

## Freedom in the World 2022 - Tunisia

Partly Free

64

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 26 / 40

[Civil Liberties](#) 38 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

71 / 100 Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

### Status Change

Tunisia's status declined from Free to Partly Free because President Kaïs Saïed unilaterally dismissed and replaced the elected government, indefinitely suspended the parliament, and imposed harsh restrictions on civil liberties to suppress opposition to his actions.

### Overview

After the ouster of a longtime autocrat in 2011, Tunisia began a democratic transition, and citizens now enjoy considerable political rights and civil liberties. However, endemic corruption, economic challenges, security threats, and unresolved problems related to gender equality and transitional justice remain obstacles to full democratic consolidation. Recent emergency measures imposed by President Kaïs Saïed, including a suspension of the elected parliament, have created deep uncertainty about the future of Tunisian democracy.

### Key Developments in 2021

- During the first half of the year, public frustration increased in response to an ongoing economic crisis, mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic, and political and institutional rivalry among President Kaïs Saïed, Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi, and parliament speaker Rached Ghannouchi.
- Street demonstrations supporting and opposing different factions escalated, and countrywide protests in late July demanded the resignation of the government and parliament. Some of these protests turned violent, as participants burned or stormed the offices of Ghannouchi's Ennahda party in several cities.
- On July 25, President Saïed announced a number of emergency measures, including suspension of the parliament, the dismissal of Prime Minister Mechichi, the repeal of lawmakers' immunity, an expanded curfew, and a ban on public demonstrations. He cited Article 80 of the constitution, which allows the president to take necessary measures in the event of an imminent threat to the country's institutions, security, or independence, though the article also requires consultation with the prime minister and parliament speaker and prohibits dissolution of the parliament, among other constraints. In the absence of a Constitutional Court, whose creation remained stalled, there was no independent body capable of adjudicating the constitutionality of Saïed's actions. Public opinion polls in the months following July 25 found significant popular support for the president.
- In late August, Saïed extended the emergency measures, and in October, he announced a new prime minister and government, swearing them in without parliamentary approval.
- In December, Saïed announced plans for a constitutional revision process that would involve online public consultation, culminating in a referendum in July 2022. He also announced plans to hold parliamentary elections in December 2022. Major civil society organizations, including the General Tunisian Labor Union (UGTT), criticized this timeline, describing Saïed's plan as insufficient to protect democracy. In the meantime, security forces prevented members of

parliament from gathering at their headquarters, and political figures who were critical of Saïed faced arrest warrants and travel bans.

## Political Rights

### A Electoral Process

#### A1 0-4 pts

**Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?** 3 / 4

The 2014 constitution lays out a semipresidential system in which a popularly elected president serves as head of state and exercises circumscribed powers, while the majority party in the parliament selects a prime minister, who serves as head of government, following parliamentary elections. The president is directly elected for up to two five-year terms.

The last presidential election took place in October 2019, following the death of President Beji Caïd Essebsi that July. Kaïs Saïed, an independent candidate and former constitutional law professor who received an endorsement from the Islamist Ennahda party, won an October runoff against opponent Nabil Karoui with 73 percent of the vote. Karoui spent most of the campaign in prison on money laundering and tax evasion charges. Local observers concluded that the election was generally competitive and credible, but raised some concerns about Karoui's inability to campaign while in prison.

President Saïed took the unilateral decision to dismiss Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi in July 2021, and in October he installed a new government headed by Prime Minister Najla Bouden without parliamentary approval.

*Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because President Saïed unilaterally dismissed the elected prime minister and named a replacement without consulting the parliament.*

#### A2 0-4 pts

**Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?** 2 / 4

Tunisia's 2014 constitution established a unicameral parliament, the 217-seat Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP); 199 members are directly elected in domestic multimember constituencies, while 18 represent multimember constituencies abroad via a party-list system. All members serve five-year terms.

