ACET African Center for Economic Transformation

Youth Employment and Skills (YES) Multi-Country Study

STRENGTHENING EDUCATION AND LEARNING SYSTEMS TO DELIVER A 4IR-READY WORKFORCE

NIGER

COUNTRY REPORT

The African Center for Economic Transformation (ACET) is a pan-African economic policy institute supporting Africa's long-term growth through transformation. We produce research, offer policy advice, and convene key stakeholders so that African countries are better positioned for smart, inclusive, and sustainable development. Based in Accra, Ghana, we have worked in nearly two dozen African countries since our founding in 2008.

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ACRONYMS

41R Fourth Industrial Revolution

ANPE National Agency for Employment Promotion

EDSN Niger Demographic and Health Survey

ICT Information and Communications Technology

INS National Institute of Statistics

NEET Not in Education, Employment or Training

ONEF National Observatory for Employment and Vocational Training

TVET Technical and Vocational Education and Training

YES Youth, Employment, and Skills

Executive Summary

Niger is a vast, landlocked West African country that is over two-thirds desert or semi-desert. Its total population was 23.2 million in 2019, of which 49.9 percent were men and 50.1 percent women. The population growth rate of 3.9 percent is one of the highest in the sub-region, with 51.9 percent less than 15 years of age and 66 percent aged under 25 (INS, 2019).

Economic growth increased from 5 percent in 2012 to 11.8 percent in 2016 with an average rate of 6.7 percent, which is close to the 7 percent level deemed necessary for significant economic expansion and poverty reduction. However, traditional agriculture and livestock rearing represent 75 percent of employment.

The general structure of the educational system is six years for primary, four years for lower secondary and three years for upper secondary. Higher education lasts two to eight years. Pre-school education was introduced in 1977 but is very poorly developed and mainly confined to urban centers. Secondary education comprises general, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and normal education. The first cycle of secondary (four years) leads to the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) while the second cycle (three years) leads to the baccalaureate certificate. The TVET stream leads to the Brevet d'études professionnelles (vocational training certificate), followed by the Baccalauréat de technicien et professionnel. Since 2017, the number of TVET schools has been rising, with pass rates also improving.

The state is the main provider of employment but its absorption capacity is limited. With one-third of the population aged between 15 and 35, Niger's youth face many difficulties in accessing the job market and run into the common obstacle of "no work experience, no job." The informal sector plays an important role in the national economy, providing employment for over 80 percent of the workforce, although often precarious and with low remuneration. About 75 percent of GDP comes from the informal sector (INS, 2013) in an economy essentially agro-sylvo-pastoral with archaic and inefficient production techniques and technologies.

To foster sustainable socio-economic growth and development, Niger continues trying to improve its educational and training systems to produce a workforce capable of high performance in the changing world of work. There have been areas of notable progress: an increasing number of women in the workforce, rising educational attainment of employees, some integration of technology in the education system, and a satisfactory level of learning in formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET). However, several factors have constrained the rate and extent of progress: rising enrollment and decreasing school budgets, lack of qualification of some teachers/trainers, insufficient teaching hours, insufficient quantity and quality of teaching materials, and overloaded and obsolete curricula. Greater emphasis is being put on improving the accessibility, quality and relevance of secondary and technical education to improve education and training outcomes in line with the changing nature of work and the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

The main obstacles to the emergence of a private sector capable of absorbing a young workforce are financial, infrastructural and regulatory in nature. Apart from the technical aspects, there are some unexpected constraints, notably the lack of managerial skills such as leadership, problem solving and communication. These deficiencies are being taken into account in the policies and strategies to make curricula more responsive to the demands of the job market.

This study makes the following main recommendations to improve the accessibility, quality and relevance of secondary and technical education to deliver a 4IR-ready workforce in Niger.

- Dispense with outdated working and learning materials.
- Enhance and revitalize the link between the curriculum and the workplace.
- Implement a deliberate gender equity policy to increase the number of female educators in STEM and TVET.
- Set up training programs in line with updated curricula and syllabuses.
- Improve the quality of the transition between the different training cycles.
- Build the capacity of the trainer of trainers and roll out effective local supervision.
- Provide teaching and learning materials and popularize the use of digital tools in course
- design.
- Facilitate the job market integration of young people through skills training and apprenticeships.
- Seek synergies with development programs that boost employment.
- Mobilize and manage resources for the creation of youth employment.
- Develop youth entrepreneurship.
- Strengthen national job market information systems to contribute to the formulation of employment creation policies and programs.
- Increase subsidies and improve access to bank loans to facilitate business start-ups.
- Improve the political and legal framework.

Part 1. Study overview

1.1. Background to the study

This study is part of a six-country project on Youth, Employment, and Skills (YES) and the changing nature of work. The project examines education and training systems and their ability to adjust to meet evolving labor demand in light of rapidly evolving digital technologies and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The six countries are Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Niger, Rwanda, and Uganda.

The project evaluates the policies, regulations and institutional arrangements aimed at boosting educational outcomes and employment opportunities, especially job creation using innovative education and training initiatives. With appropriate education and training, Niger's youth could be a major development asset if there is an appropriate policy framework that harmonizes the YES requirements with the changing job market to accelerate progress towards sustainable development.

Niger's population is the youngest in the world with 75 percent of its residents under 30 years old. However, nearly 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, and the population is growing at an annual rate of 3.9 percent—hence the enormous need for public spending in basic sectors such as health, education and infrastructure. The unemployment rate is 15.9 percent, affecting women (25 percent) more than men (12 percent). People aged 15-29 have the highest unemployment rate (23.7 percent). In addition, more than 80 percent of workers are in the informal sector, either in agriculture or in urban activities characterized by underemployment and low incomes.

