

Report  
**Somalia: Children and youth**



**Translation provided by the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons, Belgium.**

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## **SUMMARY**

Since Somalia is very fragmented, politically, economically and socially, the conditions for growing up will vary according to where you actually live in the country. Neither local nor central authorities have the capacity to take measures attending to the needs of children. The conditions under which children grow up are therefore decisively determined by the capacity of the family under the conditions in which they live. The role of the family is crucial, especially when it comes to security, schooling, health, and later on for job opportunities. Access to school and health services varies very much throughout the country, but seems to be best in Somaliland and in Mogadishu.

Somalia has a very young population, of which the group under 14 years constitutes 44 %. With a deficient educational system and a high unemployment rate, especially among the younger part of the population, Somalia faces a big challenge in facilitating for the coming generations.

# CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>1. Introduction</b> .....  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>2. Somalia’s population</b> .....  | <b>5</b>  |
| 2.1 Percentage of children and youth .....                                      | 5         |
| 2.2 Different groups .....  | 6         |
| <b>3. General conditions for upbringing of children</b> .....                   | <b>6</b>  |
| 3.1 Children without families .....   | 7         |
| 3.2 Studies about conditions influencing children’s upbringing in Somalia ..... | 7         |
| 3.2.1 <i>Comments on findings</i> .....   | 9         |
| <b>4. Legal framework for children’s rights</b> .....                           | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>5. Schooling</b> .....   | <b>10</b> |
| 5.1 Types of schools .....  | 11        |
| 5.2 Schools in Mogadishu .....  | 11        |
| 5.3 Schools in Puntland .....   | 12        |
| 5.4 Schools in Somaliland .....   | 12        |
| 5.5 Quality of education in Somalia .....                                       | 12        |
| <b>6. Health services</b> .....   | <b>13</b> |
| <b>7. Child labour and child soldiers</b> .....                                 | <b>13</b> |
| 7.1 Measures against child labour and child soldiers.....                       | 14        |
| <b>8. Female genital mutilation</b> .....                                       | <b>15</b> |
| <b>9. References</b> .....  | <b>16</b> |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is no easy task to provide a comprehensive report on the situation for children and youth in Somalia. This is both because of a lack of information and the fact that the topic is complex, given that the country is highly fragmented economically, politically and in terms of security. The country has no central government leading a unified policy directed at children and youth and the local authorities around the country have virtually no or very little resources to spend in this area. Children's upbringing in Somalia is thus largely determined by what their family is able to provide for them. Simply put, if the family lives under reasonably safe, good conditions, their children will also have a satisfactory life. For example schooling, where available, is generally only possible if the family can afford to pay tuition.

Security issues are important to children's upbringing, but are not discussed in this report. Information about this can be found in other publications from Landinfo and, due to the unstable situation in many places, particularly southern Somalia, updated information should always be sought on the places in question.

Access to health services is also not discussed. A more complete account is available in Landinfo's report *Somalia: Behandlingsmuligheter og medikamenter [Somalia: Treatment opportunities and medications]* (2014). It must also be noted that female genital mutilation is discussed in more detail in another Landinfo report (Landinfo 2011).

This report is primarily based on studies conducted by major international organisations such as UNICEF. But, for example, mapping of access to schools has only been done in a few limited areas, partly for safety reasons. There is little reliable information about most of Somalia. The areas that are best covered are Mogadishu, Puntland and Somaliland.

## 2. SOMALIA'S POPULATION

### 2.1 PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Out of Somalia's population of over 10 million, it is estimated that the age group 0-14 constitutes almost 4.6 million, i.e. about 44 % of the population (CIA 2015). If we extend the age group up to 30, the percentage of the younger part of the population is 70 % (UNDP 2012). At the same time Somalia has a birth rate that is currently amongst the highest in the world. With a life expectancy of 50 years, Somalia will thus have a population with a very high proportion of youth compared with most other countries in the coming years (CIA 2015).

