Niger
Niger: Current Path

Kouassi Yeboua

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Niger: Current Path

Niger: Current Path forecast

Chart 1: Political map of Niger
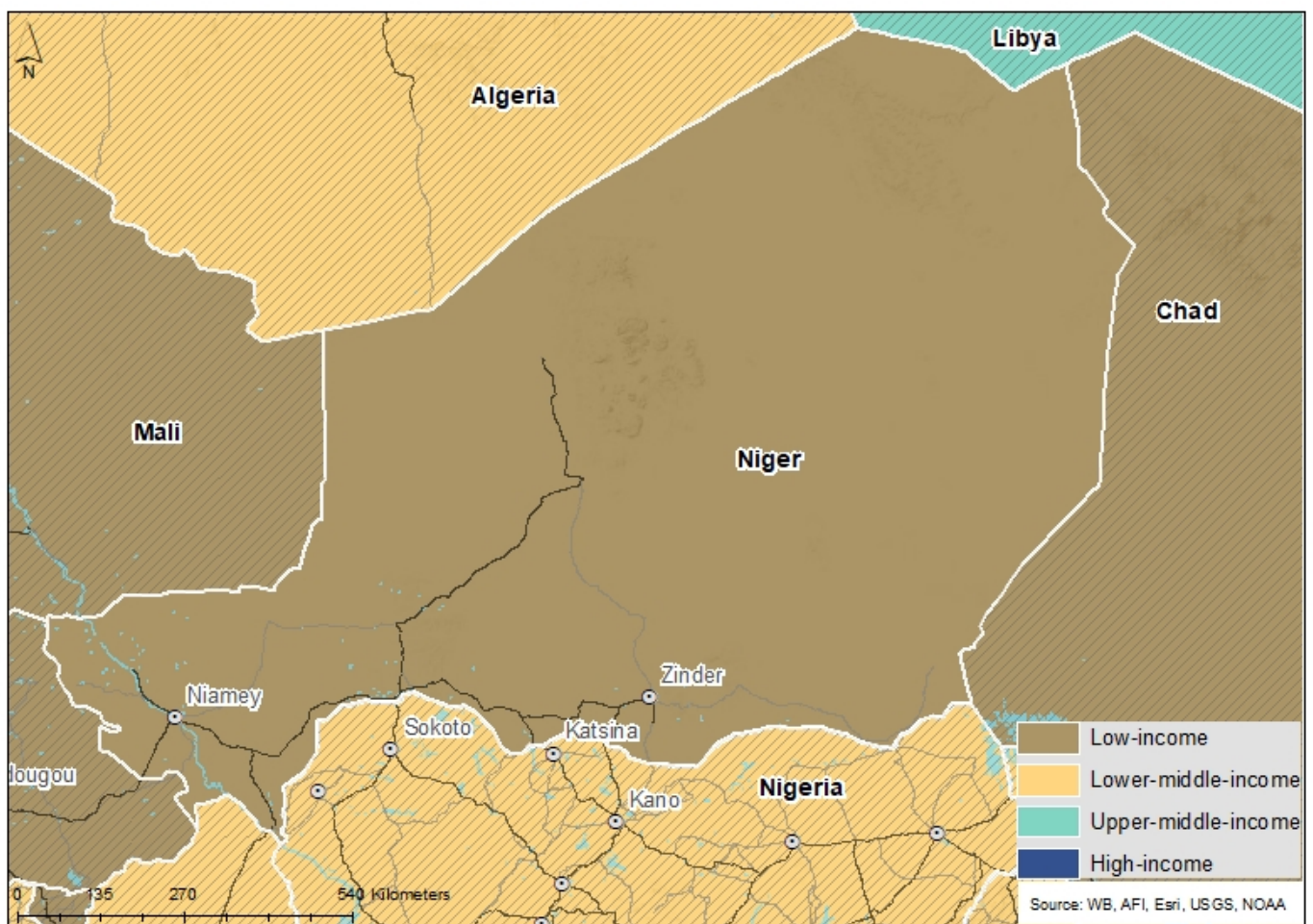
This page provides an overview of the critical characteristics of Niger along its likely (or Current Path) development trajectory. The Current Path forecast from the International Futures forecasting (IFs) platform is a dynamic scenario that imitates continuing current policies and environmental conditions. The Current Path is, therefore, in congruence with historical patterns and produces a series of dynamic forecasts endogenised in relationships across crucial global systems. We use 2019 as a standard reference year, and the estimates generally extend to 2043 to coincide with the end of the third ten-year implementation plan of the African Union's Agenda 2063 long-term development vision.

The Republic of Niger, or Niger, is a landlocked country in West Africa named after the Niger River, the country's only

perennial river that is about 550 km long. With a vast land area of almost 1 270 000 km2, it is the second largest landlocked country in West Africa behind Chad, its neighbour to the east. Niger is a unitary state bordered by Libya to the north-east, Nigeria to the south, Benin and Burkina Faso to the south-west, Mali to the west, and Algeria to the north-west.

Over 80% of Niger's land area is arid and lies in the Sahara Desert. The remaining land areas are threatened by periodic drought and desertification. The country's economy is dominated by subsistence agriculture, with some export agriculture in the more fertile south and the export of raw materials, especially uranium ore. Niger faces serious challenges to development due to its landlocked position, desert terrain, inefficient agriculture, explosive population growth, poor educational outcomes, deep-seated poverty, lack of infrastructure, poor healthcare, and environmental degradation.

Historically, what is now Niger has been on the fringes of several large states. Since independence, Nigeriens have lived under five constitutions and three periods of military rule. After the military coup in 2010, Niger became a democratic, multiparty state. Its new constitution, which restored the semi-presidential system of government of the 1999 constitution, in which the president and a prime minister named by the president share executive power, was approved on 31 October 2010.