1.2. Objectives of the study

The overarching objective of the study is to examine the YES challenges and opportunities in Niger. It examines how the education and training systems in Niger are adapting to the changing nature of work in the face of rapidly evolving digital technologies. It seeks a better understanding of the demographic challenges, employment, education and skills of young people in the context of preparation for 4IR. The study focuses on four main questions:

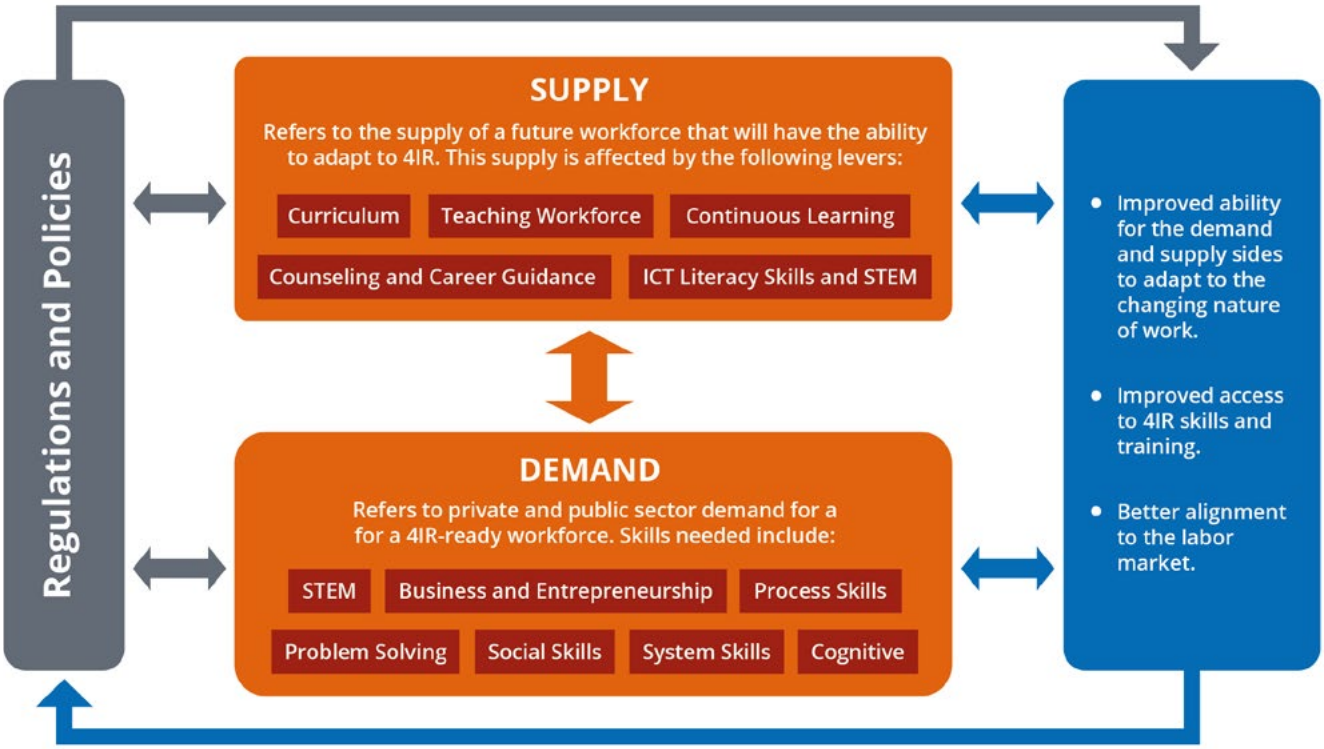
1. How is labor demand in industry changing in the face of digital technologies?
2. What is the current level of mismatch between labor supply and the demand for skills, and what are the implications for employment?
3. How are education and training systems responding to the changing nature of work in Niger?
4. What role is industry playing to ensure that education and training systems are producing the right workforce?

The answers to these questions are critical for informed decision-making on how to restructure education and training systems to meet the key challenges of rapid youth population growth, skills mismatch and the changing nature of work.

1.3. Analytical framework

Figure 1 provides the analytical framework for the study. Policies and regulations are fundamental drivers for alignment of the education and skills development systems with the changing world of work. They influence the supply, quality, and relevance of the workforce in terms of hard skills as well as crucial soft skills such as critical thinking, analysis, problem solving, and communication.

Figure 1. Analytical framework



- The study examines how the following five education-related levers drive supply and demand factors:
- Ensuring the alignment of curricula with the changing needs of the labor market.
- Investment in developing and maintaining a professional teaching workforce ready for 4IR-relevant pedagogical approaches, skills, and subjects.
- Early exposure to the workplace through internships and apprenticeships, with early access to career guidance counselors and career fairs.
- Physical and digital infrastructure development for safe buildings, high access to computers and internet, and frequent classes to develop information and communications technology (ICT) skills.
- Creating a culture of lifelong learning, with both demand and supply sides ready to continuously adapt to changing skills demands.

The performance of these five levers helps determine the outcome defined as the "improved ability for demand and supply-side stakeholders to adapt to 4IR needs and the changing nature of work."

Supply refers to the present and near-term supply of labor and covers youth—i.e., students; fresh graduates; employed; and those not in education, employment, or training (NEET)—while demand refers to employers who use these human resources for production.

