

# Niger

## Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government of Niger has been a member of ILO-IPEC since 2000.<sup>2617</sup> Since that time, ILO-IPEC has launched two projects aimed at ending child labor on grain farms and at the Niamey slaughterhouse, and reintegrating child workers into schools. Two additional ILO-IPEC programs are being planned in Niger that will target street children and children working in gold mines.<sup>2618</sup> In January 2002, Government of Niger officials attended a seminar with officials from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Mali, Togo, Senegal, and several UN agencies and NGOs to discuss child trafficking and exploitation in West and Central Africa.<sup>2619</sup> In the resulting declaration, the Yamoussoukro Declaration, the conference participants pledged to conduct coordinated information campaigns on child trafficking.

In order to lay the foundation for the formulation of child labor laws and regulation, the Ministry of Labor of Niger, in conjunction with UNICEF and ILO-IPEC, organized a national workshop in 2001.<sup>2620</sup> In 2000, the Minister of Justice formed a commission to investigate the problem of child brides,<sup>2621</sup> the Association of Traditional Chiefs signed an agreement with UNICEF to support programs against early marriages and forced child labor,<sup>2622</sup> and the Ministry of National Education dedicated an office to promoting girls' education.<sup>2623</sup>

In 1998, ILO-IPEC carried out a survey on working children to provide the basis for action programs against child labor.<sup>2624</sup> In 2000, the Justice Minister announced the government's intent

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<sup>2617</sup> ILO-IPEC, *All About IPEC: Programme Countries*, [online] August 13, 2001 [cited December 4, 2001]; available from [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/about/countries/t\\_country.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/about/countries/t_country.htm).

<sup>2618</sup> Five hundred underage workers, half of them girls, are targeted in the grain farm project, and about 350 working minors will be beneficiaries through the slaughterhouse project. See Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Niger: Child Labour Project Launched", IRINnews.org, [online], September 13, [cited November 29, 2001]; available from [http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=11374&SelectRegion=West\\_Africa&SelectCountry=NIGER](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=11374&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=NIGER).

<sup>2619</sup> Integrated Regional Information Networks, "West and Central Africa: IRIN Focus on Regional Efforts Against Child Trafficking", IRINnews.org, [online], January 21, 2002 [cited December 16, 2002]; available from [http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=19693&SelectRegion=West\\_Africa&SelectCountry=CENTRAL\\_AFRICA-WEST\\_AFRICA](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=19693&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=CENTRAL_AFRICA-WEST_AFRICA).

<sup>2620</sup> U.S. Embassy- Niamey, *unclassified telegram no. 1645*, October 2001.

<sup>2621</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Niger*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, 503-05, Section 5 [cited December 16, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8396.htm>.

<sup>2622</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Examen des Rapports des États Parties, Rapport initial du Niger*, CRC/C/SR.784, Geneva, July 2002, para. 37.

<sup>2623</sup> Ministry of Social Development of the Population, the Promotion of Women, and Protection of the Child, *Rapport National sur le Suivi du Sommet Mondial pour les Enfants*, Republic of Niger, December 2000, 16.

<sup>2624</sup> ILO-IPEC, *Francophone Africa: New IPEC Initiatives Make Significant Inroads*, [online] [cited November 29, 2001]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/public/English/standards/ipec/about/factsheet/facts14.htm>.

to conduct a study on trafficking as part of a legal modernization effort,<sup>2625</sup> and UNICEF is implementing a social policy program that supports government efforts against the worst forms of child labor.<sup>2626</sup>

The Government of Niger is also working with various agencies and NGOs to improve its primary education sector. Education is expected to be a cornerstone of the country's poverty reduction initiative under the IMF's program for Highly Indebted Poor Countries.<sup>2627</sup> In late 2001, the government set aside USD 4.2 million for the purchase of school supplies to promote schooling.<sup>2628</sup> UNICEF is also supporting government education efforts through its Basic Education and African Girls' Education Initiative programs, which aim to improve school enrollment rates, promote literacy and improve the quality of primary education, particularly among girls.<sup>2629</sup> The World Food Program is also active in Niger implementing activities to increase enrollment and attendance in primary schools, particularly among girls, through a school canteen program.<sup>2630</sup>