In 2020, Mohamed Bazoum of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism was elected president in polls held in December 2020 and February 2021, which marked the first democratic transfer of power in Niger's history. However, on 26 July 2023 the presidential guard detained President Bazoum and Presidential Guard commander General Abdourahamane Tchiani proclaimed himself the leader of a new military junta. In response to the coup, ECOWAS imposed sanctions on Niger, which then announced that it was leaving ECOWAS to pursue a confederation with Burkina Faso and Mali and that it intended to expand the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), established shortly after the coup. Niger subsequently decided to leave the G5 anti-jihadi force in the Sahel region and requested France to withdraw its 1 500 troops from the country.
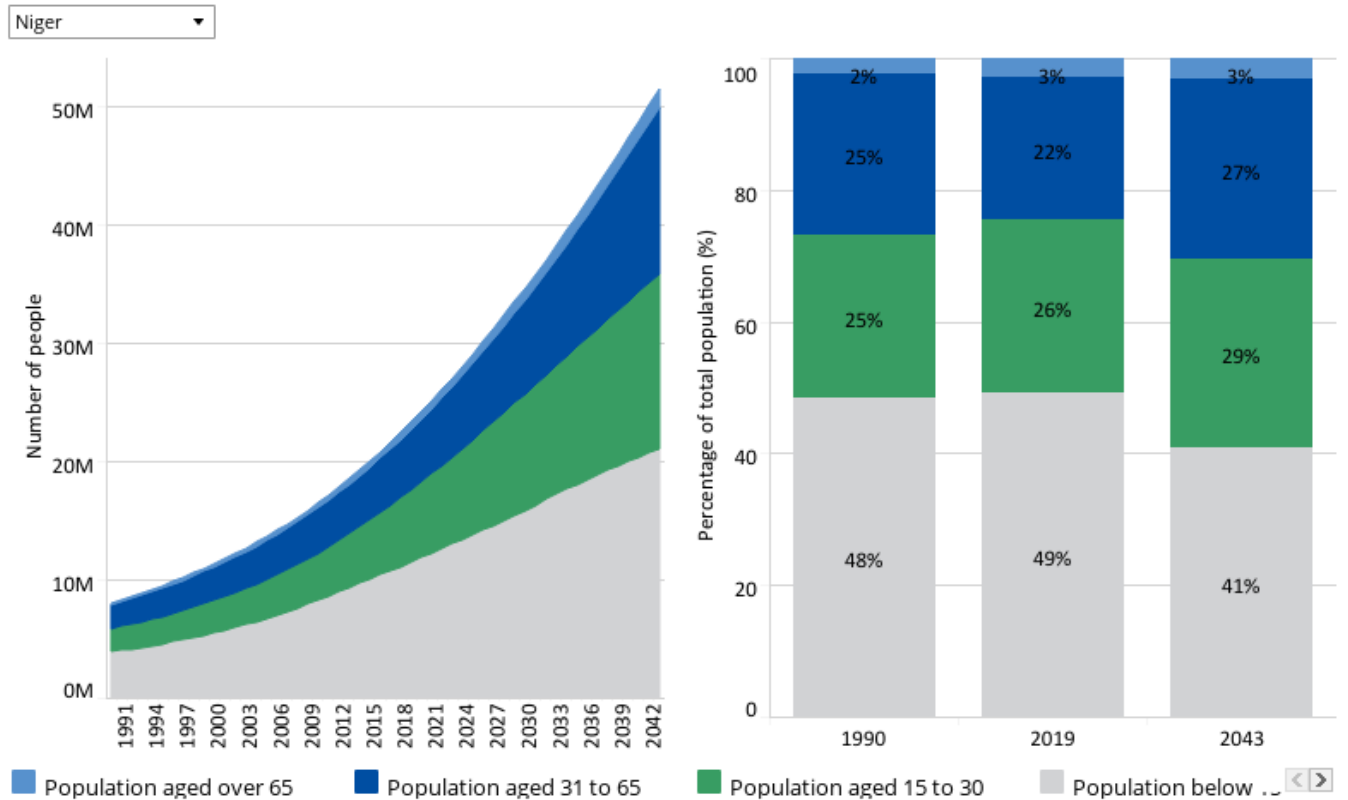
Niger is technically still a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), although it has announced its withdrawal with immediate effect. The treaty requires a notification process of one year.

Demographics: Current Path

Chart 2: Population structure in CP, 1990–2043
By cohort and % of population

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Legend: ■ Population aged over 65　■ Population aged 31 to 65　■ Population aged 15 to 30　■ Population below ...

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Population Division Population Prospects estimate and World Development Indicators population data

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Niger has the fastest growing populations globally. Coming from a baseline of just over 8 million people in 1990, by 2019 the country's population had increased almost threefold to 23.3 million people. Over the coming two decades, Niger's population is expected to more than double and amount to 51.5 million people. In 2019, the population growth rate stood at 3.8%, the highest in the world when it comes to natural population growth. Population growth in Niger is driven by natural population growth, in other words, births outstripping deaths. The country has the highest average total fertility rate in the world.

Niger also has the world's youngest population, followed by Somalia in East Africa and Mali in West Africa. In 2019, half of Niger's population was younger than 15.3 compared to the average median age of 17.9 years for the group of Africa's low-income economies. In the Current Path forecast, Niger's demographic structure is expected to change only very slowly. Historically, the country's fertility rate has been extremely high. In 2019, it stood at an average of 6.8 births per woman, the highest globally and significantly above the average of 4.9 for its low-income peer group. By 2043, Niger's fertility rate is expected to drop to 4.04 births per woman. As a consequence, the median age is projected to increase to 19.3 years — still the second lowest globally to be preceded only by Chad. Even in 2043, close to 70% of Niger's population is projected to be younger than 30.

The slow decrease in fertility rates contrasts with an expected above-average increase in life expectancy — a combination that accelerates Niger's explosive population path. In 2019, the country's average life expectancy was 64.5 years. On average, women reached 65.7 years and men 63.2. The country's low life expectancy stems from a high disease burden,

driven to a large extent by low access levels to safe water and improved sanitation. With a rate of 5.3 deaths per 1 000 people, Niger's communicable-disease burden is higher than the average rate of its African income peer group which is 4.1.

On the Current Path, the average citizen of Niger can expect to live to 73.6 years — a gain of almost 10 years over the coming two decades, which would lie above the 2043 average for Africa's low-income economies (at 70.8 years). A higher life expectancy would be a boost to Niger's workforce. By 2043, the country's working-age cohort is expected to account for 55.9% of the population compared to 48.1 in 2019. The ratio of people of working age relative to the dependent population is improving, but too slowly. Niger is moving through the demographic transition in slow motion. In fact, on the Current Path, it is expected to reach the peak of its demographic 'sweet spot' only in 2084 (from 0.92 in 2019 to 2.16 in 2084), more than ten years later than the average of its low-income peer group and at the absolute global bottom.

