



Belgium
partner in development

THE STATE OF GIRLS' RIGHTS IN NIGER

March 2022



GIRLS' RIGHTS AT A GLANCE¹

While Niger has an overall legislative environment promoting gender equality, girls, adolescent girls and young women in Niger **experience various forms of violence and discrimination**. Among those discriminations, early, child and forced marriage and union (CEFMU) is a top concern, perpetuated by multiple factors. Women are expected to abide by **limiting gender norms** and stereotyped roles that confine them to the domestic sphere. Women are, therefore, responsible for domestic chores and care, and are considered dependent on men and under their protection, regardless of their level of education. Girls experience a double sentence because of their gender and their age. They are raised to become wives and mothers and are therefore expected to take on household chores from an early age to be prepared for those roles.

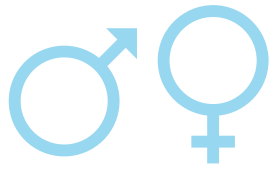
The control society has on girls and women is of various forms: **low access to resources, to healthcare**, with eight women in ten not making their own decisions on their health; and **low access to decision-making bodies** with quotas provided by the government unmet. Both a symptom and a consequence of gender discrimination, **Niger has the highest rate of CEFMU** in the world: eight girls in ten are married before the age of 18 and, consequently, four girls in ten have their first child before 18 years old. Lack of education, preservation of the honour, protection from unwanted and out of wedlock pregnancies, economic situation of parents, importance of social norms attributed to marriage, and religious misinterpretations are the main causes at stake. As an intertwined girls' rights violation, **school drop-out** is a preoccupying issue in Niger. Six girls in ten will complete their primary school, and only two of them will be enrolled in secondary level. **Poverty and limiting gender norms interact strongly and result in prioritizing boys over girls**, especially in an environment with poor quality infrastructure that do not create incentives for girls to complete secondary education.

Girls and young women are likely to **experience violence**: six in ten have experienced at least one type of violence, either emotional, physical or sexual, which is driven by structural gender inequality and unequal power relations, where men and boys are ascribed higher status to women and girls and are given the ability to control them and limit their decision-making. **Violence against women and girls is therefore often condoned**, as it is believed to be justified for men and boys to assert their dominance over women and girls. Six women in ten, including aged 15-24, find it **justified for a man to beat his wife**. Similarly, corporal punishment is widely used as part of the education both for boys and girls, with one in two caregivers thinking that physical punishment is necessary in parenting.

Young women face, as a result of gendered expectations, **lack of skills and opportunities, important barriers to their economic empowerment**. Seven women out of ten are not engaged in paid work, and almost all working women are engaged in vulnerable employment. In addition, control from their partner prevent them from accessing credit as they cannot open a bank account without their husband's permission.

The population in Niger experience **two major humanitarian crises**: the Sahel crisis at its border with Burkina Faso and Mali, and the Lake Chad crisis, at its border with Chad and Nigeria. Populations living in the affected regions experience conflicts and growing instability, significant movements of populations, both internally displaced persons and refugees from neighbouring countries. Combined with the effects of climate change on the population's survival, the humanitarian crises and their consequences are putting the efforts against poverty at risk, while already four Nigerien out of ten live below the poverty line. Girls and women are the ones suffering the most from the situation, as seven out of ten female household heads are in a situation of food insecurity, compared to three men out of ten. Highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, external shocks conduct to increase domestic burden for women, school drop-out, domestic violence and disruption of income-generating activities for girls and women.

