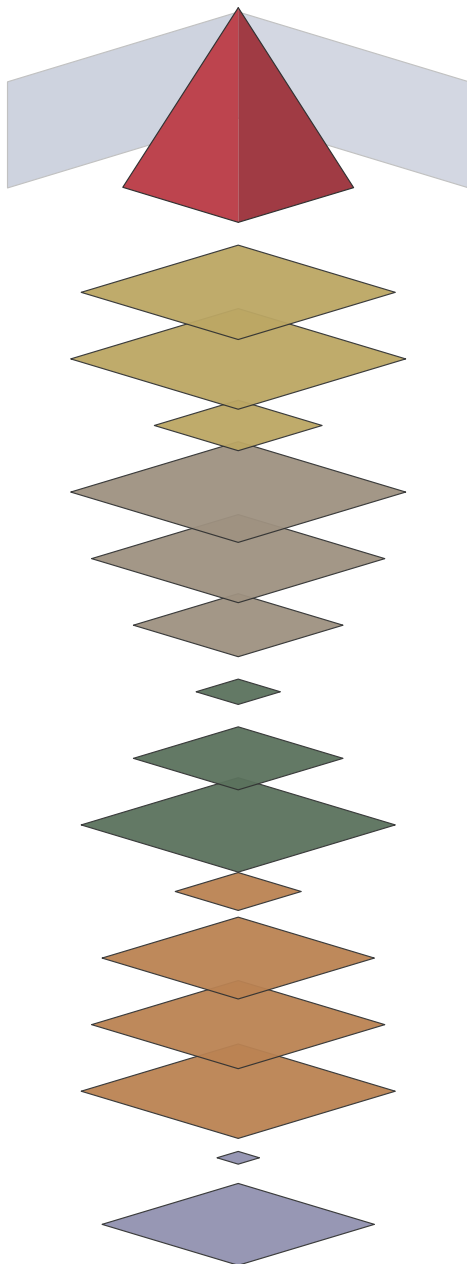


 **NIGER**



 **5.7  
CRIMINALITY SCORE**

18<sup>th</sup> of 54 African countries  
6<sup>th</sup> of 15 West African countries

 **CRIMINAL MARKETS 5.7**

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	7.5
HUMAN SMUGGLING	8
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	4
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7
ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	5
FLORA CRIMES	2
FAUNA CRIMES	5
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.5
HEROIN TRADE	3
COCAINE TRADE	6.5
CANNABIS TRADE	7
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	7.5
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	1
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.5