The most recent legislative elections took place in October 2019. International and national observers declared the elections to be generally competitive and credible. Ennahda placed first with 52 seats, Karoui's Qalb Tounes (Heart of Tunisia) party took 38 seats, the progressive Democratic Current took 22, and Al-Karama (Dignity) Coalition took 21. The remaining seats were won by 11 other parties and 17 independent candidates. After a period of political gridlock, Elyes Fakhfakh became prime minister in February 2020. Hichem Mechichi succeeded Fakhfakh in July 2020, after a corruption scandal forced his resignation. A cabinet reshuffle approved by the parliament in January 2021 was rejected by President Saïed, whose allies were among the ministers slated for dismissal.

On July 25, President Saïed suspended the parliament and dismissed Mechichi over the objections of the Ennahda party and parliament speaker Ghannouchi. The president also revoked lawmakers' legal immunity, and several members later faced house arrest or detention and trials in military courts. Though Ghannouchi declared the parliament to be in session on October 1, lawmakers were prevented by security forces from gathering in the parliament building. The parliament remained suspended and unable to assemble at year's end.

*Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 2 due to the president's unilateral suspension of the parliament.*

#### A3 0-4 pts

**Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?** 4 / 4

The Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), a nine-member commission, is tasked with supervising parliamentary and presidential elections. Since its inception in 2011, the ISIE's political independence and conduct of elections have been well regarded by Tunisian and international observers. In 2019, the ISIE successfully oversaw the early presidential election, including a televised debate between the two candidates in the second round, as well as parliamentary elections.

In December 2021, President Saïed announced his intention to hold a referendum on a revised constitution in July 2022 and parliamentary elections in December 2022. While no details had been released by year's end, Saïed was known to prefer a constitutional model in which directly elected local councils would select representatives for a weak national legislature. It remained unclear how the ISIE would participate in reforms of the electoral framework.

## B Political Pluralism and Participation

### B1 0-4 pts

**Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?** 3 / 4

Tunisia's numerous political parties represent a wide range of ideologies and interests. Though parties have generally been free to form and operate in the post-2011 period, recent events have called these freedoms into question. After the suspension of parliament and parliamentary immunity on July 25, 2021, some lawmakers and political figures were subjected to repressive measures including travel bans, detention, and house arrest. Critics of Saïed with diverse political leanings, including Seifeddine Makhlouf and Abdellatif Aloui of Al-Karama and independent Yassine Ayari, faced unexpected arrests based on old charges. In the first month after July 25, Amnesty International counted at least 50 people who received "arbitrary" travel bans. In November, Tunisian authorities issued an international arrest warrant for former president Moncef Marzouki, who had been publicly critical of Saïed, on charges of "undermining the external security of the state." Marzouki remained in France, where authorities declined to extradite him to Tunisia. In late December, former justice minister Nouredine Bhiri and former Interior Ministry official Fathi Baldi were detained by plainclothes officers on unspecified charges; according to Human Rights Watch, Bhiri was the first high-ranking Ennahda member to be placed in custody since the 2011 revolution.

*Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 because a number of political figures who criticized the president's actions faced arrests or travel bans.*

### B2 0-4 pts

**Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?** 4 / 4

Opposition parties participate competitively in political processes, and the 2019 elections demonstrated that new parties and independents can win office and enter government. President Saïed is not affiliated with a political party, nor are the two most recent prime ministers, Mechichi and Bouden. It remained unclear at the end of 2021 how Saïed's actions since July 25 would affect the potential for future rotations of power.

### B3 0-4 pts

**Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?** 3 / 4

Voters are generally able to exercise their political choices without undue interference. However, campaign-finance laws are complex and often unclear, and parties occasionally bend, if not break, the rules in order to campaign effectively. Domestic economic oligarchies have a high degree of influence over politics. Foreign groups also reportedly supply funds to preferred parties and candidates, though these channels of support are opaque.

In 2021, the president's critics accused him of colluding with the regimes of the United Arab Emirates and Egypt to carry out his seizure of power, particularly in light of their common enmity toward Ennahda. Alliances between Tunisian political factions and foreign actors, and corresponding accusations of proxy status, have been a common feature of Tunisian politics since 2011. However, the precise nature of foreign influence on the events of 2021 remained unclear.