Chart 3: Urban and rural population in CP, 1990–2043
% of population

Niger, Rural   Niger, Urban
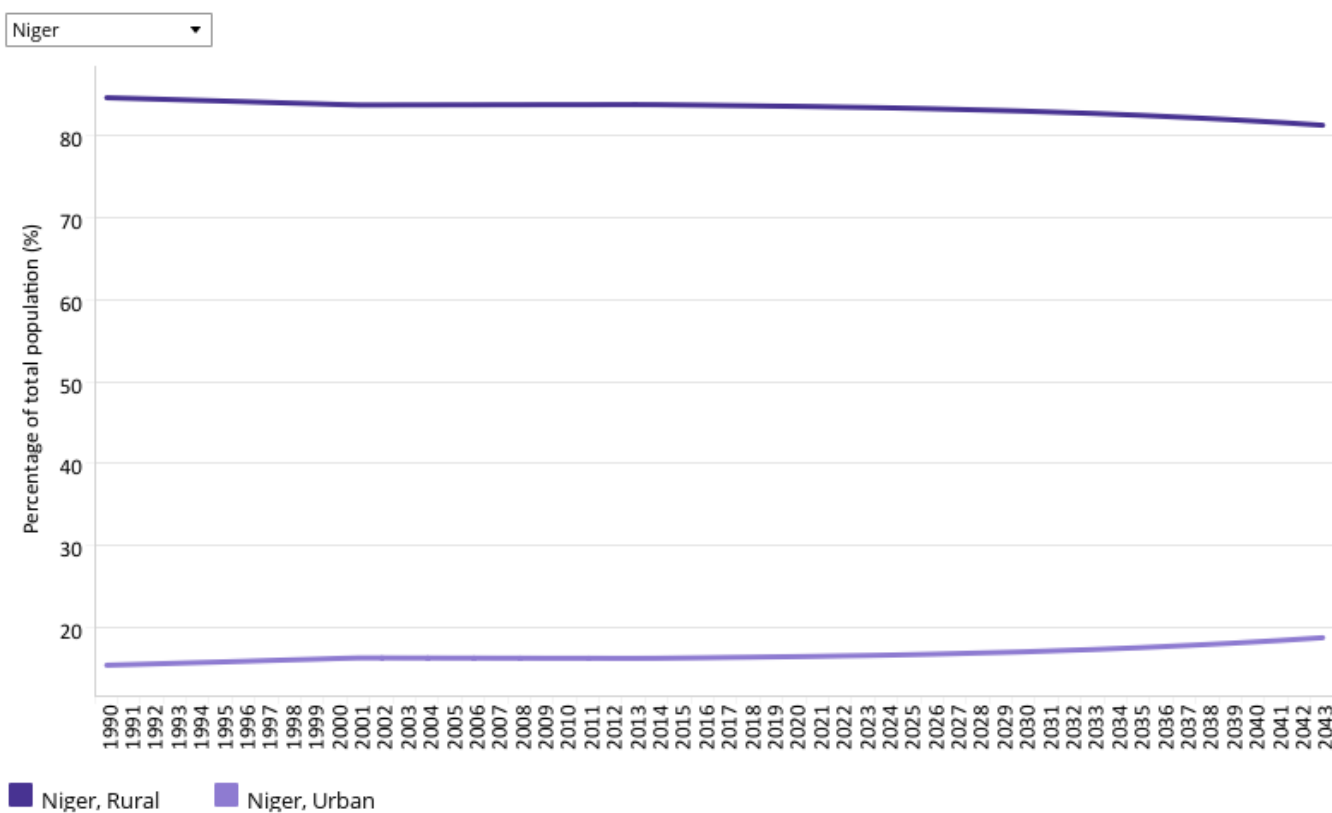
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN World Urbanization Prospects estimate

View on Tableau Public   Share

Niger is a latecomer to the global trend of urbanisation too. The overwhelming majority of the country's population lives in rural areas. In 2019, this was 83.6% of the overall population while only 16.4% of the population lived in urban areas. This is an extraordinarily low rate of urbanisation. The average rate of urbanisation in the group of Africa's low-income countries is 31% versus 69% living in rural areas. On the Current Path, Niger's rate of urbanisation is expected to increase only modestly to 18.7% in 2043. Over 80% of its people are projected to continue to live in rural areas. The anticipated ratio for its low-income peer group on the continent is 40.7% urban versus 59% rural in 2043.

Chart 4: Population density map for 2019
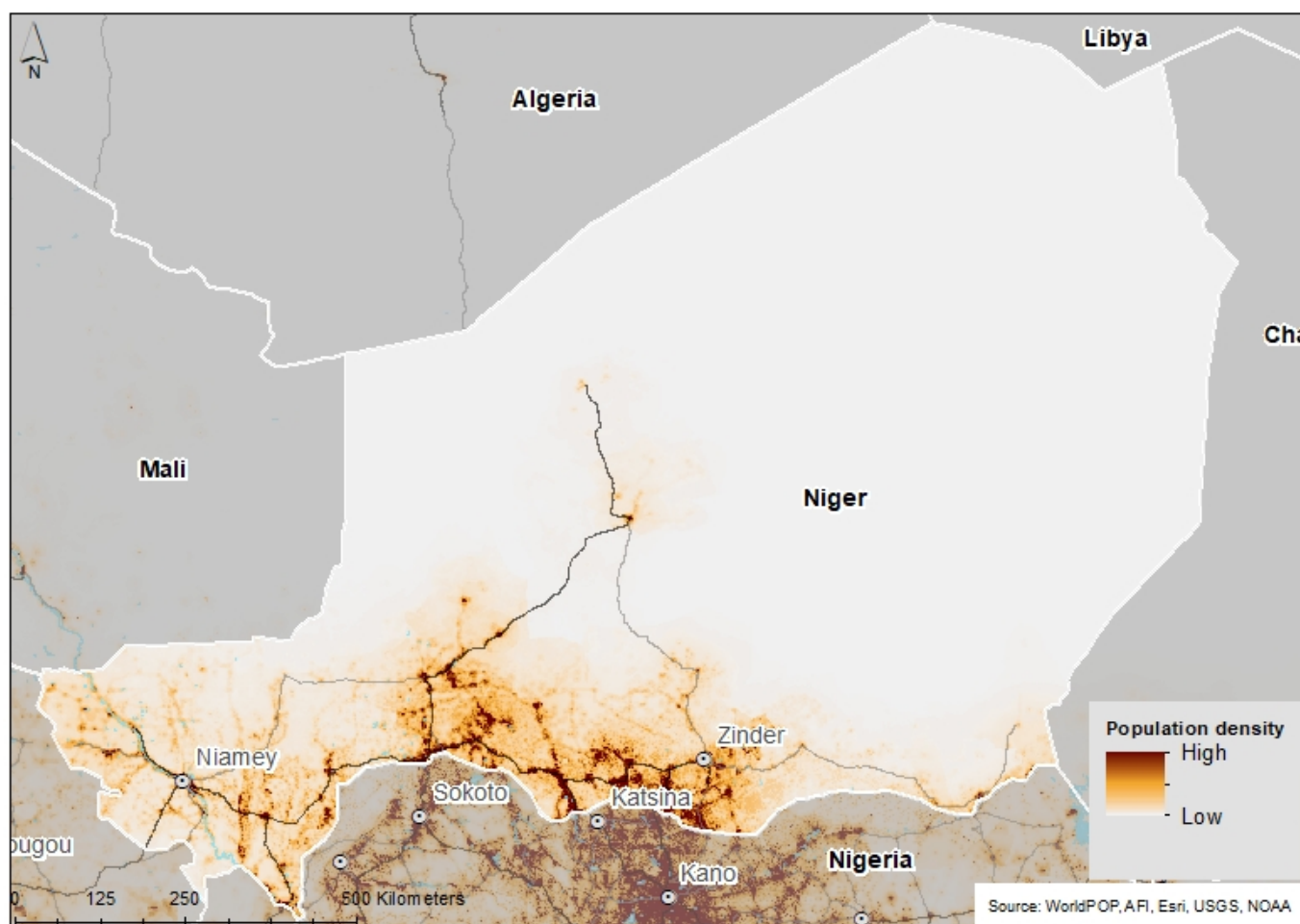
Niger's population of about 23.3 million people mostly lives in clusters in the far south and west of the country. With 80% of the country's land area being arid, population density is low. It is estimated that 94% of the population lives on just 35% of the land. Niger's capital and largest city is Niamey, located in Niger's south-west corner on the River Niger. The second and third largest cities are Maradi and Zinder, respectively.

