

State of **SKILLS**



International
Labour
Organization

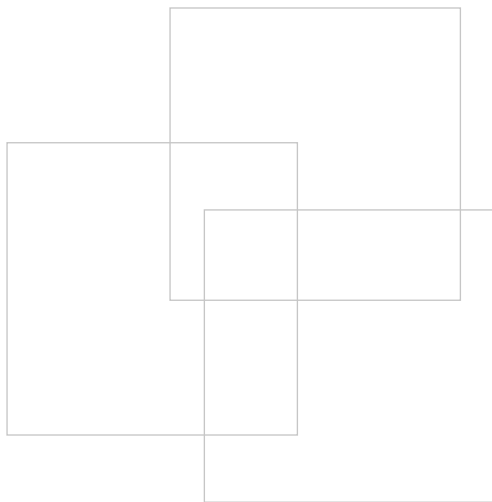
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1919-2019



Niger

State of

SKILLS



Niger

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The socio-economic context

Soaring population growth and a challenging environment.

In 2018, Niger had an estimated population of 21,546,595, which is forecast to reach 34,277,414 by 2030 (RGPH, 2012). The population growth rate (estimated at 3.8 per cent for the period 2015-2020) is one of the highest in the sub-region, as is the fertility rate, which is one of the highest in the world (7.6 in 2005-2010 and estimated at 7.2 for 2015-2020) (UNDP, 2018). Integrating young people and generations to come into the labour market therefore represents one of the most pressing challenges facing the country for its future development.

Niger also has a challenging environment, linked to its isolated location, strong pressure on land, and climate variations. Since 2012, crises in neighbouring countries (northern Mali, northeast Nigeria and Libya) have contributed to growing insecurity in some regions, resulting in an increase in migratory flows and, more particularly in those of refugees and internally displaced people.

Niger is one of the world's poorest countries, ranking tenth in the Human Development Index (HDI) in 2017 (UNDP, 2018). In 2016, Niger's score in the Multidimensional Poverty Index was 0.154, with an estimate that 35.3 per cent of the population live in multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2018). According to the national poverty threshold, 25.2 per cent of the population lives below this marker, and 15 per cent live on less than USD 1.90 per day in purchasing power parity terms.

A growing economy based largely on the primary sector.

It is forecast that in 2019 and 2020, real GDP growth rates will be respectively 5.3 per cent and 5.7 per cent (ADB, 2019). This trend is part of the pattern observed in 2017 and 2018, with growth rates of 4.9 per cent and 5.2 per cent, respectively. This situation is largely due to the strong performance of the agriculture sector, which contributed 43.4 per cent of GDP in 2018.

The growth trend looks set to continue in this sector, driven by the second phase of the Economic and Social Development Plan (ESDP) 2017-2021, which sets out to increase production capacities.

The secondary sector (industry and mining) contributes 14.9 per cent to GDP and, since 2012, has undergone considerable development, particularly through oil exports, and shows strong potential in the sector of raw material extraction (uranium, coal, gold) and the development of new projects/initiatives (cement works). Lastly, the tertiary sector (services, trade) accounts for 35 per cent of GDP, but remains mainly concentrated in the principal urban centres.

Despite real potential for development, largely linked to opportunities offered by its giant neighbour Nigeria, Niger's economy remains acutely vulnerable, due to erratic rainfall, fluctuations in the prices of raw materials, and the threat of terrorism in the Sahel, among other factors.

A poorly organized labour market faced with skills shortages.

Notwithstanding considerable government efforts to facilitate access to education, in 2012 the population's educational levels remained extremely low, with a literacy rate of 30.11 per cent (RGPH, 2012)¹. Disparities are strongly skewed in favour of urban areas (58.51 per cent compared with 23.68 per cent in rural areas) and men (38.64 per cent compared with 22.10 per cent for women).

¹ From 2001 to 2012, the proportion of people aged 15 and over in an educational structure declined from 73.3% to 55.6%.

That same year, the share of the population to have reached primary level was 20.67 per cent, compared with 4.58 per cent for the secondary 1st cycle (BEPC) and 0.77 per cent for the secondary 2nd cycle (BAC). The share of the population to have benefited from vocational training was even lower, with 0.34 per cent at lower secondary level (ETFP1), 0.23 per cent at secondary level (ETFP2), and 0.22 per cent at higher level.

Niger's economy is predominantly informal, with this sector accounting for 30 to 40 per cent of GDP, according to different estimates,² and dominated by agricultural activities. The private sector is poorly structured beyond large-scale organizations (Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Crafts, employers' organizations). In 2018, the working-age population reached 8,760,638, of whom 43.33 were women (World Bank, 2018). The agriculture sector accounted for 75.9 per cent of employees, compared with 15.97 per cent in the services sector, and 8.12 per cent in industry.

In 2014, the official unemployment rate was 17 per cent (ENISED, 2016). Women are more affected than men, with respective rates of 28.9 per cent and 4.4 per cent. In the 15 to 29 age group, the unemployment rate was 23.7 per cent (ECVMA, 2011).

