

NIGER

end
child
marriage
A voice. A chance. A future.

COUNTRY PROFILE
2022



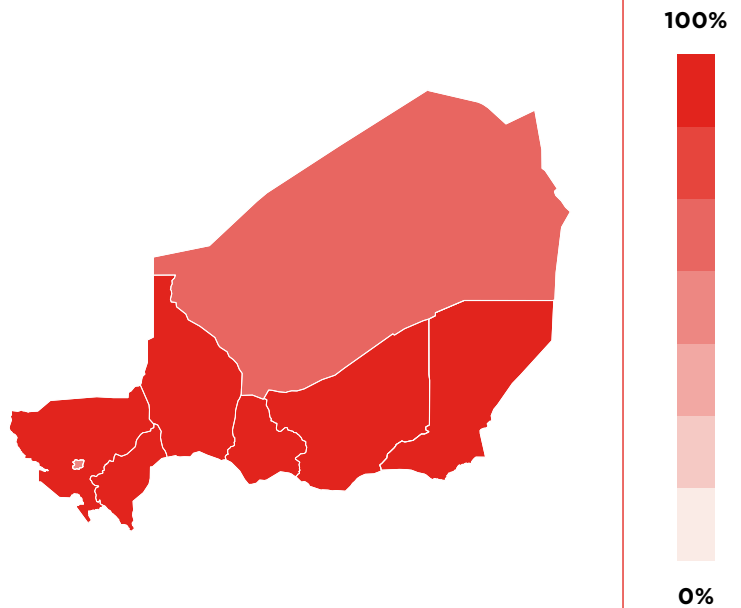
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“ I feel very useful in the community since I started attending the exchange sessions as a girl correspondent, because I am invited to the meetings and this proves that I am important. Things have really changed since I became a protection correspondent because I feel proud to help my friends and sisters and all the friends respect me and everyone wants to talk with me to enjoy the messages I transmit. This changed many things in my life, such as hygiene and sanitation and especially the danger of child marriage, because often it is we who ask our parents to marry us as soon as we see a friend of the same generation getting married, even if we are studying.”

— Habsatou Djibo, 16, Mai Yodo village, rural commune of Olléléwa, Zinder

NIGER

FIGURE 1: Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18.



Note: This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or area or the delimitation of any frontiers.

The global context

Child marriage threatens the lives, the well-being and the futures of girls around the world. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage has declined by around 15 per cent since 2010. Nevertheless, COVID-19, climate change and conflict have had lasting effects on poverty, school dropout and inequality, triggering increases in child marriage. UNICEF estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic alone will have put more than 10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage by 2030.

Ending child marriage is a global priority:

93 governments have signed up to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3 to end child, early and forced marriage, and 43 countries either have, or are working on, national action plans to end child marriage. Girls' education is a consistent protective factor against child marriage, with child marriage rates among girls who complete secondary school 66 per cent lower than among girls with no education, and 80 per cent lower among those who complete higher education. COVID-19 increased the number of school dropouts, thereby increasing the risk that girls who are out of school will not return. Girls who drop out of school are significantly more likely marry early, and 87 per cent of married adolescent girls are out of school.

Global advocacy and dialogue

In 2022, the international community made key commitments to end child marriage at global and regional forums. On 15 November 2022, the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee resolution on child, early and forced marriage,¹ led by Zambia and Canada, was adopted by consensus. A total of 125 Member States sponsored the resolution (compared to 114 co-sponsors the last time the resolution was put forward in 2020). Countries which sponsored the resolution for the first time included: Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritius, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Several of the countries have a high prevalence of child marriage — and, by sponsoring, demonstrated their political commitment to ending it. The resolution highlights the urgent need to reach the poorest and most marginalized girls and women—while calling upon the international community to increase its efforts to end child, early and forced marriage. It recognizes how global health threats, climate change, conflicts and forced displacement can have a particularly negative impact on women and girls and which, by extension, can also increase child, early and forced marriage. The resolution appreciates the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and other

1 See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventy-seventh Session, Third Committee agenda item 64(a) (A/C.3/77/L.19/Rev.1)*

similar global, regional, and national initiatives, encouraging coordinated and comprehensive approaches across sectors and at all levels.

