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Responses to Information Requests

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3 September 2020

SOM200233.E

Somalia: Entry and exit requirements at land borders and airports, including documentation required; whether there are checkpoints for domestic and international travel; whether there are travel agencies that facilitate travel within and outside Somalia (2018–August 2020)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

In an interview with the Research Directorate, a lecturer at King's College London, whose research interests include mobility and migration in Somalia, indicated that land borders are "very porous" and that people can travel across them without documentation (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2018* similarly states that Al-Shabaab [al-Shabab] and others are able to move across the region "mostly undetected" due to Somalia's "porous borders" (US 1 Nov. 2019, 43). A country information report on Somalia by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) describes Somalia's entry and exit procedures as "not technologically advanced" and states that Somalia does not have a "central database" monitoring illegal departures (Australia 13 June 2017, para 5.17).

In contrast, *US Country Reports on Terrorism 2018* indicate that Somalia has a "national immigration screening watchlist" (US 1 Nov. 2019, 43). A 2018 article by the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that Somalia uses the IOM-developed Migration Data Analysis System [Migration Information and Data Analysis System (US 1 Nov. 2019, 43)] (MIDAS), which has "the capability to collect, process, store and analyse traveler information in real time," at 16 ports of entry (UN 9 Oct. 2018). A 2016 report by the World Bank et al. indicates that there were 57 "recognized" border control points in Somalia (World Bank, et al. 2016, 23). The IOM article quotes an officer with the IOM's Immigration and Border Management program as stating that MIDAS "does passport reading, it takes the photo of a traveller who's coming in, it also takes the finger prints ... and then runs it over a database to check if you have the right of entry or not" (UN 9 Oct. 2018). *US Country Reports on Terrorism 2018* indicate that "procedural and network connectivity deficiencies limited [MIDAS] effectiveness" (US 1 Nov. 2019, 43).

2. Entry and Exit Requirements at Land Borders and Airports

Sources indicate that passports and visas are required for foreigners entering Somalia (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020; UK 29 May 2020). Sources state that the authorities in Somaliland and Puntland issue their own visas (US 12 Mar. 2019; Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020).

A country of origin information on South and Central Somalia by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that documents "play little or no role" in South and Central Somalia and identity documents are not required for Somali citizens travelling within Somalia (Netherlands Mar. 2019, 28). The Lecturer indicated that "some form of ID" is required for Somali citizens entering Somalia at airports and that a Somali passport allows Somali citizens entry at any airport in Somalia (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020).

2.1 Somalia

Somalia's Immigration and Naturalization Directorate (IND) indicates that citizens of all countries, without exception, are eligible to obtain a visa on arrival (Somalia n.d.). The same source further states that in order to obtain a visa on arrival, an individual must first obtain a visa-on-arrival approval letter (Somalia n.d.). The IND provides the following procedures to obtain the visa on arrival approval letter:

1. Contact your [r]epresentative ([b]usiness partners, [c]ompany [r]epresentative, [p]rotocol/[l]iaison [o]fficer, etc[.]) in Somalia.
2. The [r]epresentative files a formal request and for [v]isa on [a]rrival [a]pproval on your behalf stating the following:
 - Name of visitor
 - Passport number of visitor

- Nationality
 - Purpose of visit
 - Address in Somalia
 - Email address of the visitor
 - Guarantee letter for the security of visitor[.]
3. The representative shall attach the following documents in support of the application
- Copy of data page of visitor['s] passport
 - Copy of valid [r]eturn ticket. (Somalia n.d.)

The IND indicates that the approval letter will be processed and issued within two working days (Somalia n.d.). The same source further states that the applicant will receive a copy of the approval letter by email, the applicant's Somali local representative will receive the original hard copy, and copies will also be sent to the airline and immigration officer at the port of entry (Somalia n.d.).

The UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) indicates that individuals arriving at the Mogadishu [Aden Adde (Mogadishu Aden Adde International Airport n.d.)] International Airport may require a letter of invitation describing the purpose of the visit and entry can be denied to those without such an invitation; the source notes that a hotel booking "may" satisfy this requirement (UK 29 May 2020).

