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International Labour Organization

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ILO WAEMU Youth Country Briefs

May 2026

Youth Labour Market Trends in Niger[1]

Key points

- Despite significant economic growth in recent years, Niger's rapid population increase has meant only modest gains in income per capita (p.c.). Between 2000 and 2025, real gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average of 5.5 per cent per year, well above the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) average of 4.4 per cent, however the total population expanded by an estimated 3.2 per cent per year. The weakly diversified and low-productivity economy dominated by agriculture and the informal sector has proved unable to generate sufficient growth in jobs and income. Consequently, Niger remains a low-income economy, with a purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusted GDP p.c. of US$1,801 in 2025 – well below the SSA average of US$5,324.
- Extreme working poverty is pervasive, affecting nearly 50 per cent of workers in 2025, well above the SSA average of 40.1 per cent and the global average of 7.9 per cent and the highest rate to be found amongst WAEMU countries. Niger's Global Peace Index (GPI) ranking is in the lower half of WAEMU countries, reflecting ongoing security challenges; however, it improved modestly in recent years, indicating some progress in stability.
- Employment in Niger is overwhelmingly agricultural for both youth and adults, reflecting the country's predominantly rural economy. Over three-quarters of all workers are engaged in agriculture, compared to just half in SSA as a whole. Women are more likely than men to work in agriculture, while men are somewhat more represented in services. Employment in industry remains very limited (under 10 per cent of workers).
- Informality is nearly universal. In 2022, an estimated 98.5 per cent of all workers were informally employed, with 99 per cent of working women and 97.9 per cent of working men in informal jobs. Among youth, informal employment is even more prevalent – almost every young worker has an informal job. Nevertheless, there are signs of gradual improvement in job quality: the share of young people working as employees (rather than in self-employment) edged up between 2019 and 2022.
- The overall NEET (not in employment, education or training) rate was relatively low at 16.8 per cent in 2022 – one of the lowest in the WAEMU region, owing to the necessity for most young people to engage in some form of work. As in many countries, however, there is a large gender gap: young women experience a NEET rate more than double that of young men. Encouragingly, both the overall youth NEET rate and the gender disparity have decreased since 2019, with young women's NEET rate falling as employment participation improved.
- There are pronounced disparities among youth. Young people with disabilities face higher NEET rates than their peers without disabilities, and these gaps widened between 2019 and 2022. In addition, NEET rates do not decline with higher education levels in Niger. On the contrary, by 2022 youth with advanced education faced the highest NEET rates, highlighting a growing education–employment mismatch.

[1] This brief was prepared by Niall O'Higgins and Vipasana Karkee (ILO) with some AI support managed by Dibyaudh Das (ILO). The authors are grateful for the very helpful comments provided by ILO colleagues Jonas Bausch, Yacouba Diallo, Sara Elder and Ali Madai Boukar as well as those provided by colleagues at the Mastercard Foundation including participants at a webinar organised by MCF on January 27, 2026.

1. Introduction: Contextual indicators

Niger has experienced solid macroeconomic growth over the past quarter-century, although rapid population growth has constrained improvements in living standards. This growth has been driven mainly by agriculture, highly dependent on rainfall as well as by the mining and extractive industries, which generate significant revenues. However, it remains fragile and insufficiently inclusive due to limited economic diversification and a predominance of informal employment. Between 2000 and 2025,[2] Niger's real GDP grew by an average of roughly 5.5 per cent per annum (p.a.), compared to an annual population growth rate of about 3.2 per cent.[3] This means that economic output has outpaced population growth, but only by a narrow margin. Periods of drought and instability in the early 2000s led to episodes of very slow growth, but the 2010s saw a recovery, and even outpaced SSA as a whole. After a pandemic-related slowdown in 2020 and 2021, annual real GDP growth returned to 11.9 per cent in 2022. Overall, economic growth in Niger during the new millennium has been well above the global and regional average (figure 1).

Box 1: YouthSTATS, a partnership between the ILO and the Mastercard Foundation

The ILO, in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation, has created a regularly updated dataset called YouthSTATS available on ILOSTAT. The dataset was first produced by the ILO as part of its partnership with the Mastercard Foundation "Work4Youth" project which concluded in 2016. Initially composed of labour indicators for young people aged 15-29 derived from the school-to-work transition surveys conducted through the partnership, the dataset now benefits from the ILO's stock of harmonized labour force survey micro-datasets. It serves as a central repository of international youth labour statistics.

This brief is one of eight country statistical briefs for WAEMU countries undertaken under the new partnership which provide an analysis of youth labour markets with a focus on gender, educational attainment and disability issues. To complement these statistical analyses, the new partnership also involves analyses of youth employment initiatives in WAEMU countries prepared with the direct engagement of young people in the region. The countries covered are Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

Niger remains one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of per capita income. In 2025, its PPP-adjusted GDP p.c. was estimated at around US$1,801 – around one-third of the SSA average of US$5,324.[4] The country also faces security challenges. According to the 2025 GPI,[5] Niger's peacefulness ranking is in the middle of the WAEMU range, placing 6th out of eight countries in the region and 143rd globally (out of 163 countries). Niger's stability has fluctuated over time: during the 2010s, the country's GPI rankings were generally in the lower half of WAEMU, reflecting conflicts and insurgencies.[6] Niger ranks last among the eight WAEMU countries in the Human Development Index. Nevertheless, the country has

[2] IMF (2026).

[3] UN estimates and projections, July 2024 (UN, 2024; data also reported in ILOSTAT).