¹ The executive summary contains references that are made available across the report



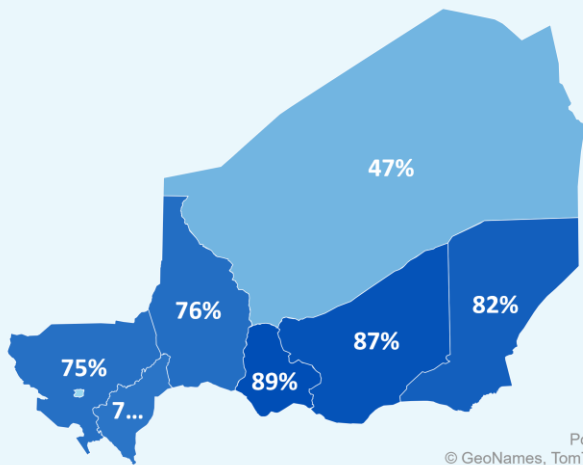
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ON THE GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX



Girls, aged 20 to 24, married before 18, by region

Series1 33% 89%



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60%

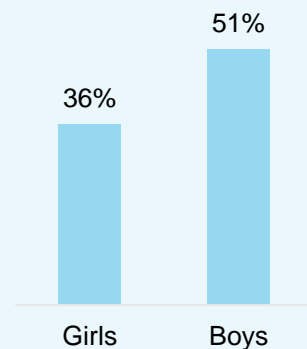
OF GIRLS AND WOMEN EXPERIENCE AT LEAST ONE TYPE OF VIOLENCE IN THEIR LIFETIME



98% OF WOMEN

ARE ENGAGED IN VULNERABLE EMPLOYMENT

Literacy rate, by gender



77%



OF GIRLS ARE NEITHER IN

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT NOR TRAINING

HOW GIRLS SHOULD BEHAVE – GENDER NORMS AT WORK IN NIGER

Girls and young women experience gender inequality daily in Niger: despite progress over the past decades, the country ranks low on the Gender Development Index on a myriad of aspects of girls' and young women's violation of rights.² Such experiences are rooted in a context of limiting norms and traditions. **Gender norms encompass precise roles and expectations assigned to men and women and to which they are expected to conform.** If not respected, they experience social sanctions – e.g., being ostracized for breaking customs, or being accused of being a disgrace to their families.

Gender norms, as **unwritten rules of behaviours**, tend to be unquestioned by community members. They find **justifications or illustrations in social conventions, culture, traditions, or religious text that tend to favour men over women, making social and gender norms particularly resistant to any change.**³

Globally, social norms around early marriage, son preference, domestic and unpaid care work, and women in the workforce and politics limit girls and young women's opportunities based on their gender.

Domestic sphere, fertility choices and agency

Gender stereotypes negatively affect the roles and values attributed to men and boys, and women and girls. From childhood, girls are **educated in order to become a “good wife” and an “ideal mother”, and embrace stereotyped roles confining them to the domestic sphere.**⁴ Women are dependent on men and expected to be under their protection, while being responsible for domestic chores, including water fetching and cooking, and taking care of children.⁵ Men are breadwinners and decision-makers.⁶

Such anchored perception of the place of women and girls in the society has **impact on all aspects of their life.** In more than three quarters of the cases, among couples, the final decision regarding major household purchases is taken by the man only.⁷ Women also experience **low access and unmet needs to healthcare**, with 79% of women not making their own health care decisions, and 17% of young women aged 20-24 reporting unmet need for family planning.⁸ The only cases in which they make decisions are when they are heads of household or when they make decisions in secret, especially regarding family planning and maternal health.⁹

Expected obedience and physical and sexual violence

Unequal gendered power relations that reinforce the **inferior status of women are at the root cause of violence against women and girls.** Expectations regarding the dominance of men and boys, and the obedience of girls and young women, result in **attitudes justifying violence against women, which in turn contributes to a high prevalence of gender-based violence.** Domestic violence against girls and women are generally unreported or under-reported, and are often considered a natural prerogative of the husband in conservative communities. Girls and young women learn to accept violence from an early age, as it is normalized by unequal gendered power relations and social

Share of adolescent girls and young women considering it is justified for a man to beat his wife for at least one reason, by age range, in Niger

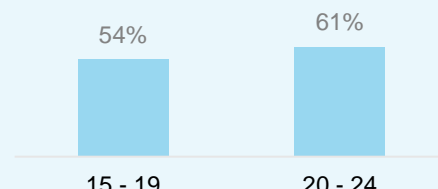


FIGURE 1: DHS, NIGER, 2012

² UNDP, *Gender Development Index*, 2020.