Niger is divided into seven regions and one capital district. These regions are subdivided into 36 departments that are broken down into urban and rural communes and administrative posts for largely uninhabited desert areas or military zones.

Nigerien society is ethnically diverse. The largest ethnic groups are the Hausa, who also represent the major ethnic group in neighbouring northern Nigeria, and the Zarma Songhai, who also live in parts of Mali. Both groups are sedentary farmers who inhabit the arable, southern part of Niger. The Kanuri (including Beriberi and Manga), on the other hand, make up the majority of the sedentary farmers in the far south-east. The remainder of the Nigerien people are nomadic or semi-nomadic livestock-raising peoples — Tuareg, Fulani, Toubou and Diffa Arabs.
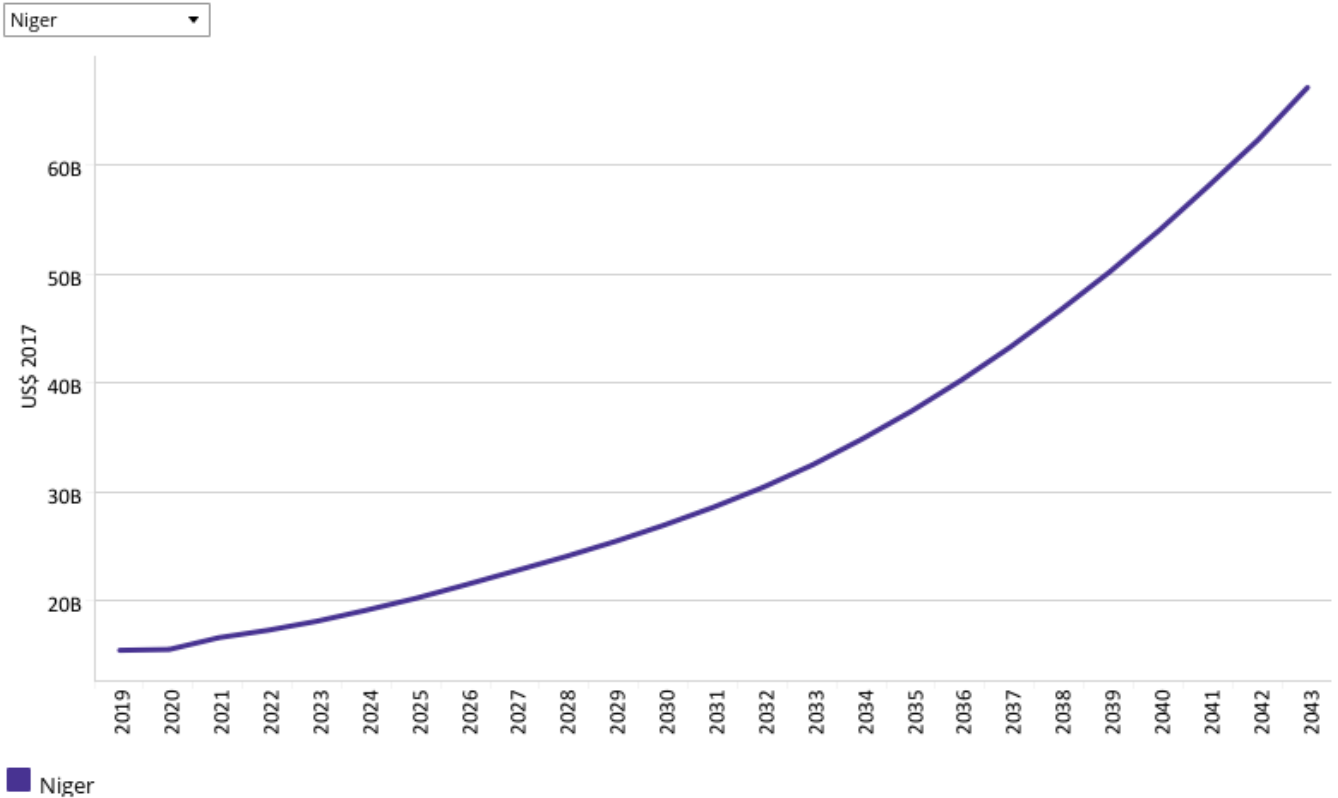
Explosive population growth has led to increased competition over scarce natural resources, including violent conflict.

Chart 5: GDP in CP, 1990–2043
Market exchange rates

Niger ▼

Niger

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook database
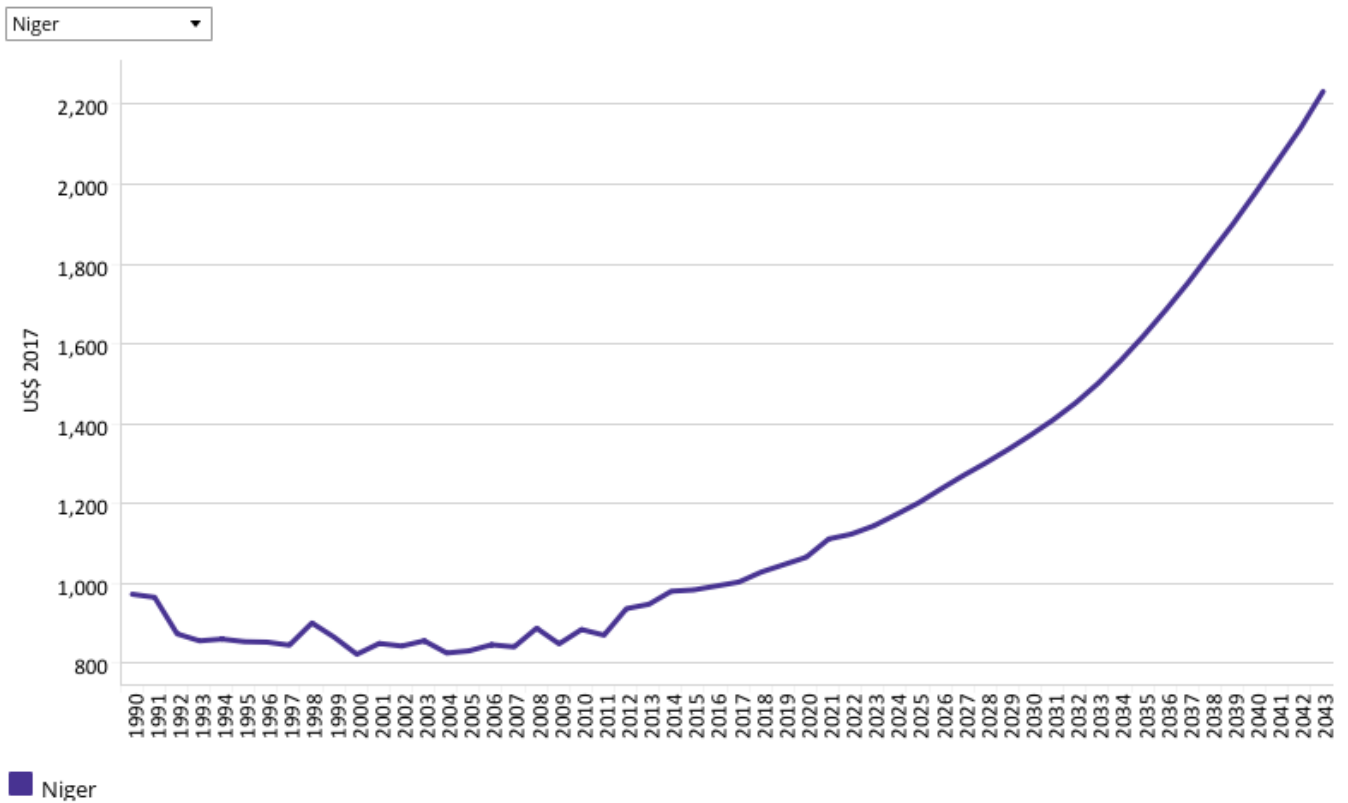
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Between 1990 and 2019, Niger's GDP increased more than threefold from US$4.9 billion in 1990 to US$15.5 billion in 2019. The country ranks tenth out of 23 African low-income economies with Sudan and Ethiopia being the lead economies. In 2043, Niger's GDP is forecast to be US$67.1 billion, more than four times as large as in 2019. In other words, the economy is expected to expand, but with projected average annual growth rates of just over 7% at best over the coming two decades. Such expansion might be insufficient to significantly boost human development.