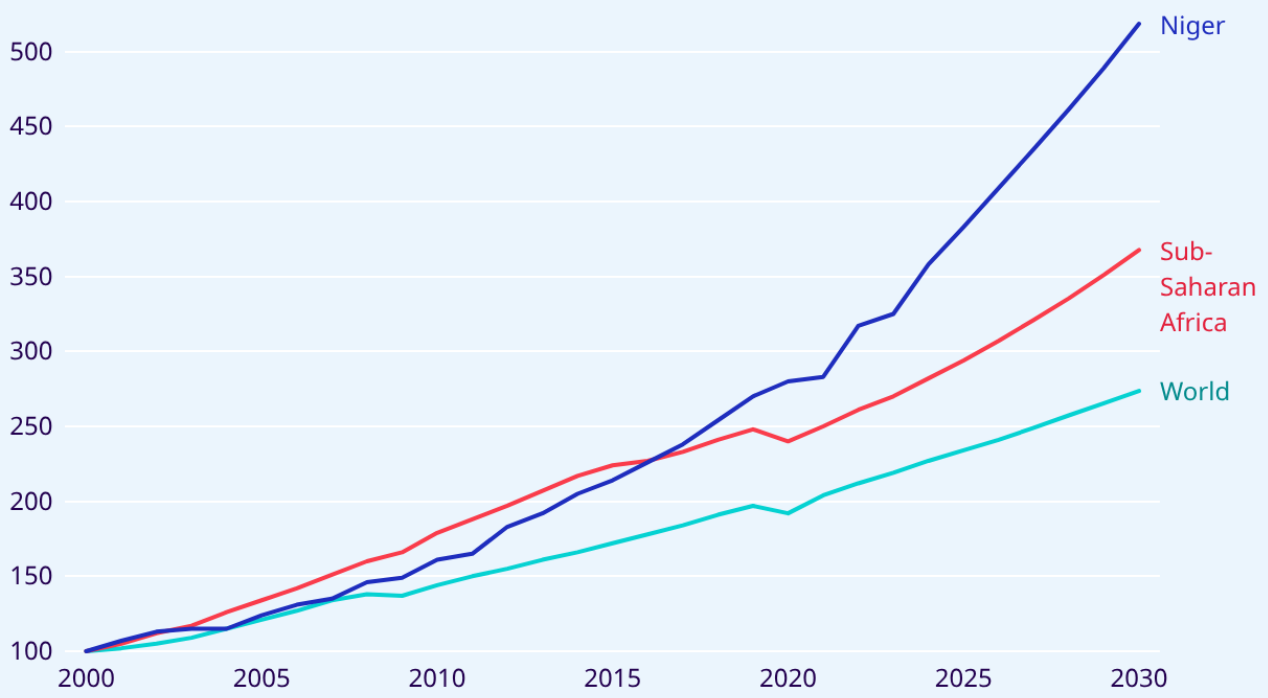
[4] The PPP adjusted GDP p.c. estimates used in this brief are from the IMF April 2026 WEO Database (IMF, 2026). Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) adjusted GDP converts a country's GDP into (usually) USD using exchange rates that equate the cost of a representative basket of goods and services in different countries.

[5] Institute for Economics & Peace (2025) and GPI raw data, 2008-2023.

[6] One might observe that a similar picture emerges from the Fragile States index, according to which, in 2024, Côte d'Ivoire was ranked fifth most fragile of the eight WAEMU countries.

made improvements to human development in the 21st century as its relative position has improved slightly and the country rose by three places between 2015 and 2023 (to 188th of 193 countries worldwide).[7]

Figure 1. Real GDP, Niger, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World, 2000-2030; 2000=100



Note: The figure reports indices for real GDP over time, for Niger, Sub-Saharan African and the world with 2000 = 100
Source: Calculated from the IMF World Economic Outlook April 2026 database.

Despite these challenges, labour force participation in Niger is high, especially among men, exceeding the global average. The employment-to-population ratio[8] (EPR) for the working-age population is estimated at 86.9 per cent for men and 73.2 per cent for women in 2022, resulting in an overall EPR of about 79.3 per cent, which is significantly above the SSA and global average. This was mainly driven by women's substantial participation, particularly in subsistence work. These figures reflect the reality that most Nigeriens, even in the absence of formal job opportunities, engage in some form of work for survival (table 1).

Table 1. Employment-to-population ratio by sex in Niger, SSA, Africa, and the World, 2022 (age 15+) (percentage)

	Female	Male	Total
Niger	73.2	86.9	79.3

[7] UNDP (2025). The Human Development Index (HDI) is a broader measure of a country's human development which takes into account also life expectancy and educational attainment, in addition to per capita GDP.

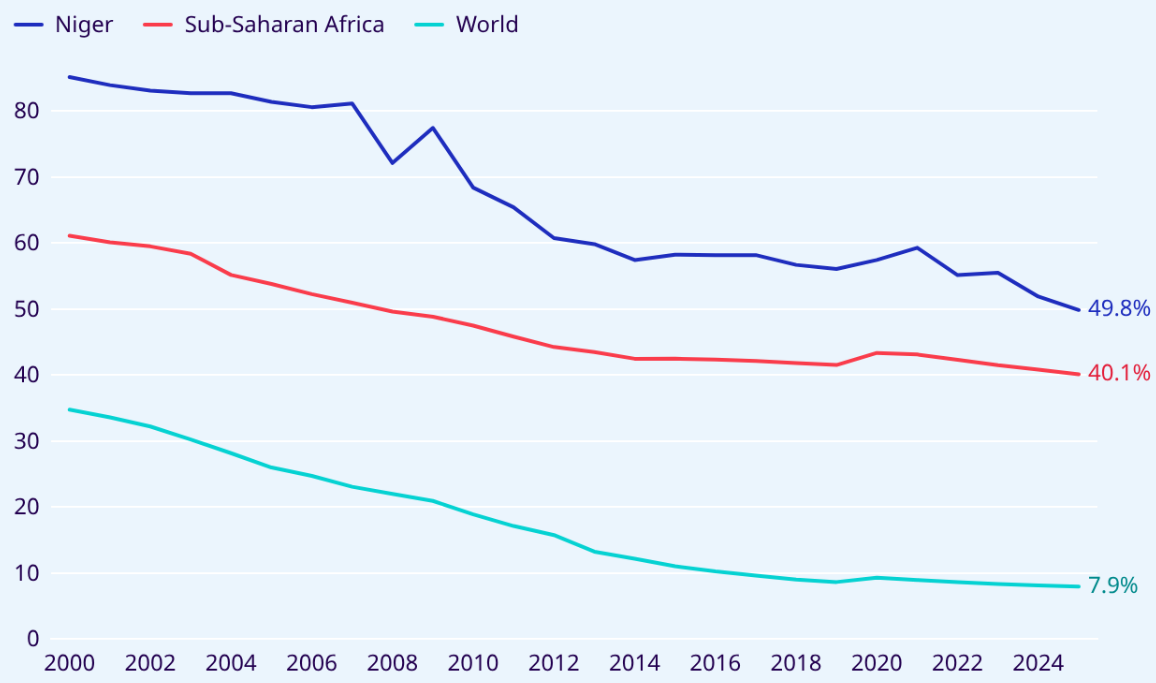
[8] This brief applies the definition of employment established by the 13th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 1982. The 13th ICLS definition identifies all persons who worked for at least one hour during the reference period as employed. More recently, the 19th ICLS established a new definition which classifies as employed all those who work for "pay or profit" for at least one hour during the reference period, however, the EHCVM survey does not contain sufficient information to apply the newer definition. The 13th ICLS definition tends to have a higher recorded employment-to-population ratio, especially in lower income countries because, for example, it includes among the employed, workers in subsistence agriculture, whereas the 19th ICLS definition does not. However, both definitions include workers in informal jobs and any other type of remunerated work of at least one hour whether or not it is formally recorded (including, for example, street vendors, unregistered platform workers and domestic workers).

