

Niger

Country Overview

Politics

The Republic of Niger is a semi-presidential democratic republic. In 2021, the ruling party candidate, Mohamed Bazoum, won the presidential election with approximately 56 percent of the vote in the second of two rounds of voting.¹ This marked the first peaceful transfer of executive power in Niger's history, in spite of an attempted coup d'état on the night of 30-31 March 2021 by several military actors.² International and domestic election observers determined both rounds of the presidential elections as well as the coinciding legislative elections to be "peaceful, free, fair, transparent, and inclusive."³

The country faces environmental threat, poverty and multiple security concerns from bordering nations, including insecurity in Libya, conflict and terrorism in Mali, as well as violent extremism in northeastern Nigeria.⁴ Niger has participated in offensives against the armed group Boko Haram, and Boko Haram has attacked the country repeatedly in retaliation. The government has repeatedly renewed a state of emergency in the southeastern region of the country in relation to these attacks.⁵

Economy

Niger is classified as a low-income economy by the World Bank;⁶ however, the country's GDP has grown steadily since 2015, jumping from 9.68 billion USD to 13.74 in 2020.⁷ Niger's GDP annual growth rate has fluctuated within that same time peaking in 2018 with 7.21 percent, falling to 5.94 the following year and reached 3.58 percent in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸ The country's economy is not highly diversified; the economy is based largely on mining and agriculture. The agricultural sector employs approximately 75 percent of Niger's population and comprises about 40 percent of the country's GDP.⁹ As a consequence, Niger's economy is highly vulnerable to external shocks like climate change, changing food prices, and security conflicts. President Bazoum has made commitments to develop agricultural businesses in the country. Other areas of government investment include mining, infrastructure and construction, and transportation.¹⁰ In 2021, amidst economic disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country's top exports were oil seeds and oleaginous fruits and miscellaneous grains, inorganic chemicals, mineral fuels, miscellaneous commodities, and edible fruit and



nuts.¹¹ More typical of recent years, however, Niger's 2020 top exports were gold, ores, mineral fuels, edible vegetables, and animal or vegetable oil and fats.¹²

Social/Human Development

The United Nations positions Niger in the low human development category. The country's 2019 human development index was 0.394 ranking Niger at the very bottom out of 189 countries.¹³ In 2020, 91 percent of the population lived in multidimensional poverty and by 2021, 41.8 percent of the population were living in extreme poverty.¹⁴

The country is home to five major ethnic groups: Hausa (53.1 percent), Zarma/Songhai (21.2 percent), Tuareg (11 percent), Fulani (6.5 percent), and Kanuri (5.9 percent). Approximately 99.3 percent of the population is Muslim while 0.3 percent is Christian and 0.2 percent is animist.¹⁵

U.S. Department of State TIP Report Summary (2021)

U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2

The *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report* notes that Nigerien children and women are most at risk of sex and labor trafficking. The Report further details that trafficking and trafficking risks are present in export supply chains of gold, salt, trona, and gypsum mines; agriculture; stone quarries; as well as manufacturing within the country.¹⁶

Read the full TIP report at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TIPR-GPA-upload-07222021.pdf>