The IND provides the following requirements to obtain a visa on arrival at a port of entry:

- Visa [a]pproval [l]etter ([p]re-approved visa letter), valid for 14 days from the date of issuance
- Valid [p]assport with minimum of six months validity
- Valid return ticket
- Two recent passport sized photographs
- Payment of [v]isa [f]ee at the port of entry. (Somalia n.d.)

The UK's FCO states that a single entry one-month visa can be obtained on arrival for US\$60 at the Mogadishu International Airport (UK 29 May 2020). The US Bureau of Consular Affairs indicates that a 60-day tourist visa can be obtained on arrival in Mogadishu for US\$60 (US 30 May 2019).

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), a trade association representing approximately 290 airlines (IATA n.d.a), indicates that foreigners aged twelve and over arriving at the Mogadishu [Aden Adde International] Airport must pay a landing fee of US\$50 (IATA n.d.b). The same source further states that air passengers departing Somalia aged two and over are required to pay a passenger service charge of US\$20 for foreigners or 10,000 Somali Shillings (SOS) [approximately C\$23] for Somali nationals and residents (IATA n.d.b).

The website of the Mogadishu Aden Adde International Airport indicates that passengers are required to undergo security screening, which checks whether carry-on items are allowed on board (Mogadishu Aden Adde International Airport n.d.). An article by Voice of America (VOA), a US international broadcaster funded by US Congress (VOA n.d.), quotes the general manager of the Mogadishu Aden Adde International Airport as stating that an air passenger "goes through searches, three scans, sniffer dogs" and that international departures have their "own security gates where further security checks are made" (VOA 25 Apr. 2017).

2.2 Somaliland

The Dutch report indicates that travelers are required to show a passport to enter Somaliland (Netherlands Mar. 2019, 15). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the UNHCR's office in Mogadishu indicated that at land borders in Somaliland, a Somali citizen must produce a national ID and a foreigner must have entry and exit visas (UN 1 June 2020). The same source stated that citizens who have their passports will receive entry and exit stamps from immigration officials at "official entry points" (UN 1 June 2020).

The UK's FCO states that a single entry one-month visa can be obtained on arrival in Somaliland for US\$60 (UK 29 May 2020). A circular issued by the Commissioner of Somaliland's Immigration Department dated 10 March 2019 states that the following individuals can obtain a visa on arrival at all Somaliland ports of entry: diplomatic passport holders; UN passport holders; national service passport holders; travelers from "multilateral agencies," such as the African Union, EU and World Bank; international NGOs registered with the Ministry of Planning; official foreign delegations invited by the Somaliland Government; business investors invited by the Somaliland Ministry of Commerce; individuals of Somali ethnic origin with foreign travel documents; and foreign nationals from European countries, Canada, US, Brazil, China, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) countries [Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda and Eritrea] (Somaliland 10 Mar. 2019).

The UNHCR office in Mogadishu stated that foreigners entering through Somaliland airports must have a valid passport and entry visa for Somaliland (UN 1 June 2020). The same source noted that Somali citizens not originating from Somaliland are required to pay the visa fee (UN 1 June 2020).

2.3 Puntland

The UNHCR office in Mogadishu indicated that an ID card is required for a Somali national to enter Puntland at land borders (UN 1 June 2020). The same source stated that all foreigners need to apply for an entry visa, which is only valid for Puntland (UN 1 June 2020).

According to the UNHCR office in Mogadishu, Somali nationals travelling by air are required to present their national ID cards and are exempt from the migration office fees, with the exception of those flying to Hargeisa in Somaliland, who are required to present the Somali passport and visa fees (UN 1 June 2020). The same source added that the visa requirement led to the suspension of "most flights" to Hargeisa (UN 1 June 2020). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to EU Flight Somalia, a charter flight service for "staff working on EU-funded and other international aid projects in Somalia" (EU n.d.a), the Puntland visa and entry fee is US\$60 and the visa should be obtained prior to travel (EU n.d.b). The same source indicates that upon departure, an exit fee of US\$50 is required (EU n.d.b).

