

Sahel Security Brief: NIGER



The Challenges

Terrorism

Terrorist activities have escalated in Niger in recent years, making the country now a hub of trafficking and extremist activity with direct implications for U.S. national security. U.S. military leaders warn that Niger and the Sahel region are a critical battleground in the fight against terrorism. A number of terrorist groups operate in Niger's border regions, including Boko Haram, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and ISIS affiliates. These groups are gaining recruits and threatening the political stability of the Sahel region. U.S. Special Forces have been in the country for more than five years, with the number of U.S. military personnel growing from approximately 100 in 2013 to more than 800 today—more than any another country in Africa except Djibouti. In October 2017, ISIS terrorists ambushed American and Nigerien military personnel, killing four Americans.

"Niger is at the crossroads of regional instability [related to] Boko Haram, ISIS-West Africa..and affiliated extremist groups in the region. Moreover, Niger faces internal governance and development issues with rapid population growth, environmental degradation, lack of economic opportunity, and stressed infrastructure."

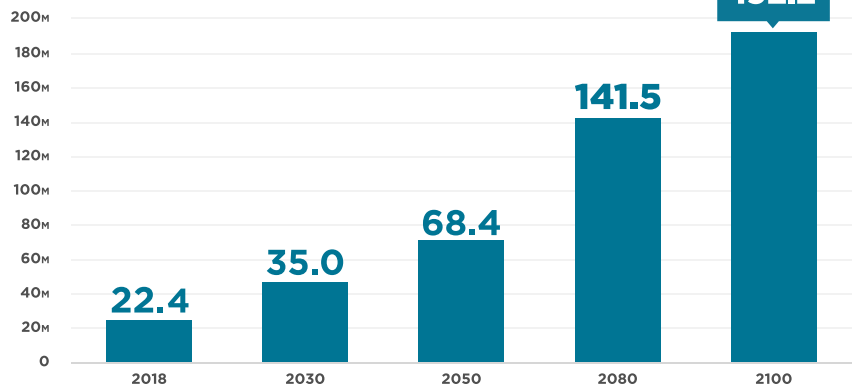
**Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser,
Commander, U.S. Africa Command**

Demographic Profile

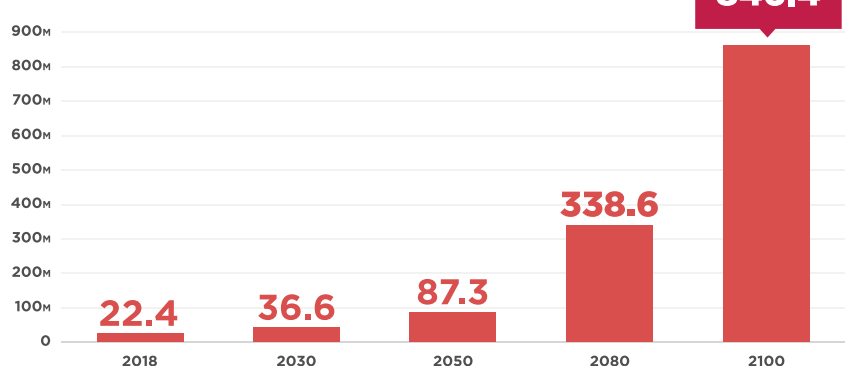
Population

In recent decades, Niger's population has grown exceptionally quickly, as women on average have had seven children or more. Niger's overall population has risen from 2.6 million in 1950 to approximately 22 million today. The UN (World Population Prospects, 2017 Revision) projects—even with a decline in fertility—that **Niger's population will more than triple to 68 million by 2050 and to 192 million by the end of the century.** If fertility rates remain unchanged (UN constant variant), Niger's population could grow even more explosively—**quadrupling to 87 million by 2050 and to 846 million by 2100.**

The UN projects—assuming a declining fertility rate—that Niger's population will rise to (figures in millions):



But if fertility remain at current levels, its population would increase even faster:

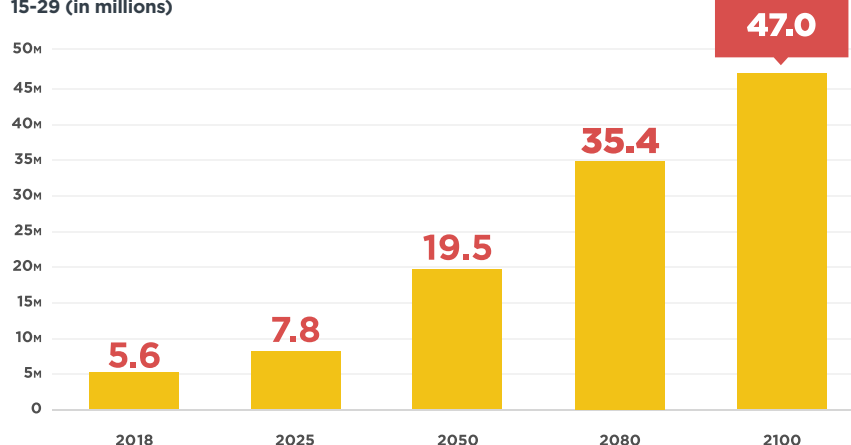


The Youth Bulge in Niger

Age demographics are increasingly viewed as a risk factor affecting national and regional security. Several studies have shown that countries with a disproportionately high number of young adults relative to the older adult population – a phenomenon known as a “youth bulge” – are significantly more prone to political unrest and civil conflict. For more than a decade, the National Intelligence Council (NIC) has identified these youth bulges as an area of concern – noting in 2017 that many “chronically youthful states” are “*ill-equipped to meet the demands of sustained high fertility, rapid urban growth... and an underemployed young-adult population, potentially contributing to instability.*”