## **2.2 DIFFERENT GROUPS**

There are several divisions in Somali society that create different living conditions for those growing up. Socially and economically the population can be divided into three main groups: nomads, resident farmers and those who live in the major cities. Secondly the country is fragmented politically without a unified administration, which leads to variations in law enforcement and the general security situation for the population depending on where one lives. Access to health services and schooling will also vary along these lines. In this context, for example, there is a big difference between living in an area controlled by al-Shabaab and living in Mogadishu. Finally it must be mentioned that there is a large group of internally displaced people in the country. These are people who have left their homes due to war, conflict and drought since the civil war broke out in 1991. Most are in the central and southern areas of the country, where the number is estimated to be more than 890,000 (IDMC 2015). Most of these people live under fairly wretched conditions and are largely dependent on humanitarian aid. Common to these groups is also that they generally do not belong to clans that are dominant where they live, something which also makes the group vulnerable in a security context.

## **3. GENERAL CONDITIONS FOR UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN**

As there is no unified administration in the country with a national policy towards children and youth, and there are no institutions that can intervene and protect them if necessary, a family's ability to take care of children is key to how a child grows up.

Families' circumstances vary according to the social, economic and political differences in the country. Over 60 % of the country's population lives in rural areas, either as nomads with livestock or as resident farmers (World Bank 2015). These two main groups in Somali society live lives that are quite different, but common to them is that they live and work in a traditional way, where the family functions as a production unit in which children also participate.

In cities and towns there is generally greater variation in the way families live, and greater economic disparity than in rural areas. Access to health services and schools are better, and the opportunities to find various jobs are greater than outside the cities. In terms of security it has often been more challenging to live in the cities than in rural areas during periods of high levels of conflict in Somalia. This is because the cities have resources that the warring parties in the civil war fought over. Today the government has control over most of the major cities in Somalia.

Most of the country's internally displaced people currently live in and around the major cities where the government has control. This is because this is where various aid organisations have access and can more easily operate. Just in and around Mogadishu, it is estimated that there are about 369,000 internally displaced people (IDMC 2015). It is also part of the picture that 70-80 % of the families amongst the internally displaced people consist solely of women and children, and that over 60 % of the group as a whole are children (UNICEF 2013b).

### 3.1 CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILIES

Many children in Somalia have lost their parents throughout the years of war and conflict. Traditionally these children are cared for by other family members, particularly by the father's family. But many have been left alone. There are no reliable figures for how many orphans there are in Somalia. There is also no comprehensive overview of the work being done in order to take care of children without families, but both local and international agencies have projects in the major cities. Amongst others SOS Children's Village runs orphanages and hospitals in Mogadishu (SOS Children's Village, n.d.). Turkey runs orphanages that were recently opened in both Mogadishu and Kismayo (Hiraan Online 2015; Kismaayo 2013). The South African aid organisation Gift of the Givers has opened an orphanage in Kismayo (Kismayo Daily 2014). There are also funds from several of the Gulf countries for large and small projects in and around Somalia to take care of orphans. But there is reason to assume that many of these children are still left to themselves and live as so-called «street children» in the major cities. Orphaned boys have also been recruited on a large scale to various armed groups, including al-Shabaab (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2011).

### 3.2 STUDIES ABOUT CONDITIONS INFLUENCING CHILDREN'S UPBRINGING IN SOMALIA

There are two reports based on surveys of children and youth in Somalia, in which an attempt was made to map how they perceive their own situation. These are UNICEF's report *What Children and Youth Think, Somalia* from 2006 and *Somalia Human Development Report 2012*, prepared by UNDP. In the following the two reports are discussed and relevant findings are referenced.

The basis of UNICEF's report is interviews with 537 children and youth aged 9 to 17 from the districts of Beletweyne, Bosasso, Hargeisa and Merka. On the profile of those interviewed, 66 % said that they come from families in rural areas, 34 % live in cities and 70 % go to school.

From the study, the following can be referenced:

- When asked whether they were happy or satisfied, 86 % answered that they were, and two thirds of this percentage group reported that they were satisfied most of the time.
- When asked when they felt satisfied, 50 % answered that it was when they were with family, and 29 % when they were with friends.
- 45 % answered that they were primarily upset when being punished by their parents.
- When asked what worried them, most responded that it was matters relating to family.
- Regarding Somalia's future, peace and economic progress were at the top of their wishlist.