³ FAO, *Profil national genre des secteurs de l'agriculture et du développement rural*, Niger, 2018.

⁴ Spotlight Initiative, *Annual narrative progress report*, Niger, 2019.

⁵ LuxDev, *Fiche Pays Genre*, Niger.

⁶ FAO, *Profil national genre des secteurs de l'agriculture et du développement rural*, op. cit.

⁷ DHS, *Niger*, 2012.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ CARE, *Analyse rapide genre pour COVID19*, Sahel-Niger, 2020.

expectations. Among girls aged 15-19, 54% think that it is justified for a man to beat his wife for at least one of the reasons listed – burning the food, arguing with him, neglecting children, refusing to have sex, and 61% of young women aged 20-24 agree with the statement.¹⁰

Corporal punishment is also widely used, both on boys and girls, by teachers, parents, “*marabouts*”, caregivers and other household members as a form of discipline for children. 82% of children aged 2 to 14 experienced “violent discipline” (physical punishment and/or psychological aggression, such as being shouted at, yelled at, screamed at or insulted) in the home. The practice is consequently considered justified as 45% of mothers and caregivers thought that physical punishment was necessary in childbearing.¹¹ One of Plan International’ staff confirms the justifications of domestic violence: “*Daughters are more often hit by their mothers and sons by fathers. If the mother starts hitting the father’s pampered son, then she too will be beaten. The father will ask why the son was hit, but finds it normal to ‘correct’ the daughter.*”

In the regions affected by the humanitarian crises, especially in Tillabéri and Diffa regions, women and girls are **even more likely to experience physical or sexual violence, whether they are perpetrated by non-state armed groups or community members.**¹² In addition to exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and increasing the risk of violence, women and girls affected by the crisis are also **less likely to access basic services, including protection services, and data remains scarce in the reporting of gender-based violence.**

The social value of marriage and the impacts of early pregnancies

Niger has the highest **child marriage rate in the world, with 76% of women, aged 20 to 24, married before 18 years old, and almost half of them having their first child by that age.**¹³ It is a violation of their human rights, as child, early and forced marriages and unions (CEFMU) keeps women and girls in relationships that deny them their basic rights.

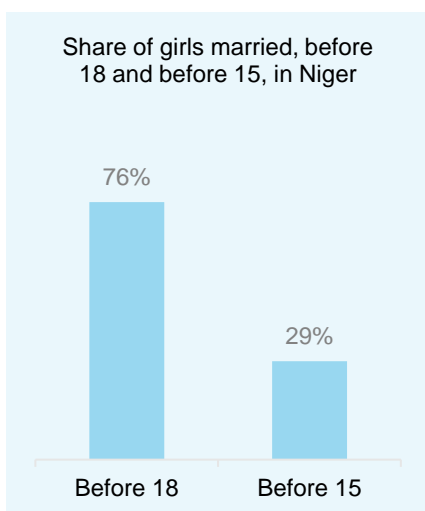


FIGURE 2: DHS, NIGER, 2012

While **poverty acts as a significant driver of CEFMU**, with parents marrying their daughters to alleviate the financial burden of the household, **CEFMU is grounded in the belief that marriage is the best outcome for girls, who are expected to take on their traditional role of housewives and start in wedlock childbearing at an early age.** This is corroborated by the fact that good relationships between families and the preservation of girls’ honour are perceived as more important than the receipt of a dowry. Family members usually set an “**ideal age to get married**” for girls – **once she has reached puberty and started menstruate – and choose the husband.** It is only if, thereafter, she is widowed or divorced, that she will be involved in the decision of a new husband and will have a say. This is determined by the wish to preserve family’s honour by preventing a girl’s virginity loss or pregnancy outside of marriage, including due to sexual aggressions.¹⁴

Qualitative insights on the value of marriage point out that **community members would pay respect to a married woman because “marriage increases a woman’s value”**¹⁵. Child brides are judged

¹⁰ DHS, Niger, op. cit.

¹¹ UNICEF, *Hidden in plain sight: a statistical analysis of violence against children*, New York, 2014.