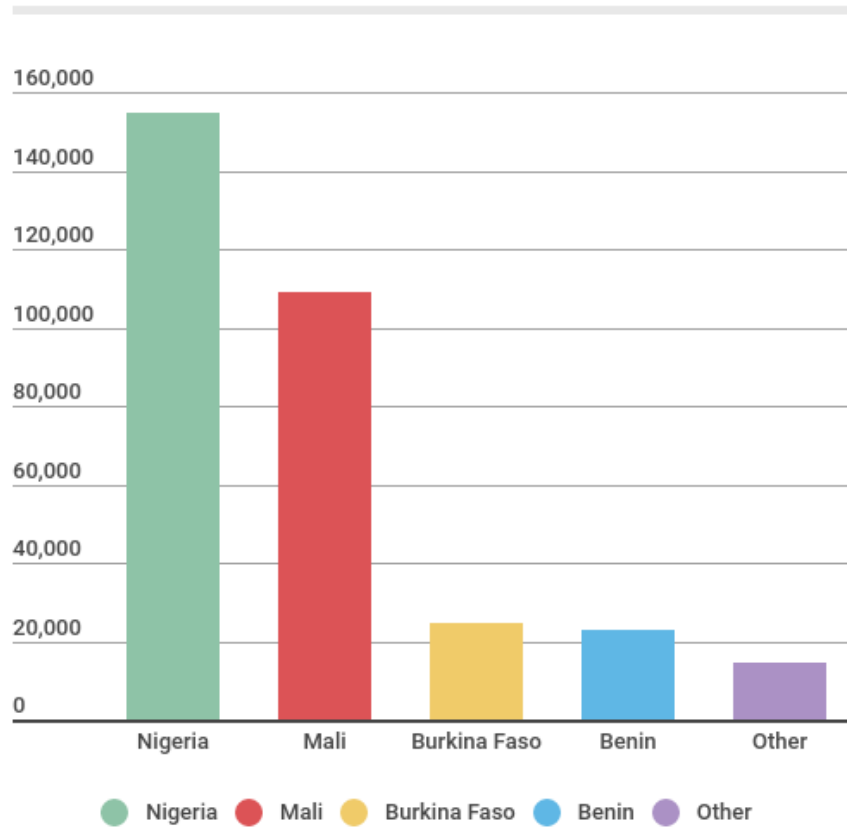
Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

Niger has a positive net migration rate.¹⁷ By mid-2020, the number of international migrants in Niger totaled 348.1 thousand making up 1.4 percent of Niger's population. As of November 2021, Niger had 583,416 persons of concern in-country. Of which, 48 percent (281,853 people) were refugees and 45 percent (264,257 people).¹⁸ Conflict in neighboring countries significantly contributes to Niger's high quantity of migrants.

In 2020, the top origin countries for migrants in Niger were Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin and Other.¹⁹ "Other" indicates that the data is unknown or incompatible with United Nation's (UN) categorization.



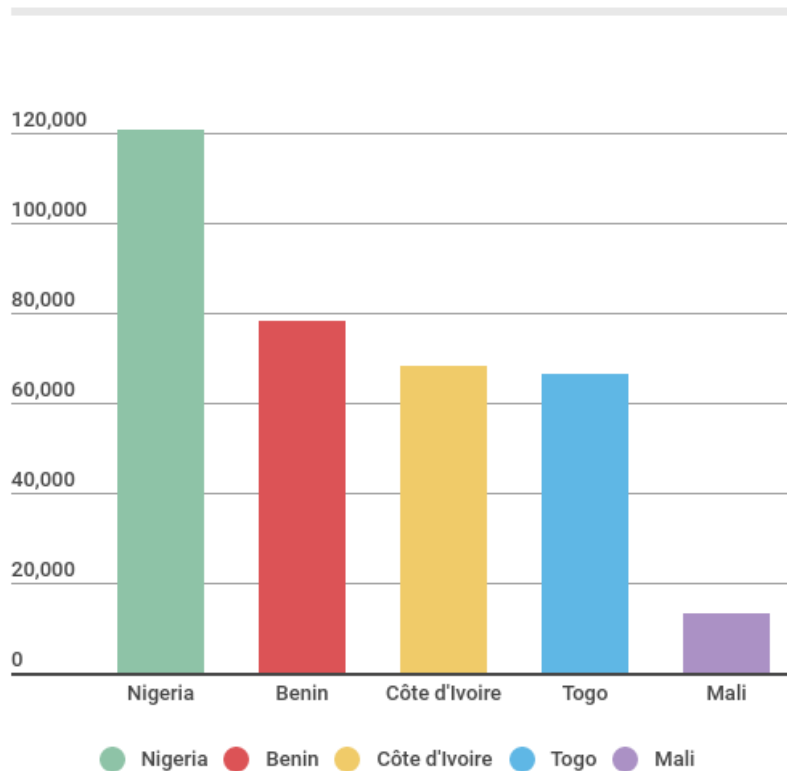
Migrants to Niger



As of 2020, the top destination countries for migrants from Niger were Nigeria, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, and Mali with Burkina Faso following close behind.²⁰