3. Checkpoints

The *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019* by the US Department of State indicate that checkpoints maintained by "government forces, allied groups, armed militias, clan factions and Al-Shabaab inhibited movement and exposed citizens to looting, extortion, harassment and violence" (US 11 Mar. 2020, 20). The same source further states that checkpoints operated by armed groups and attacks on humanitarian workers "severely restricted movement" and aid delivery in the southern and central regions (US 11 Mar. 2020, 20). The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicates that the "prevalence of checkpoints and improvised explosive devices significantly limits road access" across Somalia (UN Jan. 2020, 32).

The UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea describes the taxation system at Al-Shabaab checkpoints as "applied consistently" and "accountable," including providing receipts to drivers, whereas checkpoints maintained by the forces of the Federal Government of Somalia or federal member state forces "doubl[e] tax drivers" who have already paid at another checkpoint (UN 9 Nov. 2018, para. 86).

The Dutch report indicates that identity cards are not required at checkpoints in South and Central Somalia; rather, the individual's clan background is evaluated (Netherlands Mar. 2019, 28). The Lecturer stated that, though there "may be consistency" in Somaliland, at the national level there is no consistent procedure at checkpoints in Somalia, where individuals may be taxed or have their identity verified through identification documents or "other methods" (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020). The same source indicated that in cities located on an

international border, an individual's documentation will be checked in offices located on either side of the border; however, the existence of border control is inconsistent due to the length of the border (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020).

3.1 Mogadishu

The UNHCR office in Mogadishu stated that the Federal Government forces control the "[m]ain checkpoints" inside Mogadishu (UN 1 June 2020). The Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Landinfo, an independent body within the Norwegian Immigration Authorities, indicates that the police were operating checkpoints on most of Mogadishu's main roads during Landinfo's visit in September 2017, and the primary purpose of the checkpoints was to prevent attacks by Al-Shabaab on government agencies (Norway 15 May 2018, 2, 11). An article on safety tips for humanitarians working in Somalia by Iman Elman, former Director of External Affairs at Somalia's Ministry of Internal Security and Head of Programs and Security for CTG, a "private sector company enabling humanitarian and development projects in conflict settings" (CTG n.d.), states that security checkpoints in Mogadishu are commonly located every one to two kilometers, including at airport compounds (CTG 22 Jan. 2019). The same article indicates that identification documents ensure the ability to "freely travel" across Mogadishu (CTG 22 Jan. 2019). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2 Somaliland

The Dutch report states that checks are conducted along all access roads and the security apparatus in Somaliland is "effective" (Netherlands Mar. 2019, 15). The UNHCR office in Mogadishu indicated the following:

- a. Each district and counts [*sic*] may have several entry and exit checkpoints.
- b. The checkpoint authorities check the travel documents of passengers or driver's licenses of the drivers. They also ask about the destination and the origin of the trip. Besides, they record the plate numbers of the vehicles as well and their contact numbers. These procedures are consistent.
- c. Immigration and police authorities operate at the checkpoints. It shall be noted that some borders (with Ethiopia) are relatively porous and migrants might enter Somaliland without documentation. This practice has been curbed, but in the past, it was common to enter through illegal entry points. (UN 1 June 2020)

3.3 Puntland

The Lecturer indicated that there are checkpoints operated by the police between Puntland and Somaliland (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020). The UNHCR office in Mogadishu stated that checkpoints are located between each state, such as between Puntland and Somaliland and between Puntland and Galmudug (UN 1 June 2020). The same source indicated that Somali nationals are required to present national ID cards and foreigners are required to present visas (UN 1 June 2020).