In March 2022, the Global Programme and partners led a high-level side-event at the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), a session which culminated in the CSW66 Agreed Conclusions, calling for action to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of policies and programmes on climate change, and environmental and disaster-risk reduction. This session, “No Time to Lose: Child Marriage and the Triple Crisis”, enabled United Nations Member States and other stakeholders to improve their collective understanding of the effects of the triple crisis on child marriage, and what could be done in response.

Child marriage country context

There are 5 million child brides in the Niger, 2 million of whom were married before the age of 15. The prevalence of child marriage among girls stands at 76 per cent, the highest in the world by far. There are no signs of progress in eliminating the practice to meet the SDG target to end child marriage by 2030, and hence the projected prevalence will remain the same as today’s levels until there are signs of improvement.



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Key highlights in 2022



19,603 adolescent girls actively participated in **life-skills or comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)** in programme areas.



3,000 adolescent girls were supported by the programme to **enrol and/or remain in** primary or secondary **school**.



15,165 boys and men participated in **group education** specifically **addressing harmful masculinities** and gender norms.



94,870 individuals (boys, girls, women and men) participated in **dialogue sessions** on consequences of, and alternatives to, child marriage, **the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality**.



544 local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) were **mobilized to participate in dialogues and consensus-building** to end child marriage.

Overall programme performance

TABLE 1: Summary of output indicator performance (2022)

Indicator	Target	Result
Indicator 1111: Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) who actively participated in life-skills or CSE interventions in programme areas	16,000	19,603
Indicator 1121: Number of girls (aged 10–19) supported by the programme to enrol and/or remain in primary or secondary school	3,000	3,000
Indicator 1211: Number of boys and men actively participating in group education/dialogues that address harmful masculinities and gender norms	16,000	15,165
Indicator 1221: Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) who participate in group education/dialogue sessions on consequences of and alternatives to child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	81,320	94,870
Indicator 1222: Number of individuals (boys, girls, women and men) reached by mass media (traditional and social media) messaging on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality	2,255,000	0
Indicator 1223: Number of local actors (e.g., traditional, religious and community leaders) with meaningful participation in dialogues and consensus-building to end child marriage	291	544
Indicator 1231: Number of CSOs newly mobilized in support of challenging social norms and promoting gender equality by the Global Programme (cumulative)	2	5
Indicator 2121: Number of primary/secondary/non-formal schools in programme areas providing quality gender-friendly education that meets minimum standards	8	0
Indicator 2131: Number of service delivery points in programme areas providing quality adolescent-responsive services (health, child protection/ gender-based violence) that meet minimum standards	8	10
Indicator 2211: Number of partnerships (both formal and informal) established to deliver adolescent-responsive social protection, poverty reduction and economic empowerment programmes and services	4	5
Indicator 3111: Number of policies or legal instruments addressing child marriage drafted, proposed or adopted at national and subnational level with Global Programme support (cumulative)	1	1
Indicator 3121: Number of subnational plans with evidence informed interventions to address child marriage	2	0
Indicator 3211: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that focus on what works to end child marriage (cumulative)	2	1
Indicator 3212: Number of generated evidence and knowledge that apply a gender analysis (cumulative)	1	1
Indicator 3221: Number of south-to-south cooperation events (conferences, expert visits, peer consultations, study tours, communities of practice) supported	0	1

Providing intensive support to marginalized girls

The Global Programme's activities are aimed at empowering adolescent girls and are carried out by trained mentors in safe spaces. The trainings, for girls aged 10–19, cover life-skills, reproductive health, gender and human rights and financial literacy. In 2022, 19,603 adolescent girls were provided with life-skills training in 125 safe spaces established by the programme in the regions of Tillabéry, Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder.