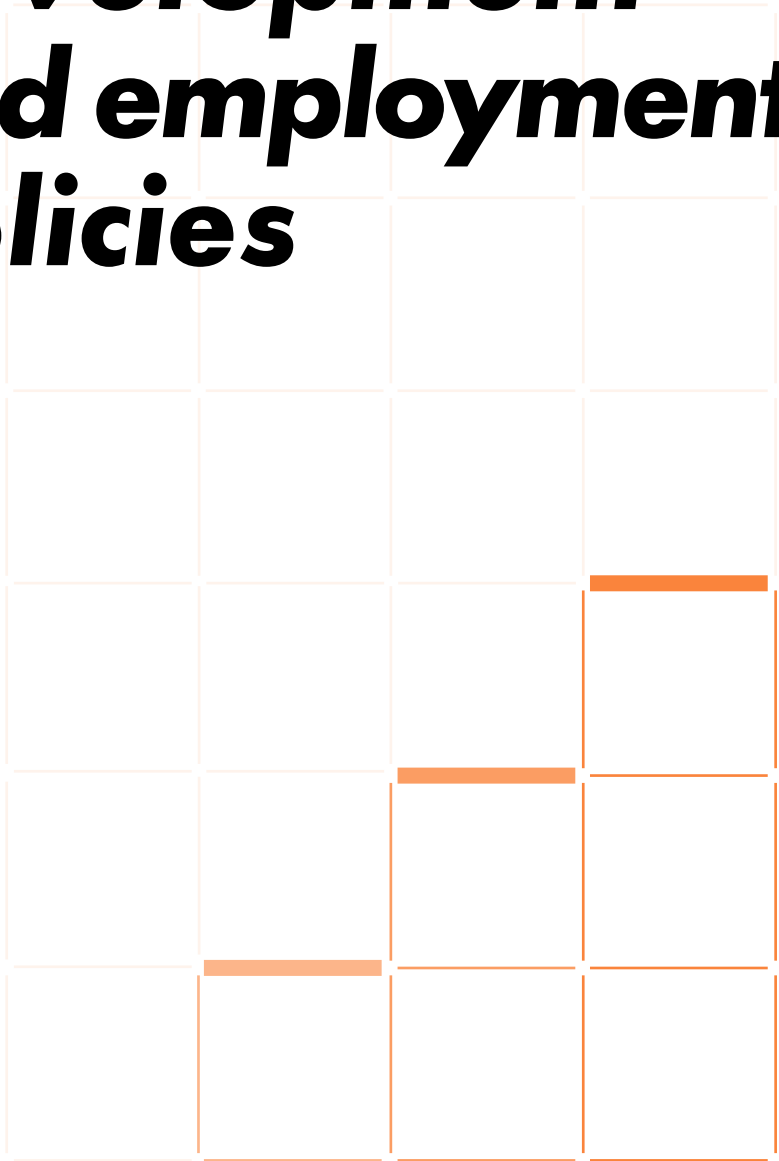
² It may represent 60% of GDP (MT, 2017).

The level of underemployment was 68.4 per cent of the active population, with rural people especially affected (70.4 per cent) due to the seasonal nature of agricultural work (ECVMA, 2014). The proportion of young people aged 15 to 24 who were not in employment, education or training was 25.2 per cent in 2014 (ILO, 2014).

In the current context, various actors involved in the private sector are unanimous on the issue of the mismatch between skills acquired by young people, especially through the national training system, and the needs of the labour market. According to employers (FOP-Niger, 2019), this situation stems from the excessive importance given to the theoretical aspect of training, from the the misalignment between pedagogical tools and modern technologies, and from the variation in quality between one training structure and another. It is also clear that there is a lack of knowledge of the TVET qualification system on the part of employers who, for financial reasons, prefer to use a pliable workforce that they train on the job in their businesses.³ In sectors where the shortage of specialized labour is most acute, there is an influx of workers from the neighbouring countries of Benin and Togo, for example in construction, while multinational companies have no hesitation in importing labour from their country of origin (for example, Turkish companies in the case of construction, and Chinese ones in the case of oil exploration and and refining).

³ According to the ENEF survey (2015), less than one-quarter (23.5%) of company workforces had been trained.

Development and employment policies



The Economic and Social Development Plan (ESDP) launched in 2012 is the reference document for socio-economic development in Niger. The plan's second phase (2017-2021) constitutes the first five-year operationalization plan for the Strategy for the Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth (SDDCI) Niger 2035, adopted by the Government on 9 May 2017. The objective of this strategy is to respond to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with regard to Agenda 2063.⁴ The ESDP 2017-2021 is organized around five strategic pillars: i) cultural revival; ii) social development and demographic transition; iii) acceleration of economic growth; iv) enhancement of governance, peace and security; and v) sustainable management of the environment. In particular, the objective of this phase is to reduce poverty from its level of 39.8 per cent in 2016 to 31.3 per cent in 2021; achieve an average economic growth rate of 7 per cent; and bring fiscal pressure to 20 per cent (Ministry of Planning, 2017). The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) (2019-2021) is also a reference document for its Vision 2030 of the UN System. In particular, this plan guides the creation of jobs in the context of resilience through the development of “value chains to create decent jobs” in the agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries sectors.

⁴ Agenda 2063 is a 50-year blueprint and master plan set in place by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

Concerning the development of economic sectors, agriculture is a priority due to the opportunities it offers, its capacities for job creation, and its potential in terms of subregional trade. Setting in place large infrastructures (water reservoirs, irrigated areas, transport routes) and upgrading production techniques form the basis of the sector's modernization. For the secondary sector, the country is focusing on developing use of raw materials, which accounted for 48 per cent of this sector's activity between 2012 and 2015. Adding value through processing products generated by agro-sylvo-pastoral output is also being promoted, targeting leather crafts and agro-processing. Developing the primary and secondary sectors is especially seen as a means for advancing the most remote areas of the country and offering job opportunities to the most disadvantaged young people, who are often candidates for high-risk migration. For the tertiary sector, the main initiatives planned focus primarily on restructuring enterprises within the private sector, particularly through incentives for them to become formalized. As for the competitiveness of economic services, this relies largely on improving the quality of vocational training and employment conditions, as well as the business environment. Development policies take particular account of vulnerability issues, especially in relation to the environment, by setting in place initiatives for integrated resource management (land, water, crops), sanitation and the promotion of renewable energies.

