable wages and skilled jobs while workers in the secondary labor-intensive sector have unstable wages and unskilled jobs that put them at-risk. The labor-intensive secondary sector has negative social connotations and does not attract local workers as they generally regard jobs as means to achieve certain social positioning (Massey et al., 1993). Hence, they shun away from them. To overcome this issue, industrialized countries rely on labor migration from developing countries to fill the needed jobs in the labor-intensive secondary sector (Massey et al., 1993). So, how does this theory apply to the French context in particular during the pandemic period?

The examination of the French labor market confirms that French natives appear not to be interested in jobs that are precarious and have lower social statuses. This was reflected during the pandemic period as labor shortage was deepened and the need for labor was acute while several people resigned from their jobs and others continued to be unemployed.

Moreover, the study by Desjonquères et al. (2021) confirms the segmented nature of the French labor market. According to the study, non-immigrants and immigrants in France do not engage in the same jobs for several reasons including the precarity of the working conditions, the type of contract, and the restrictions on the public sector. According to the authors, immigrants in France exercise different occupations from the natives. Immigrants are more represented in independent activities as craftsmen, traders, or enterprise managers (Desjonquères et al., 2021). On the other hand, the more educated immigrants do not also get to take the same occupations as the natives, and they work in less qualified occupations in comparison to non-immigrants with high qualifications. In general, a high number of immigrants are represented in low-skilled jobs

such as maintenance workers, domestic workers, construction workers, cooks, clerks and security agents, employees in hotel and catering industry as well as security agents (Desjonquères et al., 2021). The study also indicates that this difference between the type of occupations that non-immigrants and immigrants can take up could be explained by the fact that non-immigrants have better chances to work in the public sector that offers better benefits whereas immigrants, in particular from outside the EU cannot enter the public sector. Moreover, non-immigrants do not take up the same jobs as immigrants because of their precarity. Immigrants often take precarious jobs that are characterized by short-term or part-time contracts (Desjonquères et al. (2021). Hence, the segmented labor market in the case of France is manifested in the precarity that specific sectors and occupations hold which are less attractive to the natives, but more attractive to immigrants who are placed in less favorable situations. Thus, this creates demand for certain categories of workers. Additionally, it is manifested in the entrenched discrepancy even among the highly skilled. Although the highly skilled immigrants have better chances to accept jobs with higher benefits and employment conditions in comparison to low-skilled immigrants, they are still placed in less favorable status in comparison to the highly skilled natives (Desjonquères et al., 2021).

Another premise of the Segmented Labor Market Theory is that migration is the solution to fill the needed jobs that are precarious and unstable in a segmented market. In fact, this is confirmed in Desjonquères et al.'s (2021) study as it found that in the case of France, when the working conditions are difficult and when recruitment difficulties are higher, there is a greater probability that these occupations would be taken by immigrants. Hence, the premise of the Segmented Labor Market applies to the French context as the demand for labor in certain

occupations that are not attractive for non-immigrants, are often met by immigrants which further reinforces the segmented labor market situation.

In this context, it is important to reiterate that the demand for labor and labor shortage in France did not emerge with the COVID-19 pandemic, but they have existed for years partially, because of the segmented labor market, but also because of the different policies and regulations that keep producing labor shortages to some extent. Anderson and Ruhs (2010) refer to these frameworks as system effects. According to the authors, the existence of certain institutional and regulatory frameworks of the labor market along with the existing public policies produces labor shortages. In fact, this theoretical viewpoint is reflected in the French context and was clearly manifested in the times of COVID-19 as French policymakers initiated different reforms to change certain policies that led to the production of labor shortage in the French labor market in particular during the pandemic. One of the policies that triggered heated debate in France was the unemployment insurance system. The unemployment insurance provided by France gives benefits for up to two years for individuals aged less than 53 and up to three years for individuals aged above 55 (DG Trésor, 2023). The unemployment insurance is given in the case of the involuntary loss of employment on condition of having worked for at least four months (Welcome to France, 2021). However, as of 2019, the unemployment benefit extended to the individuals who resign themselves to start their own enterprise on the condition of having worked for at least five years (Welcome to France, 2021). Facing “Great Resignation”, and stable unemployment rate during the pandemic while France was experiencing acute labor shortage in particular during the first years of the pandemic, French officials resorted to making some changes in their regulatory framework to lessen the labor market tension and decrease labor shortage. For some officials, they believed that reducing the duration of the unemployment

benefit would have a direct impact on lessening the labor shortage. In November 2022, the Labor Minister Olivier Dussopt announced that as of February 2023, the duration of the unemployment benefit would be reduced by 25% (Le Monde, 2022). This approach was justified by the acute labor shortage that France has been experiencing and the high unemployment rate (Le Monde, 2022). Although this step might be perceived a solution to encourage the unemployed to urgently find opportunities, it might not have a significant impact on reducing the labor shortage as the segmented nature of the French labor market will continue to always produce occupations in sectors that are not attractive to the natives, however, they are often attractive to immigrants. Additionally, the demanded skills for certain jobs experiencing labor shortage might not be available among the unemployed. Hence, in order for this measure to be effective, it needs to be accompanied by retraining policy measures.

This thesis assumes that when faced by acute labor shortages, France turned to migrant workers during the pandemic to keep its economy functioning. It also assumes that migrant workers, specifically Tunisian migrant workers, highly skilled and low-skilled, key workers, and non-key workers were relied on during the pandemic to secure the needed labor for the French economy. So, what role did immigrant workers, specifically from outside the EU and from Tunisia play during the pandemic? What sectors and occupations where they employed in during the pandemic? How did they bridge the acute labor shortage that was revealed during the pandemic?

