

PRESS RELEASE

EU-Tunisia Migration Deal Worsening Human Rights Violations

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(Brussels, July 16, 2026) – The European Union (EU) and its member states should publicly denounce human rights violations in Tunisia and stop funding abusive migration control activities, 46 human rights and humanitarian organizations said in a joint statement released today. The statement comes three years after the EU and Tunisia signed a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#) on July 16, 2023, largely motivated by seeking Tunisia's cooperation to prevent boats carrying migrants and asylum seekers from irregularly departing for Europe.

The MoU has fueled and normalized serious human rights violations in Tunisia. In some cases, these abuses have led to [deaths](#). Continued migration cooperation with Tunisia makes the EU complicit in human rights violations by Tunisian security forces, the organizations said. Under the migration component of the agreement, the EU and its member states have provided [EUR 105 million](#) for interceptions at sea and border control activities in Tunisia. At least [65 million](#) are already contracted to train and equip abusive entities, notably the Tunisian Coast Guard and the Tunisian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre.

"People we have rescued from distress at sea have shared with our crew harrowing accounts of torture, sexualized violence and racist abuse they've been subjected to in Tunisia," said Marie Michel, policy expert at SOS Humanity. "The EU-backed Tunisian Coast Guard acts violently against people in distress at sea and forces them back into a system of abuse with a high risk of being deported to the desert or trafficked to Libya. With every Euro paid to the security forces responsible, the EU is entrenching a system of abuse against people in need of protection."

Since the deal was signed, [United Nations bodies](#), [human rights organizations](#), and [humanitarian groups](#) have documented serious human rights violations by Tunisian security forces against refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, including reckless and violent conduct during interceptions at sea; arbitrary detention; torture and other ill-treatment, including [sexualized violence](#); and collective expulsions to neighbouring countries.

Tunisian officials' [racist rhetoric](#) and [discriminatory practices](#) against Black Africans, including Tunisian nationals, have [fueled](#) racist violence and racial profiling. Tunisian authorities have [targeted](#) civil society organizations providing essential assistance to refugees and asylum seekers, including with arrest and prosecution. They have suspended the asylum activities and refugee status determinations of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) since June 2024, effectively [eliminating access to asylum](#) in the country.

"Since the presidential discourse portraying migration as a 'criminal plan to change the demographic composition of Tunisia,' which preceded the signing of the MoU, our legal assistance mechanisms have seen a sharp increase in requests from migrants and asylum seekers," said Emma Cabrol, Euro-Mediterranean Regional Director at Avocats Sans Frontières. "These requests generally come from individuals arrested during large-scale security operations where their rights were not respected, people forcibly evicted from their homes or subjected to abuses by private individuals, as well as asylum seekers facing serious obstacles in accessing protection. The testimonies we collect through our legal aid reveal unprecedented levels of violence and vulnerability experienced by migrants in Tunisia, at the hands of both state and non-state actors. With growing barriers to housing, employment, and safe pathways out of the country, many migrants describe their situation as an open-air prison."

Despite serious concerns and recommendations raised by the [European Ombudsman](#) and the [European Court of Auditors](#) in 2024, the European Commission has failed to demonstrate that continued funding, training, equipment, and operational support to Tunisian authorities complies with the EU's legal obligations and safeguards contained in its funding instruments, the organizations said.

Migration cooperation should not be viewed in isolation from the human rights context in Tunisia, the organizations said. The same Tunisian state institutions, backed by EU-funding, responsible for border control and immigration enforcement—notably the Tunisian National Guard and police—are also implicated in the ongoing [crackdown](#) on dissent, judicial independence, and criminalization of nongovernmental groups since President Kais Saied's power grab [in 2021](#).

Tunisian authorities have escalated abuses against [political opponents](#), [journalists](#), [lawyers](#), [civil society organisations](#)—including through arbitrary arrests—[detention](#), criminal investigations, administrative restrictions, and other forms of repression.

In February 2026, the EU added Tunisia to a list of so-called safe countries of origin, despite findings by [UN experts](#), [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), the World Organisation Against Torture ([OMCT](#)), and [independent investigative reporting](#) that Tunisia is not a "place of safety" under maritime law.

Continued EU migration cooperation without effective safeguards takes place within—and risks reinforcing and perpetuating—a wider system of authoritarian governance, the human rights and humanitarian groups said.

"The EU cannot pretend to champion human rights while deepening cooperation with Tunisian authorities responsible for crushing dissent and abusing migrants," said Friederike Mager, Senior Coordinator EU Advocacy at Human Rights Watch. "Three years after its flawed deal with Tunisia, the EU should speak up against violations and put human rights—not migration control—at the center of its engagement, with clear benchmarks and real consequences if abuses continue."

Link to official joint statement, please visit: <https://asf.be/publication/a-blueprint-for-complicity-three-years-of-eu-tunisia-migration-agreement-three-years-of-human-rights-violations-english/>

For more reporting on Tunisia, please visit:

- Avocats Sans Frontières: <https://asf.be/resources-tools/publications/?country=tn-en&page=1&lang=en>
- Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/north-africa/tunisia>
- SOS Humanity: <https://sos-humanity.org/en/our-mission/change/tunisia/>

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