### B4 0-4 pts

**Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?** 3 / 4

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations have worked to increase the political participation of marginalized groups. A 2017 law requires an equal number of men and women at the top of candidate lists, as well as at least one candidate with a disability and three people under the age of 35 on each list. Representation of women in subsequent elections has been high, and legislation aimed at protecting the rights of women has been passed. Fifty-four women held parliamentary seats after the 2019 elections. Eleven women and one openly gay man requested nomination to stand as candidates in the 2019 presidential election.

The Amazigh ethnic community is underrepresented in electoral politics, but the first party to address their interests, the Akal Movement, was formed in 2019.

Despite these positive developments, some segments of the population still lack full political rights. Only Muslims may run for president. Societal discrimination and laws criminalizing same-sex sexual activity exclude many LGBT+ people from active political participation, and political parties largely fail to address LGBT+ issues.

## C Functioning of Government

### C1 0-4 pts

**Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives 1 / 4 determine the policies of the government?**

Conflict over the division of powers between the legislative and executive branches has undermined policymaking and governance since 2011. Late president Essebsi manipulated the national budget in such a way that the parliament was deeply underfunded, leaving it with limited ability or resources to craft legislation on its own or check executive authority. Clashes between the executive and legislative branches continued under Saïed, culminating in his emergency powers declaration on July 25, 2021. The move to suspend the parliament effectively allowed Saïed to rule by decree, with elected lawmakers playing no role. The new government of Prime Minister Bouden took office in October without the constitutionally required approval from parliament, and it remained responsible only to the president.

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 1 because the president's suspension of the parliament left national legislative representatives entirely unable to influence government formation or policymaking.*

### C2 0-4 pts

**Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4**

Anticorruption legislation has historically been considered weak. The Economic Reconciliation Law of 2017 effectively offered amnesty for those implicated in corruption under the pre-2011 regime of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, but it was amended due to public disapproval.

The National Commission for the Fight against Corruption (INLUCC) was established in 2011, and a permanent body, the Commission on Good Governance and the Fight against Corruption (IBGLCC), was meant to replace it under the 2014 constitution. While legislation intended to establish the IBGLCC was passed in 2017, the new body remained inactive. INLUCC thus continued its operations, though with inadequate funding and little authority to compel legal action. Political conflict surrounding the commission escalated in 2021. In June, Prime Minister Mechichi dismissed INLUCC president Imed Boukhris after Boukhris made corruption allegations against several ministers appointed by Mechichi in his January cabinet reshuffle. Mechichi's move to replace Boukhris with judge Imed Ben Taleb drew criticism from civil society organizations, including the anticorruption group I Watch, which had filed a lawsuit against Ben Taleb in 2020. President Saïed rejected the appointment, leading to further conflict over the division of executive powers. INLUCC headquarters were shuttered by police in August, though some operations continued. Separately, Chawki Tabib, a former INLUCC president who had been dismissed in 2020, was placed under house arrest for several weeks between August and October 2021.

In this context of weak enforcement, charges of corruption have significantly shaped recent elections and political dynamics. Nabil Karoui, the 2019 presidential candidate, spent much of the campaign period detained on suspicion of money laundering and tax evasion. (Karoui was released in June 2021, then detained in September by Algerian authorities on a charge of illegally crossing the border.) In July 2020, then prime minister Fakhfakh was forced to resign over a report that he held stakes in firms that were involved with public contracts. President Saïed justified his seizure of power in July 2021 in part by arguing that it was necessary to uproot corruption in the political establishment. The subsequent travel bans and arrest warrants against political figures and businessmen led critics to accuse Saïed of instrumentalizing anticorruption efforts to eliminate his political enemies.

### C3 0-4 pts

**Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 2 / 4**

A 2016 freedom of information law was criticized by watchdog groups for its security-related exemptions. Cabinet ministries often refuse public requests for information. Members of the government frequently craft policy behind closed doors, without input from other parties or citizens. Al-Bawsala, a nonprofit organization that promotes transparency and accountability, has criticized ruling elites from all parties over their lack of responsiveness to the public, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A 2018 law requires the president, ministers, and high-level public officials, among others, to declare their assets to INLUCC; penalties for violating the law include large fines and prison terms of up to five years. Members of the Bouden government reportedly declared their assets in October 2021.