Data published in 2022 by the General Directorate for Foreigners in France, Department of Statistics indicates that in general, immigrants represent 11.2% of the entire working population in France and immigrants from outside the EU constitute 72.2% of active immigrants in 2021. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the attention to the role of migrant

workers in the receiving countries, specifically, their vital role in times of crisis. Fasani and Mazza (2020) highlight that immigrants were vital in keeping the European economies functioning during the pandemic. They found that 14% of key workers in the EU were immigrants (Fasani & Mazza, 2020a). According to the authors, during the pandemic migrant workers specifically, those from outside the EU were overrepresented in occupations such as personal care workers, health services, transport, and food processing. Another study by OECD (2020), titled “*COVID-19 and key workers: What role do migrants play in your region?*” outlines that during the pandemic migrant workers from outside the EU played an important role specifically in health care, where 23% of them worked as doctors and 14% of them were nurses. The study also highlights that immigrants were relied on in key sectors such as distribution and food processing.

Surrounded by acute labor shortage during the pandemic, France relied on migrant workers to keep its economy functioning. Migrant workers helped in reducing the labor shortage by offering an additional labor supply (OECD, 2020) in different sectors not only limited to the key sectors during the pandemic. Low and highly skilled migrant workers played vital roles in keeping the French economy functioning during the pandemic and in the aftermath of the pandemic. The following section, taking Tunisian migrant workers in France as a case study, examines this argument and sheds light on the lived experiences of Tunisian migrant workers in the French labor market during the pandemic.

Chapter 4: Foreign Labor in the French Labor Market in Times of COVID-19: Experiences of Tunisian migrant workers

Introduction

The emergence of the pandemic revealed different weaknesses in the French labor market and brought to surface the important role that migrant workers have been playing in the French economy. As the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer considered a threat, it is crucial to look back on this period and highlight what this health crisis uncovered. The pandemic showed that migrant workers have been key actors in supporting the economies of the receiving countries. In France, migrant workers have been contributing to the growth of the French economy. The COVID-19 pandemic unveiled this reality. During the pandemic, migrant workers helped in keeping the French economy functioning particularly the key sectors including health and food production. Taking Tunisian migrant workers as a case study, this chapter begins by exploring foreign labor supply dynamics in France before and during the pandemic. Then, this chapter sheds light on the experiences of Tunisian migrant workers in the French labor market during the pandemic period 2020-2022.

Recruitment of Foreign Labor Before the Pandemic

To recruit the needed labor to meet its demand over the years, France has relied on the recruitment of labor from other European countries and from countries in the Global South including North African countries. It concluded several labor agreements to ensure the continuation of labor supply. Through these labor agreements, France has managed to meet the foreign labor demand which could be traced back to the reconstruction period following the Second World War. Examples of these labor agreements include the 1974 labor agreement with Italy, the 1956 labor agreement with Spain, the 1963 labor agreement with Tunisia, and the 1968

agreement with Algeria (De Lary, 2004). In the case of Tunisia, the 1963 labor agreement was followed by several agreements over the years to ensure the continuation of the Tunisian labor migration to France. According to a study published by ONM in 2020, the 1963 labor agreement regulated the recruitment process for Tunisian migrant workers, the different rights that they should enjoy in the receiving state. According to this agreement, a pre-selection of the Tunisian migrant workers must be carried out by the Tunisian authorities and a final selection must be carried out by the respective French service under the French Embassy (ONM, 2020).

Additionally, the costs of the migration process should be covered by the French government (ONM, 2020). Following the selection, the worker signs a contract, approved by the services of the French Ministry of Labor, and which will be given to the migrant worker before his departure (ONM, 2020). Another important agreement is the Tunisian French agreement of 1988 on residence and work. This agreement regulates the stay and access to work for nationals of France and Tunisia (ONM, 2020). Furthermore, another pathway through which France has been recruiting the needed labor is the Young Professionals program. Under this program, France concluded several bilateral agreements with a number of countries to facilitate the exchange of young professionals. The program is of a temporary mobility nature. It can be organized and facilitated by periods ranging from three months to maximum 18 with no market test needed in the majority of sectors except the restricted occupations (De Lary, 2004). In the case of Tunisia, France signed an agreement relating to the exchange of young professionals in 2003 (ONM, 2020). The agreement allows young Tunisian professionals to improve their professional qualifications through gaining an experience within a company in France (ONM,2020). Conditions of employment and guaranteed rights depend on the situation of the labor market; however, they are organized through a fixed-term contract (ONM,2020). The implementation of

the agreement is the responsibility of the Tunisian Ministry of Employment, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Employment and Solidarity, as well as the OFII from the French side (ONM, 2020). Furthermore, France also relies on the recruitment of seasonal workers from third countries to meet its labor demand in seasonal work. To ensure the supply of seasonal workers, France also concluded different agreements with different countries from the Global South to sustain labor migration of seasonal workers depending on the need of the French labor market. In 2008, France concluded the Franco-Tunisian framework agreement of 28 April on the Concerted Management of Migration and Development and its protocol on the Concerted Management of Migration (EMN France, 2020). Under this framework, the quota for Tunisian migrant workers was set to be 2,500 for all sectors (EMN France, 2020). It is important to note that Tunisian seasonal workers in France are concentrated mainly in two sectors, tourism, and agriculture (EMN France, 2020). Similar framework was signed with Morocco in 1963 and intended to facilitate the recruitment of Moroccans (EMN France, 2020).