¹² Plan International, *Rapport de l’évaluation conjointe des besoins en protection et la prise en charge des VSBG dans la région de Tillabéri au Niger*, 2020.

¹³ DHS, Niger, op. cit.

¹⁴ Ministère de la protection de la femme et de la protection de l’enfant, *Plan stratégique national pour mettre fin au mariage des enfants*, Niger, 2019-2021.

¹⁵ Save the Children, *Gender Norms, Child Marriage and Girls’ Education in West and Central Africa*, 2020.

on how respectful and obedient they are, how well they care for their mother-in-law, and how they treat their husband.¹⁶

Early pregnancies often come along with CEFMU. Once married, girls are pressured to become pregnant, even though their bodies are not ready to give birth. This puts the life of both the adolescent mother and the child at risk. **One of the leading causes of death among adolescent girls in Niger is complications from early pregnancy and childbirth.** The adolescent girl's development is also affected as early pregnancy may stop her from growing and negatively affect her nutritional status. Children are also more likely to have low birth weight, having an impact on their health and development. Psychologically, adolescent mothers are rarely ready to educate a child and lack the skills and maturity they need to become good mothers.¹⁷

As such, CEFMU is both a symptom and a consequence of gender discrimination fostered by patriarchy and inadequate access to quality services.¹⁸

The value of girls' education and school dropout

Child marriage is also **deeply intertwined with school drop-out, as once out of school, there are even more reasons for a girl to be married.**¹⁹ The median age at first union for women is 21 for girls who completed secondary school, compared to 16 years old for those with no education.²⁰ School drop-out is a major challenge as only 57% of girls have completed primary school, and only 17% are enrolled in secondary school.²¹

While **poverty is a key driver of school dropout – with 93% of poorest girls with no education, compared to 50% for the wealthiest**²² - boys tend to be prioritized when it comes to education, especially when the socio-economic situation of the family is difficult.

The Gender Parity Index for literacy rate among youth (15 to 24 years old) is only 0.7 - meaning that **for 100 boys who can read and write, only 70 girls do.**²³ Given the traditional gender roles assigned to them, girls are expected to grow to become housewives and mothers, while boys are expected to become breadwinners and decision-makers. The perceived returns to education are therefore higher for boys, which lead parents to invest more in boys' schooling than girls'.

Furthermore, most parents find it dangerous for girls to go to school and prefer having them safely at home.²⁴ **Schools are often far from villages.** Thus, girls have to travel long distance, sometimes alone, exposing them to all sorts of violence on their way. Inadequate learning environment is also an obstacle to girls' education.

Basic on-site facilities, such as access to potable water (12% in rural areas), electricity (5% overall, 3% in rural areas), latrines, school canteens, or adequate playgrounds, **are missing in most schools**, which fails to provide an inclusive and protective

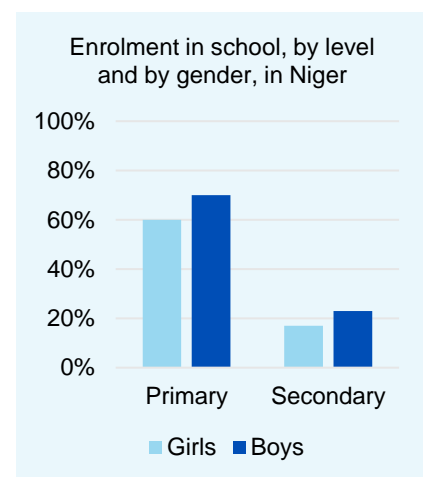


FIGURE 3: WORLD BANK, NIGER, 2017-2018

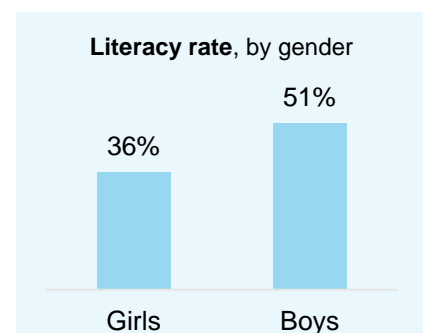


FIGURE 4: WORLD BANK, NIGER, 2017-2018

¹⁶ Girls Not Brides, *Atlas*, Niger, 2020.