Migrants from Niger



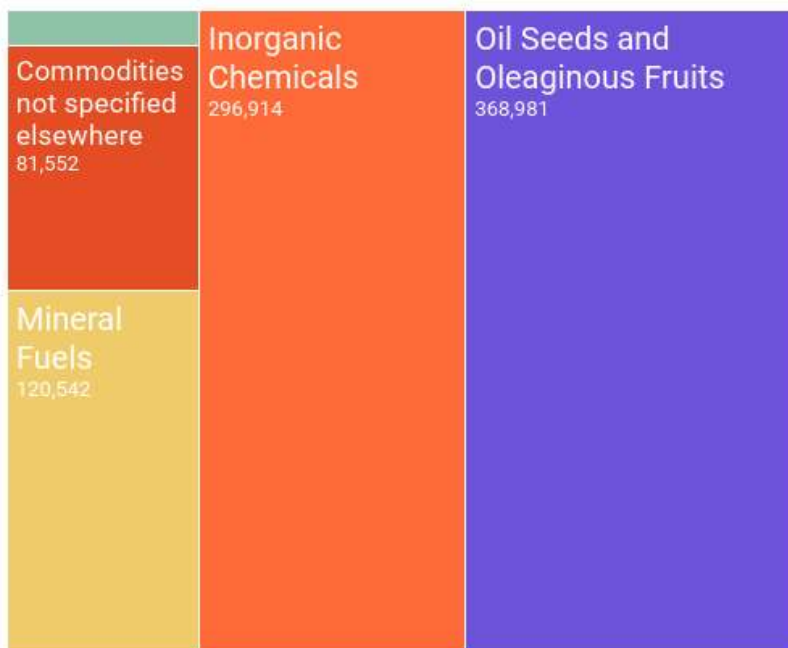
Exports and Trade

In 2021, the country's top exports were oil seeds and oleaginous fruits and miscellaneous grains, inorganic chemicals, mineral fuels, miscellaneous commodities, and edible fruit and nuts.²¹ This represented a great diversion from Niger's recent export history which is better reflected by the top exports of 2020, which were gold, ores, mineral fuels, edible vegetables, and animal or vegetable oil, and fats.²²



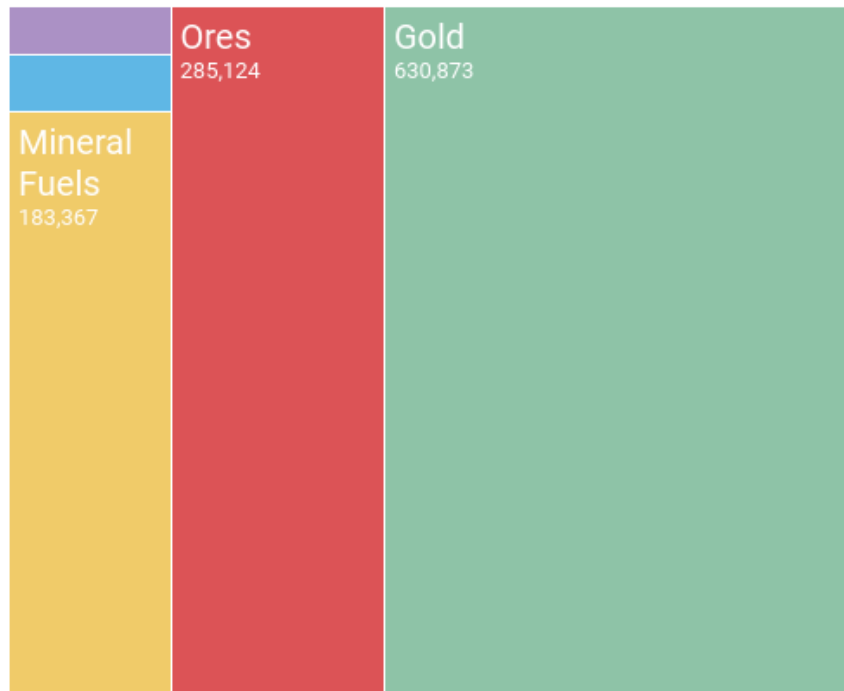
Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

2021



Top Commodity Exports (USD/Thousands)