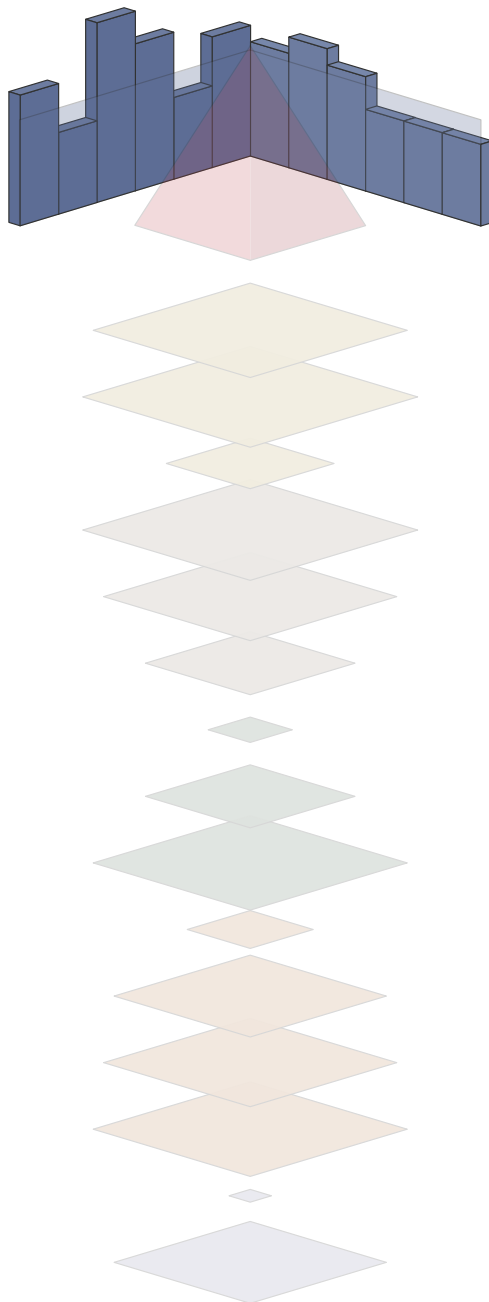
 **CRIMINAL ACTORS 5.7**

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	4
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.5
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.5
FOREIGN ACTORS	5.5
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	5.5

 **3.46  
RESILIENCE SCORE**



 **NIGER**



 **3.46  
RESILIENCE SCORE**

**30<sup>th</sup>** of 54 African countries  
**10<sup>th</sup>** of 15 West African countries

<u>POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE</u>	<b>4</b>
<u>GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY</u>	<b>2.5</b>
<u>INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</u>	<b>5.5</b>
<u>NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS</u>	<b>4.5</b>
<u>JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION</u>	<b>2.5</b>
<u>LAW ENFORCEMENT</u>	<b>4</b>
<u>TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY</u>	<b>3.5</b>
<u>ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING</u>	<b>4</b>
<u>ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY</u>	<b>3.5</b>
<u>VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT</u>	<b>2.5</b>
<u>PREVENTION</u>	<b>2.5</b>
<u>NON-STATE ACTORS</u>	<b>2.5</b>

 **5.7  
CRIMINALITY SCORE**

 <u>CRIMINAL MARKETS</u>	<b>5.7</b>
 <u>CRIMINAL ACTORS</u>	<b>5.7</b>



# CRIMINALITY

## Criminal Markets

### PEOPLE

Niger is a source, transit, and destination country for victims of human trafficking. The majority of identified victims are women and girls, both local and foreign nationals, with the latter being mainly Nigerian nationals. Sexual exploitation is the most common motivation for the crime. Sex trafficking is common near the border with Nigeria and along the main east-west highway, primarily between the cities of Birni-N'Konni and Zinder. Other networks, based in Zinder and Maradi, specialize in trafficking women and children for labour exploitation, mostly in the form of forced begging or agricultural and domestic work. In certain regions, particularly in the north, traditional practices associated with servitude persist. Migrants travelling through Niger on credit can be vulnerable to trafficking, as some traffickers use unpaid transportation fees as a form of debt bondage, coercing migrants who are unable to pay into forced labour or commercial sex. However, exploitation usually takes place once migrants reach Libya. The presence of artisanal gold mines in remote areas further contributes to the risk of human trafficking, as some goldminers are coerced or misled into labour exploitation.

Niger is a significant crossroad for trans-Saharan migration. Human smugglers – referred to as passeurs locally – operate at various degrees of organisation, ranging from highly sophisticated networks to individual transporters, depending on the route and the type of smuggling service offered. However, most passeurs work with coxeurs – intermediaries who put migrants in contact with passeurs. These networks typically facilitate northbound movements to destinations such as Libya and Algeria, from where some migrants attempt onwards travel to Europe. Though the town of Agadez once served as a key departure hub for routes to Libya, the enforcement of the 2015 law banning human smuggling in Niger saw human smuggling activities in Agadez drastically reduce. Instead, human smuggling increasingly takes place on more remote clandestine routes to the east of Agadez, which involve higher risks and costs for both smugglers and migrants. The town of Tahoua has also gained prominence as a transit hub for travel to Algeria, which has gained in popularity compared to Libya and has been less targeted by anti-smuggling efforts than Agadez. Since the criminalisation of their activities, many passeurs in northern Niger also turned the transport

of Nigeriens travelling to Libya as part of longstanding circular migration patterns, as well as transport and trade servicing goldmining areas.

In Niger, illicit activities such as kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and protection racketeering have been identified as sources of terrorism financing. These activities are carried out by violent extremist groups primarily in the cross-border area with Mali and Burkina Faso and the northern Tillabéri region.

