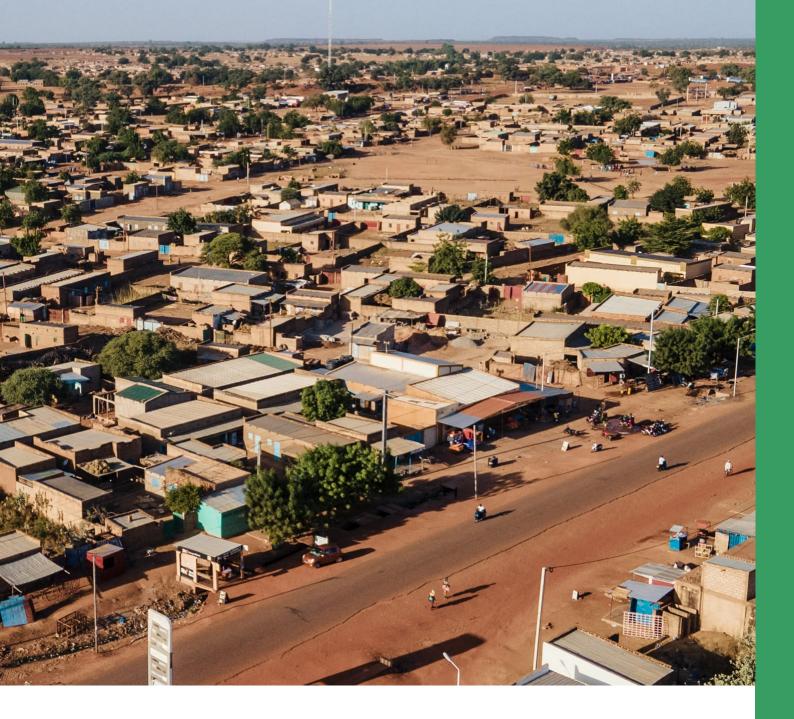# Niger
Niger: Conclusion

Alize le Roux and Du Toit McLachlan

Niger: Conclusion

Chart 38: Policy recommendations

Recommendations

- Strengthen governance and institutional capacity through anti-corruption measures, inclusive decision-making, and enhanced policy monitoring.
- Diversify the economy by investing in manufacturing, agro-processing, and maximising opportunities under AfCFTA.
- Enhance human capital development by expanding education access, reducing gender disparities, and promoting vocational training and digital literacy.
- Promote demographic transition by increasing contraceptive access, improving maternal and child health, and establishing social protection systems.
- Boost food security and agricultural resilience through climate-smart practices, irrigation expansion, and improved cold storage and distribution infrastructure.
- Expand infrastructure development with all-weather roads, renewable energy projects, and sustainable urban planning.
- Leverage renewable energy potential by scaling up solar energy projects and de-risking private investment in renewables.
- Strengthen security and regional cooperation by collaborating with international partners and enhancing the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).
- Support equitable rural development with sustainable land-use policies, improved access to clean water, sanitation, and climate-resilient infrastructure.
- Foster regional and international cooperation to secure financial support, manage transboundary resources, and address key development challenges.

Chart 38 summarises the policy recommendations for Niger.

The Current Path highlights both challenges and opportunities for Niger as it strives for inclusive and sustainable development. While the country faces significant hurdles, its untapped potential offers a path toward sustained growth and shared prosperity if leveraged effectively.

Niger's youthful population, with a median age of just 16 in 2023 and projected to remain among the youngest globally, represents a demographic opportunity for economic transformation. Similarly, the country's abundant natural resources—including uranium, gold and oil—coupled with its strategic location, provide a solid foundation for economic diversification and enhanced trade. However, these strengths are overshadowed by persistent challenges.

Despite its resources and potential, Niger remains one of the world's poorest nations, with 47.4% of its population living in extreme poverty as of 2023. Political instability, characterised by repeated coups and extended periods of military rule, has weakened governance structures and disrupted developmental progress. Environmental challenges such as desertification, erratic rainfall and rising temperatures exacerbate vulnerabilities in the agricultural sector, which employs the majority of the population. Food insecurity remains a critical issue, affecting 13% of the population in 2024.

Niger's rapid population growth, driven by a high fertility rate of 6.1 births per woman in 2023, adds further strain on resources, infrastructure and social services. While this growth presents the potential for a demographic dividend, inadequate economic opportunities, poor infrastructure and low education enrollment rates threaten to turn this opportunity into a liability.

To address these structural challenges and unlock its development potential, Niger must implement targeted and coordinated policy actions. By focusing on governance reform, economic diversification, human capital development and climate resilience, the country can set itself on a path toward inclusive growth and shared prosperity.

The priority policies outlined below (Chart 38) provide a roadmap for this transformation:

Enhance Governance and Institutional Capacity:

- Strengthen anti-corruption frameworks to address inefficiencies in resource management and ensure transparent use of revenues from uranium, gold and oil.

- Develop inclusive decision-making mechanisms to restore public trust eroded by Niger's history of political instability, including five successful coups and fragile democratic transitions.

- Establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure policy effectiveness and adapt strategies to meet changing needs.

- Promote youth engagement and political inclusion to leverage Niger's demographic advantage for governance improvements and innovation.

Diversify the Economy:

- Invest in manufacturing and agro-processing industries to reduce dependency on resource exports, which accounted for over 80% of Niger's export earnings in 2023.

