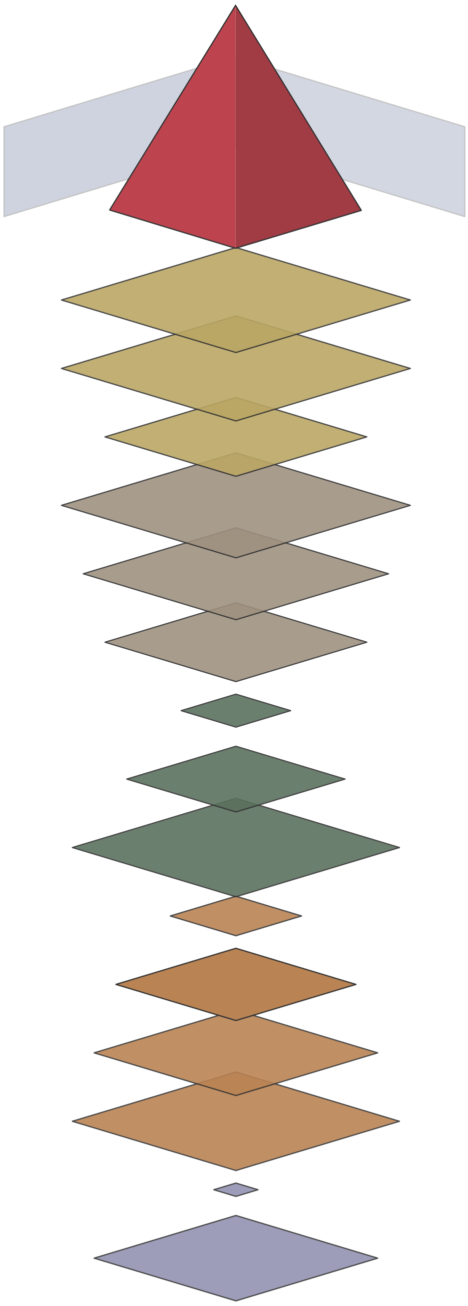
Africa
ORGANISED CRIME INDEX 2025

enact — Enhancing Africa's response to transnational organised crime

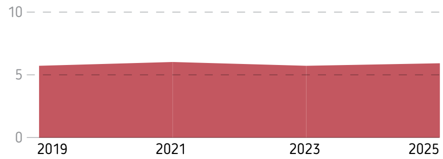
This project is funded by the European Union

NIGER



5.93 ↗0.23
CRIMINALITY SCORE

17th of 54 African countries ↗1
4th of 15 West African countries ↗2



CRIMINAL MARKETS	**5.87**	↗0.17
HUMAN TRAFFICKING	8.00	↗0.50
HUMAN SMUGGLING	8.00	0.00
EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING	6.00	↗2.00
ARMS TRAFFICKING	8.00	0.00
TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS	7.00	0.00
ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS	6.00	↗1.00
FLORA CRIMES	2.50	↗0.50
FAUNA CRIMES	5.00	0.00
NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES	7.50	0.00
HEROIN TRADE	3.00	0.00
COCAINE TRADE	5.50	↘1.00
CANNABIS TRADE	6.50	↘0.50
SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE	7.50	0.00
CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES	1.00	0.00
FINANCIAL CRIMES	6.50	0.00

CRIMINAL ACTORS	**6.00**	↗0.30
MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS	5.50	↗1.50
CRIMINAL NETWORKS	7.00	↘0.50
STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS	8.00	↘0.50
FOREIGN ACTORS	6.50	↗1.00
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS	3.00	0.00