Sub-Saharan Africa (ILO Modelled Estimates)	59.7	71.8	65.6
Africa (ILO Modelled Estimates)	50.5	69.9	60.1
World (ILO Modelled Estimates)	45.7	69.4	57.5

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository; ILO Modelled estimates (November 2025), https://ilostat.ilo.org/.
Note: The reported ratios all apply the definition of employment established by the 13th ICLS in 1982.

Niger's low income levels are associated with extremely high rates of working poverty. In 2025, an estimated 49.8 per cent of workers lived in extreme poverty.[9] This rate is well above the SSA average of 40.1 per cent and is in stark contrast to the global rate of 7.9 per cent (figure 2). Nevertheless, this represents a marked improvement from the early 2000s, when well over 80 per cent of workers were extremely poor. Between 2000 and 2025, extreme working poverty in Niger declined in absolute terms more rapidly than the SSA average did, yet many other WAEMU countries achieved even larger proportional reductions. The persistence of high working poverty highlights the continued lack of productive employment opportunities and low earnings, especially in rural areas.

▶ **Figure 2. Extreme working poverty rates, Niger, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World, 2000–2025**



Note: The figure reports extreme working poverty rates of employed persons aged 15 and over, for Niger, Sub-Saharan African and the world.
Source: Based on ILO Modelled estimates (November 2025), https://ilostat.ilo.org/

[9] ILO modelled estimates, November 2025. The working poverty rate is an estimate of the proportion of the employed population living in poverty despite being employed, implying that their employment-related incomes are not sufficient to lift them and their families out of poverty and ensure decent living conditions. Extreme working poverty is defined as the percentage of the employed population living in households with a per capita income of under US$3 PPP per day, https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/working-poverty/.

▶ Box 2: Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM) in WAEMU, 2019-2025

The analysis of youth labour market trends in the ILO-WAEMU Youth Country Briefs is being undertaken primarily using the Household Living Conditions Surveys (Enquêtes Harmonisées sur le Conditions de Vie des Ménages; EHCVM) being undertaken by the World Bank and the WAEMU commission in WAEMU member states. These are nationally representative Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) household surveys which incorporate labour modules, allowing for labour market analysis in the eight countries. The EHCVM surveys used in these briefs apply the same international statistical standards and questionnaires across years and countries, thereby collecting data that can be harmonized and allowing comparisons across countries and over time. These household surveys were conducted in each of the WAEMU countries in 2018-2019, 2021-2022 and 2025-2026.

Data for 2019 and 2022 has been received and processed by the ILO for all eight countries. All data in the ILO-WAEMU Country Briefs utilize EHCVM survey data unless otherwise stated. Data for the third round (2025-2026) will be available in late 2026.

Agriculture remains the dominant source of employment in Niger by far. As of 2022, about 74 per cent of all workers in the country were engaged in agriculture, a share significantly higher than the SSA average of 49.4 per cent. Industry accounted for a modest 9.3 per cent of total employment, while the services sector represented around 17 per cent. Women are more likely to work in agriculture. Women also have a higher representation in industry, while men are more concentrated in services. A comparison with the broader region underscores Niger's highly agrarian employment structure (table 2).

The dependence on low-productivity, seasonal agriculture limits aggregate demand and household incomes, while developing large-scale irrigation programmes could secure these incomes by boosting agricultural employment and productivity. A modelling study has shown that the development of irrigation programmes (even small-scale) would diversify production, extend the growing season, increase land productivity and secure the incomes of local farmers, with positive impacts on production and the incomes of rural households (Tillie, Louhichi and Paloma, 2018). The Large Irrigation Program (IMP), implemented since 2025 by the Nigerien authorities with the support of international partners, aims to significantly expand irrigated areas to strengthen agricultural production and contribute to food security, which demonstrates the importance given to this type of measure for more sustainable incomes and jobs creation for the youth. [10]

▶ Table 2. Employment distribution by economic activity by sex, Niger, 2022 (age 15+) (percentage)

	Female	Male	Total
Agriculture	78.8	68.8	73.9
Industry	11.0	7.5	9.3
Services	10.2	23.8	16.9

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/ .

Informal employment is widespread in Niger, particularly among women, and is the norm for most workers. In 2022, 98.5 per cent of workers in the country were informally employed – 99 per cent of working women and 97.9 per cent of working

[10] https://www.lesahel.org/programme-grande-irrigation-booster-la-production-agricole-dans-toutes-les-regions-pour-la-securite-alimentaire-au-niger/

men.[11] Among young people, the incidence is even higher, with 99.5 per cent of employed youth in informal jobs. This prevalence is comparable to the situation in other WAEMU countries.

Taken together, despite periods of strong economic growth, Niger remains a primarily agrarian economy with a labour market dominated by informal agricultural and petty trade activities. Structural transformation towards higher-productivity sectors has been limited; most workers – young and old – continue to rely on low-income jobs in farming and the informal economy.

2. Youth labour market trends

Africa is a relatively young continent, with a youth population that continues to grow, bringing potential and challenges (ILO, 2020a; box 3). Between 2015 and 2025, Niger's youth population (aged 15–29) grew by about 4.4 per cent p.a., outpacing the growth of the youth population in SSA as a whole, which was at 2.8 per cent p.a. (figure 3).[12] Such rapid growth in the number of young people entering the labour force each year intensifies the need for job creation and skills development.

Box 3: Who are the youth?