In 2018, 1,301 Tunisian seasonal workers traveled to France to work in seasonal work (EMN France, 2020). The EMN study (2020) shows that 95 % of Tunisian seasonal workers work in agriculture while 5% of them work in tourism. Along the same lines, there is another important legal instrument that organizes the recruitment of seasonal workers from third countries to the EU which is the Directive 2014/36/EU of 26 February 2014 (EMN France, 2020). In line with this directive, in 2019, 5,594 first residence permits for seasonal workers were issued (EMN France, 2020). Morocco (2,611) and Tunisia (455) were among the top five countries of origin (EMN France, 2020). Hence, the recruitment of foreign labor to meet the French labor demand has been regulated and managed by several labor agreements that intend to sustain labor mobility between France and different labor sending countries including Tunisia.

Recruitment of Foreign Labor During the Pandemic

Reliance on foreign labor to fill specific positions in the French labor market including seasonal work has been the characteristic of the French labor market for decades. However, the emergence of the pandemic made it problematic as the supply of European workers and workers from countries like Tunisia and Morocco was halted due to border closures and movement restrictions. Faced by acute labor shortages, France tried to introduce certain measures to ensure the continuation of the provision of the basic services in key sectors such as health and agriculture. These measures could be divided into two categories: urgent measures in response to border closures and exceptional measures to meet the labor demand.

Urgent Measures in Response to Border Closures

Several urgent measures were introduced by France to address the issue of labor shortage that was exacerbated by the rupture of labor migration systems from labor sending countries like Tunisia. During the pandemic period, specifically the first few months of 2020, the hiring process decreased in certain sectors. However, it increased in certain occupations that were deemed essential and continued functioning despite the different restrictions imposed by the pandemic. These occupations included health care, food production and distribution (OECD, 2020b). Faced by the urgency to cover the labor demand in times of COVID-19, France took urgent measures targeting mainly the existing migrant workers in France and Europe as well as the local workforce to fill the vacant positions that are usually filled by migrant workers.

Measures targeting Migrant Workers

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic indicated how migrant workers were strongly present in key sectors in the French labor market such as health and agriculture. To meet

its labor demand, France facilitated the movement of key workers by giving them work authorization to move freely to their workplaces. For example, the EU's guidelines concerning the exercise of the free movement of key workers during the COVID-19 outbreak (2020/C 102 I/03) highlighted in the previous chapter, specifies this point. Furthermore, the French government published a circular in May 2020 to allow the hiring of European seasonal workers and third countries seasonal workers legally residing in the EU to meet the seasonal work labor demand (EMN France, 2020).

According to OECD (2020), 14% of the key workers were migrant workers. The percentage of migrant workers among the key workers indicates the important role which they played in covering the labor demand. In fact, migrant workers were actively present in different key occupations. This could be inferred from the list of key occupations that was published by the French government when it introduced a measure to fast-track the naturalization process for migrant workers who held essential occupations during the pandemic period. This list includes the following:

- Cleaners.
- Security guards.
- Home care workers.
- Childminders.
- Refuse collectors.
- Agricultural workers.
- Funeral home staff.
- Healthcare workers.
- Teachers and educational staff.

- Postal workers.
- Screening staff.
- Workers in child protection.
- Lorry drivers and delivery staff.
- Till staff in the commercial food sector.
- Staff of the food processing industry.
- Workers of the medical / paramedical sector. (European Commission, 2020)

In 2020, and as a recognition of the frontline workers' efforts, France announced the acceleration of citizenship for key migrant workers who played a crucial role in France's response during the pandemic (European Commission, 2020). In an article in the Guardian, France's former Minister Delegate for Citizenship, Marlène Schiappa stated "Frontline workers responded to the call of the nation, so it is right that the nation takes a step towards them," (The Guardian, 2021). The decision to accelerate the naturalization process for migrant workers who held one of the positions mentioned in the published list confirms the important role that migrant workers played during the COVID-19 period. As part of the accelerated naturalization process, nearly 16,000 migrants acquired French citizenship in 2021 as frontliners (INSEE, 2023). According to the available data, the highest number of immigrants who received the French citizenship in 2021 came originally from Morocco (11,600), Algeria (9,400) and Tunisia (5,300) (INSEE, 2023). In the case of Tunisia, the number of Tunisian migrants who received the French citizenship is very significant in relation to the volume of the Tunisian migration. Although the number might include Tunisian immigrants who were not frontliners, this high number indicates that Tunisian immigrants have been highly present in the French labor market during the pandemic. Furthermore, the measure to accelerate the naturalization process for migrant workers

under the COVID-19 scheme highlights the reliance of France on migrant workers during the pandemic and also France's intention to gain these migrant workers' loyalty to ensure their presence in the French economy.

Additionally, to meet its labor demand, France took certain actions in certain key sectors such as the health sector and agriculture. In the health sector, France introduced different measures to retrain the existing medical staff including medical students and trainee doctors to start working quickly in the hospitals, mobilized and re-assigned the existing health doctors and medical professionals, and allowed foreign doctors without practice license to hold non-medical health-related positions (OECD, 2020b).

To meet labor demand in seasonal work, France extended contracts for foreign workers who were present in France before the emergence of the pandemic. According to data from OFII (2021), in March 2020, France extended the duration of seasonal contracts of the present seasonal workers in France to nine months instead of six months, the duration of the normal seasonal contracts. Another important measure that was taken by France to overcome the movement restrictions and the rupture of the cross-border movement was the mobilization of the local workforce in order to ensure the continuation of the agricultural services and food supplies. Hence, it turned to the unemployed or those who were on temporary layoffs to encourage them to fill the jobs which experienced labor shortage. As mentioned throughout the thesis, agriculture was one of the sectors that was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in terms of the supply of seasonal workers from outside the EU. In the wake of the pandemic, Christiane Lambert, the president of the National Federation of Farmers' Unions (FNSEA) called the local workforce to support farmers who needed labor "To all those who have the time, we

will need 200,000 seasonal workers within three months. We will welcome you in perfect, safety conditions” (EURACTIV, 2020).