ISS INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES

INTERPOL

GLOBAL INITIATIVE AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

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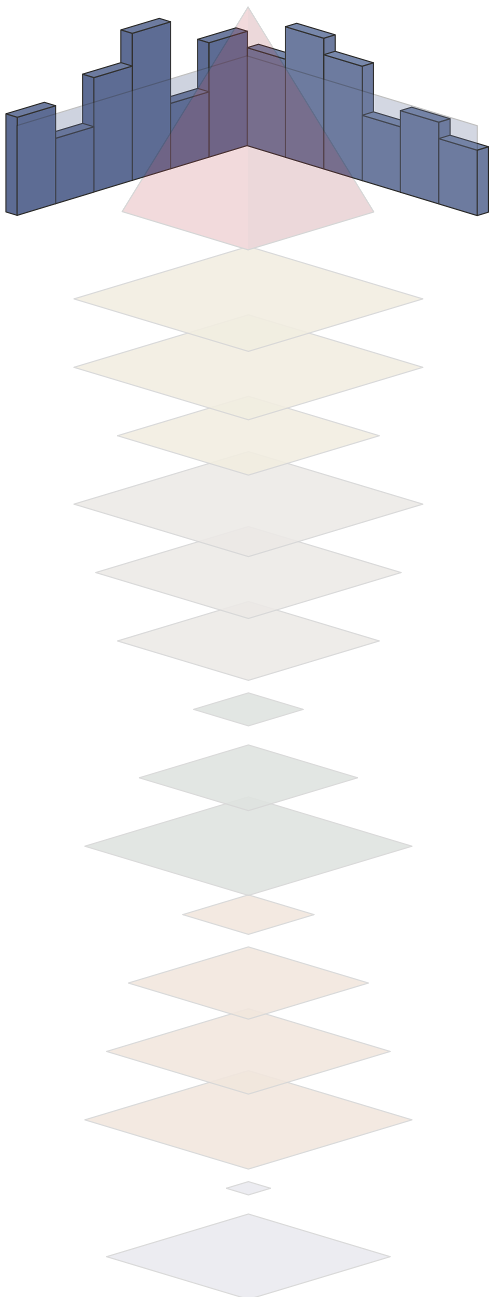
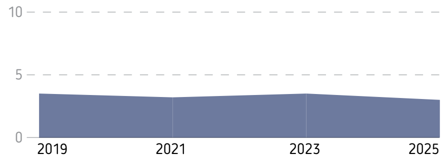


2.96 ↘0.50
RESILIENCE SCORE

39th of 54 African countries ↘9
11th of 15 West African countries ↘1



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	3.00	↘1.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	2.00	↘0.50
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	3.50	↘2.00
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	4.50	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	2.00	↘0.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	3.50	↘0.50
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.00	↘0.50
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	4.00	0.00
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	3.50	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	2.00	↘0.50
PREVENTION	2.50	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	2.00	↘0.50

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CRIMINALITY

Criminal markets

PEOPLE

Niger is as a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking, including sexual exploitation, forced labour and domestic servitude. Criminal actors range from organized transnational groups to violent extremist factions like Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), Islamic State Sahel Province (IS Sahel) and Boko Haram-related groups, alongside bandits exploiting instability. Trafficking methods include deception, coercion and manipulation, often exploiting economic vulnerabilities. Victims include Nigeriens, often those on low-incomes, women and children who are vulnerable to exploitation in agricultural, mining or other labour-intensive sectors, as well as sexual exploitation. Migrants from West and Central Africa traveling through Niger towards Algeria and Libya are also vulnerable to labour and sex trafficking as well as extortion. The repeal in November 2023 of human smuggling legislation which had criminalized people for assisting migrants has improved migrant safety. But efforts to combat people trafficking has declined since the 2023 coup, with fewer investigations and inadequate victim services. The increase in migrant flows through Niger has also facilitated human trafficking, especially between Nigeria and Libya. Women and children remain especially vulnerable to diversion into prostitution and labour in agriculture and mining. Caste-based slavery persists despite its criminalization, particularly affecting women in northern regions.