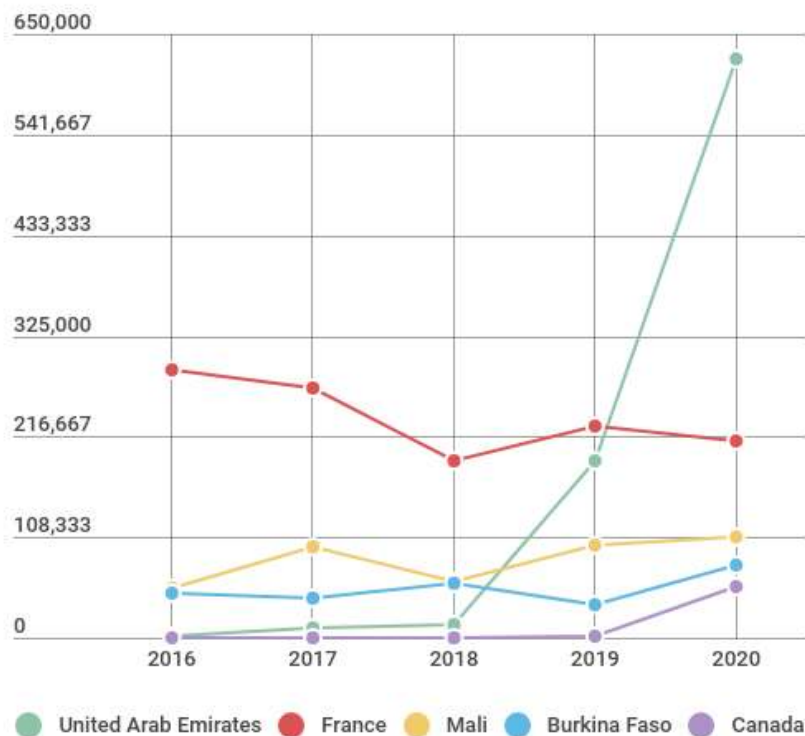
2020



According to direct data, Niger's top importers as of 2020 were United Arab Emirates, France, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Canada.²³ However, mirror data shows that the second top importer was China, followed by Canada with the United States as fifth.²⁴



Niger Export Partners (USD/Thousands)



Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Risk Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

Freedom of Association

The U.S. Department of State reports that Niger's constitution and law provide for the freedom of association through the right to form and join unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes, but, importantly, the government has not adopted implementing regulations to enforce these laws.²⁵ However, the State Department notes that "authorities generally respected freedom of association, the right to strike, and the right to collective bargaining, and workers exercised these rights."²⁶



While there are no prohibitions of strikes in nonessential sectors, the government does require minimum employment during a strike in essential services—the scope of which is broader than the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) definition. Niger’s essential services include telecommunications, health, government media, water supply, electricity distribution, fuel distribution, air traffic control, financial services, public transportation, garbage collection, and government authority services.²⁷ Workers must give employers notice of a strike three days in advance.²⁸

Niger law provides that unions can conduct activities without interference, and prohibits antiunion discrimination.²⁹ While there are penalties for breaking these laws, there is no legal requirement to reinstate workers dismissed for union activity. The U.S. State Department reports that while the law applies to both the formal and informal sectors of the economy, the government largely enforced the law in the public and private sectors, but not in informal workplaces where the majority of economic activity occurs.³⁰ However, the informal sector does feature some unions such as in urban marketplaces.³¹

Working Conditions

There is a minimum wage established by the labor code, but only for salaried workers in the formal sector with contractual terms of employment.³² The lowest minimum wage was higher than the official poverty income level.³³ The legal workweek is 40 hours with one rest period of 24 hours minimum. The labor code establishes occupational safety and health standards and by law workers can remove themselves from dangerous situations without jeopardizing their employment. This law applies equally to migrant and foreign workers, but the U.S. Department of State has reported that authorities do not effectively protect employees in such situations.³⁴ However, the informal sector operates without much formal regulation.³⁵

Discrimination

The constitution provides for equal access to employment for all citizens, and prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national origin, or citizenship, social origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, language, sickle cell anemia, HIV-status, , or other communicable disease. Under customary law, women have fewer legal rights than their male counterparts.³⁶ Moreover, the U.S. Department of State has reported that the government does not effectively enforce the law, and that discrimination occurs with respect to sex and disability.³⁷ There continues to be stigma for people with HIV status and for former slaves, or their descendants, however, the government is undertaking an antidiscrimination campaign to protect those with HIV and AIDS.³⁸

