

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

[Home](#) > [Research Program](#) > [Responses to Information Requests](#)

## Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

7 October 2013

### SOM104589.E

Somalia: Distinguishing characteristics of the Gabooye (Midgan) people; whether it is possible for a member of the minority clan living in Mogadishu to hide that they are part of the Gabooye from his or her spouse and in-laws, who are members of a majority clan

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### 1. Distinguishing Characteristics of the Gabooye People

Information on distinguishing characteristics of the Gabooye people was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that there are no physically distinguishing characteristics of the Gabooye [also spelled: Gaboye, Gabooyo; also known as Midgan, Midgaan] people (Associate 24 Sept. 2013; Somaliland Sun 27 Aug. 2013). According to a UNHCR report on Somalia, Gabooye people "may appear physically similar to Samaal," a "dominant" ethnic group in Somalia (UN 5 May 2010, 43, 46).

In 24 September 2013 correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate with the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, who has published academic papers on topics related to Somalia and performed field research in northern Somalia, explained that Gabooye are distinguishable based on their genealogy and can be divided in four other sub-groups: Madhiban, Muuse Deriyo, Tumaal, and Yibir.

The Associate also indicated that while some members of the Midgaan and Yibir sub-groups have their own dialect, generally the Gabooye speak "standard" Somali (24 Sept. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Associate also noted that the Gabooye often live in a distinct area of residence, such as the Dhami neighbourhood in Hargeysa, in northern Somaliland, away from the majority clans who view the Gabooye as "dirty" (Associate 24 Sept. 2013).

For further information on the Gabooye people, including subgroups, languages, occupations, location, and affiliated clans, please see the Response to Information Request SOM104239.

#### 2. Marriages Between Gabooye People and Members of Majority Clans

Sources report that majority clans are prohibited from marrying people of the Gabooye caste (Samad Aug. 2002; MRG May 2011; Somaliland Sun 8 Feb. 2012). Similarly, the Associate said that the marriage between Gabooye and "most other Somali groups" is "taboo" (24 Sept. 2013). The Associate also said that

[a]t least in Somaliland, this taboo is adhered to rather strictly (there are always exceptions on an individual basis). In Puntland in the northeast of Somalia, members of the Majeerteen majority clan sometimes marry [Gabooye], but not frequently. (24 Sept. 2013)

#### 3. Possibility of a Gabooye Person Hiding Distinguishing Characteristics

Information about Gabooye persons hiding distinguishing characteristics was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The Associate stated the following in his correspondence dated 24 September 2013:

These characteristics could be hidden if a person would live far away from his/her home. There are stories about 'runaway' Midgan/Gabooye women who, in a place where nobody knows them, change their identity to a majority group and marry a man from another majority group. But this can only happen if people in the new place of residence do not inquire deeply about the women's background and demand to see her relatives (e.g., as part of the marriage ceremony).

So, the woman would have to argue that she was orphan, that her close relatives had died or live abroad, etc. [U]sually, Somalis are really good at figuring out a person's background quickly. Someone is always in some way related to another person. In the diaspora, things are different and one might be able to hide one's identity more effectively. Since there are no physical markers of Midgane/Gabooye and also dialect can be hidden, people can change identities easily in the diaspora ....

In another correspondence dated 4 October 2013, the Associate further indicated that while it was possible that Gabooye/Midgan men could "run away," change their identity and marry a woman from a majority group, he had not heard of any such cases. He explained that since Somalis are "serious about descent," the genealogy of both men and women would be scrutinized "as much as possible" by future in-laws (Associate 4 Oct. 2013). According to the Associate, in patrilineal Somali society, the children inherit the descent of the father. Thus, his descent is decisive. The woman is supposed to represent the 'soft' qualities such as kindness, religiosity, morally good behavior, industriousness, etc. She is keeping the kids and the house nice and clean. The man, on the other hand, situates the family within a lineage, a clan, etc. which has serious political implications and is relevant in case of conflict .... Thus, if at all, a man from a majority clan can marry a woman from a minority clan, as it sometimes happens (more frequently with Majeerteen in Puntland, less frequently with Isaaq or Darood in Somaliland). But a woman from a majority group marrying a man from a minority clan is the ultimate scandal, because her kids will become Midgan/minority group members and thus, 'lost' completely in the eyes of her family. In the other case, if a Midgan woman gives birth to Isaaq or Darood children, it is a 'step upwards' in genealogical perspective. (ibid.)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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.

## References

Associate, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. 4 October 2013. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

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Minority Rights Group International (MRG). May 2011. "Gabooye." <<http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4510>> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2013]

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United Nations (UN). 5 May 2010. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers From Somalia*. (HCR/EG/SOM/10/1) <[http://www.asgi.it/public/parser\\_download/save/unhcr\\_somalia\\_2010.pdf](http://www.asgi.it/public/parser_download/save/unhcr_somalia_2010.pdf)> [Accessed 3 Oct. 2013]

## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact the following organizations were unsuccessful: Somali Canadian Association of Etobicoke; Somali Canadian Education and Rural Development Organization; Canadian Somali Congress; UNHCR Somalia. A professor at Colby College was unable to provide information.

**Internet sites, including:** African Press International; Aménagement linguistique dans le monde; Centre for Justice and Accountability; ecoi.net; Factiva; The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies; Horn of Africa Human Rights Watch Committee; Norway – LandInfo; Somali Minority Rights and Aid Forum; United Kingdom – Home Office; United Nations – Refworld; Vice.com.

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