The top and bottom arrows in Figure 1 represent the use of regulations to drive reform in a continuous process aimed at reducing the time and strengthening the capacity for the market to adapt to new technology. Access to education is defined as physical (distance, facilities, human resource) but the costs (tuition uniforms, transportation, feeding) and the socio-cultural norms that govern access are also considered. From a financial aspect, school attendance is sometimes discouraged due to the fact a young person attending secondary school can be seen as a source of income loss from labor activities, particularly in rural areas.

This study also explores the key drivers and challenges to education access and examines the quality and relevance to the workforce of each of these education levers, with inputs and recommendations from the demand and supply sides.

1.4. Methodology

Desk review involved secondary data from literature on labor and education (secondary and TVET) and on the informal sector from an educational and labor market perspective. Official and policy documents reviewed included government plans and programs and statistics from official institutions, particularly the National Institute of Statistics (INS). The literature review covered information on youth, demography, employment and training, including vocational training. Primary data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides covering the formal and informal sectors on the supply and demand sides, public and private sector decision-makers, teachers and administrative staff, and young people.

The overall objective was an in-depth examination of policies, regulations and institutional arrangements aimed at increasing employment opportunities for young people and ways of implementing innovative education and training initiatives. During this study, 894 people and institutions were engaged in focus groups or individual interviews.

Part 2. Country overview

2.1. Geography, demography and the economy

Located in the heart of the Sahel, Niger is a huge (1,267,000 km^2) landlocked country over two-thirds desert or semi-desert. The population has grown to 21.5 million, at an intercensal rate of 3.9 percent, one of the highest in the sub-region, up from 3.1 percent in 1988-2001. More than half of the population (51.9 percent) is under 15 years old; 66 percent is under 25 years old and 33 percent is between 15 and 35 years old (INS, 2019). Of the total population, men and women are 49.9 percent and 50.1 percent, respectively. The strong demographic growth represents significant potential in human resources, but with consequences such as increased basic social needs (food, education, health, employment, and security) amid limited resources.

Table 1. Population dynamics

Year	Working-age (15-64 years) (percent of total population)	Youth (15-35 years) (percent of working-age population)	Total population (millions)
2000	49.4	30.2	11.3
2015	49.1	30.4	19.1
2030 (projection)	42.7	34.7	34.3

Source: Data from INS Statistical Yearbooks

Economic growth fell from 11.8 percent in 2012 to 5 percent in 2016, with an average rate of 6.7 percent, close to the 7 percent level deemed necessary for real growth and significant poverty reduction. However, this average masks the poor diversification of the economy, the erratic nature of growth due to the weight of agriculture and livestock farming, low level of industrialization and the high vulnerability to climatic and economic shocks due to price fluctuations in oil and for Niger's important uranium exports. The sectoral composition of GDP has not changed significantly. Poverty affects 44.1 percent of the population, and the average annual per capita income is US$420.

Niger faces significant macroeconomic risks due to security threats at its borders and the volatility of commodity prices. The country needs to monitor the sustainability of its external public debt, but a fundamental concern is the weak economic diversification and the dominant role of the rural and informal sectors. Around 75 percent of GDP comes from the informal sector in an economy essentially based on agro-sylvo-pastoral production, with archaic and inefficient production techniques. The growth of Niger's economy is highly volatile, due to its heavy dependence on the primary sector and rainfall.

2.2. Overview of education and skills development

Niger's pyramidal education system has six years for primary, four years for lower secondary and three years for upper secondary. Pre-school was introduced in 1977 but is found only in urban centers. The learning path is as follows:

- Pre-school lasts up to three years and is for children aged 3-5, with specially trained public or private educators.
- Primary education comprises four types of institution: (i) traditional schools using French as the language of instruction; (ii) madrasas or Franco-Arabic schools using French and Arabic; (iii) experimental schools using national languages during the first three years of the cycle; and (iv) specialized schools for those with special needs.
- Secondary education consists of three types: (i) general; (ii) technical and vocational education and training; and (iii) teacher training. The duration of study is seven years in two cycles. The first cycle lasts four years and leads to the Brevet d'études du premier cycle (BEPC) certificate. The second cycle lasts three years and leads to the baccalaureate. There are some teacher training colleges mainly for primary and secondary levels.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) leads to a vocational aptitude certificate (BAP) obtained after two years of study; the technical baccalaureate after three years of study; and the vocational aptitude diploma (DAP) also after three years of study. These diplomas enable learners to enter the world of work with a variety of skills. Since 2017, the number of technical and vocational high schools has continued to rise, along with pass rates. A fairly large proportion of training is targeted at the modern employment sector.

Table 2. Education sector budget by ministry, 2016-2020 (FCFA)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Ministry of Primary Education, Literacy, Promotion of National Languages and Civic Education	141,806,062,045	133,335,590,776	130,847,081,151	136,865,494,057	148,000,000,000
Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation	58,955,519,678	60,069,158,220	52,373,197,326	50,813,583,507	54,140,000,000
Ministry of Vocational and Technical Education	19,494,207,462	13,270,635,910	28,657,766,767	35,172,416,018	36,080,000,000
Ministry of Secondary Education	19,494,207,462	13,270,635,910	28,657,766,767	35,172,416,018	36,080,000,000
Total Education Budget	**239,749,996,647**	**219,946,020,816**	**240,535,812,011**	**258,023,909,600**	**274,300,000,000**

Source: Ministry of Finance

Act No. 98-12, from June 1998, governs the direction of the education system in relation to 4IR. It guarantees education for children between the ages of 4 and 18; makes education a national priority; defines French and the national languages as languages of instruction; enshrines the decentralization of education system management; and prescribes four forms of education:

- Formal education, which includes basic, middle and higher education;
- Non-formal education, which is provided in literacy centers, faith-based schools, training centers and various training and support structures;
- Informal education, which is channeled through the family unit, the community, social groups and various associations; and
- Special education, which is provided by institutions for the physically or mentally challenged and includes rehabilitation centers for juvenile delinquents.