Forced Labor

The government has not fully met the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking according to the U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, but is making



significant efforts to do so. The 2021 report acknowledged growing efforts to meet the minimum standards, in spite of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁹ Examples of such efforts included increased training for officials and members of civil society, greater identification and referral of victims to the government's shelter and the introduction of a national referral mechanism (NRM).⁴⁰ Nevertheless, penalties and enforcement mechanisms are reportedly insufficient.⁴¹

Law prohibits the use of child labor and the employment of children under the age of 14. However, this does not apply to informal work, self-employment, or subsistence agriculture.⁴² Children aged 12 or 13 may undertake light work for a maximum of two hours per day outside of school hours with authorization if it does not impede their schooling, morals, or health.⁴³ Children aged 14 to 15 may work, with limits on the hours and type of work, but they cannot join unions.⁴⁴ However, laws addressing the worst forms of child labor do not explicitly prohibit forced or compulsory labor by children, particularly in agriculture, and the U.S. Department of State has noted that the government does not effectively enforce child labor laws.⁴⁵ The U.S. Department of State report in 2021 noted that child labor is prevalent from the age of five.⁴⁶ While education is provided for children from 4-18, compulsory attendance lacks enforcement and as of June 2021, over 50% of school-age children were not enrolled.⁴⁷

Civil Society Organizations

The U.S. Department of State has reported that the public media does not cover the statements or activities of civil society organizations that are critical of the government.⁴⁸ Amnesty International reports some level of repression of freedom of expression via prosecutions of journalists.⁴⁹ For example, when publicizing findings on government corruption, journalists and civil society activists have been arrested.⁵⁰

Immigration Policies Limiting the Employment Options or Movement of Migrants

The law provides for the freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the U.S. Department of State has noted that the government generally respects these rights.⁵¹

In June 2021, President Bazoum announced a returns policy with the aim of promoting the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the Diffa and Tillabéri regions, despite the precarious security situations present there.⁵²



Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants

Conventions	Status
ILO 29 Forced Labor	In force
ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize	In force
ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining	In force
ILO 100 Equal Remuneration	In force
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor	In force
ILO 111 Discrimination	In force
ILO 138 Minimum Age	In force
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies	In force
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force
ILO 97 Migration for Employment	Not ratified

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Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Niger scored 96.0 on the Fragile States Index in 2021, being categorized as the world's nineteenth most fragile state. Since 2018, the score has averaged at 95.9, after falling from 98.4 in 2016. Factionalized elites, public services, demographic pressures and the security apparatus are the most pressing issues according to the index.⁵⁴ The U.S. Department of State reports that the regional fight against the terrorist group Boko Haram continues, and has reportedly resulted in the killing of many civilians. There have been reports of abductions, theft, violence, and use of child soldiers by Boko Haram. Various reports demonstrate examples of forced marriages to Boko Haram militants.⁵⁵

Level of Crime and Violence

According to the Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), a division of the U.S. Department of State, there is a risk of non-violent crimes like theft in Niger's major cities and the further risk of violent crimes committed after dark.⁵⁶ As Niger has lengthy and porous borders, it has been used as a transit route for the smuggling of gold, vehicles, illegal drugs and humans.⁵⁷ Sharing borders with countries with key access routes to Europe, it has had a sustained impact as a transit country for human trafficking.



This prompted the 2015 introduction of anti-smuggling legislation and anti-smuggling efforts, such as the training of border staff and the provision of small business projects to former smugglers. In conjunction, these measures resulted in a 500% reduction in human trafficking across Niger's northern border. However, there have been various negative side effects to the legislation. It limits regionally mobility as foreigners cannot migrate through the northern border, it has had a profound effect on the local economy, it has increased the security risk for smugglers and their clients, including increased risk of death in transit.⁵⁸

Smugglers and their clients must now take alternative routes via remote locations or cross the border into Chad, where routes are not as well-established. Moreover, the state security forces which formerly protected smugglers and migrants now have to prevent the smuggling operations, and so smugglers will avoid state security forces to avoid detention – even if they must resort to abandoning their clients in the desert. Hence, the legislation prevents individuals from fleeing war and puts them at risk. Reflecting this, the Forced Migration Review has noted the rapid increase in mortalities, with twice the level of mortality for people crossing the Sahara as those crossing the Mediterranean.⁵⁹