The country is a key source and transit hub for human smuggling, driven by migration from West and Central Africa to North Africa and Europe. Regional conflicts and restrictive policies in neighbouring countries have also made it a destination for refugees, who may fall into the hands of smugglers. Human smuggling involves local and transnational networks. The effective decriminalization of human smuggling within Niger has made some journeys cheaper and safer but crossings into Libya and Algeria remain clandestine and expose migrants to risks of arrest and expulsion. Migratory flows increased significantly in early 2024, particularly through Agadez, while transport costs from Agadez to Libya dropped markedly. Coup-related border closures also heightened demand for smuggling at the Benin border.

Extortion and protection racketeering remain entrenched, driven mostly by various criminal and violent extremist groups from Mali and Burkina Faso. These groups finance their operations through extortion, collaborating with local networks to control key routes and services. Banditry has substantially increased, particularly in northern Niger, with Chadian fighters targeting high-value convoys or providing protection to traffickers, while local bandits attack vehicles and valuables on main roads. Kidnappings for ransom are also prevalent in border areas, and forced zakat (religious tax) collection affects multiple regions. Extortion payments in the form of livestock and cash, has significantly increased. The regions of Tillabéri and Tahoua are particular hotspots, with 1 500 livestock and more than FCFA17 million taken away by armed groups in June 2023.

TRADE

Niger is a significant source, transit and destination country for arms trafficking, driven by extremist groups and state-embedded actors. Arms are trafficked from Libya through Agadez, Tahoua and Tillabéri to Mali and Nigeria, following ancient trade routes to avoid surveillance. The bulk of these arms come from intra-continental flows, including battlefield losses and government stocks elsewhere in Africa. However, more recent inflows into the Sudan conflict from external actors are also spilling over into Niger. The proliferation of arms has fuelled violence, including terrorism, intercommunal conflicts and clashes between state forces and militant groups; and local demand is driven by insecurity and pastoral conflicts. Arms trafficking profits are laundered through real estate, disguised businesses, livestock investments and gold mining.

Driven by limited healthcare access and porous borders, the country remains a transit and destination country for counterfeit medicines. The market involves various actors, including pharmaceutical employees, civil servants, law enforcement, street vendors, as well as organized criminal networks and some armed groups. Sourced primarily from Europe, the US and neighbouring regions like North Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, counterfeit pharmaceuticals are prevalent. Seizures highlight hotspots in Niamey, Gaya and several other localities. Corruption and complicity among customs officials facilitate the trade, while recent crackdowns have revealed extensive supply networks. Despite growing enforcement, the market remains resilient and widespread.

Niger is primarily a transit country for tobacco smuggling, driven by weak state presence and severe poverty. A sophisticated smuggling route established across Saharan Africa connects Benin and Togo to the Maghreb. Smuggled cigarettes often originate from Burkina Faso and pass through Niger on their way into Libya, or via Mali, Algeria and Mauritania. Criminal networks, including terrorist groups, and private sector actors are involved in the trade. Territorial disputes and competition between criminal groups for control of this lucrative market have been reported, reflecting its high profitability.

ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging involving foreign actors, although not closely linked to organized crime, is reported sporadically and is poorly sanctioned. The country's limited flora crime market may be the result of underreporting. Inadequate protection and surveillance of remote areas allows extremist groups to export though these areas undetected. The involvement of transnational terror networks in the timber trade suggests that they have diversified revenue streams amid regional turmoil.

Niger remains a source and transit country for the illegal wildlife trade, driven by poverty and demand for rare meats. Poaching persists in protected areas like the Termit and W national parks, with extremist groups facilitating access. Species most affected include the Dorcas gazelle, Arabian bustard and Dama gazelle, among others, which face a critical threat of extinction. Cattle rustling, linked to cross-border criminal networks and violent extremist groups, is a major source of instability and violence in regions bordering Mali, Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

Niger is also a key source of gold, oil and uranium, with gold mining by locals and foreign workers prevalent in the Agadez, Tahoua and Tillaberi regions. Illicit mining has increasingly drawn the attention of extremist groups which use the industry for revenue and recruiting workers. Gold trafficking follows transnational routes, such as from Niamey to Dubai. Burkinabè gold is also being trafficked through Niger amid shifting areas of border insecurity. Discrepancies in official export data, which are shown up in significant seizures, suggest widespread corruption. Fuel smuggling is particularly intense in Zinder and Agadez, and the flow between Libya, Niger and Nigeria remains a major illicit economy.