In the area of employment policy, Niger has aligned itself with practices adopted in other countries of the sub-region, expressing a strong determination to promote employment and decent work as a means of poverty reduction. With support from ILO and UNDP, in March 2009 the Government developed and adopted a national employment policy, with the objectives of combating unemployment and underemployment; developing and supporting economic growth; encouraging the creation of productive and secure decent jobs; and promoting social dialogue between the Government, employers' and workers' organizations and civil society. Implementation strategies include employment creation within the framework of the country's macro-economic policy, strengthening employability through the provision of basic training and skills upgrading, encouraging entrepreneurship and self-employment among youth, developing vocational guidance and strategies for jobseekers, developing local employment to keep young people in their home regions, and developing an enabling environment (administrative, judicial, fiscal, financial) for business development. Agriculture and livestock, construction, information and communication technologies (ICT) and the modern (formal) sector are priority areas of intervention in the PEN, taking account of their potential at national level.

“Each one has the right to life, to health, to physical and moral integrity, to a healthy and sufficient food supply, to potable water, to education and instruction in the conditions specified by the law.”





– Constitution of the Republic of Niger

Article 12

The skills system in Niger

Niger developed a state technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system in the 1970s comprising several different levels, with the aim of covering the entire country. In the 2000s, the private sector also began opening TVET establishments. In recent years, the number of trainees enrolled in formal and non-formal programmes has seen sharp growth, rising from 68,486 in 2012-2013 to 332,025 in 2016-2017⁵ (MEPT, 2018), representing a growth rate of 385 per cent in 5 years. This trend has translated into an increase in demand for vocational training, especially for the coming years.

⁵ The number enrolled in non-formal schemes accounted for 79.2% of total trainees in 2016-2017.

TVET reform policies

Since 2013, the Government has adopted a new education policy through the Education and Training Sector Programme (PSEF) for the period 2014-2024.⁶ The aim is to develop an education system that responds to social demand, as well as to the needs of all economic sectors. For TVET, three strategic pillars have been identified:

- I.** Facilitating access by strengthening supply in establishments at national level, developing apprenticeship programmes that are in line with the level and needs of youth, as well as support and advice to help them enter the labour market (practical training, advice, etc.).
- II.** Improving the quality by developing practical training schemes that match expectations of the labour market, updating and developing pedagogical methods and support, and strengthening the capacities of trainers (training-of-trainers).
- III.** Improvement of guidance by strengthening the quality control of TVET with a more systematic involvement of private sector actors in providing support and advice and in decision-making for TVET governance and apprenticeships (setting up commissions).

⁶ Based on education guidelines in the Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES 2012-2021).

In parallel, two reform strategies are being developed. These are the national policy for vocational training through apprenticeships and the national policy for continuous vocational training. Plans are also in place for a shift towards a training strategy (programmes) based on the competency-based approach (APC), so as to respond to the demands of the labour market. As a first step there are plans to conduct a pilot experiment in three trades: leather craft; construction; hospitality and tourism.



(© ILO)

Governance

Since 2006, TVET has come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training (MEP-T). The MEP-T is made up of three main bodies – the General Directorate of Formal Education (DGEF), the General Directorate of Employment Direction and Integration (DGOIP), and National Directorates for Support.

For implementation of certain strategies, the MEP-T has received support from three state agencies:

- I.** National Agency for the Promotion of Employment (ANPE) which coordinates recruitment for posts in formal businesses, as well as support and advice, guidance and training for youth, with a view to helping them to enter the labour market.
- II.** The Support Fund for Vocational Training and Apprenticeship (FAFPA) which offers opportunities for continuous and short duration training for individuals and companies.
- III.** The National Employment and Training Observatory (ONEF) which conducts surveys and sectoral studies in order to anticipate needs and TVET development strategies to match demands of the labour market.

At national level, the TVET governance system is centralized under the MEP-T. This latter conducts general inspection visits as well as mapping monitoring indicators as part of its work in tracking facilities. It is supported at the level of 8 administrative regions by 16 divisions (regional inspectorates), whose role is to conduct regular monitoring of TVET centres at local level. However, due to the size of the national territory and the lack of financial and logistical resources, it is difficult for these to carry out their tasks in full.

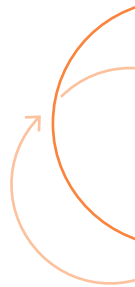
Social dialogue

Until now, the involvement of private sector actors in TVET has been limited, aside from a few conferences between the ANPE and employers' organizations, as well as certain parastatal enterprises. These have mainly involved offering trainees work-experience programmes within businesses in well defined sectors (construction, postal services, hydraulic engineering and machine operations). Nevertheless, the large private sector employers' organizations and trade union bodies are showing a real interest in becoming involved in supporting TVET, more especially through the integration of steering and monitoring committees proposed in the new policies that have recently been developed, and are now awaiting adoption.

Financing

The TVET system is mainly funded by the state budget through the MEP-T. This budget has been substantially increased, partly due to implementation of reforms linked to the PSEF.⁷ State funding primarily covers salaries, allowances and some investments in infrastructure and equipment.