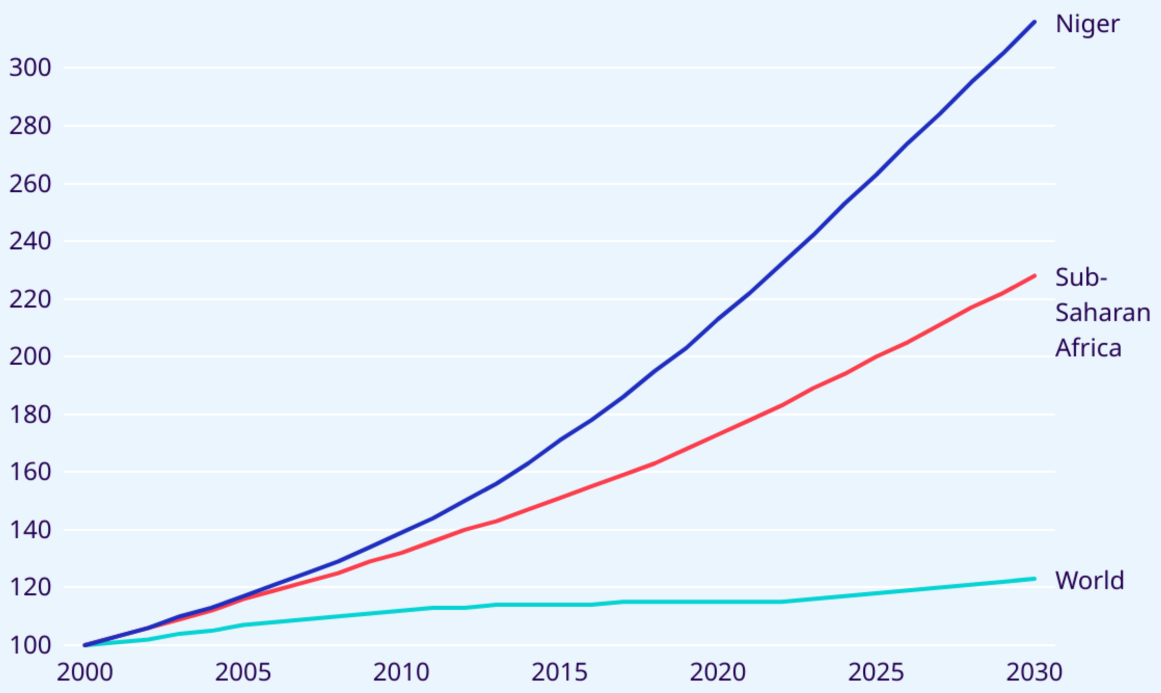
For statistical purposes, the United Nations defines youth as persons aged between 15 and 24 years old. The specific age-group was originally intended to cover the period during which the School-to-Work transition takes place for most young people. This is the definition used for the standard indicators produced by the ILO in ILOSTAT including the ILO modelled estimates of regional and global age-based aggregate indicators (ILO, 2026).

In practice, varying approaches to the age-range applied to define of youth are to be found in different contexts. The African Union, for example, defines young people as those aged between 15 and 35 inclusive. For the analysis presented in this brief, following the standard practice for the country level indicators reported in the ILO's YOUTHSTAT database, youth refer to persons aged between 15 and 29 years old. This recognizes the fact that some young people remain in education for longer and captures more information on the post-graduation employment experiences of young people. For comparison purposes, selected indicators for young people aged 15-35 are available in an online data annex.

[11] ILO micro database. As noted in box 2, these and the other labour market indicators analysed in this brief are derived from the EHCVM survey data.

[12] UN estimates and projections, July 2024 (thousands), ILOSTAT

▶ **Figure 3. Youth (15–29) population in Niger, Sub-Saharan Africa, Africa and the World, 2000–2030; 2000=100**



The figure reports indices for the youth population (age 15-29), for Niger, Sub-Saharan Africa and the World with 2000 = 100 in each case.
Source: Population indices are calculated on UN estimates and projections of population by age and sex, July 2024 (thousands)

Beyond primary education, educational attainment in Niger is low compared to SSA averages. UNESCO estimates that, in 2021, only 35.8 per cent of children in Niger completed primary education, which is well below the average primary completion rate in SSA (68.2 per cent).[13] This still represents significant progress since 2000, when only around one in ten children in Niger completed primary school. Improvements have benefited both boys and girls; for example, the primary completion rate for girls tripled from roughly 10 per cent in 2000 to over 32.6 per cent in 2022. Completion rates for lower secondary education in 2022 were extremely low at 9.1 per cent, lagging far behind the SSA average of 46.7 per cent. At the upper secondary level, only a very tiny share of youth in Niger completed their studies at 3.5 per cent. The gender gap in educational attainment is not as significant as in other countries in the region, if only because of the extremely low secondary completion rates of both boys and girls.

Turning to educational participation among youth (aged 15–29), the education participation of those not in employment has decreased slightly after the pandemic (figure 4). By 2022, 9.6 per cent of young women and 11.5 per cent of young men were in education – with a somewhat larger drop after 2019 for young men thereby reducing the gender gap.

▶ **Box 4: NEET**

This brief makes extensive use of the NEET rate – the share of young people Not in Employment, Education or Training – as a measure of youth labour market vulnerability. This is in line with the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the consequent establishment of reductions in the NEET rate as the target indicator (SDG 8.6.1) chosen to measure progress in youth labour markets. Although NEETs also includes (most of) the young