According to OECD (2020b), despite the different efforts by the French government only 150.000 had engaged by the beginning of April 2020 to support the farmers in the seasonal work. It is important to highlight the nationalities of those who were recruited as a result of this call, are unclear. However, given the distribution and the positioning of the migrant workers in the French labor market in France and the segmented nature of the French Labor Market, it is assumed that the recruited labor might have included a number of migrant workers. Furthermore, different platforms were also created by Pôle Emploi to encourage the mobilization of unemployed workers and employees on temporary layoffs to cover the labor demand in certain sectors such as health, transport, and telecommunications (OECD-2020b). However, as argued in the previous chapter the segmented nature of the French labor market appeared to be an important factor in creating several difficulties in meeting the labor need. For instance, despite all the initiatives that were put in place to mobilize the local workforce to support farmers who needed labor, the nature of the agricultural work which required specific skills pushed the French government to introduce to exceptional measures to supply labor from the Global South (EMN France, 2020)

Exceptional Measures

Among the exceptional measures that were introduced by the French government was the organization of special operations to allow the travel of seasonal workers from third countries to France; however, these operations were limited to certain categories such as spouses of French nationals and beneficiaries of family reunification (OFII, 2021). According to the available data,

to bridge the labor shortage in agriculture as a result of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, France created a specific system to facilitate the recruitment of foreign seasonal workers in 2020 (OFII, 2021). Through this system employers inform the Prefecture with their labor needs and then the employers commit to respect COVID-19 related health protocols such as quarantine and regular testing (OFII, 2021). After filing the request, the Ministry of the Interior can grant an authorization to employers to bring in migrant seasonal workers (OFII, 2021). The employers are responsible for financing the flight to France. Under this special arrangement, 829 Moroccan seasonal workers were able to travel to France to save the clementine harvest in Haute-Corse in October 2020 (Francetvinfo, 2020). Data from OFII (2021) shows that 1399 Tunisian seasonal workers traveled to France in 2020 to work. However, it is hard to determine in what occupations these workers were recruited and if this number was a direct result of the exceptional measure which was introduced by France to allow the supply of foreign seasonal workers.

In the first year of the pandemic, labor mobility from Tunisia to France was halted due to border closures. According to Ali Belhaj, the Tunisian Migration Expert:

The first period of COVID from March to June 2020, Tunisia closed its borders the same case in France. There were only evacuation trips. So, during the first period there was no migration. However, there was a second period when Tunisia opened its borders in June. During that period, there were some migrants who went through ANETI, and their files were ready in 2019 but with the emergence of COVID, they could not travel. They traveled in 2020 but their number was not high. (Personal Interview, August 11, 2023)

According to the ANETI 2020 report, in 2020 the agency received only 12 job offerings from France. This result could be explained by border closures and the different restrictions which the pandemic imposed.

Nevertheless, despite the temporary halt in labor mobility from Tunisia to France during the first few months of the pandemic period, movement resumed gradually in 2021. In 2021, 246,000 immigrants entered France; 41% of immigrants who arrived in France in 2021 were born in Africa (INSEE, 2023). The most common countries of birth for immigrants entering France in 2021 were Morocco (9.4%), Algeria (6.5%), Tunisia (4.7%), Spain (3.9%), Italy (3.5%) and Afghanistan (3.3%) (INSEE, 2023). INSEE defines an immigrant as “a person who is born a foreigner and abroad and resides in France.” (INSEE, 2023). Based on this definition, it is hard to determine the exact number of migrant workers who entered France in 2021. However, the percentage indicated the resumption of migration movement to France following the border closures.

Although it is hard to determine the exact of Tunisian migrant workers who were brought in during the pandemic to bridge labor shortage in France, the positioning of the current stock of Tunisian migrant workers in the French labor market indicates that Tunisian migrant workers were involved in different essential and non-essential occupations in the French labor market during the pandemic. As highlighted by the Tunisian expert Migration, Ali Belhaj, the COVID-19 pandemic “had no impact on the stock of migrant workers.” (Personal Interview, August 11, 2023). In other words, the pandemic did not affect the stock of Tunisian migrant workers in France. Tunisian migrant workers are still concentrated in the common sections and occupations. They still contribute heavily to the health sector, public works, tourism, and to some extent to agriculture (Ali Belhaj, Personal Interview, August 11, 2023). For instance, 220,000 physicians

are currently working in France; nearly 10% of them were trained abroad and nearly half of them were trained in North African countries mainly Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco (THAMM, 2021).

According to HIMS (2021), Tunisian migrant workers abroad are mainly concentrated in sectors of construction and public works, the hospitality and catering Industry, trade, manufacturing industry, and agriculture and fishing. In fact, this was confirmed when conducting the nine interviews with Tunisian migrant workers in France for the purpose of this study who happened to work in the majority of these sectors.

Tunisian Migrant Workers in the French Labor Market During the Pandemic

Volume, flows, and profiles of Tunisians emigrating to France have changed over the years. However, there are certain conditions that continue to influence Tunisians' migration decision. The majority of Tunisian migrants residing in France migrated to seek better opportunities which they were not offered in their home country, Tunisia. Despite their educational and professional backgrounds, the nine Tunisian migrant workers who were interviewed in this thesis research, agreed that Tunisia could not offer them what they wanted. As R.M, a 28-year-old Tunisian female Clinical Researcher in France described:

If I had the opportunity in Tunisia and If I had the opportunity to benefit my country, because my country taught me not France, I would have stayed and benefited my country. You cannot grow in Tunisia. Tunisians with PHDs work as technicians. They will suffer as long as they are in Tunisia. (Personal Interview, September 16, 2023)

It is important to highlight that the diversity of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers' profiles and their different migratory timeframes cannot represent all the lived experiences of all Tunisian migrant workers who are residing in France. However, the experiences of the nine

interviewed Tunisian migrant workers could help us understand some aspects of Tunisian migrant workers' experiences in France. Findings indicate that a combination of push and pull factors encouraged the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers to leave Tunisia. Unstable political conditions, lack of economic opportunities, and a deteriorating education system in Tunisia appear to be the main factors that pushed the nine interviewed migrant workers to leave their country and emigrate to France. Better education system, facilitated access to the French education system, better economic opportunities, cultural proximity and having a good command of the French language seem to be the main factors that attracted the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers to France. The following section addresses some of these factors.