- Maximise opportunities under the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) to enhance exports and integrate Niger into regional and Africa-wide value chains, and mitigate the potential negative side-effects of withdrawing from ECOWAS.

- Improve the business environment to attract private sector investment, with a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and fostering innovation.

- Support private sector-led initiatives in renewable energy, agro-processing and digital services to drive economic growth.

- De-risk investments through public-private partnerships, streamlined regulatory frameworks and targeted incentives to encourage domestic and foreign investors.

Invest in Human Capital Development:

- Expand access to education, with a focus on increasing gross enrolment rates (82.8% at the primary level in 2023) and reducing gender disparities, especially at secondary and tertiary levels.

- Address the high rates of child marriage (66% for girls aged 15–19) and early pregnancies, which significantly hinder school completion rates, through continued community dialogue and engagement by religious and traditional leaders.

- Develop new vocational training programs aligned with market demands, and support existing ones through more raw materials and financial resources, to equip Niger's youthful population—51.5% of adults aged 15–29 in 2023—for productive employment.

- Promote digital literacy and expand ICT access to prepare the population for participation in the global digital economy. Supporting international initiatives such as the Digital Transformation Center Niger, which focused on making girls and women digitally literate—but was stopped in July 2023—should be a priority.

Promote Demographic Transition:

- Expand contraceptive access through targeted education programmes on the benefits of family planning, especially for those not aware of available contraceptive methods, and increase access to community health workers to lower Niger's fertility rate (6.1 births per woman) and facilitate a demographic dividend.

- Strengthen healthcare systems to improve maternal health (402.1 deaths per 100 000 live births in 2023) and child nutrition, reducing under-five malnutrition rates (32.2% in 2023). Providing supplementary food to children and cash transfers to households facing food insecurity has proven successful in the past and remains a potential solution for persistent child malnutrition.

- Establish robust social protection systems to support vulnerable groups and cushion against shocks from poverty and climate change.

Enhance Food Security and Agricultural Resilience:

- Promote climate-smart agricultural practices to counteract desertification, erratic rainfall and soil degradation, which jeopardise agricultural productivity. Continued support for and strengthening of Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) is needed to capitalise on progress already made and increase the areas of regenerated farmland.

- Invest in cold storage and distribution infrastructure to reduce post-harvest losses. This will mitigate food insecurity, which currently affects 13% of the population.

- Expand irrigation systems to improve crop yields and reduce dependency on rain-fed agriculture by ensuring the Large-Scale Irrigation Development Programme (PDGI), launched in 2024, is completed and expanded after the programme's end date in 2027.

- Support women in agriculture by improving their access to land, financial services and training in sustainable farming practices.

Expand Infrastructure Development:

- Prioritise the construction of all-weather access roads to improve rural connectivity and access to markets, addressing the poor state of rural roads, 20% of which were in very poor condition in 2023. Entering into partnerships with international development agencies aimed at improving rural connectivity, such as the agreement reached with the Millennium Challenge Corporation between 2018 and 2023, has proven successful in the past and should be pursued again.

- Expand rural electricity access (currently 12.1% in 2023) through off-grid renewable energy solutions and extensions of the current distribution grid to reduce reliance on imported electricity (83.4% in 2023).

- Invest in affordable housing and sustainable urban planning to manage the pressures of urbanisation in Niamey and reduce informal settlements.

Leverage Renewable Energy Potential:

- Scale up solar energy projects, such as the Niger Solar Electricity Access Project, to improve national electricity access (21.5% in 2023) and capitalise on Niger's abundant solar radiation.

- Promote renewable energy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and enhance energy security, especially in rural areas.

- Encourage private investment in renewable energy projects through incentives, de-risking mechanisms and supportive regulatory frameworks.

Strengthen Security and Regional Cooperation (supported by ISS West Africa report):

- Adopt a balanced approach that combines kinetic operations (e.g., military-driven actions like counterinsurgency missions and physical interventions to neutralize immediate threats) with non-kinetic strategies, such as promoting defections, reintegration programs, and community-based conflict resolution.

- Draw lessons from successful initiatives in the Lake Chad Basin, where non-kinetic methods like incentivizing combatants to disengage from extremist groups have proven effective. This dual approach addresses both immediate threats and the root causes of instability, such as poverty, weak governance, and social grievances.

- Strengthen collaboration within the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) to enhance coordinated security and diplomatic efforts with Burkina Faso and Mali.

- At the same time, work toward basic military and security agreements with ECOWAS countries to rebuild trust and foster regional stability. This should be complemented by leveraging existing frameworks, such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), for broader and more inclusive cooperation.

Support Equitable Rural Development:

- Implement sustainable land-use policies that balance agricultural productivity, environmental preservation, and community needs to combat desertification and soil degradation.

- Expand access to clean water (41.4% in 2023) and improved sanitation (17.5% in 2023) to reduce health risks, particularly in rural areas.

- Focus on climate-resilient infrastructure, including all-weather roads and community-based irrigation systems, to empower rural communities.

Foster Regional and International Cooperation:

- Reinforce partnerships with multilateral organisations such as the Niger Basin Authority and Lake Chad Basin Commission to sustainably manage critical water resources for agriculture and livelihoods.

- Engage strategically with non-traditional partners to balance geopolitical shifts while ensuring alignment with Niger's long-term development priorities.

Advocate for increased international support in areas such as renewable energy, education and governance reform to address Niger's pressing development challenges.

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