304

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

| Bilagsnr.: | 304 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Land: | Algeriet |
| Kilde: | Freedom house |
| Titel: | Freedom in the World 2022 |
| Udgivet: | 28. februar 2022 |
| Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet: | 19. maj 2022 |

Freedom House

Freedom in the World 2022 - Algeria

NOT FREE 32 / 100

Political Rights 10 / 40
Civil Liberties 22 / 60
LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS
32 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.

Overview

Political affairs in Algeria have long been dominated by a closed elite based in the military and the ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN). While there are multiple opposition parties in Parliament, elections are distorted by fraud, and electoral processes are not transparent. Other concerns include the suppression of street protests, legal restrictions on media freedom, and rampant corruption. The rise of the *Hirak* protest movement in 2019 has put pressure on the regime, leading it to crack down on dissent in the following years.

Key Developments in 2021

- Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the longest-serving president in Algerian history, died in September.
 Bouteflika resigned in 2019 after his efforts to serve a fifth term sparked the Hirak and after the armed forces withdrew their support.
- The ruling FLN and the allied National Democratic Rally (RND) were the two largest parties in the lower house of Parliament after elections were held in June. The Islamist Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) and El Binaa Movement said the polls were marred by fraud, while the Hirak boycotted the contests. Turnout stood at 23 percent.
- Hirak protests, which were suspended in 2020 due to COVID-19, resumed in February. The
 Interior Ministry banned unauthorized rallies in May in an effort to stop the ongoing protests.
 The authorities also responded with mass arrests; over 1,000 people were arrested for
 appearing at nationwide rallies held on May 14.
- In May, the government declared the Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylie (MAK)
 and the Rachad—which counts members of the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) among its
 members—terrorist organizations. The government blamed the MAK for causing forest fires
 that affected several provinces in August and went on to arrest MAK members as the year
 progressed.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through 1 / free and fair elections?

The president, who is directly elected for up to two five-year terms, remains the dominant figure in the executive branch, though some authority was shifted to the prime minister under constitutional reforms adopted in 2020. In 2008, term limits were removed, allowing Abdelaziz Bouteflika to serve four terms, but they were reinstated in 2016 when Parliament passed a constitutional reform package. Bouteflika's decision to seek another term, which would have been his fifth, sparked the Hirak protests in 2019. Bouteflika resigned that April after losing the support of the armed forces.

Bouteflika ally Abdelkader Bensalah, the head of Parliament's upper house, served as interim president during a transitional period, and a presidential election was held in December 2019. Former prime minister Abdelmajid Tebboune won in the first round with 58 percent of the vote, defeating four other candidates. Abdelaziz Belaïd, a 2014 presidential candidate and the only contestant who had not served in cabinet posts under Bouteflika, won 7 percent. The Constitutional Council reported a turnout of just under 40 percent, and one outside expert suggested a figure as low as 20 percent. Protesters called the election a sham and orchestrated a boycott. Outside observers were not allowed to enter the country to monitor the poll.

The president nominates the prime minister after consulting with the parliamentary majority. Abdelaziz Djerad, who became prime minister in 2019, resigned in June 2021. Tebboune named Finance Minister Ayman Benabderrahmane as Djerad's successor later that month.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair 1 / elections?

The 407 members of the National People's Assembly, the lower house of Parliament, are directly elected to five-year terms, which can only be renewed once under the 2020 constitutional reforms. Parliament was dissolved in February 2021 and early elections were held in June. The ruling FLN won 98 seats, while the allied RND won 58. The MSP won 65 seats, the Future Front won 48, and the moderate Islamist El Binaa Movement won 39. No other party won more than 10 seats, though 84 independent lawmakers were elected.

The MSP and the El Binaa Movement alleged that the elections were marred by fraud, while the Hirak boycotted the polls. Nationwide turnout stood at 23 percent. Preliminary turnout figures in Bejaïa and Tizi Ouzou stood at under 1 percent. The Independent National Authority for Elections (ANIE) reported that over 360 polling facilities were shuttered nationwide due to looting and other disruptions.

The president appoints one-third of the members of the upper house, the Council of the Nation, which has 144 members serving six-year terms. The other two-thirds are indirectly elected by local and provincial assemblies. Half of the chamber's mandates are renewed every three years. The FLN secured 29 of the 48 indirectly elected seats at stake in December 2018, with the RND and smaller factions or independents taking the remainder. Upper-house elections due in December 2021 were delayed to 2022.