Education

Six out of the nine interviewed Tunisian migrant workers chose the education path to successfully emigrate to France. However, through their stories, education was not the ultimate aim behind their migratory journeys but rather a means to finding better economic opportunities after the completion of their studies.

For the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who chose the education path to emigrate, they selected France because the educational system in France seemed to be attractive in terms of the educational expenses that were considered low. As R.Z a 28-Tunisian migrant worker, working as energy trader in France highlighted:

Back then [2014] education in France was free for all migrants. But starting 2020 they started paying. However, during my time I did not have to pay, but what I needed to justify for the French Embassy was that I had enough money to sustain my life, equivalent to almost 600 Euros per month and it was provided by my family...I migrated to France for

the quality of the degree and the field I wanted to study. (Personal Interview, August 16, 2023)

Furthermore, some of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who wanted to continue a career in research chose France because of the limited research opportunities in Tunisia. One of participants reported “there is no research in Tunisia, unfortunately. Research needs funding. I knew I could not progress in my career in Tunisia.” (R.M, Personal Interview, September 16, 2023).

Several Tunisian migrants chose to emigrate using the education channel because it is the easiest way to complete their migration journey. Further, the majority of them ended up settling in France after the completion of their studies. As highlighted by one of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers:

If it was possible for me to find a job and emigrate, I would have chosen it. It [education] was the easiest way for me to get the visa. Once you arrive in France and you don't have a French diploma you would have to go through several procedures and lots of papers. The easiest way is to study. That's why I did my MA. (Y.Z, Personal Interview, July 24, 2023)

Economic Opportunities

On the other hand, for the three interviewed Tunisian migrant workers, who emigrated to France mainly for economic reasons, they stressed lack of economic opportunities in Tunisia as the main drivers behind their migration. In fact, the deteriorating economic situation in Tunisia has pushed several Tunisians to leave the country seeking a better life abroad over the years.

Y.M, a 25-year-old Tunisian irregular migrant who emigrated to France in 2019 described the situation in Tunisia as follows “in Tunisia, we are not living” (Personal Interview, August 10, 2023).

Regardless of the different statuses and profiles of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers, lack of economic opportunities and lack of opportunities for self-realization were the main drivers to emigrate to France. For the majority who selected education as the main pathway for their migratory journey, this pathway was the most convenient channel for them to reach France and settle there. The majority of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers emigrated before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic between 2014 and 2019, except for one female Tunisian migrant who emigrated in 2020 for educational purposes when border restrictions were lifted.

Exploratory Visits

Interviews with the Tunisian migrant workers showed a common characteristic in their migration experiences. For some of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who have better educational backgrounds and easier access to France, the ability to familiarize themselves with the available opportunities in France through having short migration experiences before making their final migration decision helped in making their migratory journeys. A 31-year-old Tunisian female civil engineer in France reported:

[In December 2019] I went for tourism but at the same time I wanted to check the atmosphere and the labor market. I wanted to discover so I don't get shocked if I go and I don't find work opportunities. I wanted to check if I would find what I want when I make my investment [migration]. (A.L, Personal Interview, July 23, 2023)

However, having prior migration experience to France was not only limited to those who had easier access to France because of their educational or professional backgrounds, but it was also observed in the cases of other Tunisian migrant workers with less privileged backgrounds. It seems that having a prior short migration experience in France was an important factor for several interviewed Tunisian migrant workers to make the final migration decision to France.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that five out of the nine Tunisian migrant workers started working during the pandemic period from 2020 to 2022 while four of them were employed in the French labor market before the pandemic. Despite the difference in the recruitment timeframe, it seems that there are two main factors that influenced the recruitment of the migrant workers. These factors are mainly having a strong network that facilitated the involvement of the Tunisian migrant workers in the French labor market and the need for labor with certain characteristics. When asked about how they found their current or past jobs, all interviewed migrant workers highlighted the existence of a social network which facilitated their recruitment in the French labor market. In fact, in migration studies, having a social network proved to be an important factor in facilitating the lives of migrants arriving in the receiving countries. Social networks facilitate the migration process for several migrants. They can provide support for migrants such as housing and work assistance. The other factor that facilitated the recruitment of the Tunisian migrant workers was the existence of demand in the French labor market. As described by one of the interviewed Tunisia migrant workers:

The French labor market is so big. If a person checks the employment website, they will find several demands and it is easy to secure the first interview. It is not difficult; this shows there is a lot of demand. (H.J, Personal Interview, July 23, 2023)

Due to the limited research timeframe and hardship to access the Tunisian population who emigrated to France during the pandemic period 2020-2022, this research only focuses on a group of Tunisian migrant workers who migrated before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they were employed during the pandemic period. As this research focuses on the pandemic period, it is important to highlight how the recruitment process of these Tunisian migrant workers who participated during the pandemic period took place. The COVID-19 pandemic uncovered how France relied on specific profiles of migrant workers who worked in specific occupations such as medical staff, delivery staff, agricultural workers, and clinical researchers. In fact, this was reflected in the recruitment procedures as differences were observed between the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who were employed in some essential occupations and the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who were employed in non-essential occupations during the pandemic. For some Tunisian migrants the recruitment procedures remained the same as before the emergence of the pandemic while for other Tunisian migrant workers, the recruitment procedures were facilitated because of their employment in essential occupations during the pandemic.