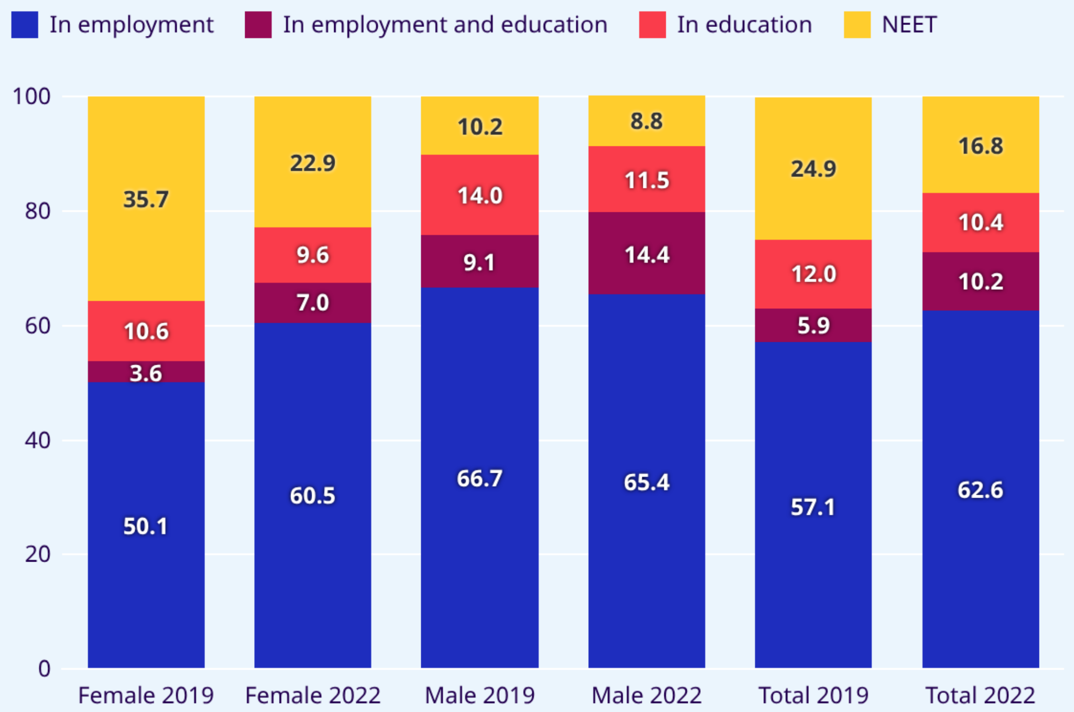
[13] http://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/ [accessed on 18 August 2025].

unemployed[14] (the so-called 'Active NEETs), the NEET rate is a broader concept encompassing all young people who are, for whatever reason, not studying or working for pay or profit. NEETs are consequently a much larger, as well as a more heterogeneous group than the young unemployed including a substantial group of young people who are not studying or working, but who are also not actively looking for work. Often termed 'inactive' NEETs, many of these young people would like to work but are not looking for it, either because they believe no jobs are to be found or because they face additional obstacles - such as care responsibilities - which impede their active participation in the labour force.

Inter alia, the shift from the youth unemployment rate to the NEET rate as the focus of policies to promote decent work amongst young people leads naturally to a broadening of the scope of such interventions. Reducing the NEET rate can be achieved both by increasing entry into employment, but also by increasing participation in education and training. Moreover, there are many factors underlying (different types) of NEET status. These include in particular obstacles to obtaining decent work faced by specific groups – such as young women and/or young people with disabilities.

Source: O'Higgins et al. (2023). O'Higgins (2025) provides a brief non-technical overview.

▶ **Figure 4. Youth status (age 15–29) in Niger by sex, 2019–2022 (percentage)**



Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

Much of the decrease in youth educational participation in Niger between 2019 and 2022 was accompanied by a rise in the youth EPR – particularly among young women. The gender gap in youth EPR has narrowed significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic, due to an increase in the EPR ratio of young women and a slight decrease in EPR of young men. At the same time more than twice as many young men as young women are simultaneously studying and working, although

[14] Excluding a relatively small but increasingly significant group of young people who are both unemployed and in education.

the population share is fairly modest for both sexes. The larger share of young men who are both studying and working reinforces the gender gap which exists in educational participation and attainment.

Young men and women (aged 15–29) in Niger are more likely to work in agriculture and slightly less likely to work in the service sector than their older counterparts aged 30 and over (table 3). Similar to pattern observed among adults, young men are more than twice as likely to be employed in the service sector and less likely to be in the agricultural sector than young women: as young women in rural areas participate extensively in farm work.

▶ **Table 3. Youth (age 15–29) employment distribution by economic activity and sex in Niger, 2022 (percentage)**

	Female	Male	Total
Agriculture	85.1	78.8	82.1
Industry	8.1	6.1	7.1
Services	6.8	15.2	10.8

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

Although the share of young people – especially young women - engaged in wage and salaried employment is small in Niger. However, this share -especially among young men - is on the increase. This suggests some improvement in working conditions (table 4).[15] By 2022, about 17.7 per cent of young male workers (aged 15–29) were employees (up from 12.9 per cent in 2019); and 4.7 per cent of young female workers (up from 3.4 per cent in 2019).

▶ **Table 4. Youth (age 15–29) employment distribution by status in employment and sex in Niger, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**

	Female		Male		Total	
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022
Employees	3.4	4.7	12.8	17.9	8.2	11.0
Self-employed	96.6	95.3	87.2	82.1	91.8	89.0

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/ .

Informal employment is even more common among young people than among older workers. In 2022, almost 99.5 per cent of employed young workers were in informal employment – compared to roughly 97.9 per cent of adults aged 30 and above; this reflects a high level of informality. This partly reflects the very high share of self-employment among youth in Niger. In 2022, approximately 82.1 per cent of young male workers and over 95.3 per cent of young female workers were self-employed (including unpaid family contributors). The prevalence of informality among young workers does not vary significantly across sectors; all or nearly all employed youth across every broad economic sector are in informal employment. Still, young people in the non-market services sector have slightly smaller shares of informal employment (table 5).

As noted, the youth EPR increased over this period. This means that although the increase in the prevalence of wage employment between 2019 and 2022 was modest, the increase in the number of young people - especially young men –

[15] The ILO status in employment indictor subdivides workers to describe the relationships of their jobs to the workplace. Broadly, the employed are classified as either "employees" or "self-employed". The former are in paid employment (with explicit or implicit contracts) which provide them with basic renumeration, whereas the latter are mainly or wholly reliant on sales and profits. Self-employment is dominated by own-account workers in low quality informal employment and in the past was indeed used as a proxy for informal employment.

in wage employment increased more substantially. Nevertheless, the vast majority of working youth remain in informal family farming or microbusinesses rather than in formal wage-paying jobs.

▶ **Table 5. Distribution of employment, prevalence of self-employment and prevalence of informality by sector among youth (age 15–29) in Niger, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**

Sector	Employment by sector		Prevalence of self-employment		Prevalence of informality
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2022
Agriculture	81.9	82.1	98.1	94.9	100
Manufacturing	4.7	6.0	88.3	82	99.2
Construction	0.7	0.8	6.0	25.5	100
Mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas and water supply	0.4	0.4	41.6	23.2	100
Market Services (Trade; Transportation; Accommodation and food; and Business and administrative services)	7.0	8.0	70.1	63.8	98.9
Non-market services (Public administration; Community, social and other services and activities)	5.3	2.7	42.9	29.7	86.3

Note: Informality could not be identified in the 2019 EHCVM/ECVM surveys due to missing information on registration and bookkeeping of enterprises.