DRUGS

While the heroin trade is not well developed in Niger, a notable quantity passes through the country bound for North Africa, primarily Algeria, with flows originating from South West and South East Asia entering through Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as well as Nigeria. Key trafficking hubs include Agadez, Maradi, Zinder and Tahoua. Precise volume estimates remain challenging due to the limited capability of law enforcement to identify substances. Some heroin shipments also reach local markets, contributing to a rise in domestic consumption.

Cocaine from South America destined for Europe and Western Asia passes through Niger, as seen in a series of major seizures between 2021 and 2024. However, the 2023 coup and outbreak of conflict in northern Mali significantly reduced cocaine flows through Niger. Despite an increase in arrests, only minor traffickers tend to face prosecution while more influential figures, including state officials, are seemingly immune. Armed groups impose taxes on traffickers for safe passage, though their involvement appears limited compared to state complicity. Trafficking routes often pass through West African ports and key cities in Niger, with most flows traversing the northern parts of the country towards Libya or Algeria. Local cocaine consumption, particularly among young people, is rising, including crack in remote areas.

Cannabis, primarily sourced from Morocco, is routed through neighbouring Sahelian states and is known to transit Niger before re-entering North Africa or passing on to Western Asia or Europe. There is also a large internal market and cannabis is the most consumed drug domestically. Key transit hubs include Tahoua, Niamey and Agadez. However, the 2023 coup and outbreak of conflict in northern Mali has also significantly disrupted cannabis flows through Niger.

Niger is both a destination and a key regional corridor for synthetic drugs. Tramadol and pregabalin are the most popular domestically, particularly among gold miners and young people, with demand concentrated in cities such as Niamey, Zinder and Dosso. At the same time, Niger plays a critical regional transit role between West and North Africa. Tramadol from India and Nigeria is imported mainly into the ports of Nigeria, Togo and Benin, and then moved overland through Niger's main hubs of Maradi and Agadez toward the Maghreb and beyond. While Niger is a significant market in itself, most Tramadol continues on to major destination points in Libya and Algeria. Recent large seizures of Tramadol and pregabalin underscore the scale and organization of these smuggling networks. The trade is fuelled by strong local and regional demand, extensive distribution networks and a combination of international and domestic drivers.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

While anecdotal evidence suggests that cybercrime in Niger has increased in recent years as a result of limited awareness, information on specific incidents is lacking.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Corruption and embezzlement remain prevalent in Niger, with systemic vulnerabilities particularly in the fields of justice, health, public procurement, taxation, banking and development projects. Financial crimes often involve overbilling, unauthorized spending, lack of documentation, inflated costs and fraudulent public tender practices. Recent cases include embezzlement schemes involving public officials and bank executives. The country's challenges are compounded by clientelism and habitual bribery among public officials. Niger's limited institutional capacity holds it back in its struggle against corruption, while external factors such as international economic conditions exacerbate domestic issues.

Criminal actors

Loosely organized, domestic criminal networks are the most common and widespread species of criminal actor in Niger. These groups operate across multiple illicit markets, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, fuel smuggling, gold trafficking, armed banditry, extortion and fauna crimes. They are especially prevalent in Agadez, Niamey, Maradi, Dosso, Zinder, Tahoua and Tillabéri, often collaborating with transnational actors, particularly from neighbouring countries. Violent extremist groups such as IS Sahel, JNIM and Boko Haram-related groups are also significant criminal actors, exploiting regional instability and controlling increasing portions of Nigerien territory.