State Persecution

The U.S. Department of State reports that members of the Boudouma and Fulani ethnic groups faced both governmental and societal discrimination because of the perception that they supported and/or facilitated the activities of Boko Haram.⁶⁰ Niger is affected by the presence of two humanitarian crises along its borders. Firstly, as a result of the Boko Haram and ISIS-related violence, the Diffa and Maradi regions receive refugees from Nigeria. Secondly, the Tillabéri region hosts refugees fleeing conflict and instability in Mali and Burkina Faso.⁶¹ This has resulted in a displaced population totalling 521, 000, including 163,000 refugees from Nigeria alone.⁶² The government of Niger has provided assistance to displaced communities and has an established system to provide protection and necessities to displaced communities.⁶³ IDPs, primarily, benefit from legislation providing protection for people fleeing violence and natural disasters. There is also legislation which provides for an established system of protection for refugees as well as individuals who do not qualify as refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention.⁶⁴ In terms of the freedom of movement, the law provides for the freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the U.S. Department of State has reported that the Nigerien government has respected most of these rights.⁶⁵ However, security officials have been reported to abuse or harm individuals accused of being members of Boko Haram, according to the U.S. Department of State.⁶⁶

Level of Corruption

In 2021, the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index scored Niger as 31 out of 100, where a 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and a 100 signals “Very Clean.” Niger ranks 124 out of 180 on the index, and the score has decreased by one point from the 2020 score, part of a



trajectory which has seen an overall decrease since 2018.⁶⁷ The World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators ranks Niger 27.4 out of 100 on the “Control of Corruption” scale, where a 0 is the lowest rank and 100 is the highest.⁶⁸ The U.S. Department of State reports that while the law provides for criminal penalties for corruption by officials and the Nigerien government has taken some measures to investigate those who have been involved in corruption, ultimately impunity persists.⁶⁹ Key factors behind the prevalence of corruption are ineffective training of the civil service, poor administrative controls, poverty, and low salaries.⁷⁰ In 2020, it came to light that corrupt dealings in relation to military procurement contracts had been taken approximately USD 137 million from the government budget.⁷¹ When publicizing findings on government corruption, journalists and civil society activists have been arrested.⁷²

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

The UN Human Development Index places Niger in the low human development category, ranking it 189 out of 189 countries with a score of 0.394 in 2019. Niger ranks below the average for countries situated in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁷³ The World Bank classifies Niger in the low-income level, but reports that the GDP has gradually increased since 2015 from USD 9.68 billion to USD 13.74 billion in 2020.⁷⁴

Level and Extent of Poverty

According to the World Bank, 41.8 percent of Nigeriens were living in states of extreme poverty in 2021.⁷⁵ The Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index value for Niger is 0.284.⁷⁶ According to the UNDP Human Development Reports Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), of which the most recent figures pertain to 2012, 90.5 percent of the population were multidimensionally poor, which gave an MPI value of 0.59.⁷⁷ The U.S. Department of State reports that the government has set the lowest minimum wage above the official poverty income level, with the statutory minimum wage being CFA 30, 047.⁷⁸

Degree of Gender Inequality

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report Gender Inequality Index value for Niger is 0.642, ranking it 154 out of 162 countries.⁷⁹ Niger ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1999, albeit with numerous reservations.⁸⁰ Niger’s Constitution outlines that Niger seeks the elimination of all forms of discrimination in relation to women and girls, including taking steps to combat gender violence and equitable representation in public institutions.⁸¹ As of February 2021, 25.9% of parliamentary seats were held by women.⁸² 76.3 % of women aged 20-24 years old



were either married or in a union prior to turning 18, with this figure including 28% of girls under the age of 15.⁸³ Further to this, 45 percent of girls will have had a child or been pregnant by 18.⁸⁴

There is a lack of effective hierarchy for statutory, customary, and religious law, all of which play a role in daily lives of the population.⁸⁵ Inheritance is governed by customary and/or Sharia law, which limits a woman's share of any inheritance. Women have limited rights to ownership or possession of both land and non-land assets. It is difficult for women to access credit and married women may not open a bank account in the same way that men can.⁸⁶