Niger's economy is dominated by subsistence farming, livestock, and some of the world's largest uranium deposits. Drought cycles, desertification, explosive population growth, as well as the slash in global demand for uranium provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic are major obstacles.

Chart 6: GDP per capita in CP, 1990–2043
Purchasing power parity

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US$ 2017 (y-axis)

■ Niger

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Population Division World Population Prospects and World Development Indicators data

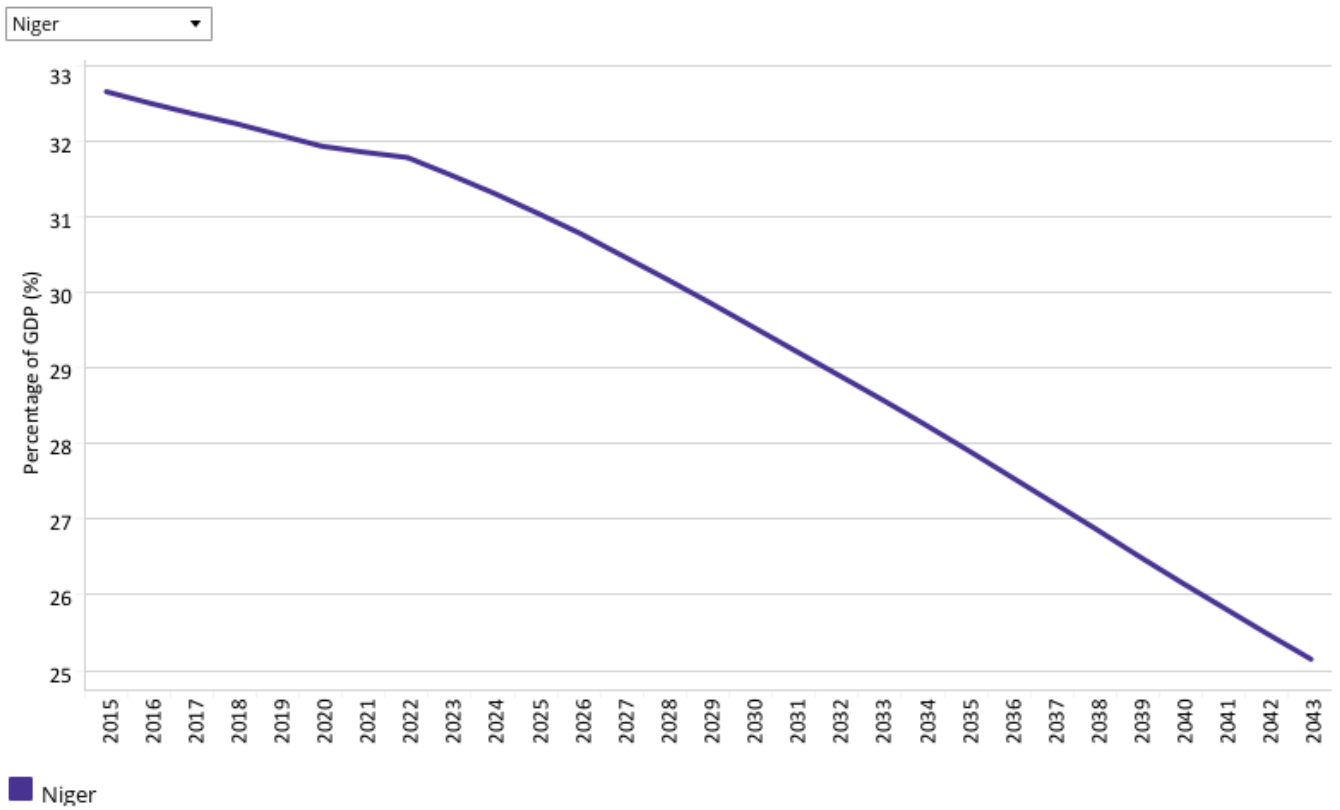⁂ View on Tableau Public   ↶ ↷ ↺ ↻ ▼ | ⬚ ▼ ▣ ⚹ Share

Although many of the charts in the sectoral scenarios also include GDP per capita, this overview is an essential point of departure for interpreting the general economic outlook of Niger.

In 2019, Niger's GDP per capita ranked 19 out of 23 at a value of US$1 047 — US$570 below the average of its Africa low-income peer group. Only the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Central African Republic and Burundi had a lower GDP per capita than Niger in 2019. In the Current Path forecast, the country's per capita income is expected to more than double to US$2 232 per capita by 2043, but it is projected to maintain its position within its peer group. In other words, Niger's GDP per capita is expected to remain below the average for Africa low-income economies at USD$3 790.

Chart 7: Informal sector value in CP, 2015–2043
% of GDP

Niger ▾

■ Niger

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Economic Commission for Europe [2008]; Elgin and Oztunali [2012]; Schneider and Enste [2012]

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In 2019, Niger's informal sector accounted for approximately 32.1% of GDP. On average, the informal sector accounted for about 30.1% of GDP in Africa's low-income economies. By 2043, Niger's informal sector is forecast to account for 25.1% of GDP likely reflecting the anticipated improvement in state capacity, including for taxation.