Local and regional elections were held amid low turnout in late November 2021. The FLN and RND won the most town-hall seats and a plurality of regional-assembly seats, while the El Binaa Movement and the MSP did poorly.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the 1 / relevant election management bodies?

Algeria's elections, which were previously administered by the Interior Ministry, were often subject to government interference, but pressure from protesters in 2019 forced the government to establish the ANIE. However, the slate of presidential candidates that was ultimately announced ahead of the December 2019 presidential election was dominated by Bouteflika-era officials, raising doubts about the efficacy of the electoral reforms. The absence of international election monitors drew criticism from Algerian civil society.

Constitutional reforms were approved by voters in a 2020 referendum that was marred by low turnout. Reform-package opponents, including Hirak activists, had called for a boycott after being prevented from campaigning for a "no" vote or airing their views on state media.

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?

The Interior Ministry must approve political parties before they can operate legally. Parties cannot form along explicitly ethnic lines. The FIS, which swept the 1990 local and 1991 national elections that preceded Algeria's decade-long civil war, remains banned. Since the Hirak emerged in 2019, the authorities have intensified their repression of opposition groups, especially parties espousing separatism, Islamist groups, and parties perceived as closely aligned to the Hirak.

In April 2021, the Interior Ministry accused the opposition Union for Change and Progress of operating without its sanction and petitioned the courts to suspend it in May. That same month, the government sought to provisionally suspend the Socialist Workers' Party. Both parties, which have

supported the Hirak, remained active at year's end.

In May 2021, the High Security Council declared the Rachad, an organization that includes former FIS members, and the MAK terrorist organizations. The same body accused the Rachad and the MAK of involvement in the August murder of activist Djamel Bensmaïl. In September, the National Gendarmerie announced that 30 people, including 7 MAK members, were detained during an investigation into forest fires that affected several provinces in August; the government ultimately blamed the MAK for causing those fires. Also in September, police arrested 27 MAK members in Kherrata and Beni Ourtilane, accusing them of "attempting to sow discord and terror."

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power 1 / through elections? 4

Opposition parties play a marginal role in Parliament, and their campaigns are regularly curtailed by the government. Election boycotts by opposition groups are not uncommon.

Opposition leaders have also been subject to detention and prosecution. Karim Tabbou of unrecognized Democratic and Social Union was briefly detained ahead of the June 2021 elections. Later that month, Democratic and Social Movement leader Fethi Ghares was arrested for insulting the president and disseminating information that could "undermine public order." Ghares remained in pretrial detention at year's end.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the 1 / political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

Since Bouteflika's resignation, the military has maintained its long-standing influence on decision making, with General Ahmed Gaïd Salah playing a key role until his death in 2019. The military has since remained the most influential political actor in Algeria, thanks to its lack of accountability and vast resources.

Allegations and scandals involving corruption and financial influence in the selection of political candidates, as well as vote-buying during elections, have surfaced in recent years. After Bouteflika's resignation, Gaïd Salah initiated an anticorruption campaign targeting entrepreneurs and officials linked with the former administration, which he claimed was aimed at reducing the improper influence of these groups on domestic political decisions.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, 1/ and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

No specific ethnic or religious group dominates the main state institutions, which tend to include both Arabs and Amazigh (Berber) officials. Kabylie-based parties associated with the Amazigh community, like the Rally for Culture and Democracy and the Socialist Forces Front, have controlled a handful of municipalities, but their activities are often curtailed by the military, and some ethnic Berbers have been targeted by the authorities for mobilizing in support of their political interests.

Women remain reluctant to run for office, are often unable to secure meaningful influence within Parliament, and are more likely to lose intraparty debates. Women won only 8 percent of lowerhouse seats in the June 2021 elections.

LGBT+ people are politically marginalized and have little practical ability to advocate for their political interests.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

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

The military has historically served as the ultimate arbiter of policy disputes in Algeria, and elected leaders have relied on its support to maintain office. The loss of military backing played a significant role in Bouteflika's resignation. The army chief of staff continues to wield considerable influence under President Tebboune.

C2 0-4 pts

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

Inadequate anticorruption laws, a lack of official transparency, low levels of judicial independence, and bloated bureaucracies contribute to widespread corruption at all levels of government. The anticorruption investigations that do occur are often used to settle scores between factions within

the regime. The constitutional reforms passed in 2020 included provisions for an Authority for Transparency and for the Prevention of and Fight against Corruption, as well as a ban on combining roles in public office and private business.