⁷ The budget allocated to TVET was 2.66 billion FCFA in 2009, then 25.47 in 2014, before falling to 13.27 in 2017 (MEP-T, 2018).



Technical and financial partners (TFP) play an important role in the development of TVET in Niger, particularly by financing national programmes⁸ and supporting the MEP-T in implementing reforms.⁹ In this context, the Government of Niger has, since 2017, set in place the Education Sector Common Fund (FCSE) financed by five TFPs (AFD, UNICEF, LuxDév, and the Swiss and Norwegian cooperation programme) and involving six sectoral ministries. Humanitarian organizations have also benefited from funding to implement specific TVET activities as part of emergency programmes for refugees and returning migrants.¹⁰

The principal incentive measures are the vocational training services offered by the FAFPA to individuals, businesses and institutions, subsidized at 88 per cent. An apprenticeship tax (TAP)¹¹ levied on businesses contributes to funding of the FAFPA.



⁸ The main programme currently being implemented is the Skills Development for Growth Project (PRODEC) (2014-2022): 42 billion FCFA funded by the World Bank, targeting 32,000 beneficiaries.

⁹ The MEP-T has particularly benefited from Luxembourg's cooperation organization (LuxDév) through different programmes.

¹⁰ In particular, the Response Mechanism and Resources for Migrants (MRRM) (2015), a programme with a global approach launched by the OIM with funding from the European Union's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa.

¹¹ A levy of 2% for wages paid to workers from Niger and 4% for foreign workers. Partial or total exemption can be claimed on request in lieu of expenses paid for training activities.

Skills anticipation

Measures for anticipating skills needs have only been set in place very recently in Niger, and in most cases this has been with support from Luxembourg's cooperation programme (LuxDév). Since 2014, the National Employment and Training Observatory has been tasked with conducting surveys and sectoral studies. Based on survey samples, and due to lack of data beyond the formal sector, the results of these studies only offer a very partial vision of the real needs of the labour market. More often than not, they are limited to evaluating the skills needs and potential for job creation in the public services and, to a lesser extent, in the larger industrial or mining companies.

As part of the TVET reforms currently under way, importance has been attached to the regular collection of data from training centres, to generate the indicators needed to anticipate skills training needs. Statistical yearbooks should be produced annually, with the most recent one covering the academic year 2016-2017. The size of the country and the limited resources of the regional inspectorates create an obstacle to the regular and comprehensive collection of data. In addition, the lack of organization of apprenticeship programmes makes it impossible to have complete information for this sector.



(© ILO)

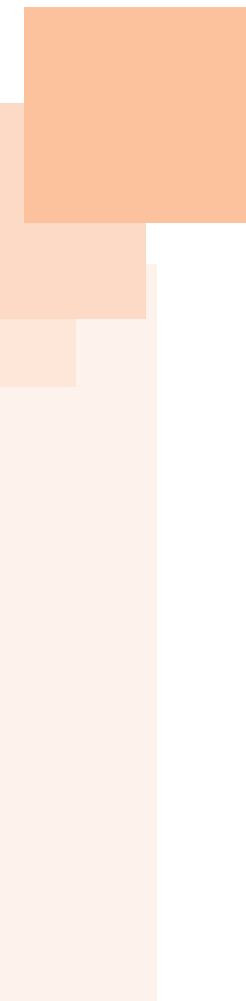
Skills development

The vocational training system in Niger includes three levels: “formal” technical education,¹² “non-formal” vocational training,¹³ and “informal” vocational training.¹⁴ Although the MEPT’s role is to oversee all three levels, the situation of a large number of private establishments remains unclear and does not meet government standards. Of a total 814 facilities inventoried in 2016-2017, 55.8 per cent had formal status. In the same year, the TVET enrolment rate accounted for 31.25 per cent of secondary level. The Government’s objective is to raise this indicator to 40 per cent by 2021 (MEPT, 2018).

¹² Provided in facilities that are part of the education system, this includes two cycles of formal education, with officially recognized diplomas.

¹³ Organized outside the school setting. The programmes and pedagogical approach are peculiar to each structure, which issues its own diplomas, most of which are not recognized by the State.

¹⁴ Brings together the different forms of apprenticeship (on-the-job training and alternation (entre le lieu de travail et le centre de formation)).



“Formal” technical education: In 2016-2017, the country had 454 formal establishments, of which 81.1 per cent were part of the public sector. Of these formal facilities, 428 are directly linked to the MEP-T. Each category of establishment is represented in all regions, with a predominance of Trades Training Centres (CFM) (71.3 per cent of structures) followed by Technical Education Centres (CET) (22.0 per cent), and only a few technical or technological high schools. These establishments had a total of 69,169 trainees, about one-quarter less than those in non-formal facilities (262,829 trainees). This situation is partly explained by the highly selective recruitment procedures in establishments considered by some to be national benchmarks, and to the high cost of vocational training.

In 2016-2017, a success rate was recorded of 68.8 per cent and 55.8 per cent respectively, and of 50.4 per cent and 31.6 per cent in the 2nd cycle (vocational training certificate and technical training certificate). The drop-out rate in 2016-2017 was 0.53 per cent (367 cases).