Chart 8: Value added by sector in CP, 2015–2043
Billions US$ 2017 and % of GDP
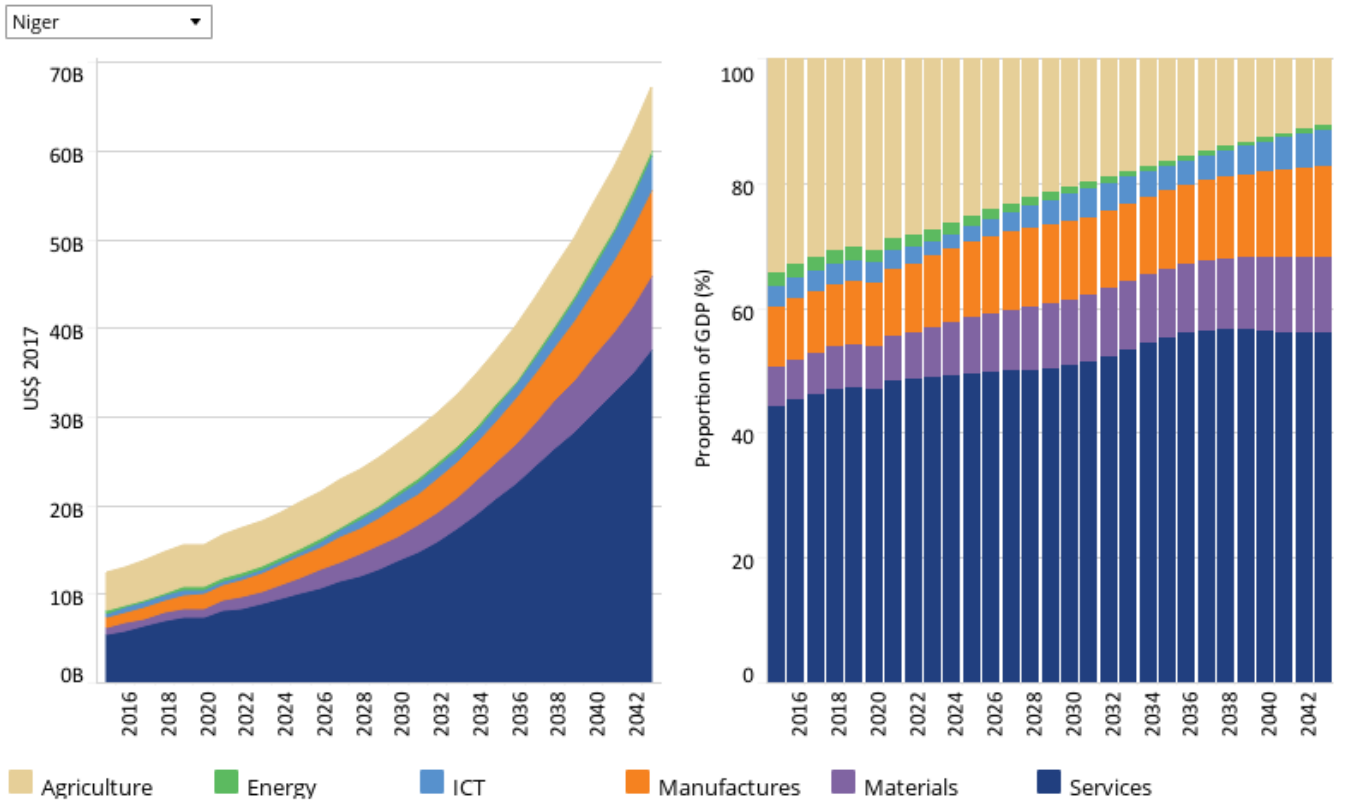
Agriculture   Energy   ICT   Manufactures   Materials   Services

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook database

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The IFs platform uses data from the Global Trade and Analysis Project (GTAP) to classify economic activity into six sectors: agriculture, energy, materials (including mining), manufacturing, services and information and communication technologies (ICT). Most other sources use a threefold distinction between only agriculture, industry and services with the result that data may differ.

In 2019, Niger's service sector accounted for almost half (47.4%) of the country's GDP (US$7.3 billion), followed by agriculture which represented close to 30.3% (US$4.69 billion). In the future, the service sector is expected to remain the most important contributor to Niger's GDP. Its share is set to grow to almost 55.9% by 2043 at a value of US$37.51 billion. At the same time, the contribution of the agriculture sector is forecast to drop to just over 10.7% (US$7.17 billion). The manufacturing sector, on the other hand, at 10.2% in 2019 the third largest contributor to Niger's GDP, is forecast to increase only modestly by 2.3 percentage points to 14.5% in 2043. This is synonymous with an expansion of its GDP contribution from US$1.58 billion in 2019 to almost US$9.73 billion in 2043.

Niger's expected trajectory roughly mirrors that of its low-income peer group with the service sector representing both the current and future lion's share of contribution to GDP, followed by the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, which are respectively expected to lose and gain ground.

Chart 9: Agriculture production/demand in CP, 1990–2043
Crops million tons

Niger ▼

■ Niger, Demand   ■ Niger, Production
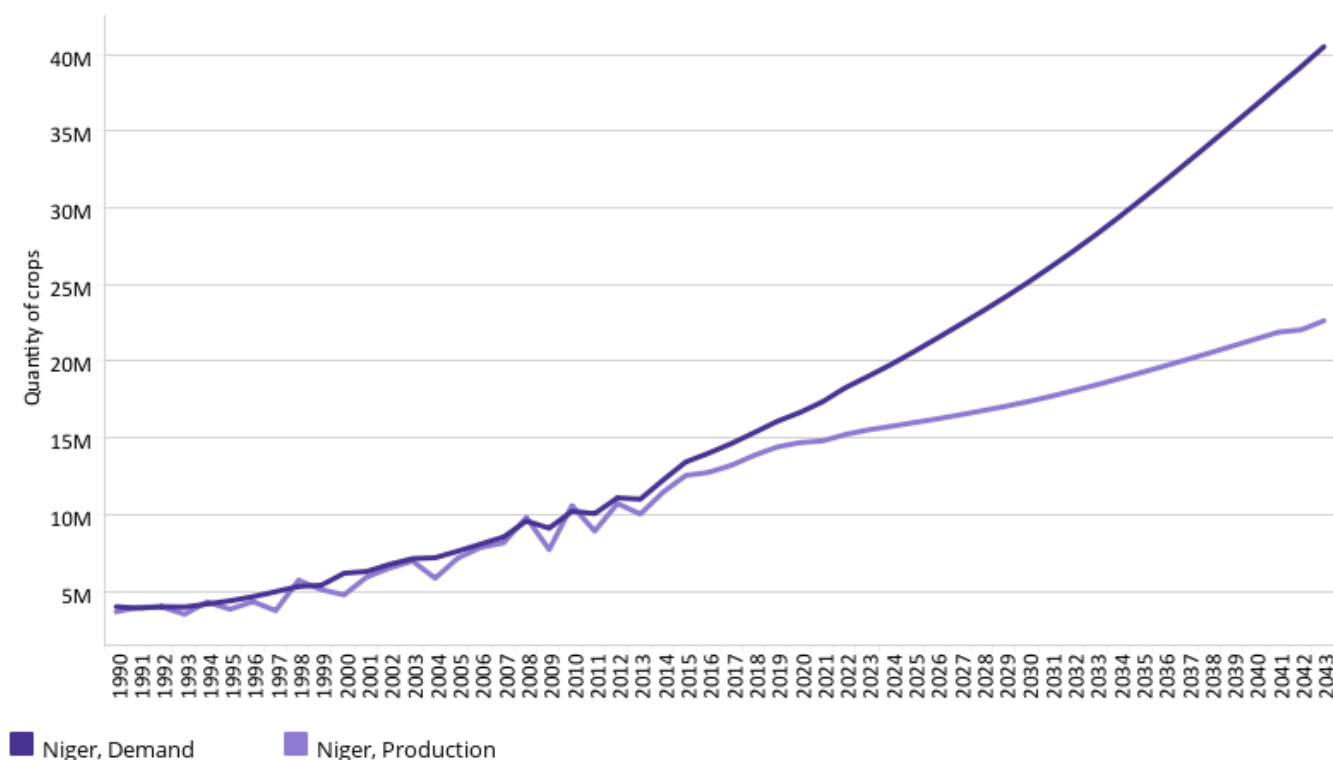
Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from Food and Agriculture Organization Food Balance Sheets