Bouteflika's former political and economic allies received harsh prison sentences after his 2019 resignation as part of Gaïd Salah's anticorruption campaign. In January 2021, an Algiers court upheld corruption-related prison sentences issued against former prime ministers Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal in 2019. Ouyahia and Sellal reportedly received additional prison time in September 2021 but received effective reductions in December.

In August 2021, Mohamed Abdellah, a former border guard, was extradited from Spain on terrorism charges; Abdellah accused the Algerian authorities of targeting him for denouncing corruption within the border patrol before fleeing to Spain in 2018.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1/4

Algeria lacks access-to-information legislation. There is considerable opacity surrounding official decision-making procedures, the publication of official acts is rarely timely, and rules on asset disclosure by government officials are weak and poorly enforced. The 2020 constitutional revision introduced a requirement for all appointed and elected officials to declare their assets at the beginning and end of their terms, and obliges the public administration to justify its decisions within a time period to be determined by law. While the revised constitution nominally guarantees the right to access information, it includes vague exceptions for "the rights of others, the legitimate interests of businesses, and the requirements of national security."

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 1/4

Although some newspapers are privately owned and some journalists remain aggressive in their coverage of government affairs, most papers rely on government agencies for printing and advertising, encouraging self-censorship. Authorities sometimes block distribution of independent news outlets that are based abroad or online. In 2020, for example, the websites of Maghreb Emergent, Radio M, and Interlignes became unavailable to Algerian users. Viewers can access unlicensed private television channels located in Algeria but legally based abroad, though these are subject to government crackdowns. In August 2021, the Communications Ministry ordered privately owned Lina TV to stop broadcasting, saying the station was unaccredited.

In 2020, Parliament approved a law criminalizing "fake news" that undermines public order and security; offenders can receive one- to five-year sentences. Under a 2020 decree, news sites must be directed by Algerian nationals and based physically in Algeria, report income sources, and keep an archive of at least six months. Websites in French or other foreign languages must be approved by a special authority for online media.

Authorities use these and other legal mechanisms to restrict media activity. Journalists and bloggers are frequently subjected to brief detentions, short jail terms, suspended sentences, or fines for offenses including defamation and "undermining national unity." In addition, journalists covering demonstrations or who are close to the Hirak have been arbitrarily arrested and interrogated. In May 2021, Radio M and Maghreb Emergent editor in chief Ihsane El Kadi was placed under court supervision over charges including "undermining national unity." In June, El Kadi was briefly detained ahead of that month's legislative elections. In September, journalists Hassan Bouras and Mohamed Mouloudj were placed in custody over their alleged links to the Rachad and the MAK.

Foreign outlets are also subject to government interference. In June 2021, the government withdrew France 24's authorization to operate in Algeria, alleging that the outlet engaged in "repeated hostility" towards national institutions. In July, the Communications Ministry revoked the accreditation of Saudi outlet Al Arabiya.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public 1 / and private? 4

Algeria's population is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. Members of religious minorities, including Christians and non-Sunni Muslims, suffer from state persecution and interference. Authorities have cracked down on the small Ahmadi minority, claiming that its members denigrate Islam, threaten national security, and violate laws on associations. Religious communities may only gather to worship at state-approved locations.

Accusations of nonbelief or blasphemy can draw criminal punishments. In early 2021, Hamid Soudad, a Christian, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and a 100,000-Algerian-dinar (\$740) fine for "blasphemy." In April, Saïd Djabelkheir, an expert on Islam, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for commenting on Islamic texts. Djabelkheir remained free as he sought an appeal.

Proselytizing by non-Muslims is illegal. In March 2021, an Oran court upheld a prison sentence and a fine against a Christian pastor and his friend for proselytizing.

Authorities have engaged in a crackdown on the Algerian Protestant Church (EPA) since 2017, though the EPA had been legally recognized in 1974. In June 2021, a court in Oran ordered the closure of three Protestant churches.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political 2 / indoctrination?

Authorities generally do not interfere directly with the operations of universities, but debate is circumscribed in practice due to restrictive laws that limit speech more broadly. Academic work is also affected by state censorship of domestically published and imported books. Student organizations were active in the Hirak, with members calling for political reforms. The authorities occasionally resorted to violence to suppress these demonstrations.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics 2 / without fear of surveillance or retribution?

Private discussion and the public expression of personal views are relatively unhindered when they do not focus on certain sensitive topics, but social media users are subject to prosecution for critical comments that touch on the government or religion. The government monitors internet activity in the name of national security and does not disclose information about the program's targets or range, which is thought to be extensive.