The Human Development Report from UNDP maps living conditions in every country of the world and is the basis of the Human Development Index, where countries are ranked. Norway is at the top of the list, while Somalia is at the bottom.

The report from 2012 on Somalia is mainly about the country's youth and conditions influencing their upbringing. The report is based on interviews of people from 3,352 households from various places in Southern Somalia, Central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland (p. 190).

UNDP's report claims to be the first to uncover what they call «the youth crisis in Somalia», as is described in the following:

*With two decades of endless civil war and unrest, Somali youth face harsh realities. Many are poor, uneducated and unemployed, or have left the country as migrants or refugees. Others have joined the armed militia, either voluntarily or involuntarily, and use violence to earn quick money through robbery, ransacking or piracy. With few choices or outlets to express their anger, they are ready recruits for engaging in risky behavior. A 'lost' generation poses significant challenges not only to youth themselves, but also imposes formidable economic, political and social costs, a real threat to national stability (p. 47).*

The report is based on an extensive survey in which both questionnaires and interviews were used. It provides more information in the form of tables about material living conditions and the attitudes and beliefs amongst those interviewed. In the description of the youth and how they perceive their situation, the report concentrates on the following topics:

- What is perceived as important in life
- Barriers for progressing in life
- Experiences with violence and conflict

To map the social and cultural beliefs of youth, they were asked what they thought was most important: family, religion, education or politics. 98 % said family was the most important thing in life, while religion came in a close second. Politics was listed as the least important.

A key point of the survey was to find out to which degree the youth experienced themselves as being included and partaking in society. They were surveyed by asking them to compare their situation with other Somali groups. Almost 80 % of those who answered in southern and central Somalia said that they felt outside and that they had less access to what they wanted than other groups, while less than 50 % said the same in Puntland and Somaliland.

An important gateway to participation in society is getting a job. The survey showed that the average unemployment rate for the country in the age group 14-29 years old was 67 %, which is one of the highest in the world. Broken down by gender, the percentage of unemployed women was 74%, while men were 61 %. Geographically unemployment was highest in Somaliland with 84%, followed by southern and central Somalia and Puntland.

As for those who said they were employed, half of the people had either performed unpaid work within the family or conducted some form or other of independent business.

How widespread the desire to emigrate is within a population must be assumed to reflect how well the society is functioning and how satisfied people are. When asked whether they wanted to leave Somalia, two-thirds of the youth said they wanted to. The percentage was highest in southern and central Somalia, with 87 %, and out of those 64 % said that the purpose was to get a good paying job, while 31 % wanted to because of the security situation.

In their report on young people's situation in Somalia, the report concludes that: «Youth employment in Somalia is possibly the worst in the world» (p. 76). It also states that: «[...] if the task of providing education and jobs for youth continues to be neglected, fallout could be disastrous for Somalia and the world» (p. 76).

### **3.2.1 Comments on findings**

The main impression from the UNICEF report is that the interviewed children do not suffer any distress and that they are satisfied. Meanwhile they ascribe great importance to family. The results have to be viewed in light of the fact that those interviewed lived in areas where there were no ongoing hostilities in 2006. The fact that 70 % of the children went to school also indicates that they came from relatively well-to-do families. The survey seems to indicate that in areas where there are no violent conflicts unfolding and families live under reasonable conditions, children in Somalia can live satisfactory lives.

The survey from UNDP primarily uncovers the frustration that obviously characterises many young people on the threshold of adulthood. The results highlight the major challenges Somalia faces in its efforts to create jobs and better schools for the rising generation. Meanwhile it also emerged in the survey that the family plays an important role for those who are interviewed, even though this group has a higher age.

The fact that children and youth express that family means a lot to them may be seen as obvious, and nothing unique to young Somalis. The reason it is emphasised here is that this clear expression of the family's importance emphasises the central role the family has in Somalia, where most other social institutions do not function.

## **4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

In the years since the Somali state collapsed, the foundation of law and order for most Somalis has been Sharia and traditional law, *xeer*. Enforcement of these laws has varied from place to place, determined amongst other by who holds the political or military power in the place. In areas controlled by al-Shabaab a very strict interpretation of Sharia is generally practiced. At the same time Somalia has a national legislation based on modern principles of law, which the administrations around the country have kept to in various ways.