2.3. Labor market trends

In the modern sector, the state is the main provider of employment. Unfortunately, there is a drastic reduction in its absorption capacity. Niger's youth aged 15-35 form one-third of the population and face many difficulties on a job market that shrank between 2016 and 2018.

Table 3. Number of graduates and jobs, 2015-2018

	2015	2016	2017	2018
Secondary school	64,953	47,139	52,563	75,481
Higher education	2,004	2,146	4,733	23,750
Technical and vocational education and training	11,423	13,396	14,899	18,192
Total graduates	**78,380**	**62,681**	**72,195**	**117,423**
Modern sector jobs	**16,850**	**17,193**	**10,242**	**6,871**
Unemployment rate of graduates (%)	**78.5**	**72.6**	**85.8**	**94.1**

Source: Integrated Regional Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector, INS, 2017

The problem of unemployment and underemployment is the first difficulty young people face when trying to enter the job market. The inactive population aged 15 and over is estimated at 5,232,486 (INS, 2017), of which 64.8 percent are women and 35.2 percent men.

Table 4. Population not in employment

	Total	Percent
Gender		
Male	1,841,000	35.2
Female	3,391,000	64.8
Age group		
15-24 years	1,808,300	34.6
25-64 years	2,955,300	56.5
65 years old and above	468,800	9
Level of education		
None	4,165,500	79.6
Primary	498,100	9.5
Secondary	52000	10
Tertiary	42,300	0.8

Source: INS, 2017, Integrated Regional Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector

The mismatch between training and skills in demand in the job market has contributed to a worsening situation. Sometimes the lack of work experience is also a barrier for these young people. Employers often require a minimum level of experience, while internship opportunities are scarce. Young people are therefore all too often caught in a vicious circle of "no work experience, no job."

The informal sector occupies an important place in the national economy, employing 92 percent of the workforce, mostly in precarious conditions. While precarious employment for young people has been a recurring problem for several years, the number of young people trained in traditional apprenticeships rose from 36,200 in 2008 to 40,900 in 2012. The number of young people trained in TVET increased from 14,700 in 2008 to 68,500 in 2013.

Table 5. Characteristics of employment

		Formal jobs (%)	Informal jobs (%)	Total workforce
Non-agricultural institutional sector	Public sector	92.8	7.2	175,340
	Private sector	0.7	99.3	1,350,519
	Households	0.8	99.2	29,263
	Total	**11.1**	**88.9**	**1,555,122**
Agricultural institutional sector	Public sector	50.6	49.4	7,370
	Private sector	0.0	100	619,715
	Households	0.0	0.0	-
	Total	**0.6**	**99.4**	**627,085**
Total	Public sector	91.1	8.9	182,709
	Private sector	0.5	99.5	1,970235
	Households	0.8	99.2	29,263
	Total	**8.1**	**91.9**	**2,182,207**

Source: INS, 2017, Integrated Regional Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector

Data from the National Agency for Employment Promotion (ANPE) show many more job applications than job offers, with males seeking employment greatly outnumbering females (81 percent to 19 percent, respectively, in the first quarter of 2019). Although job applications do not necessarily come from the unemployed, this profound imbalance suggests the persistence of unemployment and underemployment. The job applications registered at the ANPE do not cover the entire nation. As a result, they are only the tip of the iceberg.

Table 6. Changes in employment demand and supply, 2014-2019

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Job applications	26,930	27,300	27,780	29,320	42,430	52,820
Job offers	1,370	16,860	17,200	10,240	7,020	17,850
Vacancies filled	13,660	16,850	17,190	10,240	6,870	15,900

Source: INS, 2017, Integrated Regional Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector

Table 7. Sectors of economic activity, by gender and location

Main activity	Location		Gender		Total	
	Urban	Rural	Male	Female	All	Percent
Agriculture	89,993	3,255,087	2,317,750	1,027,330	3,345,080	75.6
Livestock, fishing, hunting	4,820	186,135	146,134	44,821	190,955	4.3
Members of the executive and legislature	789	625	1,153	261	1,414	0.0
Other administrative authorities	2,805	375	2,566	614	3,180	0.1
Company managers and staff	2,373	1,653	3,075	951	4,026	0.1
Members of religious organizations	8,616	4,680	12,131	1,165	13,296	0.3
Self-employed and liberal professions	6,302	1,034	6,096	1,240	7,336	0.2
Senior managers in companies	2,051	263	1,836	478	2,314	0.1
Senior managers (civil service and municipalities)	4,431	434	3,977	888	4,865	0.1
Senior managers (civil service and business)	13,667	2,145	1, 377	3,435	15,812	0.4
Middle managers and technicians in companies	2,974	182	2,267	889	3,156	0.1
Middle managers and technicians (civil service and municipalities)	5,856	1,060	4,670	2,246	6,916	0.2
Middle management and technicians (civil service and business)	50,764	31,731	43,948	38,547	82,495	1.9
Trade employees	47,080	24,904	46,030	25,954	71,984	1.6
Self-employed people in trade	134,488	144,000	123,255	155,233	278,488	6.3
Non-trade employees	101,255	20,549	103,534	18,270	121,804	2.8
Craftsmen and industrial workers	111,248	71,571	120,180	62,639	182,819	4.1
Craft and service workers	28,402	42,800	22,275	48,927	71,202	1.6
ND	3,740	13,074	14,659	2,155	16,814	0.4
Total	**621,654**	**3,802,302**	**2,987,913**	**1,436,043**	**4,423,956**	**100**