The authorities are known to prosecute social media users, particularly Hirak supporters. In January 2021, activist Walid Kechida received a three-year prison term and a 500,000-dinar (\$3,700) fine for posting satirical content on Facebook. In August, two Facebook users were arrested for aiming to espouse pro-Rachad views on the social network. In October, Mohad Gasmi, a Hirak supporter and activist for the unemployed, was sentenced to five years' imprisonment over his social media activity; Gasmi had been charged with "praising terrorism."

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 1/4

Legal restrictions on freedom of assembly remain in place but are inconsistently enforced. Hirak protests were sometimes tolerated by the authorities, though they used force and engaged in arbitrary arrest to preempt or disrupt some rallies.

Hirak organizers suspended their activities in March 2020 as the novel coronavirus spread worldwide, but protests resumed in February 2021. In May, the Interior Ministry banned unauthorized rallies and required that permits include start and stop times for protests as well as the names of organizers. The government also used terrorism charges to impede the Hirak; in April, the public prosecutor in Oran charged 15 supporters, including journalist Saïd Boudour, with terrorism. The case against four of the defendants was moved to an antiterrorism court in Algiers in September.

Police also engaged in mass arrests as protests continued, with officers regularly arresting scores of people during events. The National Committee for the Liberation of Detainees (CNLD) reported that over 1,000 people were arrested for participating in nationwide protests held on May 14. While many protesters were quickly released, some remained in detention for long periods; in November, the CNLD reported that protesters and activists were among the 231 people who remained in detention.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged 1 / in human rights- and governance-related work?

The 2012 law on associations effectively restricts the formation, funding, and activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Permits and receipts of application submission are required to establish and operate NGOs, but organizations often face considerable delays and bureaucratic obstacles when attempting to obtain such documents, leaving them in a legally precarious position.

In May 2021, the Interior Ministry moved to dissolve the Youth Action Rally, an NGO that has supported the Hirak, citing its alleged violation of the law on associations. In October, an administrative court ruled in favor of its dissolution.

NGOs must notify the government of staffing changes and submit detailed reports on their funding; those that accept foreign funding without government approval risk fines or imprisonment.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 1/4

The country's main labor federation, the General Union of Algerian Workers, has been criticized for its close relationship to the government and for its failure to advocate for workers' interests.

Workers require government approval to establish new unions, and this is difficult to obtain in practice, leaving many unions without legal status. Authorities routinely clamp down on independent unions. The Autonomous National Union of Electricity and Gas Workers, an independent union that represents workers at the National Society for Electricity and Gas, a public utility, has been repeatedly harassed by the authorities in recent years. In June 2021, Ramzi Derder, a National Federation of Informal Workers member, was arrested on charges including terrorism.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 1/4

The judiciary is susceptible to pressure from the civilian government and the military. Judges are appointed by the High Council of the Judiciary (CSM), which is headed by the president, although the 2020 constitutional reforms removed the justice minister and attorney general from the body. Two representatives of the judges' union and the chair of the National Human Rights Council were added.

Concerns regarding the judiciary's independence persist despite these reforms. In May 2021, the CSM expelled Sadedin Merzoug, a Hirak supporter, from the judiciary for obstructing justice and violating his duty of confidentiality.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1/4

The lack of judicial and prosecutorial independence often erodes the due process rights of defendants, particularly in politically sensitive trials against former officials or civic activists. Lengthy delays in bringing cases to trial are common. Prosecutors' requests to extend pretrial detention periods are typically granted. Security forces frequently conduct warrantless searches and engage in arbitrary arrests and short-term detentions.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war 2 / and insurgencies? 4

A 2006 reconciliation law gave immunity to Islamist and state perpetrators of serious crimes during the civil war, while compensating families of those who were subject to such crimes, which included forced disappearances. The reconciliation law also criminalized public discussion on the fate of the disappeared.

Allegations of torture have decreased since the civil war's end, but human rights activists still accuse the police of using excessive force and abusing detainees. In February 2021, Walid Nekiche, a student, accused security officers of sexually assaulting and torturing him after his 2019 arrest, prompting prosecutors to open a preliminary investigation. In May, Nekiche criticized the investigation's pace.

Prison conditions are poor; in 2020, the online outlet Algérie Part reported that inmates at Algiers' Harrach prison faced significant overcrowding and poor hygiene.

Terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State militant group, continue to operate in Algeria. However, attacks have grown less frequent in recent years. In January 2021, five people were killed and three were injured by a roadside bomb in Tébessa Province. AQIM reportedly claimed responsibility for placing the explosive but denied targeting civilians.

F4 0-4 pts

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

Officials have made gradual efforts to address the Amazigh community's cultural demands. Tamazight, the Berber language, became a national language in 1995, allowing it to be taught officially in schools serving Amazigh areas. Tamazight received the status of an official language

nationwide through a 2016 constitutional amendment, meaning it could be used in administrative documents. The 2020 constitutional revisions made it impossible to change the status of Tamazight as a national language. However, Arabic remains the prevailing language of government.

The constitution guarantees gender equality, but women continue to face both legal and societal discrimination. Many women receive lower wages than men in similar positions, and there are few women in company leadership positions. Sexual harassment, while punishable with fines and jail time, is nevertheless common in workplaces. NGOs dedicated to women's rights have become more vocal as part of the Hirak, calling for a renewed commitment to the constitutional promise of gender equality.

LGBT+ people face discrimination and violence, and many LGBT+ activists have fled the country. Same-sex sexual activity is punishable with prison sentences as long as two years. While prosecutions for such acts have declined in recent years, LGBT+ Algerians face mistreatment at the hands of police and discrimination by health providers and employers. In 2020, 2 people received prison terms and another 42 received suspended sentences after they were arrested at a clandestine gay wedding in Constantine.

About 175,000 Sahrawis from Western Sahara live in refugee camps in the Tindouf area, near the border with Morocco. The camps have been present since 1975, in a remote desert region with limited job opportunities. About 90,000 of the residents are considered "vulnerable" by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as they rely on humanitarian assistance for food, water, and education.

Sub-Saharan African migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, are subject to racial discrimination in Algeria and are often arbitrarily arrested and deported from the country—or simply abandoned at the southern desert borders—without being given the opportunity to challenge the actions in court. In the first quarter of 2021, Algeria sent nearly 3,800 West African migrants to areas near the border with Niger. Algerian authorities sent scores of migrants to the border with Niger after it reopened in July. In September, as diplomatic tensions rose between Algiers and Rabat, Algeria deported about 40 Moroccan migrants to Morocco.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of 2 / residence, employment, or education?

While most citizens are relatively free to travel domestically and abroad, the authorities closely monitor and limit access to visas for non-Algerians. Men of military draft age cannot leave the country without official consent. The land border between Algeria and Morocco remains closed. Police reportedly limit the movement of sub-Saharan African migrants attempting to reach the Mediterranean coast. Married women younger than 18 must obtain the permission of their husbands to travel abroad.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the authorities imposed significant restrictions on domestic and international freedom of movement in 2020 and 2021; curfews and other controls fluctuated along with the rates of infection.

G2 0-4 pts

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

The government plays a dominant role in the economy, leaving little room for private competitors. Cronyism is also a major obstacle to private enterprise, with businesspeople who are not aligned with the regime often facing harassment by the authorities. Numerous regulations and their flawed implementation make Algeria one of the most difficult environments in the world in which to establish and operate a business. Inheritance rules favor men over women.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and 2 / size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

Women do not enjoy equal rights in marriage and divorce under the family code, which is based on Islamic law. Among other provisions, women must obtain a male guardian's permission to marry, and the father is the legal guardian of his children. No law addresses spousal rape.

Domestic violence is common, and the laws against it are weak; for example, cases can be dropped if the victim forgives the alleged abuser. Women's rights groups report that between 100 and 200 women are killed in domestic abuse incidents each year. In late January 2021, public-television journalist Tinhinane Laceb was killed by her spouse in their Algiers home.

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 1/4

The weak rule of law, government involvement in the economy, and bureaucratic obstacles pose major barriers to economic opportunity and social mobility. Laws against unsafe or abusive working conditions are poorly enforced.

A 2009 law criminalized all forms of trafficking in persons, and Algeria reported its first conviction under the law in 2015. In recent years, the government has made an effort to enforce the ban through prosecutions and has provided protection for victims, though not systematically. Undocumented sub-Saharan African migrants are particularly susceptible to labor exploitation, including through the practice of debt bondage, as well as sexual exploitation.

ecoi.net summary:
Annual report on political
rights and civil liberties in 2021

Country: Algeria

Source:

Freedom House

Original link: https://freedomhouse.org/cou ntry/algeria/freedomworld/2022

Document type:Periodical Report

Language: English

Published: 28 February 2022

Document ID: 2071846

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and
Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

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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.









