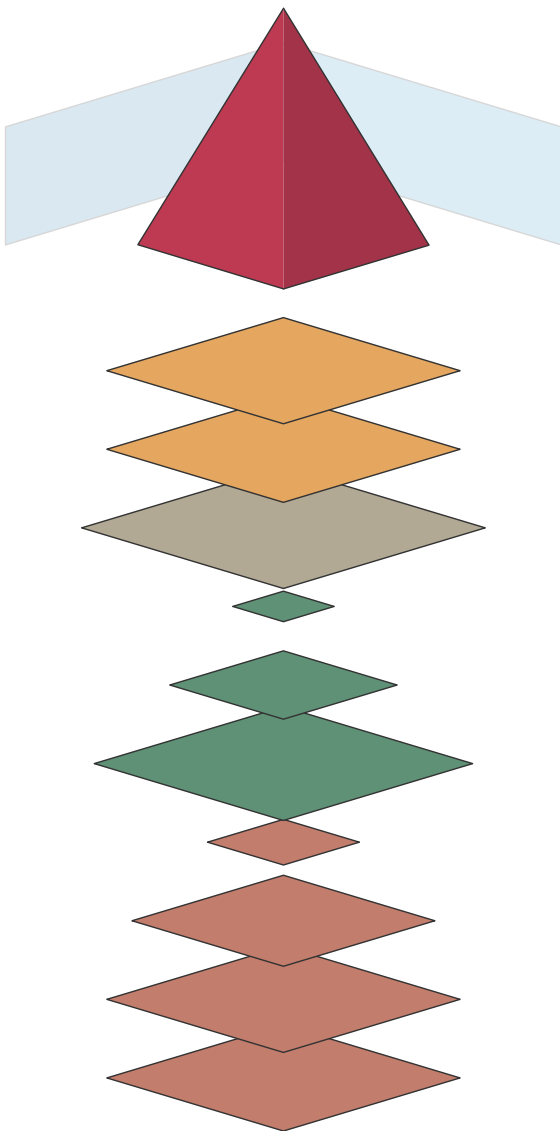


 **NIGER**



 **6.01**  
**CRIMINALITY SCORE**

**41<sup>st</sup>** of 193 countries  
**14<sup>th</sup>** of 54 African countries  
**3<sup>rd</sup>** of 15 West African countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS** **5.90**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.00
HUMAN SMUGGLING	7.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.00
FAUNA CRIMES	4.50
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.50
HEROIN TRADE	3.00
COCAINE TRADE	6.00
CANNABIS TRADE	7.00
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	7.00

 **CRIMINAL ACTORS** **6.13**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	4.00
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.00
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.00

 **3.21**  
**RESILIENCE SCORE**

**163<sup>rd</sup>** of 193 countries  
**35<sup>th</sup>** of 54 African countries  
**11<sup>th</sup>** of 15 West African countries