### TRADE

Arms trafficking poses a significant threat to Niger's stability and security. While historically it has been a transit country for weapons destined for conflict zones in the region, the deteriorating security situation within Niger has led to a rise in the domestic demand for firearms, particularly small arms and ammunition. The country's vast desert territory and a lack of state control over border areas make it challenging for authorities to combat trans-border insecurity effectively. Weapons circulating in the illicit market in Niger originate from various sources, including leftover munitions from former internal armed conflicts, diversions from national stockpiles, and smuggling from neighbouring countries such as Chad, Libya, Mali, and Nigeria. The activities of arms brokers and intermediaries are not specifically regulated by law, which contributes to the proliferation of weapons in the country. Arms trafficking in Niger is closely linked to other illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, rather than being driven solely by violent extremist groups or militias.

Counterfeit goods pose a significant problem, with pharmaceutical products being the most commonly traded of these. Niger relies heavily on imported medicines, which makes it challenging to monitor and control the influx of counterfeit products effectively. The illicit trade of excise goods, specifically contraband tobacco products, is also prevalent in the country.

### ENVIRONMENT

Niger has minimal tree cover, and unregulated logging has long been a problem owing to the widespread use of traditional biomass resources. Wood and charcoal are the primary cooking fuels used in almost all households throughout the country. However, unregulated logging is not associated with organized crime groups.



In terms of fauna crimes, local poachers, particularly Nigerien gangs, target the Niger W National Park during the dry season to hunt for ivory, big cat skins, and wild meat. For several years there has been an absence of traditional forest rangers in the park, resulting in a potential threat to the West African giraffe population. Efforts have been made to halt the decline of the giraffe population in the Koure Giraffe Reserve, but a lack of funding for protection and conservation has led to concerns about a potential resurgence in poaching. Niger also serves as a transit country for trafficked animals, with smugglers transporting African grey parrots and chimpanzees from Central Africa through Niger to Libya.

Illicit activities linked to non-renewable resources, particularly those related to gold mining, continue to present significant challenges in Niger. In northern Niger, most gold mining is artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM), and remains informal in nature. While providing a key livelihood for many Nigeriens and foreign miners, in a context where alternative economic activities are scarce, ASGM also bears significant risks for those involved, including labour trafficking and exploitation risks. Armed banditry targeting gold convoys has also been on the rise in recent years.

## DRUGS

While not a major consumer or producer country, Niger is known as a transit point for northbound heroin flows. Niger is also a transit point for cocaine flows heading to Algeria and Libya, and onwards to towards markets in Europe and the Middle East. Key trafficking routes from Mali pass through Niger, with Malian non-state armed groups being heavily involved in this trade, particularly along the route from Mali to Libya via Niger. The trafficking of cocaine through Niger has also fuelled a steady rise in consumption within the country, with crack cocaine increasing in urban areas since 2020.

Niger plays a significant role as a transit point for cannabis resin, particularly along the west to east trafficking route for Moroccan kif. The country serves as a passage for kif convoys from Mali to Libya, making it an essential part of this trade.

The illicit trade and local consumption of synthetic opioids, particularly tramadol, has become a considerable problem in Niger in recent years. Weak oversight of the pharmaceutical industry in the country and the ease with which it is possible to import tramadol from India and China to neighbouring Nigeria have positioned Niger as a crucial transit point for traffickers. The demand for the drug in the wider region fuels the trafficking trade, with

smugglers capitalizing on the higher price it commands in Libya as compared to Niger. Tramadol consumption is also fuelled by challenges faced by the Nigerien population in access to healthcare and appropriate pain management and is widespread among groups involved in arduous physical labour, such as agricultural workers and goldminers.

## CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

There have been no relevant incidents of cyber-dependent crime related to organized crime groups in recent years.

## FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crime and corruption are major concerns in Niger. In recent years, billions of CFA francs of public funds have been misappropriated through manipulated defence procurements. Fraudulent practices including false delivery notes, inappropriate orders, and contracts for non-existent or unfulfilled services have been the primary methods facilitating financial crimes. Notably, there have been some high-profile embezzlement cases, primarily involving state-owned companies, which have led to the imprisonment of public officials and even ministers.

