



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Sustaining Relief and Development Responses in Niger

Context and background

Niger is one of the world's least developed countries, ranking 189 out of 191 on the 2021 Human Development Index (HDI). Chronic vulnerabilities persist due to a variety of compounding factors and shocks, including rapid demographic growth, climate change, and a lack of basic services and infrastructure. Extreme and persistent gender inequalities further exacerbate entrenched poverty, particularly due to low rates of female education, high prevalence of early marriage and inequitable rights to land and assets. In recent years, a deteriorating security situation has further increased humanitarian needs and seen a surge in displacement, with increasingly complex and protracted responses required to meet basic needs.

Despite an abundance of increasingly exploited natural resources, Niger's economy remains underdeveloped and highly vulnerable to regional and global shocks. Long-term economic growth is further hindered by the high prevalence of undernutrition, with 47 per cent of children suffering from chronic malnutrition, and limited access to education as 1 in 3 children are not enrolled in primary school. Compounding this, the country is

extremely vulnerable to climate change, experiencing both destructive climatic shocks (floods and droughts) and the longer-term effects of accelerated desertification and land degradation.

WFP is a key partner and responder in Niger, providing both strategic guidance on the design and implementation of sustainable food security solutions and at-scale assistance to highly vulnerable communities. WFP has a proven capacity to rapidly scale up humanitarian operations and deliver life-saving assistance¹, including in fragile and hard-to-reach areas of Niger, and most of it using cash assistance. In 2022, WFP transferred over \$75 million to 2.1 million people while increasing local food purchases for the provision of food transfers, supporting the local economy. At the same time, WFP's flagship integrated resilience-building programme and support to social safety nets are already delivering tangible results, supporting longer-term reductions in humanitarian needs and contributing to community-led peace-building efforts. WFP's overall portfolio of work in Niger accounts for 40 percent of the UN's Development Cooperation Framework budget in Niger.

1. WFP Niger has 340 staff based in between the Country Office and 5 Sub-Offices across the country, serving populations in all regions of Niger.

The recent political crisis is compounding already severe humanitarian needs

The political crisis, sanctions and borders closure, and the resulting socio-economic impacts in Niger come amid an already complex context, where needs have escalated in recent years. More than 10 million people in Niger already live in extreme poverty. [According to the World Bank/WFP's September 2023 analysis](#), the projected increase in inflation and negative GDP per capita growth could result in the extreme poverty rate rising to 44.1 percent, which would mean an additional 700,000 people falling into extreme poverty in 2023.

The suspension of international budget support to Niger is likely to have a negative impact on economic development and access to basic services. Niger's annual budget was highly dependent on external budget and project support, including the receipt of approximately USD 2 billion in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) annually. Following the political crisis, most bilateral partners have suspended budget support, with the exception of the IMF. As a result, direct budget support is already projected to decline substantially in 2023 and 2024, with projected disbursement for both

years standing at \$260 compared to the \$1.12 billion of projected disbursements prior to the coup. Combined with a simultaneous reduction in project financing, the World Bank projects a loss of 6 percent of GDP due to the reduced disbursements of development financing in 2023.

Reduced external financing flows are likely to have a multisectoral impact, with the education and health sectors particularly vulnerable.

Economic shocks may reduce access and quality of education, and lead to persistently low enrolment rates and gender disparities in education in the long term. The World Bank also sees a high risk that projected gains in health outcomes will stagnate or even decline. As economic challenges are likely to increase needs, including those related to food insecurity, it is more important than ever to ensure that investments already committed and under implementation are sustained for the benefit of Niger's communities. Cuts in financing will likely also reduce national capacities to provide at-scale government relief responses including for food security.





Rising food insecurity requires the immediate scale-up of assistance to avert long-term repercussions

Humanitarian responses must continue at scale. Effective delivery of assistance will depend on guaranteed humanitarian access and financial resources. As needs are likely to increase, partners must ensure adaptable and coordinated responses to increase the efficiency and impact of emergency assistance. Ensuring that humanitarian supplies can enter the country and partners can operate unhindered across Niger, in line with humanitarian principles, is essential for the safe delivery of life-saving assistance.

Food insecurity in Niger has reached unprecedented levels in 2022 and 2023. 3.3 million people were severely food insecure and in need of food assistance during the 2023 lean season, and an additional 7.3 million were at risk of becoming severely food insecure if faced with a shock. The ongoing price and livelihood crisis is likely to push many of these households into severe food insecurity, as households resort to negative livelihood coping strategies. This was highlighted in [a national household survey conducted by WFP in September and published in a joint World Bank-WFP report](#), which found that an unusually high

percentage of households had employed emergency-level coping strategies since the start of the crisis (begging; selling female-reproducing animals, or selling their house and land), and that only 40 percent of households had acceptable food consumption levels. Food insecurity is expected to increase disproportionately in areas where households depend heavily on exports to Nigeria and Benin for their livelihood, and in urban areas where households rely on market purchases to meet their food needs and are therefore particularly vulnerable to price inflation.

WFP is closely monitoring the food security and livelihoods situation and will adapt its response once results from the upcoming Cadre Harmonisé/ IPC analysis are available in late November 2023. In 2023, WFP planned to reach 1.5 million people with emergency food assistance. Despite operational challenges following the political crisis, almost 1 million people were reached in August alone. Should resources become available, WFP and its partners have the capacity to rapidly reach additional food-insecure populations across Niger.

Criticality of sustaining social safety nets as part of a food systems approach

170,000 Niger households rely on social protection transfers to meet their basic needs, including food. These transfers provide short-term relief in the aftermath of shocks, both floods and droughts, while enabling households to invest in their livelihoods over time, reducing long-term dependency on humanitarian assistance. A systems-based approach to addressing needs is particularly important in the context of Niger, where climatic shocks and the slow-onset effects of ongoing climate change are drivers of humanitarian needs and chronic vulnerability.