Source: INS, 2012

The rate of underemployment in the 2017 survey was 60.2 percent, disaggregated to 72.6 percent for women and 51.9 percent for men. For young people aged 15-24, the rate of underemployment is 74.6 percent compared with 69.2 percent for those aged 15-34. Analysis by level of education shows a rate of 62.4 percent for those with no education, 58.2 percent for primary, 50.9 percent for secondary and 30.4 percent for those with higher education.

Table 8. Socio-demographic characteristics of labor underemployment (%)

Age Demographic	Gender		Education Level			
	Male	Female	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
15-24 years	67.1	82.5	76.3	72.4	69.6	69.6
25-34 years	54.1	77.1	67.5	61.3	49.5	5.9
15-34 years	59.8	79.5	71.1	67.3	60	62
35-64 years	46.9	64.1	56.5	42.4	36.1	19.7
15-64 years	52.7	73.4	63.7	58.2	58.2	30.7
Workforce Total	**2,492,600**	**1,675,200**	**3,216,000**	**514,000**	**353,000**	**84,000**

Source: Integrated Regional Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector, INS, 2017

Although the last national study of the informal sector dates back to 1995, the social and economic importance of the sector is undisputable. In 1995, Niger had some 668,000 informal sector enterprises, including 277,400 (41.5 percent) in the production sector, 235,200 (35.2 percent) in the trade sector and 155,300 (23.3 percent) in the services sector. From a spatial point of view, these institutions are mainly located in rural areas (85.3 percent), particularly in the regions of Zinder, Maradi, Tahoua and Dosso. The informal sector is strongly dominated by small-scale activities (with very few or no employees). In 42 percent of cases, these activities are carried out in a household setting, while 16 percent are carried out in public markets and 14 percent on public roads.

Most of Niger's working population is in the informal agricultural sector. Thus, in preparation for 4IR, Niger needs to modernize the agricultural sector and strengthen its links with other sectors. This will require significant investment in improved seeds, modern machinery, intensive cultivation, low-cost fertilizers, and effective extension agents, along with infrastructure and support mechanisms to reach local and international markets with diversified products. The government must also consider the specificity of each area (type of crop possible, active population, arable land available, etc.).

- Traditional apprenticeship is closely linked to the informal sector and production in the craft sector, while the industrial sector is still not very open to apprenticeships. Training is purely practical; it is not regulated by the state and there is no predefined training program. It mainly absorbs young people who have completed primary education as well as those who have never been to school. Masters and apprentices are bound by an apprenticeship contract, usually verbal, and each apprentice pays the apprenticeship fees. In the craft sector, the transmission of knowledge and practical skills of the trade is based on the ability to observe and imitate professional gestures. One of the strengths of the system is that it enables apprentices to practice and produce throughout their apprenticeship.

- However, traditional apprenticeship also has major shortcomings, including high costs, insufficient and often obsolete equipment, a lack of theoretical courses, a low level of education among master craftsmen, and a lack of official recognition of the skills developed and qualifications acquired. Another serious challenge is the low level of ownership among the craft professional associations, which are insufficiently involved in the organization and implementation of official apprenticeships when they should be the main responsible actors.

Table 9. Job market indicators and trends, 2000-2018 (%)

	2000-2007		2008-2013		2014-2018	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Labor force participation – Youth	81.1	18.2	48.8	18.2	72.3	50.9
Labor force participation – Total	89.8	39	67.2	20.3	83.9	60.9
Unemployment rate – Youth	1.7	4	3.8	5.6	3.8	5.6
Unemployment rate – Total	3.4	2.7	3.8	3.7	3.8	5.4
Employment growth	-5.1	-10.9	3.6	2.4	16.1	7.9
Employment/population ratio	89.5	70.6	86.6	67.7	83.4	60.6
Vulnerable employment – Youth	_	_	_	_	_	_
Vulnerable employment – Total	88.2	91.7	87.7	91.4	87.4	91.2
Working poverty (income less than US$1.90 per day)	69.1	75.9	44.4	44.3	41.1	54.3

Note: The active female labor force participation rate has tripled since Niger adopted the National Gender Policy in 2009, which promoted the inclusion of women in all sectors of economic activity.

Source : INS Statistical Yearbooks, various years

Table 10. Sectoral composition of employment, 2019

Economic activity	Proportion of total employment (%)
Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries	75
Mining and quarrying	0.5
Manufacturing	22
Services (public)	17.7
Construction	0.6
Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorbikes	8.9
Transportation, storage, and communications	1.5
Accommodation and catering activities	5.3
Financial and insurance activities	0.1
Real estate, commercial and administrative activities	0.2
Public administration and defense, social security	2.1
Education	1.9
Human health activities and social action	0.6
Other services	2.3

Note: Some individuals engage in more than one activity at the same time.