## Criminal Actors

Government officials at various levels are suspected to be significantly involved in drug trafficking and other forms of organized crime. This includes officials ranging from local government council members to members of Parliament. Although high-level government officials are implicated, the extent of their involvement remains unclear. The government, both at the national and local level, maintains close ties with organized crime groups in order to minimize violence. This often involves informal and tacit agreements aimed at keeping the environment safe for daily business activities. While Nigerien military units are aware of criminal group operations, they avoid direct confrontation with heavily armed bandits, possibly owing to insufficient equipment and isolated postings.

Currently, there is no substantial evidence that large mafia-style groups are operating in Niger. By contrast, there are smaller criminal networks that engage in illicit activities, with smuggling and drug trafficking being prominent. These groups facilitate cross-border trade, including the smuggling of contraband such as weapons, drugs, fuel, vehicles, and humans. Smuggling operations predominantly occur through the Sahara Desert, often by means of caravans of trucks.



The criminalization of human smuggling has pushed what was once a licit and crucial livelihood underground, encouraging smugglers to use more remote bypass routes involving greater risks. Armed banditry has increased in the country, especially in the south-western and northern regions.

Foreign criminal actors contribute significantly to illicit activities in Niger, particularly in the drug and smuggling trades. Latin American and Asian cartels, as well as African diaspora and Maghreb mafia-style groups, are involved in the drug economy. Foreign nationals are also involved in human smuggling. With regards to gold smuggling, foreign actors with connections in Sudan and Dubai are increasing their influence, making Niger an important hub for illicit gold smuggling. Nigerian trafficking networks also play a significant role in arms trafficking in the country, particularly in the transportation of weapons

sourced from northern Mali and then moved through Niger and Benin. Malian non-state armed groups exert significant control over the smuggling routes between Mali and Niger, and maintain connections with influential political figures in Niger. Chadian armed groups are also becoming increasingly involved in criminal activities, particularly in northern Niger and the Chad–Niger–Libya triangle. Niger also faces security threats from violent extremist groups, including IS Sahel and JNIM, as well as Nigeria-based groups such as Boko Haram. In the private sector, there have been instances of local companies across different fields reportedly engaging in illicit activities, specifically fraud, forgery, and money laundering, but the frequency of these cases seems to be rare. Corruption in businesses is a concern but not thoroughly investigated at present.

# RESILIENCE

## LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The government of Niger has demonstrated some attempts to combat organized crime, although its effectiveness in practice is limited. Its primary focus is addressing violent extremism as well as irregular migration, under pressure from international partners. While Niger is no longer the regional irregular migration hub it once was, due to the implementation of stricter measures introduced by the government on migratory routes and the effective enforcement, under EU pressure, of a 2015 Law on illegal trafficking of migrants, human smuggling dynamics still remain a significant component of illicit economies in the country as they continue to adapt and respond to demand for mobility.

Despite the small strengthening of governance that has been witnessed, Niger's political elite and security apparatus have been regularly suspected of involvement in the illicit economy and concerns regarding political rights and civil liberties have not been addressed by the government. Transactional corruption is prevalent across state institutions and law enforcement, although solid evidence of state involvement in organized crime is difficult to obtain. Anti-corruption agencies have faced criticism for their lack of independence and their financial dependence on the executive branch. The government often fails to act on their recommendations or pursue corruption cases in court.

Niger has ratified various international legal instruments aimed at combating organized crime, including those related to corruption, illicit drug trafficking, the arms trade, and the protection of endangered species. The country relies heavily on international assistance to enhance its capacity to combat organized crime, with several countries providing security assistance, training, and troops on the ground. Niger has incorporated many international standards against organized crime into its national legislation with international cooperation. However, the capacity for effective implementation remains low. In terms of corruption, although the Constitution contains some provisions, Niger's anti-corruption framework is inadequate and underdeveloped.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in Niger is characterized by a certain level of independence, as mandated by the Constitution. However, concerns persist regarding executive interference, and corruption remains a significant issue within the judiciary. Factors such as low salaries, inadequate training, and limited resources contribute to the prevalence of corruption. The judiciary often fails to hold high-ranking politicians criminally accountable, resulting in a lack of public trust. Nepotism is also widespread at lower levels of the judiciary, leading to inefficiency and an overwhelming caseload. Furthermore, arbitrary arrests



and prolonged pretrial detentions are commonplace in Niger. In certain regions, states of emergency have been declared, granting the military the power to carry out mass arrests and detain individuals suspected of having ties to terrorist organizations.