In Somaliland the authorities in 1993 declared that the establishment of a national legislation should be based on the laws that were enacted before Siad Barre came to power. In the constitution Somaliland adopted in 2001 it also states that all laws must

be based on Sharia to be valid in Somaliland, and that existing laws that are contrary to Sharia will be deemed invalid (Le Sage 2005). Somaliland has not yet adopted a new family law or other type of law that governs the rights of children.

At the formation of the administration in Puntland in 1998 it was declared that all laws that former governments had introduced would remain in effect until new laws were drafted. In addition it was made clear that no previous law that was contrary to Sharia would be valid (Le Sage 2005).

After the new Somali constitution was adopted in 2012, the Federal Republic of Somalia was established.<sup>1</sup> In the second paragraph of the constitution it is stated that no law not in accordance with the general principles of Sharia can be adopted. It also states in paragraph three that the constitution promotes human rights. Children are handled in a separate paragraph where it states that children have the right to protection from abuse and mistreatment and to legal aid paid by the public when necessary, cf. paragraph 29. Regarding education it states in paragraph 30 that any Somali citizen has the right to free education up to secondary school (Constitution 2012). In addition Somalia joined the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2015 (UN News Centre 2015).

However these modern legal rules have barely been applied. This is due to both a lack of institutions and resources to handle them, which is particularly true in cases of civil law, such as the enforcement of the rights of children, including the right to free education. But there is also a widespread perception amongst Somalis that private and civil legal matters should be organised according to Sharia and traditional law. Sharia does not indicate any specific age at which one is considered an adult. There is the criterion of puberty. If you are sexually mature, you are no longer regarded as a child. One is then responsible for one's own actions and can, for example, get married. This applies to both genders. This is the general rule both in traditional Somali law and as Sharia is practiced in Somalia.

## 5. SCHOOLING

After Somalia became independent the country's authorities focused heavily on building a national school system, particularly from the 1970s. There were major challenges. The country had no national written language and it was estimated that only 5 % of the country's population could read and write. After a Somali written language became a fact in 1973, a large-scale literacy campaign was launched. A modern school system took shape that the nomadic population could also benefit from. The efforts produced results and in the 1980s it was estimated that 55 % of the population could read and write. But after the 1980s the education sector was neglected and in 1990 it was estimated that the percentage who could read and write had fallen to 24 % (Int.Comp, n.d.).

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<sup>1</sup> The federative republic includes the southern and central areas of Somalia and Puntland. Somaliland does not wish to be a part of the federation, but does not have international recognition for the creation of an independent state.

Since the Barre regime collapsed in 1991 Somalia has in practice been without a functioning government, which also means that there has been no central school system in the country. Access to education and schools in Somalia therefore varies from place to place depending on who administers the area you live in. Educational services are generally better in Somaliland and Puntland than in southern and central Somalia, with the exception of Mogadishu. Access to schooling also depends on whether one is settled or nomadic and whether one lives in the city or in a rural area. Those who have the poorest access to schooling of all groups in Somalia are apparently the children of nomads. For the country as a whole, UNICEF estimated that 42 % of all children in Somalia go to school, and in the individual regions of the country the percentage that go to school is estimated at 44 % in Somaliland, 41 % in Puntland and 38 % in southern and central Somalia (UNICEF 2013a).

## **5.1 TYPES OF SCHOOLS**

In Puntland and Somaliland the schools are mostly public. In southern and central Somalia, including Mogadishu, most of the schools are private. The private schools were generally created through local initiatives and are operated based on tuition fees and contributions from various international organisations. Eventually the individual schools have joined together in so-called «Education Umbrellas». These organisations have had different views on teaching content, but have recently agreed to cooperate with the authorities on a common curriculum (UN Special Envoy 2013). Common to all the schools, both private and public, is that the students must pay school fees that vary from school to school and that are largely determined by the quality of teaching.

There are Koran schools in most places in Somalia. Their primary task is to give students an introduction to Islam and to teach them texts from the Koran in Arabic. But in the areas where there are no other types of schools, Koran schools usually teach basic math and Somali (Moyi 2012). This is particularly the case in areas controlled by al-Shabaab.