Accustomed Recruitment Procedures

The profiles of Tunisian migrant workers in the French labor market are very diverse. Tunisian migrant workers are present in essential and non-essential occupations. They have been contributing to the French labor market as highly skilled and low-skilled workers. The emergence of the pandemic highlighted the active participation of Tunisian migrant workers in different occupations and sectors before and in times of COVID-19. In fact, this was reflected across the interviews with the nine Tunisian migrant workers. During the pandemic, Tunisian migrant workers contributed to the recovery of the French labor market and in meeting the labor

demand. However, one key difference that was observed among the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers is the difference in the recruitment procedures and access to the labor market. For migrant workers who did not hold positions in essential occupations, but they were still demanded in the labor market, their recruitment took place under the normal procedures that migrant workers have to experience. These procedures include applying for jobs, going through the interview process, and changing the legal status. As highlighted by an interviewed Tunisian migrant worker who was recruited in the manufacturing sector:

I put my CV on Appen, a website for recruitment. Several engineers called me, and I did like around seven to eight interviews and then I got accepted to one. The second job was a friend of mine who co-opted me in the company, and I had one interview and started working with them. (Y.Z, Personal Interview, July 24, 2023)

Despite the high demand, the recruitment process of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers working in non-essential occupations was not facilitated neither by the French government nor by their employers. The interviewed Tunisian migrant workers highlighted that they were the ones who found the jobs and applied without any recruitment facilitation. Furthermore, changing the legal status from a student to an employee appears to be one of the biggest challenges that all Tunisian migrant workers who complete their studies in France have to experience when seeking job opportunities. For the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who were recruited in non-essential sectors during the pandemic including public works and energy supply, they faced difficulties in changing their legal statuses from students to employees which was described by them as a lengthy and tiring process. H.J highlights:

If you want to change from a student to a paid employee, you're required to be working in your field and not outside it. It is very strict. You need to be in the civil engineering field, and you need to have a high salary. I don't understand why. If you are still a student and you start working, you won't have this requirement. To be honest, it is a hassle to go through. (Personal Interview, July 23, 2023)

Facilitated Recruitment Procedures

For Tunisian migrant workers who were recruited in essential occupations during the pandemic, their recruitment procedures were facilitated by their employers who played an important role in speeding the hiring process for certain profiles of Tunisian migrant workers. Based on the conducted interviews, Tunisian migrant workers in essential occupations such as researchers and delivery workers did not face the same recruitment difficulties that were faced by Tunisian migrant workers who were hired in non-essential occupations. For the two interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who worked in the research field during the pandemic, their recruitment process was described as easy and fast. They did not have to go through the usual interview process. As highlighted by one of the participants who was hired as a research engineer during the pandemic period:

I sent my CV, and I had a very quick interview; it was for formality with the head of service. She told me about the vacancy and asked about my experience. At that time, they needed someone, so they did not make it hard. (A.B, Personal Interview, September 17, 2023)

This was also experienced in the case of Y.M who worked as a delivery worker for five months during the pandemic. He highlighted that he did not face any issues getting hired in the delivery service despite his irregular situation (Personal Interview, August 10, 2023).

With regards to changing the legal status, unlike Tunisian migrant workers who were hired in non-essential occupations, for Tunisian migrant workers who were hired in essential occupations, changing the legal status from students to employees was not a challenge as employers facilitated the process through exerting pressure on the Prefecture, the responsible authorities in changing the legal statuses and issuing the work permits. As highlighted by R.M:

I needed to change my status from student to employee and there were long procedures, but the employer was responsive whether you like or not they really need us because of this kind of research...So, they [employers] were obliged to complete the procedures until the end because if they lose the employees, they wouldn't find human resources to fill in. (Personal Interview, September 16, 2023)

According to the website Avec Vous Avocats [With You Lawyers], making the final decision on changing the legal status may take two months by the responsible authorities (Avec Vous Avocats, 2019). However, as highlighted by the majority of participants in this study, the decision usually takes longer than two months. In the case of one of interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who worked in research during the pandemic, the involvement of her employer to facilitate the receipt of the work authorization through changing the legal status helped her in changing her status in two months (A.B, Personal Interview, September 17, 2023). Furthermore, it is important to highlight that in the context of the majority of the interviewed migrant workers who found jobs after the completion of their studies in France, they had the APS which authorizes foreign students to work under the same conditions as they were students. In other words, they were allowed to work approximately 20 hours per week for a maximum of 964 hours per year (Campus France, n.d.)

Findings from the experiences of the Tunisian migrant workers during the pandemic reveal that in addition to differences in the recruitment procedures, some differences in terms of the employment conditions were experienced. These differences depended mainly on whether the occupation held by the Tunisian migrant worker was highly skilled or low-skilled.