- 55 per cent of the girls are aged 10–14
- 42 per cent have never been to school
- 37 per cent have completed primary school
- 21 per cent have reached secondary level
- 82 per cent are not married
- 30 per cent of those who had ever been married were in a polygamous household.

Some 348 girls in the programme trained in various income-generating activities, including:

- the manufacture of beauty products (perfume, soaps and creams) and household products (liquid soaps for floors and dishes)
- food processing (peanut oil extraction, manufacture of peanut cake and paste)
- gardening (landscaping and planting of moringa)
- video production.

The 2022 evaluation of the National Strategic Plan to End Child Marriage 2019–2021 revealed it has taught and enabled girls to act individually and collectively to refuse child marriages. Girls are increasingly influencing decisions by seeking the support needed to escape marriage, which is a violation of their rights. The evaluation showed that, among adolescents who attended and completed the seven-month course of life-skills sessions, 4 out of 5 refused to accept or stay in a child marriage.

In 2022, the programme supported the reintegration of 3,000 adolescent girls into formal education and alternative education. To support the continuity of learning for children, UNICEF signed a memorandum of understanding with the Social Change Factory and Search for Common Ground to set up an e-learning platform (<http://voixdesjeunes.org>). Partnerships have also been formalized with cellular phone companies (Zamani, Airtel and Moov) to support connectivity and distance learning.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

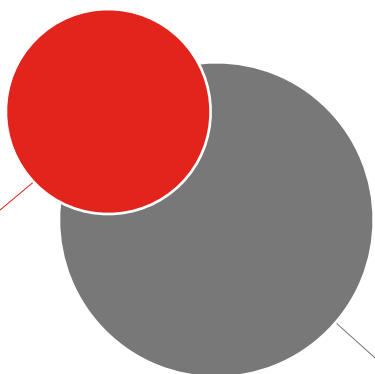
Child marriage can be effectively delayed by ensuring adolescent girls stay in education or in other vocational training. However, overall investment in keeping girls in schools or engaged in economic empowerment activities is limited. The programme is establishing innovative partnerships with the private sector to link and refer adolescent girls for support towards economic empowerment and training.

The experience of adolescent girls participating in the ‘Community Approach to Child Protection’ (PDAC) meetings, enabling them to share their perspectives on human rights and issues affecting them, allows the community to better understand their motivations for change and provides them with the necessary support.

Enhancing the family and community environment

The PDAC mobilizes communities to work with adolescents, religious and traditional leaders, community and women’s organizations and schools to address harmful gender norms and prevent child marriage. Communities are required collectively to explore the option of delaying the age of marriage. Such discussions must respect the desire of families to uphold their traditions, while exposing the harm associated with the practice and reinforcing human rights principles. A greater voice should be given to girls themselves while, at the same time, supporting

2.1
MILLION
married
before
age 15



5 MILLION
married
before age 18

Niger is home to around **5 million child brides**; **3 in 4** young women were married in childhood.

FIGURE 2: Number of girls and women of all ages who were first married or in union before ages 15 and 18.

the strong engagement of men and boys. Families must be convinced that enough people in the community will support – or at least tolerate – a move to delay marriage. In 2022, 15,165 boys and men were engaged in community dialogues to address negative masculinities. Boys were also engaged in interactive role-plays as females to help to deconstruct sexist stereotypes they have inherited.

Findings from the evaluation of the Strategic Plan to End Child Marriage show steady progress in engaging traditional and religious leaders in the elimination of harmful practices, including child marriage. Interviews with these leaders highlight their degree of involvement, ownership and support for interventions that address harmful gender norms. Some of the traditional and religious leaders have taken the initiative by creating positions for women in their courts, including 'magagias' in charge of girls' schooling, child marriage and gender-based violence (GBV) issues. Some leaders have also allocated portions of land to girls and women for agricultural development. Overall, with the mobilization and engagement of these leaders, 94,870 community members participated in dialogues promoting gender-equitable norms, including raising the age of marriage for girls in 2022.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

There is a lack of follow-up of the commitments made during public declarations to end child marriage in communities and villages. The child protection services unit in charge of monitoring and following up public declarations is understaffed and under-resourced. This is also affecting the implementation of village action plans to end child marriage. The programme is supporting the use of the Rapid Pro platform for data-collection in the villages to support the monitoring and follow-up of actions.