There is no complete list of education offers in Somalia. But the authorities in Mogadishu, Puntland and Somaliland have recently conducted surveys in collaboration with UNICEF to map what exists in each area.

## **5.2 SCHOOLS IN MOGADISHU**

In 2013 there was the first report with a complete overview of education offers in Mogadishu, i.e. primary schools and secondary schools divided by district. The survey provides a range of information, including about who runs the schools, access to textbooks, number of students per classroom and the teachers' qualifications (Ministry of Education, Somali Federal Government 2013).

In terms of the number of schools, the survey shows that Mogadishu has 270 schools at the primary and lower secondary level attended by 79,376 students, and 151 secondary schools attended by 19,048 students. Of the schools at the primary and lower secondary level, two are public, the rest are run privately. None of the secondary schools are public. The district of Dharkenley has the greatest number of

schools at the primary and lower secondary level and secondary level, while Abdiaziz has the fewest number of schools.

At the primary and lower secondary level the survey registered 2,337 teachers, of which 262 were women, and the average number of students per teacher was 34. At the secondary level the survey registered 1,204 teachers, of which 33 were women, and the average number of students per teacher was 16. It also stated that only 12 % of the teachers at the primary and lower secondary level had formal education, while at the secondary level the percentage was 23 %.

### **5.3 SCHOOLS IN PUNTLAND**

For Puntland as a whole there is an overview of the schools at the primary and lower secondary level from 2013 (Ministry of Education Puntland State of Somalia 2012). The survey showed that the region has 411 schools. The coverage was the best in the province of Bari with 114 schools. Out of those 61 were in the port of Bossaso.

The total number of students was 91,451 with the largest percentage in the province of Bari. 4,173 teachers were registered there, which gives an average of 24 students per teacher. 13 % of the teachers were considered qualified.

### **5.4 SCHOOLS IN SOMALILAND**

Mapping of the schools at the primary and lower secondary level in Somaliland was last done in 2011/12 by the Ministry of Education in Somaliland (Ministry of Education and Higher Education 2012). The survey covers all of Somaliland.

In the survey 940 schools were registered with 197,974 students. In the capital Hargeisa there were 72 schools, attended by 46,508 students. Unlike in Mogadishu the percentage of private schools is very low in Somaliland. Over 89 % of the schools are public.

The number of teachers was determined to be 6,157, which gives an average of 31 students per teacher. 51 % of the teachers were considered qualified, which is significantly higher than in both Puntland and Mogadishu.<sup>2</sup>

### **5.5 QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SOMALIA**

To the extent that Somali authorities were able to eventually get control of and stabilise major areas in Somalia, there is reason to assume that the number of schools will increase, as recently witnessed in Mogadishu. An equal challenge to improving access to education, is to ensure the quality of the education provided. The low percentage of qualified teachers in Somali schools today, as revealed by the surveys, indicates that the quality of education is a problem.

During a visit Landinfo made in Mogadishu in February 2015, the question of quality of the schools in Somalia was brought up in conversation with three people from Somalia. All three said that most schools are bad compared with the level in

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<sup>2</sup> In terms of secondary education, there is a report from 2009 with an overview of what is available at this level in Somaliland (UNESCO 2009).

neighbouring countries, and that this is due to the lack of resources and to the teachers not being sufficiently qualified. For example one said that he had sent his children to boarding school in Kenya to ensure they got a full education. Another said that his wife and children stayed in Kenya mainly for the same reason. A third said that the level at universities in Somalia is at a level with secondary school in countries with a good school system.

## **6. HEALTH SERVICES**

Compared to most other countries, including in Africa, Somalia has a poor health and health services situation. An estimated 80 % of the population has no access to healthcare. The country has a physician coverage of 0.4 per inhabitant. In comparison, coverage in Norway is 41.6 (CIA World Factbook 2015). Both infant mortality and women's risk of dying in childbirth are the highest in the world. The two most common causes of death for children under five are respiratory infections and diarrhea, which are both usually treatable if one sees a doctor in time (UNICEF 2012).

As there is no national health authority in Somalia able to provide the population with health care, what is available varies depending on where one lives or stays. Availability primarily depends on who manages the area and the extent to which local and international aid agencies have access to the area.