“Non-formal” vocational training: In 2016-2017, the number of non-formal establishments was 360, of which 31.7 per cent were public. These structures target the most vulnerable groups (youth, rural dwellers, girls), offering apprenticeship opportunities in trades largely based on practical training. More accessible, they have been provided to a total of 262,829 students, or 3.8 times as many as in the case of formal technical education. Some categories of facility have been developed based on an approach and experience particularly designed to offer skills acquisition through practice, in growth areas such as agriculture, crafts or the environment.

“Informal” vocational training: In Niger, the system of apprenticeship and work-based learning is still poorly developed, and is mainly informal. It covers about 80 per cent of total people to have received vocational or technical training, with a very clear majority being trained on the job in a family setting (MEP-T, 2015). Traditional apprenticeship training takes place in workshops, most of which belong to the informal economy. The National Federation of Artisans in Niger (FNAN) claims to have a total of 79,913 master artisans, who in 2014-2015 trained 41,053 apprentices, of whom 13,604 (33.1 per cent) were girls (MEP-T, 2015).

Poor development of vocational training in Niger has led to disparate experiments, with limited impacts. That is particularly true of “dual” work-based learning, which although first launched in the early 2000s,¹⁵ had only involved a total of 3,165 students at national level by 2014-2015 (MEP-T, 2015). The competency-based approach (APC) promoted as part of the reforms is currently in the experimental phase. The limited number of public-private partnerships within TVET has prevented training centre managers from making approaches to businesses on a regular basis.

¹⁵ Tested with the support of German cooperation agency (GIZ), with training in the form of modules of 360 hours, linking 20% theory and 80% practice.

Skills recognition and quality assurance

The system of recognition of qualifications and training comes under the MEP-T's Examination, Certifications and Guidance Board (DEXCCO), and is primarily concerned with TVET establishments that are officially recognized by the State, and termed "formal" if they award formal certificates and diplomas, and "non-formal" if they award non-formal certificates. It is based on three types of standards (occupational standards, skills standards and assessment standards). All vocational qualifications that are recognized by the State are listed under the National Vocational Qualifications Framework. The current system should nevertheless be further developed following a pilot implementation of the competence-based approach (APC) planned in the short term.

Certification and recognition of formally acquired skills: This is organized in two training cycles, leading up to 4 diplomas. The status of "basic-skilled worker" is acquired through a Certificate of Professional Competence (CAP) or Vocational Studies Certificate (BEP) (training of 2 to 3 years, accessible, respectively from levels CM2 and BEPC).

The status of “medium-skilled worker” is acquired through a Technical or Vocational high-school diploma (training of 2 years, accessible from basic level BEP).

Certification and recognition of informally acquired skills: This includes 5 levels of vocational qualifications, mainly directed towards practical training. The pre-vocational training (FIP)¹⁶ forms the starting level, leading to 3 options for credentials (Vocational, Technical or General AQB). The Certificate of Qualification for Trades (CQM) is accessible on the basis of an FIP or work-based learning. The three higher levels (Vocational Training Certificate (CQP), Vocational Training Diploma (CQP), and the Higher Technician Diploma (BPT) are accessible following the preceding qualification, together with 2 years of continuous training.

On an informal basis, there is a bridging system in both directions between “formal” technical training and “non-formal” vocational training, through the Recognition of Prior Learning (VAE) system, based on 3 years of practical experience in positions with a level of responsibility that is higher than or equal to the credential being sought.

¹⁶ It is accessible to out-of-school people and those who have dropped out, aged 14 upwards.

The adoption of TVET reforms currently under way will have an effect on any reorganization of the system of equivalence, with plans for private sector actors to be involved in the setting in place of new measures, as part of a new ad hoc commission.

Recognition of skills acquired informally: There is currently no system of recognition of skills acquired informally. This situation affects the majority of trainees, as well as a large number of private TVET establishments, which do not respect the norms imposed by the MEPT. These establishments are therefore considered as “informal”, only issuing certificates and other credentials that belong to them alone. This situation is a cause of major concern given the difficulties of introducing such former trainees into the labour market; many of them have no choice but to go into informal businesses, with precarious working conditions.

Due to strong demand from the National Federation of Artisans in Niger (FNAN), which is trying to certify both its members and artisan trainers, the MEP-T is seeking to introduce a recognition system by organizing exam sessions in parallel to traditional exams.

Quality assurance: Mechanisms for quality assurance of national training provision, evaluation and certification are conducted by organizing permanent sessions, of common public and private exams, and through monitoring by the General Inspectorate for Education (IPG). At local level, public and private facilities are monitored on a more regular basis by MEP-T regional inspections. Lack of logistical and financial resources, as well as the size of the country, combine to restrict the consistency of visits. With the aim of improving the quality of services provided, standardizing pedagogical methods and encouraging facilities to obtain official recognition, the recent reforms have focused on the use of well defined qualitative and quantitative indicators, with reporting conducted on an annual basis.

Social inclusion

In Niger, society places a particular premium on general education, considering technical and vocational training as a second chance for those who failed in mainstream education. Nevertheless, this perspective is currently undergoing a shift as a result of the challenges in entering the labour market faced by those leaving secondary academic education (BAC) or higher education (Bachelor, Master or PhD degree).



Accessibility of the TVET system

For several years now, the Government of Niger and NGOs (for example, Swisscontact) have identified the opportunities offered by apprenticeship and short or long duration vocational training as a means of engaging rural populations in agro-sylvo-pastoral or small-scale crafts activities, thereby helping to stem the rural exodus. For this purpose, the Government has set up a network of Trades Training Centres in each of the country's municipalities, so as to make them accessible to the largest number of people.¹⁷ The Ministry of Population, Women's Promotion and the Protection of Children has also set up a network of Women's Training and Promotion Centres (CFPF), which between 2014 and 2015 trained 14,200 girls and 970 boys from disadvantaged backgrounds. (MEP-T, 2015). The Government provides bursaries to formal TVET trainees (public + private) from disadvantaged backgrounds. Numbering 11,615 students, of whom one-third were girls in 2016-2017, these account for 16.8 per cent of total trainees in formal facilities.