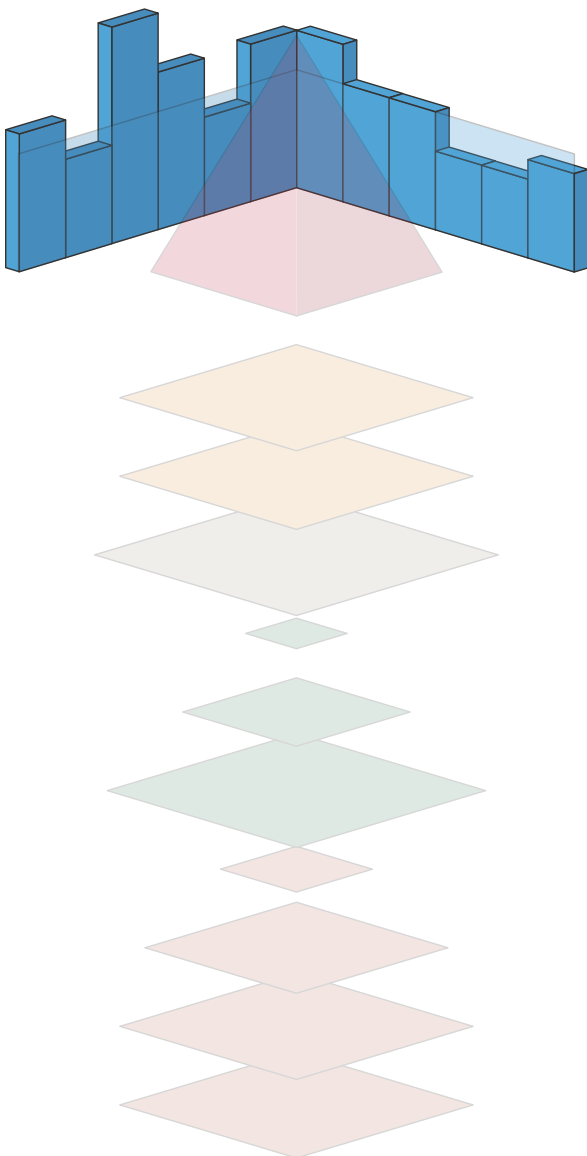


Funding provided by the United States Government.



ENACT is funded by the European Union and implemented by the Institute for Security Studies and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

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<u>POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</u>	<b>3.50</b>
<u>GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</u>	<b>2.50</b>
<u>INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</u>	<b>5.50</b>
<u>NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS</u>	<b>4.00</b>
<u>JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION</u>	<b>2.50</b>
<u>LAW ENFORCEMENT</u>	<b>4.00</b>
<u>TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY</u>	<b>4.00</b>
<u>ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING</u>	<b>3.00</b>
<u>ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY</u>	<b>3.00</b>
<u>VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT</u>	<b>2.00</b>
<u>PREVENTION</u>	<b>2.00</b>
<u>NON-STATE ACTORS</u>	<b>2.50</b>

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 <b>CRIMINAL MARKETS</b>	<b>5.90</b>
 <b>CRIMINAL ACTORS</b>	<b>6.13</b>



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# CRIMINALITY

## CRIMINAL MARKETS

### PEOPLE

Niger is a country of origin, transit zone and recipient country for victims of forced labour and sex trafficking. Traditional slavery practices continue, primarily in the north, where girls born into slavery are sold or offered as gifts, and then forced into labour and sexual servitude. People from West Africa are increasingly falling victim to trafficking while passing through the country en route to North Africa and Europe. Nigerien children are forced to beg, subjected to domestic servitude and forced labour in the country's gold, salt, iron and gypsum mines, as well as in agriculture, stone quarries and manufacturing. While some Nigerien women work in brothels en route to Europe, there are also networks that specialize in trafficking women and children for labour exploitation in West and North Africa, the Middle East and Europe, where victims are also forced into domestic work and sex trafficking, or work in the agriculture sector and animal herding.

Niger's human smuggling market includes both highly organized networks and opportunistic criminal entrepreneurs. Niger – and the city of Agadez, in particular – is a crossroads for trans-Saharan caravan routes that link the Mediterranean and West Africa. Human smuggling is a financial lifeline for many local people, particularly in the north; and the challenges associated with traversing the Sahara cause many to turn to smuggling networks. Although the number of people transiting Niger has decreased, networks have shown increased degrees of sophistication and adaptation. A high degree of corruption also facilitates operations, which have been disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions.

### TRADE

Niger is a major transit corridor for weapons destined for conflict zones in the region. The deterioration of Niger's own security and stability however has made it increasingly a destination market for arms, while illegal gold mining has also generated a market for illicit explosives. Weapons include munitions from past conflicts, diversions from government stockpiles, and those smuggled from other countries in the region. Terrorists use a range of trafficked weapons including explosives, small arms, machine guns and mortar rounds, as well as armed vehicles.

Conflict in the Tillabéri region continues, while armed Toubou groups based in southern Libya prey on illicit economies in northern Niger. The Islamic State in West Africa poses a substantial threat to Niger's border region with Nigeria, and armed groups operating in Nigeria's

Zamfara forests, which border Niger's Maradi region, have become increasingly violent.

### ENVIRONMENT

Unregulated logging has long been a problem due to the traditional use of biomass as cooking fuel. With regards to wildlife crimes, gangs of Nigerien poachers visit the W National Park in search of skins, meat and by-products from animals including buffalo, antelope, elephants, snakes, monkeys and big cats. Vultures are also killed illegally. Since 2018, there have been no traditional forest rangers in the park. Niger has been successful in halting the poaching of its West African giraffes, but the Kouré giraffe reserve may once again become vulnerable due to a lack of conservation funding following a targeted terrorist attack in August 2020 and the subsequent end to tourism in the area.