¹⁷ UNICEF, *Covid-19: A threat to progress against child marriage in Niger*, [COVID-19: a threat to progress against child marriage in Niger | UNICEF Niger](#), 2021, accessed on 13/01/2022.

¹⁸ Ministère de la protection de la femme et de la protection de l'enfant, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ World Bank, *Niger*, 2019.

²² DHS, *Niger*, *op. cit.*

²³ World Bank, *Niger*, 2018.

²⁴ Girls Not Brides, *Atlas*, Niger, 2021.

environment, especially for girls, who are forced to go back to their home or to miss school during their period.²⁵

Gender stereotypes and structural barriers, including systemic gender inequality that limits girls' access to quality education and high-status career opportunities, prevent women from accessing

Economic empowerment and limiting gender norms are strongly intertwined. Literature reviews regarding women's agency and empowerment highlight that gender norms surrounding women's agency moderate the impacts of many interventions that aim at alleviating material constraints. Access to financial resources alone, without addressing gender-specific constraints, is not a mechanism that consistently improves young women's agency. However, giving young women more direct control over resources, often by employing design or program features such as privacy or digital payment systems, appears to be a mechanism that consistently leads to improvements in women's agency.

Yet, working with girls and young women as early as possible is a unique opportunity to strengthen their agency

Based on the literature review, programs show a greater impact when aiming to support young women in delaying marriage and childbearing, compared to programs that aimed to change household decision-making dynamics within a marriage, perhaps because women did not have good outside options.

Adolescence is a crucial time in the transition from childhood to adulthood, a time at which the expectations, opportunities, risks and needs for girls and boys diverge considerably.

leadership position²⁶. **At national level, women are under-represented in decision-making bodies, with 14% women in the parliament and 19% in the government, leaving the conservative quotas of 25% and 30% unmet.**²⁷

POVERTY TRAP, SHOCKS AND RESILIENCE: HOW POVERTY ACTS AS A BARRIER TO EMPOWERMENT IN NIGER

Poverty trap and limited economic empowerment

Girls in Niger experience various forms of violence, denial of their rights and discrimination in accessing basic services and educational opportunities. **This prevents girls from gaining knowledge and skills needed to access decent and sustainable employment or entrepreneurship opportunities.**²⁸ Additionally, as they grow, young women continue to deal with various forms of discrimination that hamper their economic empowerment and gender stereotypes that restrict their career choices. This prevents them from **breaking out of the gendered poverty trap**²⁹. 71% of women, aged 15 to 49, are not engaged in paid work – and this is particularly the case

Women in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) on average report less freedom of choice, control over one's life and life satisfaction compared to men in the same countries and women in wealthier countries. Globally, the average rate of respondents agreeing that wife beating is acceptable, that women have no say in decisions on large household purchases, or that agree that men make better business executives than women do, is strongly correlated with wealth of the country – the lower the GDP per capita, the more likely respondents will report negative attitudes towards gender equality and women and girls' empowerment.

²⁵ Plan International Niger, *Country Strategy FY16-20 (Revised), extended to FY21-22*, 2020.

²⁶ Wei Chang, Eleonora Guarnieri, Seema Jayachandran, Lucia Diaz-Martin, Akshara Gopalan, Claire Walsh. *Enhancing Women's Agency: Cross-Cutting Lessons From Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Studies in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, July 2020. J-Pal Working Paper

²⁷ DHS, *Niger, op. cit.*

²⁸ CARE, *Analyse rapide genre pour COVID19, Sahel-Niger*, 2020.