¹⁷ In 2017-2018, 262 centres were set up, with the goal of covering all 267 municipalities by 2020. Accessible to those in school but not admitted to the CEP, to out-of-school children and school drop-outs, that same year the centres trained 28,441 students, of whom 45.5% were girls (MEP-T, 2019).

In response to the recent crises in Niger's neighbouring countries, programmes conducted by humanitarian organizations have included vocational and technical training activities in their intervention strategies, with the aim of integrating non-voluntary returning migrants into their home communities, or supporting refugees and displaced persons in their host communities. These initiatives, which have also benefited local youths in difficulty, are generally ad hoc and based on short duration training (maximum 6 months), and are not part of the official curricula, providing a simple training certificate at the end. The number of beneficiaries varies widely, depending on the activities (from one hundred to several thousand).

Support for integration into the labour market

One key observation is the lack of career planning among young people in Niger, whose priority is to guarantee a regular salary by being taken on in public services or undergoing recruitment examinations (for the army or police force). The Ministry of Employment, Labour and Social Protection (MET-PS) and the Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training (MEPT), together with some large-scale organizations from the private sector (Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Crafts) have developed initiatives aimed at stimulating an entrepreneurial spirit in young people. The ANPE and FAFPA have seen their powers expanded, with the strengthening and/or insertion of a career guidance component, while a ‘House of Enterprise’ was set up in 2012. These structures offer various services (job search skills, entrepreneurship training, work experience programmes) to youth, the long-term unemployed and people seeking vocational retraining).¹⁸

¹⁸ In 2018, the programme for labour market insertion of youth (PAIJ) implemented by the ANPE, enabled some 550 young people to benefit from work experience and 150 to undergo entrepreneurship training.

These initiatives are strongly encouraged by employers' organizations, which see them as a way of improving skills and stimulating motivation for those entering the labour market.

On the issue of migration, the OIM has launched several initiatives for the reintegration of returning migrants, especially within small and medium-sized businesses and industries and start-ups, with a key component involving the identification of training needs to strengthen capacities. In the same vein, a project to mobilize Niger's diaspora has been launched, to encourage the setting up of businesses in Niger designed to include migrant labour.

Lifelong learning

Initially, continuous training involved recycling within state services, often conducted outside the country. Use of continuous training as part of business development plans remains more marginal, but is likely to increase with promotion of the private sector. In 2015, 21 per cent of businesses had set up training schemes for their workforce.¹⁹ In the majority of cases, these were large companies (with a turnover higher than or equal to 500 million FCFA). In practice, almost one-quarter (23.5 per cent) of the formal sector's workforce benefited from work-based training during the 12 months prior to the survey, primarily in micro-enterprises (3 to 9 employees). The main sectors are, in descending order: wholesale and retail trade (24.7 per cent of all those trained), construction (22.0 per cent), finance (14.0 per cent), and real estate and business services (10.8 per cent).

¹⁹ National Survey of Employment and Training of Enterprises in the Formal Sector (ENEF), 2015.

This training was supplied during work experience programmes with educational or training facilities (9.4 per cent of companies) or with public funding (1.9 per cent). This latter figure reflects companies' very limited knowledge of opportunities for subsidized training (FAFPA), with just 20.7 per cent of those surveyed informed on this issue. Reasons given by companies for not training their workers were: the costs (26 per cent), workers leaving after training (24 per cent), and demands for higher wages (22 per cent).



Key challenges

The Government of Niger has demonstrated a clear awareness of the importance of integrating young people into the labour market, as a means of combating poverty and the rural exodus, and especially as a pathway for developing the local economy and improving people's livelihoods. In the Economic and Social Development Plan (PDES 2012-2021), importance is placed on the role of education, training and invigorating the national economy by developing agriculture and private enterprises, in a spirit of competitiveness and of boosting trade. Through the Education and Training Sector Programme (PSEF 2014-2024), the Government has placed a special focus on enhancing and improving the structuring of vocational education and training (TVET), as well as of apprenticeship. To reach these objectives, it has worked together with private sector actors to develop pedagogical methods and to make skills recognition a priority. However, implementing the initiatives planned remains dependent on the adoption of policies that have recently been developed (2018),²⁰ and are currently being reviewed.

To succeed with reforms to TVET, the Government of Niger will first have to ensure real implementation of measures to strengthen the agriculture sector, so as to make it more competitive. In parallel, it will need to create incentives for launching and supporting businesses, promoting the development and structuring of a dynamic private sector and job creation. The main challenges facing TVET fall directly within the major strategic pillars of the PSEF. In particular, it will be important to:

²⁰ National policy for vocational training through apprenticeship and national policy for continuous vocational training.

1

Develop a system of vocational training and apprenticeship that matches the needs of the national economy.

This must involve developing skills for the labour market which respond to employers' expectations, and which harness new practices and technologies. The system should give priority to occupations from the primary and secondary sectors, and include components linked to the conservation of the environment and sustainable development. A particular focus must be placed on practical phases, facilitating access to work experience while developing the apprenticeship system so as to give it greater capacity for promoting vocational skills. The Government of Niger has already launched a number of initiatives, including the opening of training facilities identified as reference centres (specialized in growth sectors such as agriculture, mining and construction). Short-term plans to develop the competency-based approach (APC) is another strategy under way, as is that of dual apprenticeship.