Niger is a source country for gold, and artisanal gold mining is widespread. Thousands of artisanal miners work in the Tchibarakaten and Tillabéri regions. The industry is unregulated and few sites have technical support, security guards or tax agents. The work is dangerous because of patrolling Algerian security forces and armed bandits. Gold panning increases the risk of corruption, misrepresentation, money laundering and non-payment of taxes, as well as of forced labour (including child labour), prostitution and sexual violence. The town of Arlit is being used increasingly as a hub for illegal artisanal-gold-mining activities. Illicit flows related to the uranium and oil industries also occur in Niger, but they are not well documented.

### DRUGS

Niger is a transit country for heroin. Afghan heroin enters Niger through its southeast and southwest borders, with the cities of Agadez, Maradi, Zinder and Tahoua being key transit hubs. Niger is also a transit country for Latin-American cocaine destined for the Mediterranean coast, Europe and the Middle East. Key trafficking routes run from Mali through Niger to Libya, and are managed predominantly by armed Malian groups. There are rumours of the involvement of influential criminal actors in Niger's cocaine-trafficking market, including senior governmental officials. While the violence associated with Niger's cocaine trade is less severe than Mali's, it has seriously impacted the country's governance. Traffickers, who are afraid of being targeted by armed groups in southern Libya, have taken advantage of the reduced number of vehicles travelling across the Tenere desert since the start of COVID-19 to increase their flows.

Cannabis is widely consumed in Niger. The country plays an important role as a transit point for cannabis resin, with

senior government actors reportedly involved in the trade. There has been a slight increase in the quantity of trans-Saharan cannabis resin being transported through Niger. Because it is located along the west-to-east route for the trafficking of Moroccan kif, all the kif convoys coming out of Mali as well as many of those entering Libya transit Niger.

The trafficking and domestic consumption of Tramadol has boomed in Niger. Lax monitoring of its pharmaceutical industry, combined with the ease of importing Tramadol from India and China, has made Niger a key gateway for the drug. Smugglers transport Tramadol from Nigeria through Niger and into Libya, where they receive a higher price for the drug.

## CRIMINAL ACTORS

Smuggling is carried out predominantly by loosely organized criminal networks. The semi nomadic, pastoral Tuareg ethnic group has long been engaged in cross-border trade of a wide range of commodities across the Sahara region. Criminal elements smuggle everything from foodstuffs to cars along Niger's border with Nigeria, using truck caravans to travel through the desert. The criminalization of migrant transport has pushed such operations underground, feeding the trafficking of drugs and weapons. Most local criminal networks are territorially based and organized into ethnic groups. Agadez's transnational smuggling networks are

organized along ethnolinguistic lines and connected to larger networks.

Since 2018, a large drug-trafficking network has increasingly been using Niger as a transit point between the Maghreb and Europe. Terrorism in Niger mainly takes the form of clashes between security forces and extremist militants, as well as kidnappings, but the country also faces threats from Mali- and Nigeria-based terrorist groups. Armed Malian groups have a stronghold on some smuggling routes and have been connected with key political stakeholders in Niamey. Foreign criminal actors feeding the Sahel's drug and smuggling economies include Latin-American and Asian cartels, mafia groups in the Maghreb, and mafia groups linked to African diasporas abroad. Foreign actors are also involved in the smuggling of humans and gold – and those with connections in Sudan and Dubai appear to have increasing influence. Most foreign criminal networks are loosely structured, and their key members are easily replaced.

A number of violent extremist organizations act as quasi-mafia-style groups in Niger. Tramadol is sold by mafia networks made up primarily of Malian nationals. Government officials at all levels are suspected to be involvement in drug, human and gold smuggling and there have been a number of corruption and alleged embezzlement scandals in Niger in recent years.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Although the Nigerien government's actions are not very effective at stemming organized crime, there is clear effort, especially regarding violent extremist organizations, militias and north-bound smuggling. The number of individuals attempting to cross the Mediterranean has decreased considerably due to government measures – however, smugglers have subsequently resorted to road banditry and drug and alcohol trafficking, or joined militias in Libya. Corruption is rife and has invaded all public and private services, with the payment of bribes to officials for basic services akin to a national taxation system. The government is not considered transparent, despite establishing two anti-corruption agencies, although questions have been raised as to the degree of independence of one of these bodies.