²⁹ Wei Chang et al., *op. cit.*

for women in the poorest households (79%, compared to 50% for the richest households) and in rural areas (73%, compared to 59% in Niamey).³⁰

The recognition of the value of the work done by young women remains low, with 8% of them still not paid for their work. Disparities exist between sectors: 37% of women employed in agriculture are not remunerated, compared to 4% of those who worked in other fields.³¹ Even when they are engaged in paid employment, women are **more likely to have precarious contracts, lower wages, and no social protection, as 98% of them are engaged in vulnerable employment.**³²

Productive assets and resources are controlled mainly by men: only 14% of women own a house alone, compared to 49% of men³³; socially, women are not allowed to open a bank account without their husband's permission. Consequently, women have difficulty accessing loans due to a lack of collateral. This pushes some women to organise in savings and loan groups, where they borrow small amounts of money from their peers.

Two major humanitarian crises affecting Niger

The population in Niger experience **two major humanitarian crises: the Sahel crisis at its border with Burkina Faso and Mali, and the Lake Chad crisis, at its border with Chad and Nigeria.** Crises trigger important movements of populations, both internally displaced persons and refugees from neighbouring countries. Populations in those regions experience recurrent conflicts and growing instability, with military and civilian coups interrupting democratic processes.³⁴

Around the Lake Chad Basin, the jihadist group Boko Haram has posed security, humanitarian and governance challenge since 2013, mainly in the South East region. The population of the Diffa region suffers from both the frequent attacks of Boko Haram and the counter-insurgency measures taken by the government. This leads to a number of **human rights violations for girls and women**, including the recruitment of children by armed groups, the interruption of humanitarian aid or exactions by armed groups, and reprisals both by the army and non-state armed groups.³⁵ At the border with Mali, the inhabitants of Tillabéri also experience a deterioration of the Sahel humanitarian crisis, due to terrorist attacks and violence committed by non-state armed groups.³⁶

These crises are affecting girls in a specific way. It increases the feeling of insecurity in their communities, especially at night, as they fear of being harassed, due to the presence of armed groups. They are also particularly vulnerable to violence, inside and outside of their home. While sexual harassment and sexual violence are common, girls, in addition, have to face kidnapping and forced marriage perpetrated by armed groups. Girls working as domestic servants are also at risk of sexual assault. Many girls' survivors reported being stigmatised for their aggression and being forced to marry their attacker. Because of the very difficult economic conditions, **CEFMU and early pregnancies are drastically increasing and sexual exploitation cases are reported.** Girls' access to education is even more limited because of poverty, insecurity and displacement. Finally, their rights to food and health are constrained, with 62% of girls reporting going to bed hungry at some point over the last month and 53% stating they have experienced a major injury or disease in the last year, most typically malaria.³⁷

Limited resilience to threats and shocks

With 79% of the population living in rural areas – and with 94% of the poor living in rural areas³⁸ -, **recurring climate and environmental disasters, particularly floods and droughts, are a major threat to livelihood.** The impact of extreme climatic episodes on agriculture, exacerbated by conflicts

³⁰ DHS, *Niger, op. cit.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² World Bank, *Niger, 2019.*

³³ DHS, *Niger, op. cit.*

³⁴ FAO, *Profil national genre des secteurs de l'agriculture et du développement rural, op. cit.*

³⁵ International Crisis Group, *Niger and Boko Haram: Beyond Counter-Insurgency, 2017.*

³⁶ Plan International Niger, *Country Strategy FY16-20 (Revised), extended to FY21-22, op. cit.*

³⁷ Plan International, *Adolescent girls in crisis: Voices from the Lake Chad Basin, 2018.*

³⁸ FAO, *Profil national genre des secteurs de l'agriculture et du développement rural, op. cit.*

and fluctuations in food prices, leads to an increase in malnutrition prevalence, especially for children under five and for populations living in rural areas.³⁹ According to OCHA, Tillabéri (85%), Maradi (79%) and Diffa (79%) are the regions with a high potential of children under 18 at risk of malnutrition.

Climate and environmental disasters and conflicts prevent communities from lifting themselves out of poverty, with 41% of the population in a situation of extreme poverty⁴⁰ and 48% of children living below the poverty line. **75% of all Nigerien children under the age of 5 do not have access to basic social services, and more than 2.1 million children will need humanitarian assistance in 2022** according to the Humanitarian Needs Overview.