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The data on agricultural production and demand in the IFs forecasting platform initialises from data provided on food balances by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). IFs contains data on numerous types of agriculture but aggregates its forecast into crops, meat and fish, presented in million metric tons. Chart 9 shows agricultural production and demand as a total of all three categories.

At only 0.81 million metric tons per hectare in 2019, the country's crop yield is the lowest within its low-income peer group on the continent. This reflects low productivity and low profitability. Rwanda, the frontrunner in this category, has more than ten times the crop yield of Niger. The average crop yield for Africa's low-income economies in 2019 stood at 2.6 metric tons per hectare. By 2043, it is expected to increase to 3.5 metric tons per hectare compared to Niger's at 1.03 metric tons per hectare.

The lion's share of Niger's agricultural output is crops. In 2019, the country's crop production amounted to about 12.38 million metric tons compared to the average output of 13.82 million metric tons in its Africa low-income peer group. This gap is projected to widen by 2043 with Niger expected to increase its output to 15.7 million metric tons versus the group's average output reaching 20.05 million metric tons.

More importantly, already at present, Niger's agricultural production does not meet demand. In 2019, the gap between production and demand came to 1.67 million metric tons. By 2043, this gap is expected to widen to 17.87 metric tons. Agricultural demand is fuelled by Niger's extremely fast-expanding population. In combination with low productivity, competition over scarce resources resulting in insecurity, as well as environmental degradation and high exposure to climate change-related risks, food insecurity is worsened.

Chart 10: Poverty in CP, 2015–2043
Millions of people and % of total population

| Niger ▼ | $1.90 ▼ |

Niger

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from UN Population Division Population Prospects estimate, World Development Indicators population data and PovcalNet World Bank data

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There are numerous methodologies for and approaches to defining poverty. We measure income poverty and use GDP per capita as a proxy. In 2015, the World Bank adopted the measure of US$1.90 per person per day (in 2011 international prices), also used to measure progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 of eradicating extreme poverty. To account for extreme poverty in richer countries occurring at slightly higher levels of income than in poor countries, the World Bank introduced three additional poverty lines in 2017:

• US$3.20 for lower middle-income countries

• US$5.50 for upper middle-income countries

• US$22.70 for high-income countries.

As a low-income country, Niger uses the US$1.90 benchmark to define extreme poverty. The country's poverty burden is high. In 2019, 44.26% of the population was living below the poverty line, which corresponds to 10.3 million people. Niger's poverty rate lies about 3.5 percentage points below the average of its low-income peer group on the continent (47.75%).

On the Current Path, the number of people living in extreme poverty in Niger is expected to drop to 7.64 million people by 2043. The country's poverty rate is projected to decline to 14.76% by then — a drastic reduction by almost 70%. Over the

same period, Africa's low-income economies will on average reduce their poverty rates by 46.45%. In 2019, Niger had the ninth lowest poverty rate among Africa's low-income economies. By 2043, it is expected to improve its position by three ranks.
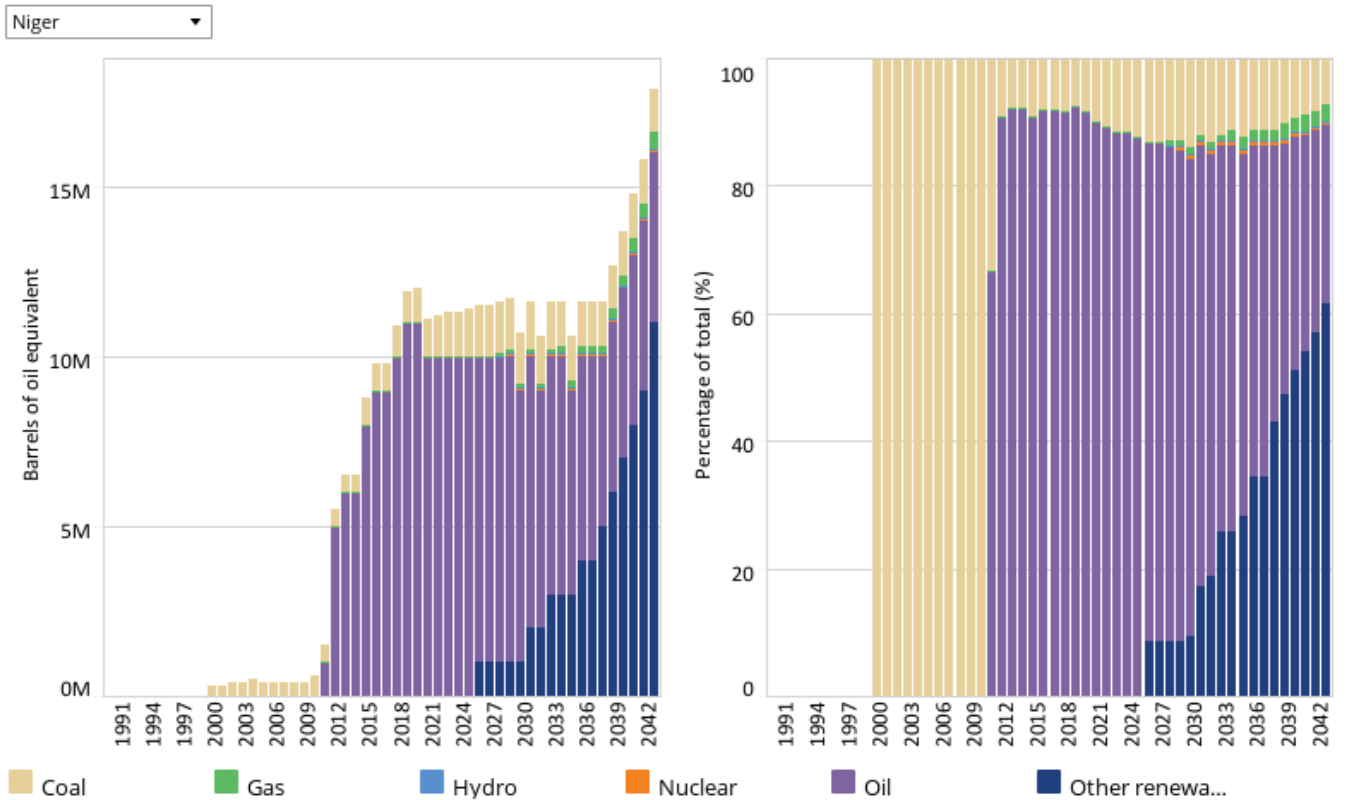
Social welfare (government to household welfare transfers) in Niger is expected to increase from US$0.08 billion to US$1.93 billion in 2043.