President Saïed's centralization of power after July 2021 led to a lack of transparency regarding official decision-making, actions by law enforcement agencies, and the future direction of the country. Journalists' groups criticized the new government's attempts to limit and control officials' interactions with the press.

## Civil Liberties

### D Freedom of Expression and Belief

**D1 0-4 pts**

**Are there free and independent media? 2 / 4**

The constitution guarantees freedom of opinion, thought, expression, information, and publication, subject to some restrictions. Many independent outlets operate, including several online news sites that have launched since the 2011 revolution. However, it is difficult to obtain data about the ownership of media companies, their audiences, or the allocation of public advertising, and press freedom advocates have expressed concern about significant political influence on a number of major private outlets.

Journalists have faced increasing pressure and intimidation from government officials in connection with their work. Security forces closed the Tunis office of Qatar's Al-Jazeera news service on the day after Saïed declared his exceptional powers in July 2021. Reporters Without Borders noted several instances of harassment and detention of journalists in the days leading up to Saïed's announcement of a new government. The National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists held protests against a trend of referring journalists and activists to military courts. Reporters covering the security forces or protests are particularly vulnerable to harassment, physical abuse, and arrest. In September 2021, employees of the digital content firm Instalingo were interrogated in connection with content that was critical of normalizing diplomatic relations with Israel. The television channel Zitouna, which is often associated with Ennahda, was raided in October after a host read an antidictatorship poem.

In addition to journalists, political bloggers have been prosecuted under insult and defamation laws. In May 2021, blogger Salim Jebali was arrested for criticizing the president on social media.

**D2 0-4 pts**

**Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public 3 / and private? 4**

The constitution calls for freedom of belief and conscience for members of all religions, as well as for the nonreligious, and bans campaigns against apostasy or incitement to hatred and violence on religious grounds. However, blasphemy remains illegal, and police may invoke it as a pretext for arrests. Islam is enshrined as the only religion of the state, and Islamic education remains a required component of the curriculum in public schools. Converts to Christianity often experience harassment and discrimination.

**D3 0-4 pts**

**Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political 3 / indoctrination? 4**

Article 33 of the constitution explicitly protects academic freedom, which has improved in practice since 2011. However, self-censorship by academics persists in some instances. Students have reported being unable to pursue dissertation research on topics including sexuality and gender identity, or to engage in critiques of Islam's role in violent extremism.

**D4 0-4 pts**

**Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics 4 / without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4**

Private discussion is generally open and free, though there is some fear of reprisals for speech on certain topics, including criticism of the military. The criminal ban on same-sex sexual activity discourages open discussion of issues affecting LGBT+ people.

Social media users have faced a growing risk of prosecution for posts that are critical of the president and government policies, though most of those targeted have accounts with large audiences. Users who posted on political topics also reported online harassment and hacking attempts in 2021.

### E Associational and Organizational Rights

**E1 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom of assembly? 2 / 4**

The constitution guarantees the rights to assembly and peaceful demonstration. Public protests on political, social, and economic issues are frequent and well-attended. However, a 2015 counterterrorism law and successive states of emergency have imposed significant constraints on such gatherings. A state of emergency allows security forces to ban strikes, meetings, and large gatherings considered likely to incite disorder.

Following large and sometimes violent antigovernment protests in late July 2021, during which some participants burned or stormed Ennahda offices in several cities, President Saïed as part of his emergency powers declaration imposed a ban on public gatherings, an extensive curfew, and restrictions on travel between cities outside curfew. Even prior to July, freedom of assembly was curtailed under COVID-19-related emergency measures, including a nightly curfew.

The year also featured a pattern of police violence against protesters. Officers at various times used batons, tear gas, and armored vehicles against protesters in the capital and in the southern and interior regions. At least one man died as police violently dispersed a protest in January. In November, police in Agareb used extreme violence against demonstrators protesting against the government's decision to reverse the closure of a toxic waste dump.

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because authorities used excessive force in response to protests during the year, and President Saïed imposed curfews and other assembly restrictions beginning in July.*

**E2 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?** **2 / 4**

A 2011 decree guarantees the freedom for NGOs to operate and outlines procedures governing the establishment of new groups. Tens of thousands of new NGOs began operating after the revolution, holding conferences, trainings, educational programs, and other events throughout Tunisia in subsequent years.