Shock-responsive social protection systems help to reduce humanitarian needs over time while improving access to basic services and strengthening livelihoods before, during and after a crisis. Social safety nets provide protection without which households may be forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms that may jeopardise their future well-being and that of future generations. The strengthening of an adaptive social protection system is essential to avoid further deterioration of the humanitarian situation and to respond to the risk of reversing decades of investment and development.

The World Bank, UNICEF and WFP are jointly supporting the roll-out of social protection

programmes in Niger, [implementing social safety nets through an innovative delivery mechanism that relies on both national systems or direct delivery.](#)

This twin-track approach provides the flexibility needed to continue providing critical safety nets even during the ongoing political crisis, and the opportunity to expand coverage to offset the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable. Actions to strengthen Niger's social protection system are coupled with women's empowerment elements that promote more equitable access to resources and reduce vulnerability linked to socio-economic factors.

The national school feeding programme in Niger is a critical social safety net that promotes sustained access to education for 330,000 children (11 percent). The provision of daily school meals increases school enrolment and retention rates, improving access to education, health and nutrition for extremely vulnerable children. More broadly, they support the whole community by strengthening food systems and economies. In Niger, WFP supports 330,000 primary school children annually, however there is an urgent need to scale-up this safety net by ensuring consistent investment to enable Niger to reach 50 percent of school-going children with daily school meals by 2030.





Further supporting a food systems approach by expanding resilience-building investments and reinforcing social cohesion

Investment in multi-sectoral resilience-building actions has secured [remarkable progress at household, community, and national levels](#) over the past decade with particular focus on the promotion of women and youth. Multifaceted support embedded within a food systems approach ensures the implementation of food security solutions that also support communities to mitigate the impacts of climate change, become resilient to shocks, and build human capital through access to basic services and increased income. This includes the development of climate-sensitive, profitable value chains that stimulate economic growth and create employment opportunities within a diversified agricultural sector – the backbone to Niger’s economy. The home-grown school feeding system being rolled-out in Niger, providing school meals based on local production, further demonstrates the multi-sectoral advantages of reinforcing food systems including enhancing access to education.

WFP's extensive land restoration activities, a key component of the integrated resilience package, support the restoration of ecosystems, including through the wealth of untapped groundwater and renewable energy sources providing women and youth with resources and opportunities to thrive. WFP has already restored more than 230,000 hectares of degraded land since 2014 including 46,000 hectares in 2022 alone. This is enabling Niger to reverse and [adapt to the longer-term impacts of climate change with the potential for large-scale](#)

[carbon sequestration](#). Moreover, [a satellite analysis of these land rehabilitation actions facilitated by USAID and the NASA](#) evidenced that, on average, vegetation cover had increased by 55 percent in project sites six years after the start of land rehabilitation activities.

Resilience-building programmes help reduce humanitarian needs, with 80 percent of resilience beneficiaries in extremely food-insecure areas not requiring humanitarian assistance during the 2022 food crisis. This translates into an overall saving of USD 30 million for WFP compared to what would have been needed if these populations had required humanitarian assistance. Scaling-up and consolidating the gains already made must remain a priority, especially as the livelihoods of vulnerable populations are at stake due to additional socio-economic challenges.

In 2023, WFP's integrated resilience programme aims to reach 2.1 million people in more than 2,000 locations. This support, focusing primarily on women and youth, equips communities with the tools and capacities they need to strengthen their livelihoods, withstand shocks, access stable incomes and realize their full potential. By addressing the multi-dimensional challenges faced by households and communities in Niger, [IFPRI has demonstrated that resilience-building programmes provide viable mechanisms for strengthening social cohesion and supporting peacebuilding efforts, particularly in fragile areas.](#)



WFP ready to scale its interventions while investing in reassurance and mitigating risks

The operating environment in Niger is becoming increasingly complex, with additional risks arising from political instability. As part of the Global Reassurance Project, WFP Niger is proactively implementing key reassurance measures in all programme areas to help WFP reach the most vulnerable people in a way that ensures the necessary safeguards and controls are in place, risks are minimised and resources are targeted to the intended beneficiaries.

It means that WFP Niger consults and listens to the people it assists and respects their privacy; that WFP knows who is safely assisted, and who has not received assistance; that WFP can track its in-kind assistance from its source to the hands of the people it serves; and that WFP maintains operational independence in accordance with humanitarian principles.

To achieve this, **WFP Niger is reviewing its operations and putting forward a decisive plan to**

strengthen all functional areas, including but not limited to: targeting, identity management for both in-kind and CBT (registration, de-duplication, distribution and reconciliation), food distribution procedures, monitoring and community feedback mechanisms, supply chain and commodity tracking, management of cooperating partners, with digital solutions and risk management in all priority areas.

Cash-based transfers have already been digitised, and investments are underway to fully digitise in-kind operations to **enable more efficient and secure verification of the receipt of assistance by targeted beneficiaries**. WFP is also finalising the implementation of a last-mile commodity tracking solution, recording food transactions and improving accountability and accuracy of commodity accounting information. WFP is also reinvesting in field and remote monitoring systems, as well as proper tracking and follow-up of all activities. Finally, WFP is building the capacity of cooperating partners, including the quality of budgeting and reporting.

World Food Programme

Niger Country Office
niger.information@wfp.org

Cover photo and pages 2-4: WFP/Mariama Ali Souley - Pages 3-7: WFP/Evelyn Fey - Page 5: WFP/Richard Mbouet