The mobilization and involvement of the leaders in a religiously conservative context such as in Niger has proven effective in leveraging their influence and galvanizing broader community support.

Strengthening systems

The programme continued to reinforce community-based child protection mechanisms that are effective in addressing social norms. In 2022, the programme supported the Government in its efforts to eliminate child marriage by establishing 454 new village child protection committees, bringing the total to 2,209.



“ Before this committee was set up, I received many complaints from women victims of domestic violence, girls about to be given in marriage or cases of rape. With our awareness-raising actions and community meetings, we have almost put an end to these practices. But that doesn't stop us from continuing to look after the well-being of the children and women in the village, because they are always the vulnerable.”

— Ibro Issoufou, village chief
of Massalata, Tahoua region

Following the Gender-Transformative Accelerator tool assessment in 2021, the programme supported the revision of gender modules for teacher training to take into account gender-transformative approaches and to identify and change gender stereotypes in textbooks. Gender-transformative approaches have been institutionalized through the integration of training in the school curriculums for pre-service teacher training. In addition, awareness-raising tools on violence in schools, menstrual hygiene management and GBV have been developed and are ready to be integrated into the teacher training curriculum.

The signing of the joint decree between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Health has made it possible to strengthen their cooperation, which will facilitate the management of issues of sexual and reproductive health of young people. It is not easy for young people to go to health facilities to seek advice on changes in their bodies. The establishment of health clubs and health centres in schools fills a void, but not for children and young people who are outside the school system.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

The establishment of school health centres equipped with essential products and school health clubs reduces the number of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Although the Government has institutionalized health clubs in all schools, most do not have adequate supplies and equipment to help the students. In partnership with Monde Digne des Enfants, UNICEF supported the distribution of menstrual hygiene management kits in schools in Tillabéry, Zinder and Agadez for 28,000 girls in the first year of middle school and the training of 936 girls and boys leaders, 1,500 parents and 956 teachers on menstrual hygiene management.

Adolescents who are out of school are often unable to access good quality adolescent-friendly services due to an absence of social workers. The use of mobile services is improving access for adolescents in communities with no service delivery points.

Building partnerships

Since the African Girls Summit, held 16–18 November 2021 in Niamey, the programme has strengthened a partnership with girl-led and women-led organizations and artists to sustain the momentum for girls' rights generated by the summit. In addition, interventions aimed at empowering girls with information on their rights, life-skills and support networks through the Illimin adolescent initiative and the community-based approach to child protection, six organizations bringing together nearly 50 girls and women received support to carry out advocacy and social mobilization actions for the elimination of harmful practices, including child marriage, as well as other forms of GBV.

The young girls and women involved in this movement are distinguished by wearing turbans instead of hijabs and other veils when they are active. They are also very active through social media networks,



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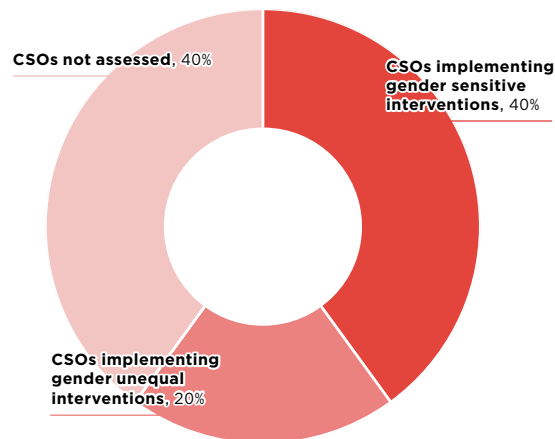
where they lead discussions on various themes related to girls' rights in Niger. One of the girl-led organizations that emerged after the summit was Fada des Filles. In Niger, Fada is traditionally a community space for speech, exchange and decision-making reserved for men and boys. The Fada is also a space of male solidarity. The concept of 'Fada des Filles' was born from the recognition of the need for girls to have appropriate spaces for speech, solidarity and decision-making within communities to contribute to the social transformation of women and girls in Niger. The Fada des Filles is composed of 30 young girls from various professional and academic backgrounds who have benefited from capacity-building allowing them to raise awareness, advocate with all types of stakeholders and play the role of role models for younger girls. They use their time to get in touch with other girls and boys with whom they play the role of elders, share their knowledge and encourage school-going girls (from peri-urban neighbourhoods) to embrace scientific careers.