## **Incidence and Nature of Child Labor**

In 2000, UNICEF estimated that 70.1 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years in Niger were working.<sup>2631</sup> Children mainly work on family farms in remote villages gathering water or firewood, pounding grain, tending animals, or working in the fields.<sup>2632</sup> Children as young as 6 years old are reported to work on grain farms in the southwest.<sup>2633</sup> Children also shine shoes, watch cars, work as apprentices for artisans, tailors and mechanics, perform domestic work, and

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<sup>2625</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Niger*, 505-07, Section 6f.

<sup>2626</sup> UNICEF, *UNICEF Programmes in Niger*, [online] [cited November 29, 2001]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/programme/countryprog/wacro/niger/support.htm>.

<sup>2627</sup> U.S. Embassy- Niamey, *unclassified telegram no. 1645*.

<sup>2628</sup> Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Niger: Over USD 4.2 Million for School Supplies", IRINnews.org, [online], October 3, 2001 [cited November 29, 2001]; available from [http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=11954&SelectRegion=West\\_Africa&SelectCountry=NIGER](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=11954&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=NIGER).

<sup>2629</sup> UNICEF, *UNICEF, Programmes in Niger*.

<sup>2630</sup> World Food Programme, *World Hunger - Niger*, World Food Programme, [online] [cited September 5, 2002]; available from [http://www.wfp.org/country\\_brief/indexcountry.asp?country=562](http://www.wfp.org/country_brief/indexcountry.asp?country=562).

<sup>2631</sup> According to the UNICEF survey, 60.9 percent of children ages 5 to 9, and 82.6 percent of children between ages 10 to 14 work. The statistics includes children working only, children working and studying, and children that carry out household chores for more than 4 hours per day. Republic of Niger, *Enquête a indicateurs multiples de la fin de la décennie (draft) (MICS2)*, UNICEF, November 2000, [cited November 29, 2001]; available from <http://www.ucw-project.org/resources/index.html>. In 2000, the ILO estimated that 43.6 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years were working. (This estimate is based on the definition of the economically active population.) See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2002.

<sup>2632</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Niger*, 505-07, Section 6d.

<sup>2633</sup> Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Niger: Child Labour Project Launched".

work as luggage porters and street beggars.<sup>2634</sup> Gold mines in Tillaberi and the main slaughterhouse in Niamey also employ children.<sup>2635</sup>

Niger serves as a transit and destination country for a small number of trafficking victims primarily from Benin, Togo, Nigeria and Ghana.<sup>2636</sup> Most of these victims end up either in domestic work or prostitution.<sup>2637</sup> In some ethnic groups, young boys are sent to study the Koran where, in return for their education, they beg in the streets for their teachers.<sup>2638</sup> Child prostitution is a present and growing problem in Niger, and it sometimes occurs with the permission of family members.<sup>2639</sup>

Primary education is compulsory for six years.<sup>2640</sup> In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 30.9 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 26.1 percent.<sup>2641</sup> Primary school attendance rates are also low, particularly for girls.<sup>2642</sup> In 1998, the gross primary attendance rate was 33.1 percent, and the net primary attendance rate was 26.2 percent.<sup>2643</sup> About 60 percent of children who finish primary schools are boys, as the majority of girls rarely attend school for more than a few years.<sup>2644</sup> Girls' limited access to education can be attributed, in part, to traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, religious beliefs and extreme poverty.<sup>2645</sup> Children are often forced to work rather than attend school, particularly during planting or harvest periods. In

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<sup>2634</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Examen des Rapports Présentés par les États Parties en Application de l'Article 44 de la Convention, Rapports initiaux devant être soumis en 1992, Niger*, CRC/C/3/Add.29/Rev. 1, Geneva, October 2001, para. 381.

<sup>2635</sup> Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Niger: Child Labour Project Launched".