Niger’s youth bulge is one of the largest in the world—and because it has an exceptionally large number of children under the age of 15, its youth bulge is likely to persist for several decades to come. There are currently an estimated 5.6 million young people in Niger between the ages of 15 and 29, and that age group is projected to reach 7.8 million by 2025 and **nearly quadruple to 19.5 million by 2050.**

NIGER’S YOUTH BULGE: number of people ages 15-29 (in millions)



*Definitions vary, but a “youth bulge” is generally said to exist when the proportion of the 15-29 age group exceeds more than 40% of all adults (15 and over). In 2017, the 15-29 age cohort in Niger accounted for 50% of all adults, and it is projected to remain at 50% or more until mid-century.

Health and Education

Poor healthcare and inadequate access to education cloud Niger’s future. According to the latest UNICEF data (UNICEF, The State of the World’s Children 2017, <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2017/>):

- Niger’s maternal and child mortality rates are among the highest in the world.
- The growth and development of 42% of the children under the age of 5 are threatened by stunting and malnutrition.
- Less than half the population (46%) have access to safe water and just 13% have access to basic sanitation.
- The literacy rate for young adults (15-24) is 35% for males and only 15% for women.
- The primary school enrollment rate is 67% for boys and 57% for girls. Attendance rates are even lower: 55% for boys and 46% for girls. The child labor rate is 31% for both genders.
- Niger desperately needs more teachers, but the high rate of adult illiteracy makes recruitment difficult.

At a Glance



NIGER IS ONE OF THE POOREST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD



MORE THAN 2 OUT OF 5 CHILDREN SUFFER FROM STUNTING AND MALNUTRITION



NIGER’S RATE OF CHILD MARRIAGE IS THE HIGHEST IN THE WORLD

“Massively growing youth populations in low and middle-income countries (LMIC) already face high unemployment and economic stagnation. If job growth does not keep pace with youth potential and food insecurity remains a severe challenge, the environment is ripe for disillusionment and instability. If poorly handled or ignored, these factors are a recipe for social disruption, political instability, migration, and conflict.”

**Youth for Growth: Transforming Economies
through Agriculture (Chicago Council – March 2018)**



Niger lags extremely far behind developed countries in the numbers of school teachers, physicians, nurses, and hospital beds per capita. With the expected tripling of its population by 2050, raising those numbers to even two-thirds of the average for developed (OECD) countries would require exponential increases:

- The number of secondary school teachers would need to increase from an estimated **13,400 in 2018 to 297,000 in 2050**.
- The number of physicians would need to grow from **426 to 155,185**.
- The number of nurses and midwives would need to grow from **3,069 to 410,724**.
- The number of hospital beds would need to grow from **6,721 to 214,261**.

“In the five countries at the core of the Sahel—Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mali and Mauritania – acute malnutrition has risen 30 percent in the past five years. Because of these conditions, a toxic wind blows from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean.”

David Beasley, Executive Director of UN World Food Program (March 2018)

Food Security and Climate

- Since 2000, Niger has suffered through several severe droughts, including historic droughts in 2010 and 2012. Even in non-drought years, Niger relies heavily on food aid from the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) and other providers. As of March 2018, food insecurity affected at least 2.6 million people.
- Only 12% of the land in Niger is arable and desertification is expanding. Soil in Niger is of poor quality, and overgrazing and unsustainable farming practices, along with drought and higher temperatures, have exacerbated the problem.
- Climate change forecasts suggest that average temperatures in Niger could rise by as much as 4 degrees Celsius by 2100 and droughts could become more frequent and severe. If those forecasts prove accurate, much of Niger's rain-fed agriculture could be lost and the productivity of its grazing lands significantly diminished.
- Water scarcity, in particular, could limit future food production, as the rate of water withdrawals in many areas exceeds the replenishment rate, and water tables, as a consequence, are falling.



Migration

Niger in recent years has become a major transit point for Africans seeking to enter the European Union. Since 2016, UNHCR reports that an estimated 300,000 migrants have traveled through Niger's Agadez region on their way to Libya or Algeria in hopes of crossing the Mediterranean. While enhanced interdiction efforts reduced the number of migrants and refugees reaching European shores in 2017, the forces driving migration—climate, conflict, unemployment, and rapid population growth—are expected to increase in future years. UNHCR also reports that attacks by Boko Haram in Niger's Diffa region displaced more than 250,000 people in 2017, and produced more than 100,000 refugees.



Africa's rapid population growth, in a context where poverty levels are already profoundly high, is one of the main causes explaining the increased number of poor on the continent despite the fast economic growth....Promoting family planning, particularly in countries with rapid demographic growth, should be an important component of policies to achieve inclusive growth and shared prosperity.

***Foresight Africa: Top Priorities for the Continent in 2018
(Brookings – January 2018)***

Meeting these Challenges

To meet these challenges, Niger must adopt and implement, with support from the U.S. and other donor nations, a plan for economic and human development that will allow Niger to prosper.

If Niger can commit to educating girls, empowering women, and improving access to modern methods of contraception, fertility rates will fall, just as they have in many other developing countries.

If Niger also makes the necessary investments in its human capital, Niger could capture what economists and demographers refer to as the “demographic dividend.”

Together, with stepped up security and improved governance, Niger could make sustainable economic progress and become a stabilizing force in a currently unstable region.

¹John F. May, *World Population Policies: Their Origins, Evolution, and Impact* (2012)