Girls from peri-urban neighbourhoods in major centres in the Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéry and Zinder regions are also mobilized through their participation in popular interactive theatre as Young Actresses of Change (JAC). These girls have found a space to express their views on the (non-)realization of their rights and the urgency for their communities to find solutions. The scenes focus on various themes related to the problems experienced by boys and girls in the neighbourhoods. The JAC are young girls and boys aged 12-20 who are out of school, and who are committed, through interactive theatre, to making their contribution to the creation of a more inclusive environment that respects children's rights.

Investment in and support to youth-led, women-led and feminist CSOs

Partnerships for important for advancing gender-transformative programming and, recognizing this, in 2022, the Global Programme assessed the extent to which the CSOs were implementing gender-transformative approaches – based on the partners identified as focusing on promoting girls' and women's rights from the previous year (five in Niger). The assessment aimed to provide guidance to UNFPA and UNICEF on how to better identify and support opportunities to advance gender-transformative approaches within the Global Programme.

FIGURE 3: Assessment of interventions of partner organizations, on the gender equality continuum



The assessment was conducted by building on information from various online resources, including the CSOs' websites, reviews of available annual reports, analysis of strategy documents, social media pages, descriptions and commentary about the CSOs from external parties (for example funders, coalitions, or networks), and news articles.

CSOs in Niger were not ranked highly in the assessment, though the CSOs do appear to make an effort to include targeted populations in strategic programming.

Challenges, lessons learned and next steps

Although the programme CSOs, to differing degrees, conduct some work relating to gender rights they do not demonstrate a very clear understanding of gender-transformative approaches. Limited resources were available to demonstrate the kinds of work that is done and how the organizations might manifest these approaches. There is room for improvement in terms of systemic change and knowledge generation.

All CSOs ought to undergo training on gender-transformative approaches. This should include guidance on how to conduct gender analyses, support on the development of policies and strategies, and guidance on how to monitor and track impact.



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Facilitating supportive laws and policies

The National Strategic action plan to End Child Marriage 2019–2021 was evaluated during 2022 with the participation of all stakeholders. UNFPA and UNICEF worked together to support the evaluation process. Recommendations have been made and will be used to develop a new plan. In addition, the issue of child marriage has been selected as a major focus of the interventions of the Economic and Social Development Plan 2022–2026, which will facilitate the mobilization of resources for the financing of the new strategic plan.

The year was also marked by the establishment of the National Child Protection Committee in accordance with the 2019 Presidential Decree. The signing of the decree is a condition of the Government's access to World Bank budget support. It establishes child protection committees at all levels – from the village to the national – with the main aim of contributing to the elimination of child marriage. The World Bank's budget support was accompanied by a fund to support the establishment and operation of 50 communal child protection committees. This support will continue in 2023 with the creation of 150 additional committees, adding to the 454 created in 2022.

The Ministry of Justice set up a national committee in charge of the reform of the Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure whose purpose is to carry out a general review of the substance and form of these two documents to, in particular, integrate all the amendments contained in scattered laws, but also the relevant provisions of the international, regional and subregional legal instruments to which the Niger is a party and propose other useful amendments. Advocacy continued to ensure that the recommendation on criminalizing the practice

of child marriage was taken into account in the amendments. Members of this committee discussed with UNFPA, UNICEF and other technical and financial partners the recommendations from a study on the part of the legislative framework which covers GBV and harmful practices, during a three-day workshop.