4. Travel Agencies that Facilitate Travel Within and Outside Somalia

The UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) indicates that there are over 150 travel agencies operating in Somalia (UN 7 Jan. 2018). The same source quotes a Mogadishu-based tour operator who has been working in the industry since 2013 as stating that he has been "hosting a lot of people from the European Union, the United States and Asia" (UN 7 Jan. 2018). A September 2016 article by Quartz, an international online business publication with headquarters in New York and London (Quartz n.d.), states that the Somali Tourism Association, a non-profit organization "dedicated to making tourism accessible to all Somalis," have organized tours outside of Mogadishu for domestic tourists (Quartz 27 Sept. 2016). The same source indicates that Untamed Borders, a British "adventure travel company," conducted organized tours to Mogadishu, Somaliland and Puntland for foreign tourists, who are accompanied by "high-level personal security, a translator, and a fixer [1] to show them around" (Quartz 27 Sept. 2016).

Information on services offered by travel agencies to Somali citizens, including assistance in obtaining travel and identity documents, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

5. Travel Restrictions Related to COVID-19

Sources indicate that all international and domestic passenger flights were suspended due to COVID-19 (Australia 21 July 2020; WorldAware 2 July 2020). The IOM states that Somalia discovered its first confirmed case of COVID-19 on 16 March 2020 and suspended all international flights on the same date (UN 13 July 2020). The US Embassy in Somalia reports that flight restrictions were implemented on 18 March 2020 (US 20 July 2020).

Sources state that domestic flights resumed on 5 July 2020 (WorldAware 2 July 2020; UN 13 July 2020). Sources indicate that international flights were suspended until 2 August 2020 (Somalia 8 Aug. 2020; WorldAware 1 Aug. 2020). Somalia's IND states that a COVID-19 negative certificate "taken" a maximum of 96 hours before a flight is required to enter or exit the country (Somalia 8 Aug. 2020). Australia's DFAT indicates that as of 21 July 2020, flights

between Hargeisa and Addis Ababa, operating at reduced capacity, were available (Australia 21 July 2020). A note by the UN's OCHA summarizing COVID-19-related directives issued by the Somali Federal Government and Federal Member States, covering the period of 17 to 28 May 2020, describes the following travel restrictions:

- Twenty out of twenty-one land borders are closed, but the borders "remain porous and cross-border movement has been observed";
- The Government of Kenya ordered the closure of the Kenya-Somalia border on 15 May following an increase in cross-border infections;
- "State-level restrictions have not yet had an implication on road transport across internal borders" (UN 30 May 2020).

A website on the COVID-19 response in Somalia by Somalia's Ministry of Health, OCHA and the World Health Organization (WHO) states that as of 20 August 2020, all twenty-one land borders are closed and all twelve airports are open (UN and Somalia 20 Aug. 2020).

The same source states that as of 20 August 2020, there were 93 COVID-19-related deaths and 3,265 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (UN 20 Aug. 2020). The same source indicates that there were 1,525 cases in Banadir, followed by 872 cases in Somaliland, 380 cases in Puntland, 202 cases in Jubaland, 144 cases in the South-west and 119 cases in Galmudug (UN and Somalia 20 Aug. 2020). A COVID-19 impact update report by the OCHA indicates that as of 22 June 2020, there was a "decreasing trend" in the number of newly reported cases when compared to the previous weeks, except for in Somaliland, and there was a "downward trend" in COVID-19-related deaths (UN 22 June 2020).


This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] A fixer acts "as a source of local knowledge," providing logistical assistance for media and other organizations in foreign countries (ICFJ 9 May 2017).

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Internet sites, including: African Union – Mission in Somalia; Al Jazeera; Asylum Research Centre; Austrian Red Cross – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation; Denmark – Danish Immigration Service, Ministry of Immigration and Integration; *The EastAfrican*; ecoi.net; EU – European Asylum Support Office; Factiva; Garowe Online; Hiiraan Online; International Crisis Group; *International Journal of Political Science*; Rift Valley Institute; Somaliland.com; Somaliland – Somaliland Diaspora Agency; Somaliland Travel; UK – Home Office; UN – Refworld, ReliefWeb, World Food Programme.

Date modified:

2020-06-01