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

An important implication of these changes, explored further below, is that NEET rates among young men and women decreased between 2019 and 2022. This is shown in figure 4 and box 4. However, this made only a modest dent in the large gender disparity in NEET rates. This disparity is all too common in youth labour markets of low-income countries (O'Higgins et al. 2023). In 2019, around 10.2 per cent of young men and 35.7 per cent of young women in Niger were NEET, whereas in 2022 the NEET rates were 8.8 per cent for young men and 22.9 per cent for young women. In other words, the gender gap narrowed from roughly 25.5 p.p. in 2019 to about 14.1 p.p. in 2022.

▶ **Table 6. Youth (age 15–29) NEET distribution by active-inactive status and sex in Niger, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**

	Female		Male		Total	
	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022
Active NEET	0.9	1.4	5.5	7.5	1.7	2.8
Inactive NEET	99.1	98.6	94.5	92.5	98.3	97.2

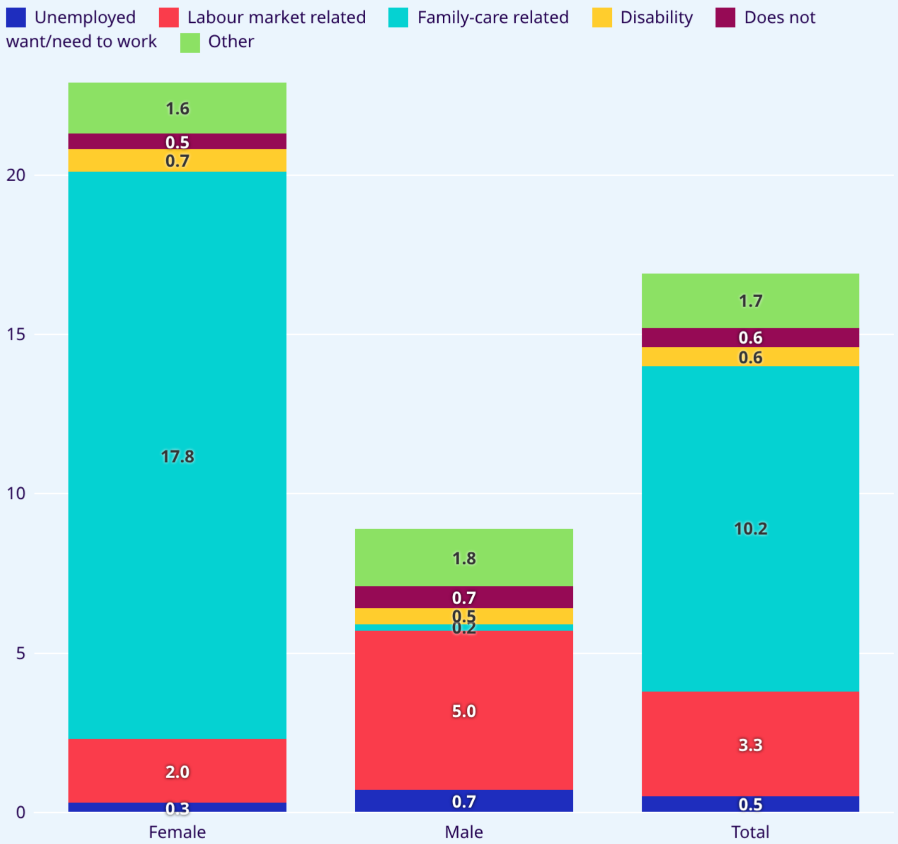
Note: Active NEETs are those who are not engaged in employment, education or training but are available and actively looking for employment opportunities, whereas inactive NEETs are also not engaged in employment, education or training but are not available or actively looking for employment.

Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

Most young NEETs in Niger are inactive NEETs. In 2022, over 98.6 per cent of young female NEETs and about 92.5 per cent of young male NEETs were not actively looking for work (table 6). Even though the share of inactive NEETs decreased slightly from 2019 to 2022, the fact that most young male NEETs and nearly all young female NEETs are not actively seeking employment is a point of concern. This is also typical of youth labour markets across the WAEMU region. The NEET rate of around 16 per cent presents a misleadingly positive picture, as it largely consists of forced participation in informal and low-quality jobs rather than genuine, sustainable integration into the labour market. Nevertheless, NEET rates provide a more relevant measure for capturing structural insertion challenges, including the accumulation of exclusion and the difficulty of accessing stable employment, thereby offering a more realistic basis for public policy.

Most young NEETs in Niger are either discouraged from seeking jobs, awaiting job or business prospects, or remain outside the labour force due to domestic responsibilities (figure 5). Young women in Niger are often outside the labour force due to social and cultural factors, such as early marriage and childcare responsibilities, while young men who are NEET tend to be discouraged by scarce job opportunities or engaged in informal income-generating activities not captured as formal employment. Traditional gender roles play a significant role in the large gender gap in NEET rates. Consistent with patterns observed in other countries in the region, 17.8 per cent of young women in Niger are NEET due to care responsibilities at home, compared to only 0.2 per cent of young men. All other reasons for being NEET show little or no difference between young women and men. Family-care responsibilities consequently account almost entirely for the wide gender gap in NEET.

▶ **Figure 5. NEET rates of young people (aged 15–29) by sex decomposed by reason for being NEET, Niger, 2022 (percentage)**



Note: **Unemployed** NEETs are those who are not engaged in employment, education or training but are available and actively looking for employment opportunities**. Labour market related reasons** for being NEET include those associated with discouragement (past failure to find a suitable job, lack of experience, qualifications or jobs matching the person's skills, lack of jobs in the area, considered too young or too old by prospective employers, and does not know how/where to find a job) as well as other labour market reasons (waiting for an answer to an application, and seasonal break). **Family-care related reasons** cover looking after small children and other household and domestic responsibilities; **disability** covers young people who are not seeking a job due to disability or illness; whereas a young NEET who **"does not need/want to work"** may have other sources of income. **Other** is a residual category covering a variety of motivations not covered by the first four categories.
Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