Source: INS Statistical Yearbooks

Table 11. Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), 2000-2018 (%)

	2000-2007		2008-2013		2014 -2018	
Age	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
15-18	10.9	13.8	60.7	80.6	48.3	64.5
19-24	9.4	10.7	––	––	57.6	78.1
25-29	8.3	9.6	58.00	79.6	69.7	82.3
30-35	6.8	7.9	67.90	85.3	76.7	87.1

Source: INS Statistical Yearbooks

Part 3. Supply-side perspectives

This section analyzes supply-side perspectives in terms of access, quality and relevance of teaching and learning.

3.1. Access to secondary education and skills training

Secondary education plays a key role in the development of human capital in relation to the job market. With the world moving towards "knowledge societies" through the rapid development of new ICT, linkages are increasingly important to facilitate the transition from primary to secondary education, as well as to higher education or vocational training. This section explores whether Niger's education and training system meets the requirements of the changing world of work.

Curriculum

Niger has been engaged for some time in a process of curriculum redesign that led to the Ten-Year Education Development Program. Despite efforts to build capacity at different levels to ensure coherent implementation, there have been shortcomings ranging from inadequate integration into formal programs, lack of preparation of teachers for new disciplines and new teaching methods, as well as shortages of teaching materials. Secondary education essentially leads to higher education only, which does not cover the needs and interests of all learners. The programs are often overloaded, resulting in superficial or partial coverage of the syllabus. There are also significant deficiencies in mathematics and science. With TVET, several employers and students consider the training to be too theoretical and not in line with the job market.

Teacher training

In order to improve the effectiveness of teacher training, Niger's education system has undergone a fair amount of reform and readjustment, with a strategy to improve and evaluate performance. For the levels of general education colleges, lycées and TVET institutions, the frequency of teacher training is as follows:

Table 12. Frequency of training of trainers (%)

Frequency	College	Secondary	Formal TVET
As the curricula are updated	18	11	20
At least once a year	76	53	59
Every 2 to 5 years	0	0	6
I don't know	6	36	15

Source: ACET field survey, Niger 2020

To provide teachers with professional development opportunities, the government holds professional competitions and short-term internships and training workshops. In addition to upgrading opportunities, all respondents said that there is a policy in place to encourage the uptake of vocational and technical training and entry into the institutions that provide it.

Career guidance

For the lower secondary cycle, 68 percent of schools do not integrate career guidance into their educational programs. For upper secondary, 82 percent of schools do not integrate career guidance alongside their courses. That figure is 85 percent for TVET institutions. At the secondary school level, 76 percent of respondents said that parents give the best career guidance, followed by teachers (19 percent of respondents) and other family members (5 percent). Also, 53 percent said that their teachers do not talk to them about potential career paths, and 84 percent said that industry practitioners do not come to their schools to provide good career guidance. At the level of TVET institutions, 77 percent of students say parents give the best career guidance, while 23 percent say, teachers. In addition, all TVET respondents said that their teachers talk to them about possible jobs at the end of their training, and 64 percent said that practitioners from the industry come to their institutions to provide good career guidance.

Physical and digital infrastructure

The government has made serious efforts to ensure that students work in the right conditions with adequate facilities and equipment. However, with the demographic boom, the challenges persist, such as clear shortages of computers for students in the main urban centers.

Table 13. Student-computer ratios (%)

Number of students per computer	Secondary		TVET
	First cycle	Second cycle	
No computer	79	83	50
More than 75	1	1	11
50 to 75	2	2	1
35 to 50	3	1	1
15 to 35	3	2	6
5 to 15	1	1	1
Fewer than 5	11	9	30

Source: ACET field survey, Niger 2020

While 42 percent of secondary schools have access to stable electricity, only 33 percent have internet access. With regard to the quality of school buildings and classrooms (in particular, roofs, tables, and chairs), 77 percent of schools have adequate buildings. But 81 percent of schools do not have ICT and STEM facilities such as laboratories and relevant equipment. Another 68 percent of schools do not use digital tools such as video projectors as part of teaching.

The situation tends to improve in TVET institutions, where 73 percent of schools have functioning computers compared, 71 percent have access to stable electricity, 46 percent of schools have internet access, and 78 percent of schools have suitable buildings and classrooms. Fifty-eight percent of TVET institutions have ICT and STEM facilities, while 63 percent use digital tools such as video projectors.

Life-long learning

Officially, Niger has a policy for life-long, in-service teacher training. However, in practice, 89 percent and 80 percent of those in charge of the lower and upper secondary schools visited said there are no continuous learning courses. For formal TVET, the proportion is 74 percent, while no non-formal TVET school benefits from this program. Implementation of this policy has not been effective because the resources have not been made available to enable its execution.

3.2. Quality and relevance of supply-side levers

Curriculum

While Niger's education system provides for all schools throughout the country to use the official state curriculum developed by the various ministries in charge of education, it should be noted that only 14 percent of schools manage to complete the program within the required time. Survey results show that among the graduates, 38 percent of respondents have formal TVET training, 36 percent have university training, 12 percent have other training, 7 percent have formal TVET apprenticeship training, 6 percent

have informal TVET apprenticeship training and 1 percent have non-formal TVET training.

Of those surveyed, 72 percent believe that the curriculum taught in secondary school did not prepare them adequately either for university or for the job market. Also, 65 percent of respondents had to resort to other sources (such as private tuition or their parents) to qualify for university or TVET, and only 35 percent reported having received adequate teaching in STEM and non-STEM subjects. In terms of participation in curriculum development, 84 percent of industrialists have never attended any sessions, while 16 percent participated at least once, which proves that the private sector is absent from the curriculum decision-making process. Yet 61 percent of those surveyed consider it necessary to participate in curriculum development, of which 91 percent said especially for TVET.