With demand growing, anticipating the need to strengthen the training system's supply capacities poses a challenge. In terms of geography, it will be important to offer training in sectors that match the needs of the public and the economic potential offered by the environment in which the facilities are located. The development of a network of TVET facilities, and initiatives to open centres operated by the private sector in the least equipped areas represents a first step. As part of the planned reforms, the Government is prioritizing collaboration with the private sector and draw on its experience, so as to improve the quality of training.

2

Strengthen norms and standards for training programme development, evaluation and certification.

This point is crucial given the wide diversity of curricula offered by training facilities within the same occupational sector, and the lack of recognition of qualifications awarded by a great many informal private establishments, as well as the majority of apprenticeships. For “formal” and “non-formal” training, particular attention needs to be paid to standardizing pedagogical methods and tools, together with the system for recognition of skills and qualifications, so that trainees can be offered the same chances of integration into the labour market, regardless of which establishment they attended, or its location. Most importantly, regulations must be set in place for recognition of informal vocational training (apprenticeship). This could include measures to facilitate access to vocational training through prior actions in the case of less educated candidates (literacy and basic skills upgrading). Support from actors in the business world to develop pedagogical tools and define standards for assessing trainees will be critical in order to respond to the needs of the economy.

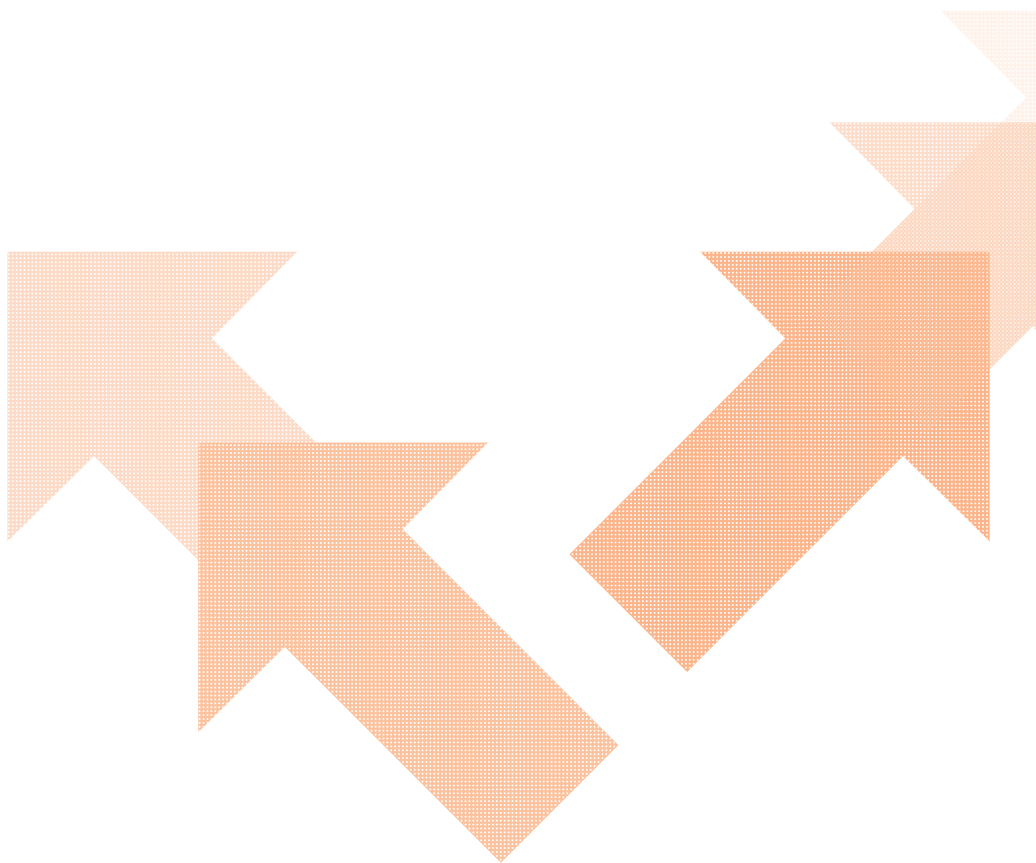
3 Improve governance of the vocational training system.


This involves strengthening the capacities and efficiency of the monitoring system for TVET facilities, in order to have reliable information on their operations and the results obtained in each TVET centre. Defining and setting in place standardized assessment indicators will enable informal establishments to come closer to complying with the standards in force (MEP-T) and thereby deliver training that is recognized. Collaboration with the private sector planned by the Government through steering committees should make it possible to address most of these challenges, particularly through a common vision and the sharing of experiences.

Lastly, a reform of the TVET system that takes into account the above-mentioned challenges will help to slow the trend for migration, by persuading young people to remain in their own communities, encouraged by the opportunities offered in economic growth sectors. The creation of decent jobs for youth will have positive repercussions on the livelihoods of local communities, and will contribute to the development and upgrading of the country's least-developed areas.