Employment Conditions and Terms during the pandemic

Employment conditions for the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers vary from a person to another. However, there are common employment conditions that could be observed among the highly skilled Tunisian migrant workers who tend to be in more privileged positions than low-skilled Tunisian migrant workers in terms of salaries and work flexibility. For the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who work in highly skilled jobs, the employment conditions tend to be better. They have better salaries and working conditions. In the case of the highly skilled Tunisian migrant workers, in particular those who worked in the research field, the pandemic did not have a huge impact on their work conditions, except that they had high workload during the first few months of the pandemic. As highlighted by R.M:

I have a senior position. We are not obliged to report on our daily hours, but we have a number of hours that we need to complete. As a senior employee, you have 39 hours per week to complete. It does not matter when you come and leave...We had a high workload because we needed to have rapid results for vaccination. So, everyone was rushing us for the results. To be honest, if it was not for our clinical experiments, no vaccines would have been created. Having vaccines now is because of the efforts of all those who worked in clinical research. We worked hard. I had time working until midnight writing reports and noting statistics. (Personal Interview, September 16, 2023)

Another important employment condition that was highlighted by the majority of the highly skilled Tunisian migrant workers was having work stability that stemmed from having permanent contracts. On the other hand, for some Tunisian migrant workers who were employed in low-skilled jobs during the pandemic including construction and agricultural workers, the employment conditions and terms were more difficult. These workers were at risk of catching the virus by having to be present in the workplace. When asked about the employment conditions during the pandemic, A.W who worked as an agricultural worker highlighted that he used to move from his place of residence to the field without work authorization despite the movement restrictions imposed by the pandemic and worked 12 to 13 hours per day (Personal Interview, August 31, 2023). Nevertheless, the participant highlighted that he was compensated for the extra hours he worked (Personal Interview, August 31, 2023). Despite getting compensated for the extra hours, it seems that working long hours was a key characteristic of the work of some Tunisian migrant workers who worked in low-skilled jobs during the pandemic. The experience of Y.M who worked as a delivery person for five months during the pandemic confirms this situation as well (Personal Interview, August 10, 2023). Working long hours and performing in-person activities during the pandemic show the commitment and the flexibility of some Tunisian workers which are key characteristics to build a resilient system.

Conclusion: Tunisian Migrant Workers and Systemic Resilience in France

French people do not do the work we do. In fact, If Arabs were not here, they would not be able to do anything. If Arab doctors, engineers, painters, those who work in bakeries leave, they would not function. (S.H, Personal Interview, July 18, 2023)

The different experiences of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers and the available data showing the important role that migrant workers played during the pandemic indicate that with their contribution and commitment, migrant workers contributed to building systemic resilience in the French economy. As defined by Anderson et al., (2021), systemic resilience is “the ability to withstand, recover from, and adapt to unexpected external shocks”. The authors highlight that the main features of a resilient system include flexibility and strong networks. Migrant workers can contribute to building resilient systems through offering flexibility in terms of employment conditions, commitment and through relying on their strong networks to cover the labor demand. This was confirmed by the lived experiences of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers in this study. Regardless of their legal status, their professional and academic experiences, all the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers are characterized by their flexibility and resilience. As highlighted above, one feature of a resilient system is flexibility. Based on the findings and the stories of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers who contributed to the French labor market during the pandemic, Tunisian migrant workers offered the French economic system flexibility and commitment. For instance, the case of H.J who found a job during the pandemic and his need to learn showed his flexibility with the work conditions. H.J reported “as a young graduate and based on my profile, I would not demand a high salary. It is the question of salary and also you would do more tasks compared to other people.” (H.J, Personal Interview, July 23, 2023). Furthermore, despite the difficulties faced in the French labor market, the characteristics of Tunisian migrant workers push them to always commit to the work they do. As highlighted by A.W, “we [Tunisians] understand everything, and we work better. Wherever they put us we work. We do anything requested.” (Personal Interview, August 31, 2021).

Moreover, having a strong network through which job and academic opportunities are found give the Tunisian migrant workers another characteristic that is also a main feature of a resilient system. Although the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers did not mention the creation of new labor networks, they highlighted that they benefited from the existing networks which were created by different generations of Tunisian migrants in France over the years. The creation of networks is a continuous process that continue to grow with different Tunisian migration flows to France.

As this study focuses on Tunisian migrant workers, it is important to highlight that migrant worker, regardless of their nationalities, especially those who participated in the French labor market during the pandemic have contributed to building systemic resilience in France through offering flexibility and commitment as well as supporting the continuation of strong networks that continue to grow with the presence of migrant workers in France.

Conclusion

Labor migration from Tunisia to France has been sustained over the years as a result of the historic ties and the signature of different labor agreements that have ensured the continuation of the Tunisian French migration system. These agreements include the 1963 labor agreement and the Franco-Tunisian framework agreement of 28 April 2008. Labor migration continues to be the most predominant type that characterizes the Tunisian French migration system. In fact, this stems from the existence of labor demand in France. The majority of Tunisian migrants perceive France as their primary destination as it has been manifested in the stock of Tunisian migrants abroad. According to HIMS (2021), (52.5%) of Tunisian migrants living in Europe are located in France.

This thesis indicates that labor shortage has been prevalent in France for decades. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic unveiled this shortage and highlighted the important role that migrant workers have been playing in bridging the labor shortage in France before, during, and after the pandemic. While migrant workers including Tunisians have been contributing to the French economy and its growth, several policymakers and politicians have been trying to restrict their entrance and limit their presence in France. Findings of this thesis provide invaluable insights on the important role that migrant workers including Tunisian migrant workers have been playing in bridging labor shortage in France particularly in times of COVID-19. The thesis calls policymakers and politicians in receiving countries including France to reconsider their approaches towards migrants. Their approaches should encompass further recognition of migrant workers' efforts in keeping the economies of the receiving countries functioning and the introduction of new policies that attract and facilitate the mobility of low-skilled migrant workers

to ensure that borders become of general applicability to all categories of migrant workers: the highly skilled and low-skilled.

Through focusing on the experiences of Tunisian migrant workers in France, this thesis aimed to contribute to the available literature by examining the situation of a number of Tunisian migrant workers in France and their contribution to the French labor market during the pandemic.