Displaced and refugee population increase the pressure over already scarce resources and basic services. This involves the depletion of water tables, the reduction of cultivable areas due to the establishment of new refugee camps or IDP sites, and the overexploitation of agricultural land. Vulnerable households affected by climate and environmental disasters are more likely to adopt negative coping mechanisms that affect girls' rights.

Gender and poverty intersect, with women representing 7 in 10 people in a situation of poverty and 69% of female-headed households experiencing food insecurity compared to 31% of male-headed households.⁴¹ Poverty reinforces women's vulnerability and affects their well-being and their ability to run businesses or any other activity properly. This is exacerbated with the failure of social services and humanitarian assistance to reach the populations who are most left behind, i.e., women and children, especially girls.⁴² In humanitarian contexts, women and girls report they lack access to safe spaces, and report a more restricted access to humanitarian assistance compared to men.⁴³

How COVID-19 can be a setback for girls' right

COVID-19 and related restriction measures exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities. **It is estimated that 1.2 million children and young people - 1 in 6 young people - have stopped studying since the start of the pandemic, and many of them may never go back to school.**⁴⁴ Before the crisis, young people aged 15 to 24 were already two to three times more likely than adults to be unemployed or underemployed. The long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to confirm such trends.

The COVID-19 crisis had a particularly significant impact on girls' rights. School closures, social distancing and confinement strategies, loss of income, meant that girls had more domestic burdens as they were forced to help their mother with household chores, or they were married, and their access to learning programs became even more limited.⁴⁵

A young girl living in rural area of South West Niger told: "*When the schools were closed, we did not have the opportunity to study by telephone, television or radio*".⁴⁶ In terms of health, girls and women were more exposed to the virus as health care workers, social workers, and especially as caregivers. Domestic and sexual violence against women and girls also increased during lockdowns.

Finally, on the economic side, many girls and women depend on the often-unstable income of their spouse. Curfews and lockdowns in Niamey and other urban regions, markets and border closures have disrupted income-generating activities, resulting in dramatic economic vulnerability for girls and women. The pandemic has depleted household savings.⁴⁷

³⁹ Plan International Niger, *Country Strategy FY16-20 (Revised), extended to FY21-22*, op. cit.

⁴⁰ World Bank, *Niger*, 2020.

⁴¹ FAO, *Profil national genre des secteurs de l'agriculture et du développement rural*, op. cit.

⁴² UNICEF, *Niger issue brief*, 2018.

⁴³ Plan International, 2020, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Save the Children, *Niger – 1.2 million children and young people were out of school because of COVID-19*, Niger, 2020.

⁴⁵ CARE, *Analyse rapide genre pour COVID19*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Save the Children, op. cit.

⁴⁷ WHO, 2020.

PROTECTING GIRLS' RIGHTS WITH STRONG LEGAL FRAMEWORKS: OPPORTUNITIES AND GAPS IN NIGER

Niger has an **overall legislative environment in favour of gender equality**. The country has ratified, amongst others, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ILO Conventions on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (ratified in 2000), and the African Youth Charter (ratified in 2008). The Government has also adopted national laws in order to contextualize international legal instruments (i.e. the law against female genital mutilation adopted in 2003). **In addition, a policy on the part of the government in favour of gender equality led to the adoption of several policies and strategies**, including National Policy on Gender 2009-2018, the Gender and Islam Strategy, the Husband's School Strategy, the Niger Adolescent Girls Initiative and the National Strategy on the Protection of Children.

However, **girls still face barriers to enjoy their rights and live free from violence and discrimination**. First, despite having ratified the CEDAW and the CRC, Niger has done so with some reservations regarding women and girls' status, meaning that the Government is not bound by the full range of obligations under the Convention. For instance, the Civil Code puts the minimum age for marriage at 15,5 years old for girls and 18 years old for boys. Similarly, the Government has signed but not yet ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, which also results in less protection for Nigerien girls and women.⁴⁸ The Family Code has never been able to be implemented because of socio-cultural and religious reasons.⁴⁹ Working groups, consultation frameworks, consortia and platforms are active for the promotion of gender equality, but at the legislative level, no law clearly expresses gender equality so far.