Teacher training

The problems related to teacher training are numerous and require rapid intervention by the government and relevant stakeholders. According to recent studies carried out by the ministry in charge of secondary education, only 12 percent of teachers have the required qualifications. About 85 percent of lower and upper secondary schools do not provide ICT training for teachers. Also, 97 percent of lower secondary schools, 59 percent of upper secondary, and 63 percent of TVET institutions do not require teachers to be trained in the use of the internet or basic software programs such as Microsoft Word.

Table 14. Student-teacher ratios (%)

Number of students per teacher	Secondary		TVET
	First cycle	Second cycle	
More than 75	23	44	12
50 to 75	14	9	29
35 to 50	25	15	13
15 to 35	21	17	40
5 to 15	9	10	4
Fewer than 5	8	5	2

Source: ACET field survey, Niger 2020

The main challenge to be met is financial, but there are others: the decline in the number of teachers, the lack of pedagogical training and the lack of resources and equipment for effective teaching and learning. Low remuneration of teachers presents another problem—62 percent are on contract, with motivation and commitment as obvious and critical concerns. On gender issues in training programs, 92 percent of respondents say secondary schools are suitable for girls, boys, and persons with disabilities for TVET; 77 percent support this statement for TVET. Nevertheless, weak infrastructure, the low number of female role models, socio-cultural burdens and insufficient teacher training on gender and other emerging issues compromise the chances of achieving gender equality in training.

Career guidance

With the very high average annual increase in enrollment, Niger has adopted a national strategy for the socio-professional orientation and integration of young people. This entails inviting private sector actors to talk to students about career choices and job opportunities. The National Confederation of Workers of Niger has commended the creation and implementation of training programs for young people through the Support Fund for Vocational Training and the regional TVET centers. These programs are intended to enable young people to learn a trade that promotes self-employment. However, their effectiveness relies on more direct involvement in helping young people to receive good career guidance, the development of training programs, and support for initiatives to create training and apprenticeship centers. In addition, the National Institute of Youth and Sport believes that even though the government encourages entry into TVET institutions and provides some guidance to pupils and students with scholarships, the interaction and feedback are not effective because collaboration between schools and industry is lacking and internships often do not meet the needs of learners. According to survey data on guidance for young people's working life, parents are involved in 78 percent of cases, teachers 18 percent and school counselors only 4 percent.

Physical and digital infrastructure

Government policy is to provide all schools with quality physical and digital infrastructure. However, increased budget allocations to the education system and updated training programs to meet current and future needs are needed. Few institutions have relevant and adequate equipment and teaching materials. The physical infrastructure is inadequate for female teachers and for teachers with disabilities.

ICT is not part of the secondary school curriculum, and few teachers use ICT to teach lessons. There is also little to no interaction between the ICT industry and secondary schools. According to Ministry of Secondary Education data, only 25 percent of secondary schools use computers, and the average student-computer ratio is more than five. In addition, little more than 25 percent of secondary schools have access to stable electricity and to the internet. The challenges that schools and training institutions face in building this infrastructure are those related to the growth in enrollment, the high cost of infrastructure, and low allocation in the state budget.

Life-long learning

Increasingly, Niger is turning towards vocational training for an economy dominated by the informal sector. Through quality training, employees can acquire and maintain necessary skills for their professions and be better prepared to adapt to new challenges. Legally speaking, vocational training is a right for every employee either through further training, on-the-job training, or specialization. The state, local authorities, public and private institutions, associations, professional organizations, and enterprises contribute to providing vocational training under conditions laid down by the country's labor code (in Article 24, paragraphs 2 and 3 of Act No. 2012-45 of September 25, 2012). However, while every worker has the right and the duty to improve their skills professional performance, within the public sector there are no systematic opportunities for public servants to learn and develop progressively, and the situation is little better in the private sector.

Part 4. Demand-side opportunities and challenges

The current job market information system in Niger was designed through the National Observatory for Employment and Vocational Training (ONEF), created by Law 2012-24 of May 2, 2012. Working in synergy with the National Institute of Statistics, its mission is to make available to public and private sector decision-makers the data relevant to job creation opportunities and to improve the alignment of skills development to market demands. According to the ministry in charge of employment, the skills most sought after are mainly in fields related to food processing, machine operation and repair, industrial refrigeration, carpentry, electrical engineering and the hotel business.

Opportunities are offered by both public and private employers to bridge the gaps between labor supply and demand. In this respect, 67 percent of enterprises have initiatives to support teachers and the education system as a whole and also to assess the market for the available skills most in demand in order to inform the education system. A fairly large number of enterprises offer internship opportunities to TVET students. In educational centers, training must be oriented more towards the primary and secondary sectors of the economy which offer more employment opportunities for young people, although certain socio-cultural burdens prevent young men and women from equal opportunities to develop. Programs designed to support young people to set up their own micro-enterprises are implemented by the National Agency for Employment Promotion and the Support Fund for Vocational Training and Apprenticeship, or by other projects that help them acquire small trades through on-the-job apprenticeship. Supported by the National Employment Policy, young people receive training in entrepreneurship and some start-up tools. These strategies are reinforced by the initiatives of young people themselves; 56 percent of our sample have set up their own businesses, the vast majority of which (76 percent) use new information and communications technologies.