Law enforcement structures in Niger continue to grapple with corruption, despite being perceived as a strong deterrent for many types of crimes. Although the police force enjoys one of the highest levels of public trust in Africa, security forces frequently accept bribes from intercepted smugglers to let them proceed, or from smugglers seeking release from jail.

Niger also faces significant challenges in maintaining its territorial integrity, owing to its extensive and porous land borders. Moreover, foreign violent extremist groups continue to pose a threat by infiltrating Niger and directly targeting the military. The destabilization of northern Chad and its border areas with Niger and Libya has further exacerbated the security situation. The return of rebel and mercenary groups from Libya following the 2020 Libyan ceasefire has contributed to increased banditry and insecurity. Over the course of 2022, the security situation continued to deteriorate, especially in the south-western regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua, bordering Mali and Burkina Faso, as well the south-eastern Diffa region, bordering Nigeria and Chad.

## ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Anti-money laundering efforts in Niger focus primarily on combating terrorism financing. However, the financial oversight infrastructure remains weak and ineffective. The informal economy represents a significant portion of the country's economic activity, leading to low levels of formal financial inclusion, which hinder effective anti-money laundering measures. As a result, Niger is considered a medium-high-risk country for financial crimes. The prevalence of cash-based transactions in the informal sector and the widespread use of informal remittance services further complicate efforts to combat money laundering. Law enforcement agencies in Niger have limited success in prosecuting money laundering cases, mainly due to the difficulty of detecting suspicious transactions conducted in cash.

Niger faces significant challenges in its economic regulatory environment. The presence of violent extremist groups, criminal organizations, and rebel groups has negatively affected the country's attractiveness to business. Foreign nationals and companies have been targeted, leading to a decline in foreign investment, particularly from major investors such as China and Europe. Additionally,

factors such as food insecurity, limited industrialization, high population growth, a weak education sector, and a lack of employment opportunities beyond subsistence farming and herding make Niger an economically poor nation. The government relies heavily on foreign donor resources to support a significant portion of its fiscal budget. Taxation policies for the extractive sector continue to be insufficient in mobilizing and managing domestic resources for economic recovery. Although the COVID-19 pandemic initially exacerbated these economic challenges, Niger's economy recovered in 2022, after two years of weak growth.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Human trafficking victim and witness support in Niger receives significant support from international organizations. The country recently introduced a national referral mechanism and established a government-operated shelter to provide care for identified trafficking victims. There has, however, been a decrease in the number of identified victims in comparison to the previous reporting period. While authorities have increased trafficking investigations, prosecutions, and convictions, they have not taken action to address the demand for commercial sex. Training in anti-trafficking measures is provided to armed forces personnel deployed on international peacekeeping missions, but cases of sexual exploitation involving Nigerien peacekeepers have been reported without adequate investigation or disciplinary action. Niger has implemented various prevention measures with international support to combat trafficking and address radicalization, and is also participating in regional initiatives to enhance border security, although these efforts have not yet yielded significant results.

The role of civil society in combating organized crime in Niger is limited, with only a few UN-sponsored initiatives in place. Civil society members have expressed concern about repression, alleging that the government has exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to arrest or silence them. The country's cybercrime laws have also faced criticism, as individuals have been imprisoned for expressing their opinions on social networks. While there have been some positive developments, such as a bill removing the penalty of imprisonment for journalists accused of defamation and insult through electronic communication, challenges persist. Limited independent information is available through state-owned and privately owned media outlets. Investigative journalism is discouraged, and journalists can face prosecution resulting from allegations of defamation or the dissemination of information that may disturb public order.