▶ 3. Vulnerable groups in the youth labour market

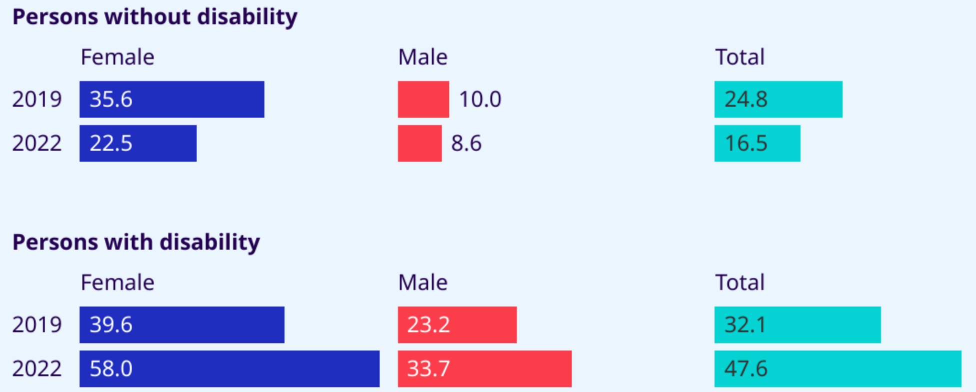
3.1 Sex

Young women in Niger face significantly greater challenges than young men in accessing decent employment. NEET rates among young women are more than twice as high as those of young men, and women also have lower EPR and lower educational participation and attainment. However, there have been some improvements in recent years, with gender gaps in key youth labour market indicators showing slight reductions. Between 2019 and 2022, the NEET rate for young women fell significantly (as more young women stayed in education or entered work). While the youth EPR increased over this period for both sexes, it rose by 13.8 p.p. for young women and only by 3.9 p.p. for young men. Moreover, the share of self-employment among young female workers also decreased modestly, indicating a shift (albeit small) towards paid employment. In the following subsections, we examine other vulnerable groups and how gender intersects with these factors to influence youth labour market outcomes.

3.2 Disability

People with disabilities face additional obstacles to their effective participation in the labour market. As pointed out by the 2025 Global Disability Summit in Berlin, young people with disabilities are especially disadvantaged at the global level facing NEET rates which are twice those of their non-disabled peers.[16] In Niger, 1.1 per cent of the youth population report having a disability or illness that affects their ability to work. These youth do experience disadvantages in the labour market, with higher NEET rates than those without disabilities, although prior to the pandemic the gaps were relatively small.[17]

▶ **Figure 6. NEET rates of young people (aged 15–29) by disability status in Niger by sex, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**



Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

By 2022, the situation had worsened: NEET rates among youth with disabilities increased by 15.5 p.p. while it decreased by 8.3 p.p. for youth without disabilities (figure 6). Almost one in two young Nigeriens with disabilities were NEET in 2022. The NEET rate for young women with disabilities was more than double that of young women without disabilities in 2022, whereas in 2019 there was near parity. For young men, although the disparity is slightly smaller, young men with disabilities in Niger had NEET rates almost four times those of young men without disabilities in 2022. This gap also widened considerably from 2019 to 2022. Specifically, NEET rates increased only for disabled youth over the period. These trends suggest that young people with disabilities have been disproportionately left behind in the post-pandemic recovery.

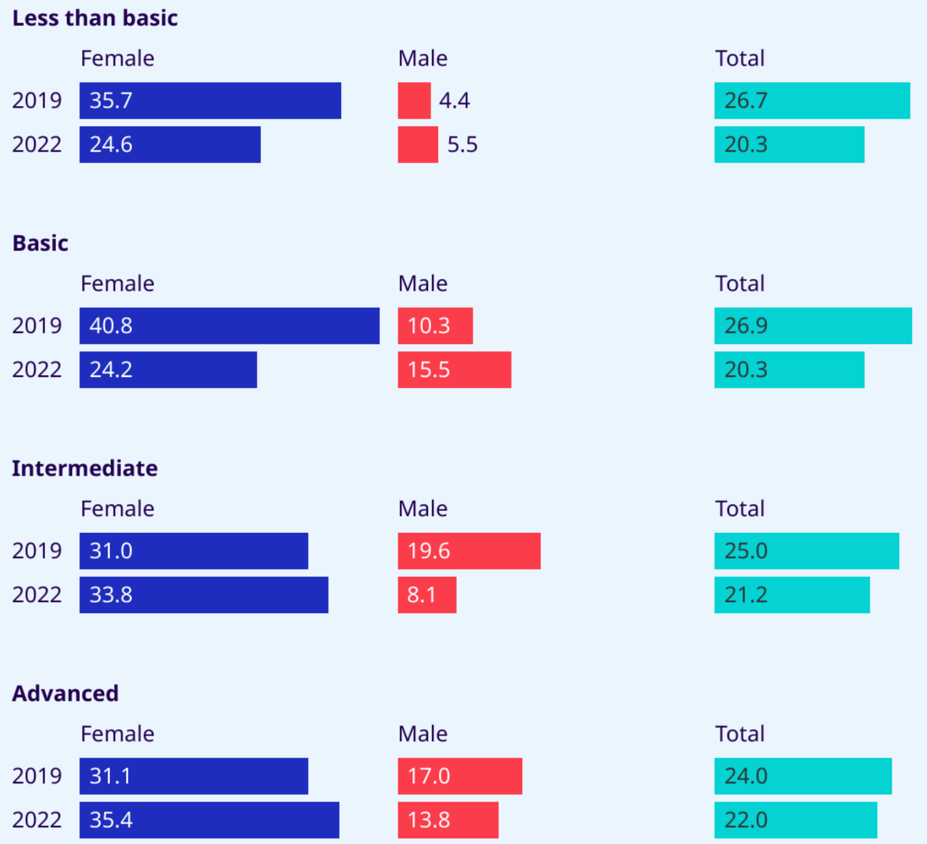
[16] For a more detailed analysis of the disparities in the labour market outcomes faced by people with disabilities, see, for example, Annanian and Dellaferrera (2024).

[17] The sample size of persons with disabilities is typically rather small in the household surveys, and even smaller for the age group of 15 to 29. This small sample size means that the estimates of indicators for youth with disabilities are necessarily relatively imprecise.

3.3 Educational attainment

The gender gap in educational participation and attainment was already observed above. One way in which this is important is that it determines young people's access to labour markets. Globally, NEET rates amongst young people are significantly higher among young people with lower levels of educational attainment (O'Higgins et al. 2023). This relationship, however, tends to be less pronounced in low- and lower-middle-income countries, with considerable variation across countries. In 2019, Niger exhibited a pattern where NEET rates declined, albeit marginally, as educational attainment rose; youth with tertiary education had somewhat lower NEET rates than those with only basic education (figure 7).