Chart 11: Energy production by type in CP, 1990–2043
Barrels of oil equivalent and % of energy production

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Coal   Gas   Hydro   Nuclear   Oil   Other renewa...

Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from World Energy Outlook data
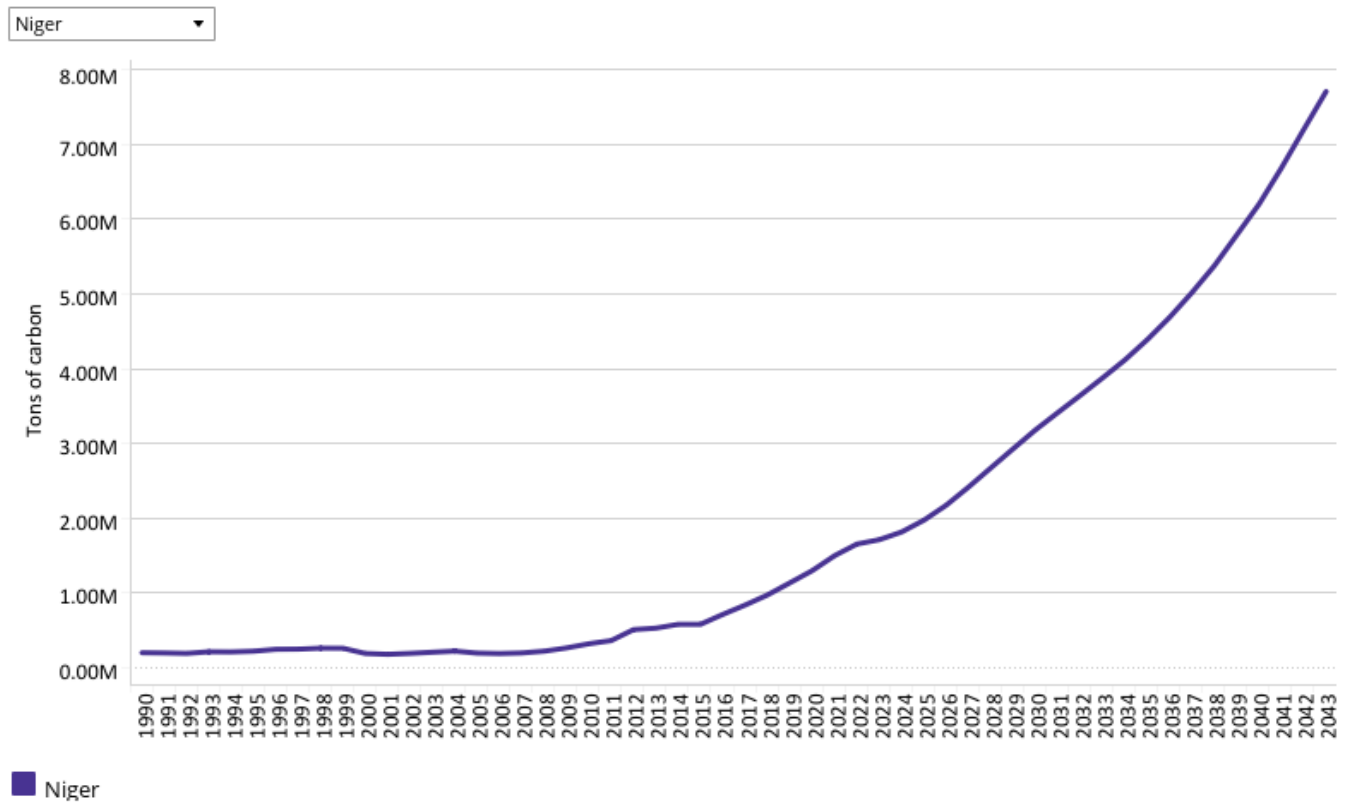
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The IFs platform forecasts six types of energy, namely oil, gas, coal, hydro, nuclear and other renewables. To allow comparisons between different types of energy, the data is converted into billion barrels of oil equivalent (BBOE). The energy contained in a barrel of oil is approximately 5.8 million British thermal units (MBTUs) or 1 700 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of energy.

In 2019, Niger's total energy production was about 0.0119 million barrels of oil. By 2043, it is estimated to increase to 0.0173 million barrels. The country's current energy mix is heavily reliant on oil, which accounts for 92.4% of total production, followed by coal at 7.6%.

The Current Path forecast indicates a significant change in Niger's energy mix in the future. From 2026 onwards, renewables are expected to take off to eventually account for 61.5% of total energy production. Oil is projected to drop to 27.9% of total production while the share of coal is projected to remain fairly steady. The share of gas, only playing a minor role in 2019, is expected to increase modestly to account for 2.8% by 2043.

The anticipated share of renewables in Niger's energy production profile by far exceeds the average of 39% that is anticipated for Africa's low-income economies. This can be explained by Niger's significant renewable energy resources (mostly solar and wind) that can be exploited to power the growing economy.

Chart 12: Carbon emissions in CP, 1990–2043
Million tons of carbon (note, not CO2 equivalent)

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■ Niger

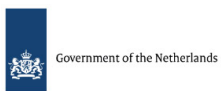Source: IFs 7.63 initialising from Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center data

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Carbon is released in many ways, but the three most important contributors to greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide (CO2), carbon monoxide (CO) and methane (CH4). Since each has a different molecular weight, IFs uses carbon. Many other sites and calculations use CO2 equivalent.

Niger's emitted 1.14 million tons of carbon in 2019. Carbon emissions are forecast to increase almost sevenfold to 7.71 million tons by 2043, increasing 576.3% from a very low base between 2019 and 2043.

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Dr Kouassi Yeboua is a senior researcher in African Futures and Innovation programme in Pretoria. He recently served as lead author on ISS studies on the long-term development prospects of the DR Congo, the Horn of Africa, Nigeria and Malawi. Kouassi has published on various issues relating to foreign direct investment in Africa and is interested in development economics, macroeconomics, international economics, and economic modelling. He has a PhD in Economics.

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