However, a 2018 law effectively equates NGOs with businesses and requires them to submit to onerous reporting requirements beyond those codified in the 2011 decree. Under the law, all NGOs (and businesses) are required to register with a National Registry of Institutions, and to provide data on staff, assets, decisions to merge or dissolve, and operations. Failure to register may result in a year of imprisonment and a fine. Critics of the rules argue that they increase state monitoring and oversight of civil society. Registration applications can be denied at the discretion of the Council of the National Registry.

**E3 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?** **3 / 4**

The constitution guarantees the right to form labor unions and to strike. Large-scale strike actions have occurred across all sectors of the economy since the revolution, with participants demanding labor reform, better wages, and improved workplace conditions. Unions have reported that some employers take steps to discourage union activities, including the dismissal of union activists.

The UGTT is the predominant union organization, though independent unions also exist. The UGTT has played a significant role in brokering political agreements during moments of crisis since 2011. In late 2021, after initially voicing support for many of President Saïed's actions, the union pressed him to move toward broader dialogue and early elections.

**F Rule of Law**

**F1 0-4 pts**

**Is there an independent judiciary?** **2 / 4**

While the constitution calls for an independent judiciary, judicial reform has proceeded slowly since the 2011 revolution, with numerous Ben Ali-era judges remaining on the bench and successive governments regularly attempting to manipulate the courts. Legislation adopted in 2016 established the Supreme Judicial Council, a body tasked with ensuring the independence of the judiciary and appointing a third of the Constitutional Court judges. Council members were elected that year by thousands of legal professionals. However, a December 2021 report from the Middle East and North Africa director of the International Commission of Jurists accused Tunisian authorities of failing to adopt reforms that would uphold the judiciary's independence and empower the Supreme Judicial Council, as required by earlier laws on transitional justice.

The Constitutional Court, whose role is to evaluate the constitutionality of decrees and laws, had yet to be established in 2021. The parliament's efforts to press forward with the court's formation were rebuffed by President Saïed in the first half of the year, adding to the broader political impasse

between the executive and legislature. The absence of a Constitutional Court complicated debate over the constitutionality of Saïed's emergency measures.

Since July 2021, the president has faced criticism from the legal community for his assertion of authority over the functioning of the courts and statements calling for the "purification" of the judiciary. While the details of any planned reforms had yet to be disclosed at year's end, the statements reportedly contributed to a hostile climate for judges, including on social media.

## **F2 0-4 pts**

### **Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 2 / 4**

Though civil and criminal procedures have improved significantly since the time of Ben Ali, a state of emergency in place since 2015 and renewed repeatedly has given police broad license to arrest and detain people on security- or terrorism-related charges, and arbitrary arrests continued to take place during the year. Civilians are still tried in military courts, particularly on charges of defaming the army. Those targeted for military trials in 2021 included lawmakers, businessmen, journalists, and bloggers.

In 2014, Tunisia established a Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) to examine political, economic, and social crimes committed since 1956, and it soon began collecting testimony. In early 2018, the parliament voted against extending the commission's mandate, a decision that drew criticism from rights activists for weakening transitional justice efforts. The commission presented its final report in 2019 and officially published it in 2020, drawing on over 62,000 complaints filed by Tunisian citizens against the state for human rights abuses. Tunisian courts began reviewing 69 indictments and 131 referrals from the IVD, but the president's emergency measures in 2021 created uncertainty about the future of the transitional justice process.

## **F3 0-4 pts**

### **Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 3 / 4**

Physical security has threatened by periodic terrorist attacks in recent years, including some claimed by the Islamic State (IS) militant group.

The police force is the subject of long-standing complaints about officers abusing civilians and detainees with impunity, and the police unions have resisted reform efforts aimed at addressing the problem. Several well-publicized instances of police abuse and harassment were caught on video in 2021. Victims included a shepherd in Siliana Governorate, a young man in the Tunis neighborhood of Sidi Hassine who was publicly stripped and beaten by police, and another Sidi Hassine man who died in police custody. These events triggered large protests against police violence, which in turn faced repression by riot police.