State-embedded actors continue to play a major role in facilitating criminal markets, including drug trafficking, the counterfeit trade, illicit gold commerce and financial crimes. Government officials at various levels maintain close ties with criminal groups. As a result, some members of criminal organizations have even transitioned into business or political roles, further blurring the line between criminal networks and formal institutions. This integration of the criminal and political spheres in Niger in part reflects a pragmatic strategy on the part of officials to maintain public order by exercising some influence and control.

Niger's strategic location and porous borders encourage foreign criminal actors, including West and North African networks and violent extremist groups, to operate within its borders. These actors control key trafficking routes and work with local networks and political figures. Their activities include drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms smuggling, extortion and racketeering.

Reports have alleged the involvement of various private sector companies in fraud, forgery and money laundering, although concrete evidence is hard to come by. Influential figures linked to gold mining operations in northern Niger are suspected of participating in drug trafficking. Businessmen are reported to engage in money laundering, channelling proceeds from drug trafficking into substantial real estate projects across West Africa. These activities highlight the connection between local economic enterprises and transnational organized crime in Niger, as well as the role of prominent individuals in facilitating financial flows derived from illicit activities.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Niger's efforts to combat organized crime involve national, regional and international legal measures on issues like corruption, drug trafficking, arms trade and wildlife protection, but these are heavily reliant on foreign assistance. Despite formal commitments, implementation remains weak due to entrenched criminal influence within the political system. Following the July 2023 coup d'état, consolidating power and strategic alliances have been prioritized over tackling corruption and organized crime, resulting in declining human rights, governance and accountability.

Action against corruption and misappropriation of public assets is still weak, threatening development efforts in Niger. However, the country has adhered to several international and regional anti-corruption legal instruments and put in place several domestic anti-corruption instruments. During the reporting period, a commission was established to address economic and financial delinquency, focusing on recovering illicit assets. Transparency challenges persist, as the law grants broad access to information but lacks effective enforcement mechanisms. Since the junta took power in the country, decision-making has not been regularly discussed publicly.

Niger has ratified multiple international conventions to combat transnational organized crime, relying significantly on external assistance for capacity building. The 2023 coup disrupted regional cooperation, prompting strong reactions from neighbouring coastal countries and Western partners, including financial sanctions imposed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Though these sanctions were partially lifted during the reporting period, Niger's withdrawal from ECOWAS, alongside Mali and Burkina Faso, halted participation in regional crime-fighting strategies. In fact, Niger aligned regionally with Mali and Burkina Faso, forming the Alliance of Sahel States, and cut ties with former foreign partners such as France and the US. As a result, foreign assistance, including for programmes addressing organized crime, has decreased significantly. Meanwhile, Niger signed extradition and judicial cooperation agreements with Senegal and Algeria to enhance criminal justice collaboration and offender rehabilitation.

During the reporting period, Niger made legislative changes to target human smuggling and cybercrime, but challenges remain over implementation. The previous human smuggling laws, aimed at curbing migrant transportation, had only pushed such services underground and increased the risks to migrants. The repeal of the primary smuggling law by the junta made journeys safer and cheaper, but it has not been replaced by another legal framework allowing effective enforcement against human trafficking. A national review of migration policy under the UN Global Compact framework was published. New cybercrime legislation was introduced to enhance the protection of information systems and foster international cooperation. However, so far it has primarily been used to supress civil society and media output rather than organized crime. Overall, despite some legislative progress, its use in on-the-ground enforcement against organized crime remains inconsistent and problematic.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Before the July 2023 coup, Niger's judiciary was nominally independent but subject to executive interference. After the coup, the transitional state court became the highest authority, and has been heavily influenced by the junta. Arbitrary arrests and prolonged pretrial detentions were common both before and after the coup, with poor documentation of prisoners and mass detentions following states of emergency declared by the junta. Criminal actors have had a significant influence over judicial processes and detentions, including by securing premature releases and procedural breaches. Prison overcrowding remains critical, particularly in urban areas. In the summer of 2024, inmates, including Islamist militants, escaped from Koutoukale prison, prompting a curfew in the Tillabéri region.