Niger has ratified international agreements related to organized crime and is party to the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption. The country is an active partner in the international community on security matters, but has low state resilience to organized crime and

depends heavily on international assistance, including from the United States and its European partners. The country also has good relations with China, particularly in the uranium, oil and infrastructure sectors. Niger has incorporated many of the provisions of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime into its national legislation, but its capacity for effective implementation is limited. It has adopted domestic laws to combat human smuggling, but its anti-corruption framework is lacking and there are no effective mechanisms in place to regulate the financing of political parties or audit state spending.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judiciary is not independent from the executive, and higher court rulings are often disregarded. Judicial corruption is fuelled by low wages and a lack of training and resources, with high-ranking politicians frequently acting with impunity. Corruption and nepotism are rampant among the lower levels of the judiciary, and decisions are often influenced by links with business. As a consequence, the

judiciary functions ineffectively, and opposition leaders and civil society activists have been sentenced. Since the criminalization of smuggling, almost no members of organized crime groups have been prosecuted, while those with political connections have avoided arrest or been released before going to trial. However, Niger does have judicial-cooperation agreements with France.

Although Niger's under-resourced law enforcement body is one of its most corrupt domestic institutions, the country's security forces represent a strong deterrent for crime and smuggling, due in part to their levying of hefty bribes to secure smugglers' release from jail. Despite a widespread lack of ready access to security services and high levels of perceived corruption, the police still enjoy the trust of the public. Law-enforcement capacity has increased alongside international attention on terrorism and smuggling in the region, with Niger's border forces successfully disrupting drug and arms smuggling at its border with Nigeria. Police, prosecutors and judges have received training on how to deal with human trafficking, and the government has cooperated with a regional anti-trafficking operation.

Niger's land border is one of the longest in the world, and spans desert areas with little state reach. Despite considerable international investment, the country's borders remain permeable to the smuggling and trafficking of drugs, arms, cigarettes and humans, as well as to the invasion of militias and extremist groups. Kidnapping for ransom is a key fundraising activity for terrorists – and despite its new border posts and increased security training, regional conflict has made Niger an ideal transit point for illicit goods. Border-control corruption provides supplementary revenues for state agents, while terrorist organizations make money by controlling some of the trans-border trade between Nigeria and Niger, including the lucrative smoked-fish industry in the Lake Chad Basin.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

While some anti-money laundering initiatives have been launched to counter terrorism, Niger's capacity for financial oversight remains weak. Its economic underdevelopment is due in part to food insecurity, a lack of industry, weak education system, increasing population, and limited employment opportunities.

While the country is a member of the Central Bank of West African States, whose banking system and currency it shares, businesses are often put off from placing large amounts of funds in the system due to high transaction costs. Most economic activity is cash-based and takes place outside of the conventional banking system. Informal money- and value-transfer services are widespread. These fall outside of the state's financial regulatory framework – and as such are not subject to taxes on income or services. Niger's economy has been hurt by terrorist activity, kidnappings and instability – and the government therefore relies on

foreign donors for much of its budget. Low uranium prices, the country's demographics and its high expenditure on security are likely to put continued strain on its economy.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Agence Nationale de Lutte contre la Traite des Personnes fights trafficking and provides support to victims. However, it is largely supported by international organizations and no other form of victim support is available. There is no witness-protection programme in Niger, and victim identification, referral and protection services are inadequate. The government does not offer any dedicated services for adult victims of modern slavery or hereditary slavery. Some activities have been launched with international support to prevent radicalization and narcotics trafficking, as well as to provide training on intelligence gathering and analysis. With the exception of a few initiatives sponsored by the United Nations, civil society in Niger does not play a major role in combating organized crime.

Legal protections for journalists are not always enforced, and members of the media are often harassed and arrested. Despite media offenses being decriminalized under the country's media law, journalists continue to be tried criminally. The arrests of journalists, the closure of media outlets and the obstruction of journalistic activities have plagued the country in recent years. During government elections, social media access and texting was temporarily blocked. State-run and private newspapers and radio stations compete with one another. News access throughout the country comes primarily from radio, where state broadcasters dominate. The authorities and certain international organizations are responsible for restrictions on the release of information, but official censorship is not common. Instead, self-censorship is practised and stems in part from political pressure or advertising incentives to influence content.

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