▶ **Figure 7. NEET rates of young people (aged 25–29) by educational attainment in Niger by sex, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**



Note: Youth is defined as young people aged 25-29 when analysing educational attainment. Educational attainment is defined here based on the ILO aggregation of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) designed to produce a simple classification of individual educational attainment which is comparable across countries. Broadly speaking: **Basic** educational attainment corresponds to the completion of primary or lower secondary education; **Intermediate**, to the completion of upper secondary education; and **Advanced,** to the completion of tertiary educational studies.
Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

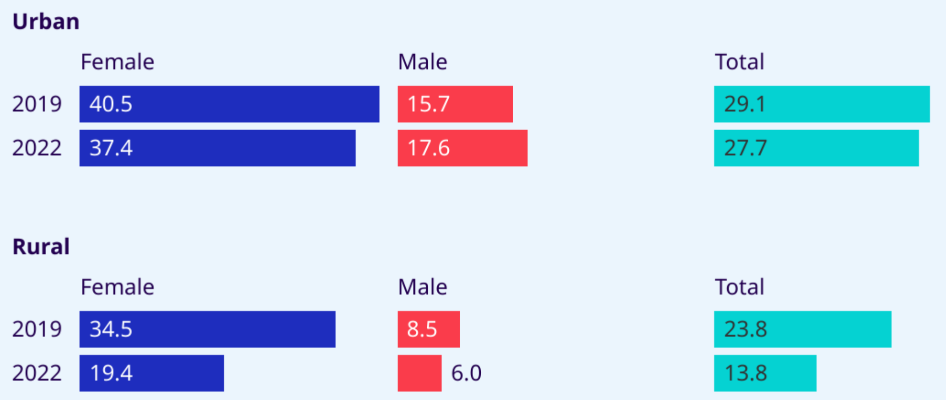
By 2022, the situation had changed. NEET rates among young adults (aged 25–29) with advanced education were slightly higher than those of young adults with less than basic education; in other words, having a higher education was no guarantee against being NEET. In other words, having a higher education was no guarantee against being NEET; in fact, the small cohort of youth in Niger with advanced degrees faced unemployment or inactivity more than their less-educated counterparts. Simply put, more education in itself does not create more employment opportunities. The data point to the emergence of educational mismatch in Niger, echoing findings in recent ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth reports (ILO, 2020; 2024). Young people with higher education are not finding jobs that match their skills, leading to frustrated aspirations and underutilized human capital.

3.4 Urban-Rural location

Globally, across all country income levels, NEET rates tend to be higher in rural areas than in urban ones. In Niger, however, this pattern is reversed – although the difference is small. In 2022, youth NEET rates were higher in urban areas than in rural areas. This counterintuitive result is linked to the nature of work in Niger's economy. Young people in rural areas are half as likely to be NEET than young people in urban areas.

In rural areas, young people, especially young men, engage in some form of agricultural work out of necessity, even if they are underemployed or unpaid, which keeps rural NEET rates low. The overall NEET rate for urban youth was still relatively low by international standards, but slightly above the rural youth NEET rate (figure 7). In 2022, young men's NEET rate in urban centres was nearly three times that of their counterparts based in rural locations. For young women, NEET rates remained high in both settings in 2019, but decreased notably among young women in rural areas in 2022. Young urban women had the highest NEET rates in Niger. The near absence of an urban advantage in youth NEET outcomes highlights Niger's broad-based scarcity of decent work opportunities.

▶ **Figure 8. NEET rates of young people (aged 15–29) by geographical location in Niger by sex, 2019 and 2022 (percentage)**



Source: Author's calculations based on the Harmonized Survey of Household Living Conditions (EHCVM), held in the ILO Harmonized Microdata Repository, https://ilostat.ilo.org/

▶ 4. Summary and conclusions

Niger continues to confront the intertwined challenges of rapid population growth, pervasive poverty and limited employment opportunities. Over the past 25 years, economic growth has outpaced population growth, but only modestly; this means per cent gains have been small. The country's recovery from the COVID-19 downturn was relatively swift. Average GDP growth of around 7.8 per cent since 2021 exceeds the expansion of the labour force, driven by one of the world's highest population growth rates. However, rapid population growth and a weakly diversified and low-productivity economy dominated by agriculture and the informal sector have meant limited gains in individual incomes. The core issue lies in the mismatch between fast demographic growth and insufficient economic transformation to generate jobs and inclusive wealth

Working poverty remains extremely high. As of 2025, nearly half of all workers in Niger were living in extreme poverty, a rate roughly six times the global average and substantially above the SSA average. Such high working poverty reflects the dominance of low-productivity agricultural and informal sector activities in employment. Indeed, employment – especially for the majority of the population in rural areas – is still overwhelmingly concentrated in subsistence agriculture.

Despite improvements in recent years, educational attainment among Niger's youth remains among the lowest in the region. The vast majority of young people, especially young women, do not complete secondary school. This education deficit both reflects and reinforces the difficult labour market situation. On one hand, low education limits access to higher-quality jobs; on the other hand, even those youth who do attain higher education are increasingly finding themselves without suitable employment, as evidenced by rising NEET rates among tertiary graduates.

Gender disparities are a critical facet of Niger's youth employment challenge. Young women's NEET rate – 22.9 per cent in 2022 – is 14 p.p. higher than that of young men (around 9 per cent), although encouragingly this gap has narrowed somewhat since 2019. Young women also have lower employment rates and educational participation than young men. Cultural norms and household responsibilities play a significant role in limiting young women's labour market engagement. Addressing these gender gaps is essential for Niger to fully leverage its youth potential.

Other vulnerable groups also face significant disadvantages. In particular, young people with disabilities have substantially higher NEET rates, and the gaps between those with and without disabilities have widened significantly in recent years in Niger. This is a troubling trend, suggesting that youth with disabilities are not benefiting equally from whatever limited improvements have occurred in the youth labour market. Geographic disparities, such as urban–rural differences in NEET, are relatively minor in Niger's context. This underscores that the lack of decent work is a nationwide issue affecting all communities.

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Contact details
International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

Employment, Labour Markets and Youth Branch
E: emplab@ilo.org
W: www.ilo.org

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