Niger adopts a **pluralistic legal system, characterized by customary law, Islamic law and secular national law**. Such pluralism often leads to competing interpretation of rights, including girls' rights, and the hierarchy between law and norms is not established.⁵⁰

Finally, in order to clearly advance in the promotion of girls' rights through the effective implementation of the National Policy on Gender, gaps are still identified by key stakeholders in the implementation of a protective legal framework, and increased knowledge of women and girls about their rights and how to claim them.⁵¹

YET, THERE IS HOPE.

Across Plan's areas of intervention, **girls challenge restrictive gender norms and promote gender equality, empowerment, protective environment**. They lead change to ensure that girls from their communities access inclusive quality education, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, and that they live free from violence in their communities. With a strong attention to inclusion, gender-transformative and human-rights based approaches, programmes and influencing work focusing on education, agency, youth economic empowerment, protection from GBV, access to services, have the potential to equip girls with the relevant tools to challenge norms, claim their rights, thrive, empower themselves to be active drivers of change and lift themselves out of poverty.

⁴⁸ CARE, *Analyse rapide genre pour COVID-19, op. cit.*

⁴⁹ LuxDev, *Fiche pays genre, Niger.*

⁵⁰ Plan International Niger, *Country Strategic Plan, 2016-2020.*

⁵¹ FAO, *Profil national genre des secteurs de l'agriculture et du développement rural, op. cit.*

Methodological note

Most of the statistical data is taken from [the Demographic and Health Surveys](#), [the World Bank Open Data](#), [Girls Not Brides Atlas](#), [UNICEF data](#), [International Labour Organization data](#), [the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys](#). This report was written on the basis of a literature review conducted by Plan International Belgium in 2021, including internal reports and documentation from Plan International's projects and programmes, as well as guidelines from peer organisations, institutions, UN Agencies and global legal frameworks.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the DGD. All remaining errors and opinions expressed in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Cover Photo: girls in Niger, 2021

Credits: Plan International



Girl in Dosso, 2019. Credits: Plan International

Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected. As an independent development and humanitarian organisation, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL BELGIUM

Plan Belgium has been committed since 1983 to a fairer and more secure world for all children and young people, by addressing the root causes of challenges and obstacles encountered by girls and vulnerable children. All our projects seek to promote **gender equality, by analysing the root causes of unequal access to opportunities for girls and boys and of gender-based violence.** We are working alongside children, youth, our advocates and partners to address the root causes of the barriers that vulnerable girls and children face. Our programs contribute to Plan's overall ambition, that is by 2025, **100 million girls can learn, lead, decide and thrive.** Currently, Plan Belgium is working in Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Malawi, Bolivia, Ecuador, Vietnam. Plan Belgium implements programs and projects in the impact areas of: i) protection against abuse and violence; ii) youth participation and leadership; iii) inclusive and quality safe education, both formal and non-formal; iv) economic strengthening of young people through employment and entrepreneurship.

In Belgium, Plan is particularly involved in the fight against gender-based violence, in the School of Children's Rights, in order to help teachers and students to be aware of their rights and those of their peers in Belgium and around the world. Finally, Plan as a civil society organization carries the voice of girls in civic and political mobilizations, including within development cooperation.

ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL NIGER





Plan International has been working in **Niger since 1998** to promote children's rights and gender equality. In Niger, access to social services such as schools and health centres is very low. The country also has the highest rate of child marriage in the world – 76% of girls are married under the age of 18. In addition, crises in neighbouring Mali and Nigeria have led to a displacement and humanitarian crisis in Niger. Plan International Niger is a leading organisation on eradicating child marriage and promoting gender equality in the country. Our goal is to support **3 million Nigerien girls and young women to become the leaders of social and economic change.** Our work focuses on the issues affecting the most vulnerable, particularly girls and children with disabilities. The key areas of our work include protecting girls and young women from all forms of violence and harmful practices, providing access to quality health services, supporting children to go school and gain key skills to succeed in life.

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