While some offenses can still draw the death penalty under Tunisian law, the authorities have not carried out an execution since 1991.

## **F4 0-4 pts**

### **Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 2 / 4**

The constitution prohibits all forms of discrimination and calls for the state to create a culture of diversity. However, LGBT+ people continue to face legal discrimination. Same-sex sexual activity remains illegal, with the penal code calling for prison sentences of up to three years for "sodomy"; this law has been enforced in practice in recent years. Although the constitution guarantees gender equality, women experience discrimination in employment, and sexual harassment in public spaces remains prevalent.

Tunisia has no asylum law, leaving the United Nations as the sole entity processing claims of refugee status in the country. Irregular migrants and asylum seekers are often housed in informal detention centers, where they suffer from substandard living conditions. Delays in the issuance of residency permits make it impossible for many to work legally, forcing them to take informal jobs with no labor protections. The reported handover of an Algerian refugee in Tunisia to Algerian authorities in 2021 raised concerns about the safety of refugees in the country.

## **G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights**

### **G1 0-4 pts**

#### **Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 3 / 4**

The constitution guarantees freedom of movement within the country, as well as the freedom to travel abroad. In 2017, lawmakers approved measures that require authorities to go through more rigorous processes in order to issue travel bans or restrict passports. However, authorities have broad license under the state of emergency to restrict individuals' movement without initiating

formal charges, and thousands of people have been affected by such orders. Freedom of movement has also been hampered by COVID-19-related measures since 2020, with some restrictions enforced by the military. Separately, human rights groups criticized the travel bans imposed after the president's seizure of power in July 2021 as arbitrary restrictions on freedom of movement.

#### G2 0-4 pts

**Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?** 2 / 4

The protection of property rights and the freedom to operate businesses are impeded in part by high levels of corruption and a large court backlog of property disputes.

Under existing law, women are granted half the share of inheritance that men receive, and efforts to establish gender equality in inheritance rights have failed to make progress in the parliament.

#### G3 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?** 3 / 4

Tunisia has long been praised for relatively progressive social policies, especially in the areas of family law and women's rights. In 2017, the Justice Ministry repealed a decree that had banned Tunisian women from marrying non-Muslim men. However, women face high rates of domestic abuse. The 2017 Law on Eliminating Violence against Women addressed domestic violence and included language intended to protect women from harassment in public and from economic discrimination. The law's implementation has been limited by a shortage of trained agents to handle complaints, pressure on women from some agents to avoid taking abusive husbands to court, and logistical barriers to reporting abuse.

Public displays of affection can lead to charges of violating public morality laws, which carry penalties including jail time.

#### G4 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?** 2 / 4

Despite efforts by civil society groups to combat such problems, Tunisian women and children are subject to sex trafficking and forced domestic work in both Tunisia and abroad. Refugees and other migrants are also susceptible to exploitation by traffickers. Cases of exploitation in the agriculture and textile sectors are prevalent; women often work long hours with no contracts, benefits, or legal recourse.

Recent protests have called attention to the lack of economic opportunity for average Tunisians due to high inflation, high unemployment, and a dearth of meaningful reform to address such issues. Protests throughout 2021 highlighted the continued problem of regional economic inequality, with marginalization, underdevelopment, unemployment, and deteriorating conditions plaguing the country's interior.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, by many measures, exacerbated Tunisia's social and economic challenges. According to the World Bank, unemployment increased from 15 percent prior to the pandemic to 17.8 percent by the end of the first quarter of 2021. Unemployment was particularly high among women (24.9 percent) and young people (40.8 percent for those aged 15–24).

---

#### ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2021



#### Country:

Tunisia

#### Source:

[Freedom House](#)

#### Original link:

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/tunisia/freedom-world/2022>

#### Document type:

Periodical Report

#### Language:

English

**Published:**  
28 February 2022

**Document ID:**  
2068830

|                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                |                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Austrian Red Cross</b><br>Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and<br>Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) | Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien<br>T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583<br>F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589<br>info@ecoi.net | Contact<br>Imprint & Disclaimer<br>F.A.Q.<br>Data Protection Notice |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