Only 42 percent of school-age girls are enrolled in school, in comparison to 58 percent of their male counterparts.⁸⁷ Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, girls would receive 1.4 years of education, in contrast to 2.8 years for a boy.⁸⁸ Approximately, 4.7 percent of the female population has at least some secondary education compared to 9.0 percent of the male population. The percentage of the female population that is part of the work force was 60.6 percent compared to 83.7 percent of the male population.⁸⁹

Landlessness and Dispossession

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Environmental Factors and Climate Change

Three-quarters of landlocked Niger is situated within the Saharan desert, classifying the country as arid or semi-arid.⁹³ With respect to Niger's Sahelian-type climate, Niger is already facing harmful effects of climate change. As such, Niger is prone to droughts, floods, desertification, locusts, crop diseases, wildfires, high winds, and decreasing soil productivity.⁹⁴ Regional temperatures are increasing at a rate which is 1.5 times faster than other global regions.⁹⁵ Unpredictable weather patterns are already affecting Niger, with its predominantly agricultural economy and with the majority of Nigeriens relying on both small-scale farming and agriculture, this could lead to further displacement, economic insecurity, and food insecurity. Experts believe that by 2100 average temperatures will have risen by approximately 3-6°C, which will have increasingly adverse impacts on food security, water scarcity, but will also aggravate conflicts and humanitarian crises.⁹⁶

Niger has begun to implement policy to counterbalance climate change. For example, in 2013 the country adopted the National Policy on Climate Change, and in 2016 ratified the Paris Agreement. Nevertheless, the Red Cross Red Crescent climate report on Niger, states that



despite there being some efforts, regional coordination to address climate change related issues has not been strong.⁹⁷

Documented Trafficking and Trafficking Risk in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Gold

Gold Overview

Gold mining has long been a key export of Niger, and at the end of 2014, it was reported that Niger had 69 artisanal mines and 24 artisanal sites.⁹⁸ In 2014, the formal mining sector provided approximately 5,000 jobs, equaling about 10 percent of the employment in the informal mining sector. However, this has greatly increased since the beginning of the country's gold rush in 2014.⁹⁹

Since the beginning of the country's gold rush, miners have been attracted from elsewhere in Niger and also, regionally. This has led to significant influxes and effluxes of miners and related workers around sites, depending on the opening, closure, and operation of sites. For example, in 2016-2018, approximately 35,000 people migrated to Tchibarakaten, with hundreds arriving daily. These individuals are reportedly attracted loss of work in the tourism industry and the 2015 crackdown on human trafficking operations.¹⁰⁰ The gold rush has also attracted gold barons, associated with smuggling and narco-trafficking. At Tchibarakaten, it was reported that local authorities declared that they were unable to control the large influx of people in the town, leaving the town in a state of lawlessness.¹⁰¹ In 2017, the Djado gold fields were closed by the government following the rise of armed Chadian and Sudanese groups active in the mining zones.¹⁰²

Accidents are commonplace at gold mines due to soil instability and outdated mining methods. In 2017, the government also closed several artisanal gold mines with the aim of modernizing the industry.¹⁰³ In November 2021, at least 18 people died as a result of an artisanal gold mine collapse in southern Niger.¹⁰⁴ The Garin-Liman mines had only been discovered several months previously, but thousands of miners had subsequently travelled to the area. Despite closure, there was a further accident, killing five, in a mining collapse in January 2022.¹⁰⁵ The informal mining sector also has a wide range of environmental impacts, including deforestation, air and soil pollution, as well as water contamination.

Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Gold

The U.S. Department of State notes trafficking in gold mining.¹⁰⁶ In addition to the use of child labor by community members under exploitative conditions, the U.S. Department of State further notes the presence of child trafficking in the industry, perpetrated by semi-organized



transnational criminal groups who traffic both Nigerien and children from nearby countries to labor in gold mining.¹⁰⁷

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- ⁷ World Bank. “GDP (current US\$) – Niger.” 2020, data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=NE. Accessed 20 May 2022.
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- ¹⁰ U.S. Department of State. “2021 Investment Climate Statements: Niger.” 2021, www.state.gov/reports/2021-investment-climate-statements/niger/. Accessed 20 May 2022.
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