One overriding challenge in Niger is the lack of a robust partnership and collaboration between schools and businesses, which leads directly to the mismatch between education/training systems and the job market. It is also notable that the Ministry of Employment is neither directly nor indirectly involved in curriculum development for schools; rather, its mission is the design, development, implementation, monitoring, follow-up and evaluation of national employment, labor and social protection policies. However, reforms in training and skills development only partially meet government objectives because young people generally lack the skills that industry needs.

Regarding educational attainment, surveys for this study found that 62 percent of employees in companies had primary education, 37 percent had secondary education and only one percent tertiary education. Motivation to work in the sector is affected by low levels of income, with 57 percent of employees on a daily income of under FCFA1000.

Notwithstanding the inadequacies of the apprenticeship training system, 60 percent of employees in companies feel they were prepared for work before they joined. This study's survey data show that the skills most in demand by companies are technical skills, teamwork skills, communication and entrepreneurship and that these same skills were cited as the skills frequently missing in new hires, in addition to problem-solving skills and the use of ICT.

Field surveys reveal that women are poorly represented in both the public and private sectors, with a workforce composed of 88 percent men and just 12 percent women. Most employers said they recruit more men than women for the simple reason that most occupations require either physical effort or total availability. Furthermore, of the formal companies and enterprises surveyed, only 21 percent have a gender equity policy in recruitment. Niger has ratified the two International Labour Organization Conventions on combating discrimination at work—Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers and Convention 111 on Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation. It has also implemented the conventions through national employment policy, which is currently being revised to adapt to the changing context.

Part 5. Conclusions and policy recommendations

Government ministries highlight in their policies and strategies the improvement of access, quality and relevance of secondary education and also the acquisition of skills in response to the changing nature of work. But several factors underscore the poor performance of the education system, including enrollment increases but funding decreases, a lack of specific teacher qualifications, insufficient quantity and quality of teaching materials, and an overloaded and obsolete curriculum. Indeed, a large part of the course curriculum cannot be completed because of disruptions. Insufficient teaching hours per week are devoted to the acquisition of skills in STEM.

This study has shown that industry is experiencing increasing human resource constraints and companies are identifying the skills they lack. Apart from the technical aspects, shortcomings in managerial skills such as leadership, problem-solving, and communication are emerging. Surveys have also shown that very few design managers are in enterprises, given that employees with tertiary level education are rare. This situation hampers initiatives. However, about 80 percent of enterprises claim to offer professional development opportunities to their staff and that they are ready to welcome TVET trainees.

Although the positive role of women is widely recognized in the world of work, this study shows that very few women (only about 10 percent) participate in the workforce of enterprises in Niger. The change in this socially burdensome paradigm has to come from enterprises, since only 21 percent of them currently have a gender equity policy in terms of recruitment. The positive effects that will result from this approach will certainly be a source of inspiration, helping many companies to improve their recruitment and push for greater quality of the workforce.

Very few of the companies surveyed (16 percent) are involved in the development of training programs in TVET institutions. However, almost all enterprises (91 percent), expressed the desire to participate in this process. This indicates the potential for fruitful future collaboration between the producers and users of skills. Also worth noting is that 67 percent of heads of enterprises state that they are ready to work with the educational system in general. Job fairs will be increasingly important as platforms for sharing of experiences and good practices in employment promotion. They give the opportunity to young entrepreneurs and producers to meet potential business partners, including those in the field of training.

In sum, the main obstacles to the emergence of a private sector capable of absorbing a workforce of ambitious and creative young people are financial, infrastructural and regulatory. Findings from this study indicate that an ongoing and participatory dialogue is necessary among all stakeholders in a constantly changing workplace.

The following recommendations—in the areas of training as well as employment promotion—aim to improve the accessibility, quality and relevance of secondary, technical and vocational education and skills to deliver a 4IR-ready workforce in Niger.

- **Provide teaching and learning materials and popularize the use of digital tools.** The government and the Ministry of Education should supply all levels of secondary education with updated textbooks and practical equipment to ensure effective teaching and learning. Also, the government should prioritize digital literacy for both students and teachers. Teachers and students must have access to computers, projectors, the internet, and more to develop their digital skills.
- **Enhance and revitalize the link between the curriculum and the workplace.** The curriculum must better match industrial needs. To ensure this linkage, industry experts should be involved in the design and review of the curriculum.
- **Implement a deliberate gender equity policy to increase the number of female educators in STEM and TVET.** The government should grant scholarship awards to female educators and intentional admission quotas to be awarded to female students or applicants to ensure that more are enrolled.
- **Set up training programs for teachers.** Ensure teachers are equipped with relevant skills and pedagogical know-how in line with updated curricula to improve learning outcomes.
- **Improve the quality of the transition between the different training cycles.** The Ministry of Education and educational institutions should have concise transition paths between the different training cycles. For instance, a student who had a TVET education should be able to transfer easily to technical universities that offer related programs of interest.
- **Build the capacity of the trainer of trainers and roll out local supervision.** Training programs should be held for trainers to strengthen their competencies amid the changing nature of education.
- **Create youth employment opportunities and help facilitate the integration of young people into the world of work.** The government should prioritize an environment conducive for job creation and youth success through (i) sound governance and resource management, and (ii) partnership with the private sector to ensure relevant skills training, apprenticeships, and internships for young people to help them acquire the requisite skills for productive work.
- **Increase subsidies and improve access to bank loans to facilitate business start-ups.** Government should increase subsidies to exporting small and medium enterprises and capital-intensive businesses, as well as provide flexible means of accessing credit for entrepreneurs.

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