Findings unveil that in the period between 2020-2022, France struggled to save its economy due to labor market tension and inability to secure the “right” number and profiles of workers that were exacerbated by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The labor market tension could be explained by the segmented nature of the French labor market that divides the market into two segments; a segment reserved for natives that is characterized by its stable terms of employment and conditions, and another segment reserved for immigrants that is characterized by its precarious terms of employment and conditions. In fact, this was observed during the pandemic as border closures and movement restrictions revealed this gap in the French labor market.

Faced by labor shortage in key sectors including health and agriculture, France rushed to meet its labor demand. France introduced several measures that targeted directly migrant workers including the reliance on existing migrant workers in France during the pandemic and the introduction of exceptional measures to bring migrant workers from countries like Morocco and Tunisia to work specifically in seasonal work. Despite the availability the local workforce, France continued to struggle with meeting its labor demand during the pandemic. Furthermore, the emergence of the pandemic confirmed the idea that French natives appear not to be interested

in jobs that are precarious and have lower social statuses. Migrant workers, regardless of their nationalities, actively contributed to the functioning of both the key sectors and non-key sectors of the French economy during the pandemic. This thesis takes Tunisian migrant workers as a case study. It found that Tunisian migrant workers contributed to covering labor shortage in France during the pandemic through their participation in different economic sectors experiencing labor shortages and in essential occupations. Despite border closures and restrictions on movements, Tunisian migrant workers were actively involved in supporting the French economy to overcome the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Experiences of the interviewed Tunisian migrant workers indicate that the pandemic had an impact on the recruitment procedures of the Tunisian migrant workers. For some migrant workers, the pandemic facilitated their recruitment procedures because of their employment in essential occupations.

This thesis provides key insights on the issue of labor shortage in France, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the French labor market, the role that the Tunisian migrant workers played in the French labor market during the pandemic period and the impact of COVID-19 on Tunisian migrant workers. However, there are several key areas that can still be addressed in future research. This thesis highlighted only the stories of Tunisian migrant workers who were involved in the French labor market during the pandemic, but it could not include the voices of Tunisian migrant workers who emigrated to France specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic to fill certain positions in the French labor market due to some limitations mentioned in the limitations section. Future research can build upon this thesis' findings to further explore the situation of Tunisian migrant workers who emigrated specifically to France during the pandemic to work in certain occupations and also the situation of other national groups of migrant workers

who worked in France during the pandemic to have a holistic understanding of the situation of different groups of migrant workers.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire: Tunisian Migrant workers

Basic Information

1. How old are you?
2. What's your gender preference?
3. What's your highest Educational Attainment?
4. What's your current place of residence?
5. What's your legal status?

List of Interview Questions

1. Where were you residing when COVID-19 started?
 - If the interviewee was in France, when did you migrate? How did you travel to France?
 - If the interviewee was not in France when the pandemic started:
 - Where were you?
 - When did you migrate to France?
 - How did you travel to France?
 - How did the borders' closure impact your migration journey?
2. Did you stay in France during the whole period of the pandemic (2020-2022)?
3. What drove you to migrate to France?
4. How did the pandemic impact you?
5. If the interviewee was residing and employed in France before the pandemic,
 - How did the pandemic impact your employment and income?
 - Did you notice any changes in the French labor market that impacted you directly or indirectly?
 - What jobs were you employed in before 2020 and between 2020-2022 in France?
 - Were you unemployed for any length of time during the pandemic? If you were, for how long?
 - Did you take up a new job during the pandemic, i.e., other than that you occupied before it?
 - How did you find your past/current job?
 - What made you eligible for this job? What made you qualify for the job? (past/current job)
 - How have the employment conditions and terms been?
 - Did your wages increase or were they reduced during the pandemic?
 - Did you work longer or shorter hours during the pandemic?

- What challenges did you face in your job and the French labor market during the pandemic?
 - How's your situation in the post-pandemic period?
6. If the interviewee had migrated to France during the pandemic:
- What did you do in Tunisia?
 - What were the available opportunities for you in France and what made you migrate during the pandemic? Did you receive a job offer before migrating?
 - In which sector did you work?
 - Which job did you have in?
 - What was the title of your job?
 - How did you find the job?
 - How were the employment conditions and terms? How about now?
 - Were you satisfied with your wages?
 - Were you satisfied with the daily duration of your work?
 - Were there other Tunisian workers among your colleagues?
 - What made you eligible for the job? What made you qualify for the job?
 - What difficulties did you face in accessing the labor market during the pandemic?
 - What challenges did you face during the pandemic?
 - How's your situation in the post-pandemic period?

Appendix B : Interview Questionnaire : Tunisian Migration Experts

Basic Information:

Name:

Job title:

List of Interview Questions

1. What drives Tunisian migrant workers to migrate from Tunisia to France?
2. What makes France attractive to Tunisian migrant workers?
3. What makes Tunisian migrant workers attractive to France?
4. How do Tunisian migrant workers usually find opportunities to migrate to France? How about during the pandemic?
5. How did COVID-19 impact labor migration from Tunisia to France? (For instance, the impact of border restrictions on this type of migration)
6. To what extent did COVID-19 lead to new migration dynamics?
 - Did border closure result in a total halt to Tunisian labor migration to France?
 - If it didn't, how were new flows channeled?
 - Were the new migrant workers offered jobs before traveling to France?
 - Was there return migration from France of Tunisian migrant workers?
7. How did migration of Tunisian migrant workers to France play out during the pandemic?
 - Are there any differences between the different periods before, during, and after COVID-19?
8. What kind of occupations do Tunisian migrant workers usually fill in the French labor market? How about during the pandemic?
9. How did COVID-19 impact Tunisian migrant workers' employment in France?
 - Were there any demands for Tunisian migration workers during the pandemic? If yes, in what sectors and occupations?