The public policy maturity model

Elimination of harmful practices such as child marriage requires the integration of strategic approaches, processes, systems and information. UNFPA and UNICEF recognize the role national action plans play in strengthening policy coherence to achieve this. Lessons from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development peer review process emphasize that the plans need:

- political commitment and policy statements
- policy coordination mechanisms
- systems for monitoring, analysis and reporting.

UNICEF has developed and tested a policy maturity model and tools for assessing public policies to end harmful practices and achieve SDG 5.3 by 2030 in 12 countries (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Lebanon, Mozambique, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia).

The maturity model provides a framework for key national stakeholders to review and assess national policy approaches and systems for

- eliminating and preventing female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage
- identifying priorities or critical investments
- building consensus around the interventions.

The model is structured around six intermediate outcomes and different subdomains that are defined by distinct levels of maturity i.e., weak-building; average-enhancing; good-integrating; and excellent-mature (see Figure 4).

TABLE 2: Snippet of the policy maturity model

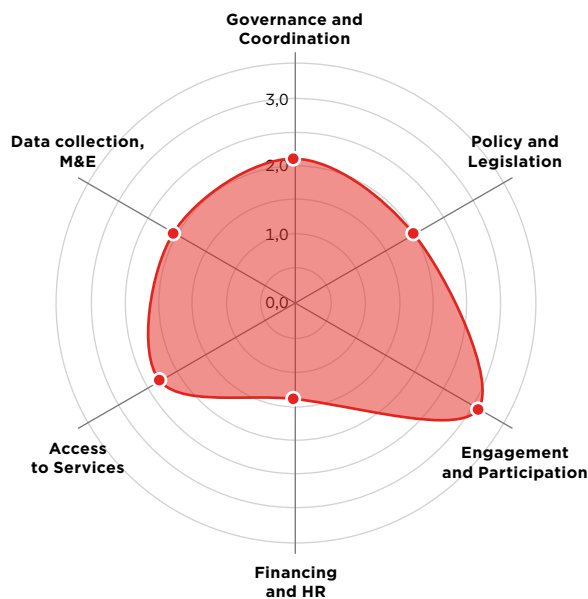
Intermediate Outcome	Sub-Domains	Score
Governance and Coordination	A1: Political Commitment	✓
	A2: Coordination structures	✓
	A3: National Action Plans	✓
Policy and Legislation	B.1: Legislation, policies and implementation mechanisms	✓
Engagement and Participation	C1: Independent complaint mechanism exists for children and women	✗
	C2: Civil Society Engagement, including women and children	✓
	C3: Community based mechanisms for Harmful practices prevention	—
Financing & HR	D1: Financing of harmful practices services	✓
	D2: National budget establishment	—
	D3: National Budget execution	—
	D4: National Budget amount	✗
	D5: National Budget monitoring and review	✗
	D6: Human Resources	✓
Access to Services	E1: Availability of Standard Operating Procedures and/or Protocols for harmful practices services	—
	E.2: Understanding and articulation of harmful practices system	✓
	E3: Modelling testing and scaling of harmful practices services	—
	E4: Availability of harmful practices services, case management and referral systems	✓
Data collection, M&E	F1: Administrative data systems and monitoring to routinely generate data on FGM	—
	F2: Data security and governance	✗
	F3: Research and surveys	—

The benchmarks for each level of maturity have been defined and require certain priorities, processes, and results to be achieved for each subdomain, and can be contextualized by country. Feedback from the testing emphasized the role of the model as:

- a useful advocacy tool
- something that builds Government accountability and action towards elimination of harmful practices
- a tool to review and track the implementation of a national action plan.

On average, overall country ratings on a 4-point scale ranged from 1.8 (weak-building in Bangladesh) to 3.0 (good-integrating in Zambia). Financing and human resources (rating 1.3) emerged as the area where countries were rated the least, while governance and coordination (rating 2.7) were rated highly.

FIGURE 4: Policy maturity assessment for Niger



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