<sup>2636</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Niger*, 505-07, Section 6f. See also Dr. Rima Salah, "Child Trafficking in West and Central Africa: An Overview" (paper presented at the First Pan African Conference on Human Trafficking, Abuja, February 19-23, 2001), [cited November 29, 2001]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/media/newsnotes/africhildtraffick.pdf>.

<sup>2637</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Niger*, 505-07, Section 6f.

<sup>2638</sup> *Ibid.*, 503-07, Sections 5 and 6f.

<sup>2639</sup> ECPAT International, *Niger*, in ECPAT International, [database online] [cited September 6, 2002], "CSEC Overview"; available from [http://www.ecpat.net/eng/Ecpat\\_inter/projects/monitoring/online\\_database/countries.asp?arrCountryID=125&CountryProfile=&CSEC=Overview&Implement=&Nationalplans=&orgWorkCSEC=&DisplayBy=optDisplayCountry](http://www.ecpat.net/eng/Ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/online_database/countries.asp?arrCountryID=125&CountryProfile=&CSEC=Overview&Implement=&Nationalplans=&orgWorkCSEC=&DisplayBy=optDisplayCountry). See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Niger*, 503-05, Section 5.

<sup>2640</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Niger*, 503-05, Section 5.

<sup>2641</sup> There is significant gender disparity in gross primary enrollment rates between boys (37.7 percent) and girls (24.2 percent). See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

<sup>2642</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Niger*, 503-05, Section 5.

<sup>2643</sup> In 1998, the gross primary attendance rate was 26.8 percent for girls and 39.2 percent for boys, while the net primary attendance rate was 21.1 percent for girls and 31.1 percent for boys. USAID, *Global Education Database 2000* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2000.

<sup>2644</sup> The female literacy rate is 8 percent, compared with a rate of 23 percent for men. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Niger*, 503-05, Section 5.

<sup>2645</sup> Protection Project, "Niger," in *Human Rights Report on Trafficking of Persons, Especially Women and Children* Washington, D.C., March 2002, [cited September 5, 2002]; available from <http://www.protectionproject.org>.

addition, nomadic children in northern parts of the country often do not have the opportunity to attend school.<sup>2646</sup>

Among the challenges faced by the Nigerien education system are primary teaching methodologies that date back to pre-independence times, pre-school education that is restricted primarily to urban areas, a reticence by parents to send their children to school due to inefficiencies in the educational system and mediocre results among students, inadequate infrastructure, lack of motivated teachers due to delayed disbursement of salaries, lack of supplies, and an economic crisis that makes it difficult for parents to cover the costs of schooling.<sup>2647</sup>

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years, although children under 14 may work with special authorization. Children between the ages of 14 and 18 years may not work for more than four and one half hours per day or in industrial jobs.<sup>2648</sup> The Labor Code prohibits forced and compulsory labor, except for work by convicted prisoners.<sup>2649</sup> Nigerien law does not specifically prohibit child prostitution or trafficking, although the Penal Code criminalizes the procurement of a minor for the purpose of prostitution.<sup>2650</sup>

The Government of Niger ratified ILO Convention 138 on December 4, 1978 and ILO Convention 182 on October 23, 2000.<sup>2651</sup>

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<sup>2646</sup> U.S. Embassy- Niamey, *unclassified telegram no. 2219*, July 2000.

<sup>2647</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Rapports initiaux*, para. 302, 03, 05, 06.

<sup>2648</sup> U.S. Embassy- Niamey, *unclassified telegram no. 0822*, February 1998.

<sup>2649</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Niger*, 505-07, Section 6c.

<sup>2650</sup> The penalty for procuring a minor is 2 to 5 years imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 to 5,000,000 francs (USD 76 to 7,559). See Government of Niger, *Criminal Code*, Article 292 [cited September 5, 2002]; available from <http://www.protectionproject.org>. For currency conversion, see FX Converter, [online] [cited September 6, 2002]; available from <http://www.carosta.de/frames/convert.htm>.

<sup>2651</sup> ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited November 29, 2001]; available from <http://iloex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm>.