Corruption among law enforcement and border officials in Niger continues to facilitate certain criminal markets, particularly human smuggling, with officials reportedly accepting bribes to enable the transit of migrants. The July 2023 coup and its regional repercussions have significantly disrupted cross-border law enforcement cooperation, particularly with Nigeria and Benin, weakening efforts to counter armed banditry and organized crime in the region. The state's reliance on community-based armed groups –including ex-rebel groups and self-defence forces, sometimes operating beyond their control – to combat extremist organizations has provided local protection but also led to an increase in community tensions. Conflicts between extremist factions and vigilante groups have also fuelled intercommunal violence, undermining stability in affected regions.

Niger's extensive borders are increasingly insecure due to the activities of violent extremist groups, armed bandits and politico-military movements such as separatist groups. The country's strategic location facilitates criminal markets, including drug and arms trafficking, as well as migrant and cigarette smuggling, with armed groups exploiting these illicit flows for funding. Prior to the coup, joint efforts between French, Italian and Nigerian authorities aimed to establish a training centre for coordinated border management, but these initiatives were suspended following the political upheaval.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Niger has established a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, aligning with international standards. Over the past two decades, authorities have progressively aligned with some EU standards through legislation, decrees and ministerial orders. The adoption of key anti-money laundering and counterterrorism laws and subsequent decrees on the freezing of assets reflect a sustained commitment to addressing financial crime. Despite these efforts, external assessments indicate persistent vulnerabilities, including a high risk of money laundering. A recent evaluation found partial compliance with global standards and a lack of substantial effectiveness in key areas.

Economic freedom in the country is limited, with institutional weaknesses creating instability and holding back poverty reduction. Corruption and political interference undermine the rule of law, while an inadequate regulatory framework weighs down private sector growth. Most labour is informal, reflecting a poorly developed labour market. Despite increasing oil exports, economic progress is still sluggish, constrained by debt and bureaucratic inefficiency. Property ownership is hampered by a lack of formal documentation and gender disparities. While projected GDP growth is optimistic, it remains uncertain, given the persistent socio-economic challenges and limited potential for long-term development.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Following the July 2023 coup, Niger's transitional government scaled back efforts to protect trafficking victims. The number of victims identified and referred to services declined sharply compared to the previous reporting period. Although the national referral mechanism remained functional and some training for law enforcement and protection actors continued, border officials largely stopped screening for trafficking indicators. The government, together with civil society and international partners, maintained shelters and day centres for victims, but services are limited, especially outside the capital. Cooperation on repatriation for both foreign nationals in Niger and Nigerien victims abroad, which had occurred previously, was no longer reported. Separately, while Niger has established a centralized framework to address drug-related issues, there is no evidence of active harm-reduction initiatives for those who use drugs.

During the reporting period, the government conducted awareness campaigns on human trafficking in partnership with civil society, distributing materials in local languages and French. An inter-ministerial committee was established to address forced child begging, and efforts to draft a national strategy and action plan commenced. However, regulatory measures for Quranic schools were not implemented, and no efforts were made to address sex trafficking.

Anti-trafficking hotlines remain unavailable. Training for judicial officials, law enforcement, protection workers and consular officials was conducted.

Civil society in Niger is still constrained, with limited involvement in combating organized crime. Security challenges and government restrictions impede the operations of NGOs. This was exacerbated after the July 2023 coup, which heightened risks for activists and disrupted UN aid due to sanctions and airspace closures. Media freedom has deteriorated significantly with increased government interference, closure of press organizations and harassment of journalists. Amendments to the country's cybercrime laws have curbed journalistic freedoms by reinstating prison sentences for electronic defamation and public disturbance, reversing prior reforms. Crackdowns have intensified, with arrests of activists and journalists drawing condemnation from human rights organizations. International media also face censorship, including through broadcast signal disruptions and targeted attacks.