The way forward



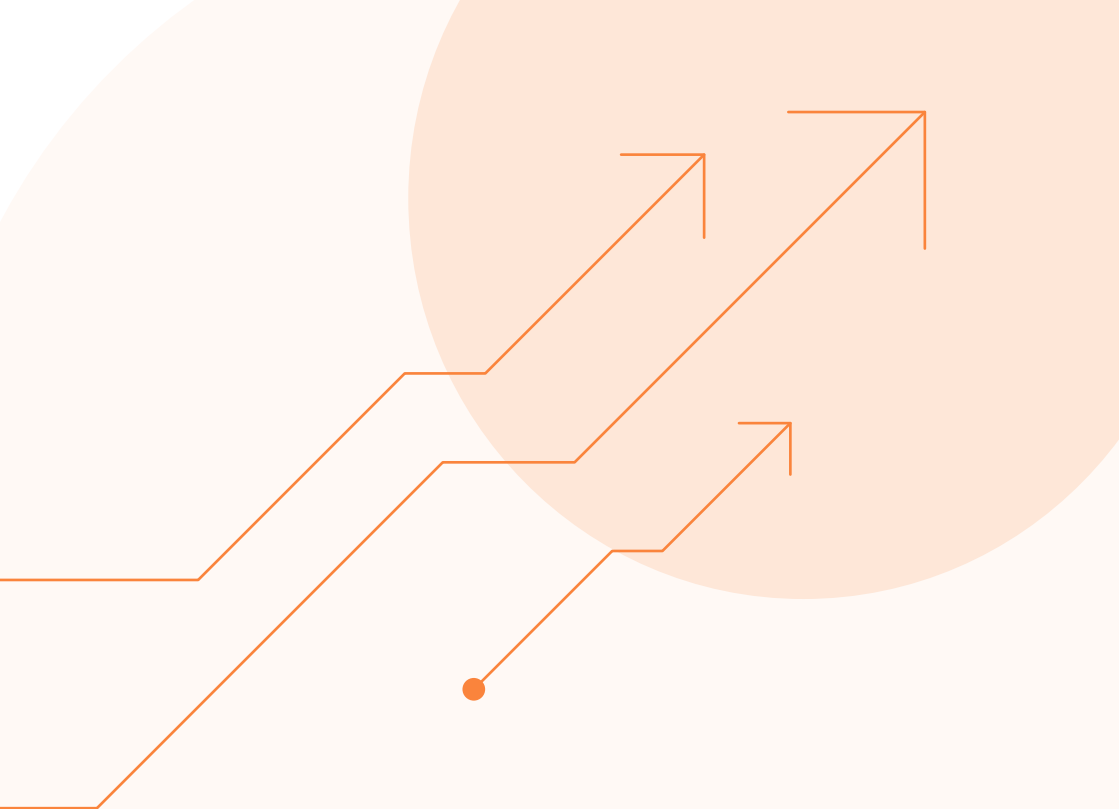
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In order to support Niger's ambitions for social and economic development, the TVET reforms must take into account the challenges identified in the previous section. The success of these reforms, and improved youth access to labour markets, are conditional on their effective integration into sectoral policies, as well as implementation of the initiatives needed to develop economic activities, especially in agriculture, which provides employment for a clear majority of the population. In line with the thrust of recent policies related to TVET, dialogue and the forging of partnerships with different private and public sector actors will be the main pathway to lasting solutions.

1

Set in place a system for skills anticipation and development at local level.

A priority for the Government of Niger is to develop rural areas by strengthening the potential of economic activities, particularly agriculture. Taking into account specific contexts, it will be important to develop training facilities that are adapted to the education level of local communities, and which respond to the opportunities/potential offered in each area in terms of training and jobs. Through their knowledge of the environment and the players who are active there, local authorities could play an important role as intermediaries between training facilities and private and public sector businesses, especially by offering incentives to encourage support for vocational training.



Partnerships could be set up between training centres and small and medium-sized businesses and industries identified with the support of employers' organizations (courses given by professionals, work placement in businesses for trainees). The Government's decentralized technical services could also play an important role in training and mentoring students, particularly in the agro-sylvo-pastoral and environmental sectors, and by accepting trainees for work experience and/or apprenticeship programmes. Large development project/programmes (construction sites, highly labour intensive works), as well as modern private farms are settings to be promoted for the acquisition of work experience.

2

Support training facilities in developing coaching skills and with training materials.

This will enable trainees to acquire knowledge of current production techniques and to no longer be out of phase with market requirements. The Government of Niger could also introduce incentives (tax exemption, facilitate access to public sector markets) for large companies, in return for offers of work experience to trainees and sending experts to coach training sessions. In addition, when awarding public contracts to multinationals (mining and construction companies), there may be a case for requesting a consideration in the form of funding for materials at the most highly specialized training centres. This would also provide an opportunity to benefit from support and advice from these companies, so as to undertake skills training that best meets their requirements. In addition, such businesses could host trainers from TVET centres to help deliver practical specialized training for modern and innovative production techniques.

3 Set in place a system of recognition of all vocational training (TVET + apprenticeship).

This means offering each trainee the same opportunities to access the labour market. For this purpose, MEP-T, in collaboration with private, public and semi-public enterprises, as well as industry associations, would draw up standards for training programmes, pedagogical tools and recognition of skills and qualifications. In a concerted manner, a system of official recognition and equivalence for informal training received would also be set in place. In this respect, the MEP-T will need to take steps to ensure wide coverage of all categories of training facilities and frameworks, so as to be able to rapidly pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of each one. As part of the same initiative, non-compliant facilities could take advantage of support and advice in how to address the difficulties they face, and then take steps to bring themselves into line (by clustering, reducing the number of sectors, adapting supply to their environment).

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