All evidence suggests that access to treatment and medications is best in larger cities, particularly in Mogadishu. Of the various population groups in Somalia, nomads are usually the worst off. There are also indications that access is poor in areas controlled by al-Shabaab, partially because aid organisations are not allowed access.

When it comes to services directed specifically at mothers and children, there is no complete overview of what is available in the country as a whole. But such clinics exist, and there are several in Mogadishu. These clinics perform checks of newborns and vaccinations and also treat simple diseases such as respiratory infections, diarrhea and malaria (Zamazam Foundation 2010). The largest hospital of its kind is in Mogadishu and is run by SOS Children's Village. The hospital provides free treatment and receives patients from all over southern and central Somalia. When Landinfo visited the hospital in February 2015, we were informed that about 500 new patients were signing up every day, but they did not have capacity to assist more than 200 a day. Emergency conditions are handled immediately, while the rest are placed in a queue.

## **7. CHILD LABOUR AND CHILD SOLDIERS**

Child labour and the use of children in military forces occurs in Somalia, and attempts have been made to estimate the extent. The UN claims to have evidence that

in 2013, there were 1,293 children used by various forces in Somalia. Of those 908 were with al-Shabaab, 209 with the Somali government forces with allied militias and 111 in the forces of Ahl al-Sunna wal Jama'a (UN Special Representative 2014).

The United States Department of Labor (2013) has prepared an overview that estimates that just under 40 % of the age group 5-14 years old in Somalia work. This estimate includes different types of work: everything from work performed within the family in agriculture and amongst nomads, to paid work such as car washing or various types of street sales, forced work such as prostitution for girls and stone cutting for boys, and service as child soldiers.

Work performed by boys and girls amongst the farmers and nomads will generally be in line with what is traditionally expected of children in rural areas of Somalia. Many of these children also live in areas where there is poor access to schools.

Paid work and forced labour occur to a greater degree amongst children in cities than in rural areas. In addition to orphaned street children, these children are primarily from families amongst the poor segments of the city's population, and particularly from groups of internally displaced people.

The abovementioned study does not reveal how much of the work effort of children of farmers and nomads make out in the total sum of work performed by children in all occupations. But there is reason to believe that the largest part of the work is performed in rural areas, given that the majority of Somalia's population lives there.

It is hard to say for sure the extent to which al-Shabaab recruits children today. But after the authorities took control of most of the major cities in southern and central Somalia in the period after 2011, a number of Somali experts, including local representatives of UN agencies and international organisations whom Landinfo was in contact with during the visit to Mogadishu in February 2015, said that al-Shabaab no longer forcibly recruited children in cities such as Mogadishu. However the same sources believed that al-Shabaab still purchased various services from children in Mogadishu, such as missions as informants or throwing grenades at police or military posts (conversations in Mogadishu, February 2015). In rural areas where al-Shabaab has control, recruitment of child soldiers may well still occur, including forcibly.

## **7.1 MEASURES AGAINST CHILD LABOUR AND CHILD SOLDIERS**

In recent years Somali authorities have been under pressure to take action against the use of child soldiers and the worst forms of child labour.

Somali authorities have in various ways now committed themselves to tackling the problems (UN News Centre 2012). There are plans to stop the recruitment and use of children in government forces and also to increase the availability of schools. In addition donor countries that contribute to funding the Somali government forces set as a condition that payment of wages to the individual soldiers can only occur after ages and identities are verified (UN Special Representative 2014).

The extent to which these measures are successful is uncertain, but regardless of this, they will have a limited impact. In areas outside the government's control, al-Shabaab and other local militias could still make use of children.

## 8. FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Female genital mutilation is very widespread in Somalia. More than 90 % of all girls in Somalia are exposed to the most radical form of the practice, i.e. infibulation. The practice is grounded in religion, tradition and sexual morality. Despite educational activities and awareness campaigns from both the government and Islamic leaders aimed at ending the practice, there is little to suggest that this will change in the near future (Landinfo 2011).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> More detailed information on this topic can be found in Landinfo's report *Somalia: Kjønnslæstelse av kvinner [Female genital mutilation of women]* (2011).

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