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[Home](#)

> [Research Program](#)

> Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests

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13 March 2015

SOM105094.E

Somalia: Frequency of members of the diaspora returning to live in the country, and particularly in Mogadishu; availability of housing and employment to diaspora returnees, including difficulties related to clan membership and economic opportunities (2012-2015)

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1. Overview

Sources report that the improved stability and security situation in Somalia has prompted members of the Somali diaspora to return to their country of origin (DRC Jan. 2013; UN 9 July 2013). According to a July 2013 news article by the United Nations News Centre, "[w]ith parts of Somalia showing signs of increasing stability ... some Somalis have spontaneously decided to move back to areas under Government control" (ibid.). The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS), a non-partisan policy research and analysis institute based in Mogadishu (HIPS n.d.), similarly reports that, as repatriation is becoming "increasingly viable," many diaspora Somalis are inspired to bring the expertise and training acquired from their host countries to Somalia (ibid. June 2014, 1). In February 2015 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Executive Director of the Somali Canadian Education and Rural Development Organization (SCERDO), a Canadian non-profit organization that "advocate[s] the needs of rural Somalia including economic development, community enhancement, environmental protection, and effective use of resources" (SCERDO n.d.), noted that members of the Somali diaspora from around the world have been returning to their country of origin for a decade (ibid. 6 Feb. 2015).

A report published in 2013 by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) states that "over 42,000 IDPs [internally displaced persons] and refugees have spontaneously returned to their areas of origin between January and October 2013. This includes over 27,000 refugees who returned to Somalia mostly from Kenya (Dadaab refugee camp) and Ethiopia" (UN Oct. 2013, 1).

According to the 2015 UNHCR *Country Operations Profile* for Somalia, in July 2014, there were 9,944 returned refugees and 10,146 IDPs residing in Somalia who had returned to their "place of origin" in the first six months of 2014 (ibid. n.d.c). A November 2014 OCHA report notes that, from January to November 2014, "more than 7,000 refugees moved from Kenya to Somalia, while over 2,000 others crossed from Ethiopia to Somalia" (ibid. Nov. 2014, 10). The same source states that approximately 4,000 Somalis "voluntarily returned from Yemen in the first half of 2014" (ibid.).

2. Assisted Returns from Kenya

Sources state that, in November 2013, the UNHCR and the governments of Kenya and Somalia signed a tripartite agreement that governs the voluntary return of refugees from Kenya to Somalia (*The Star* 2 July

2014; UN 8 Dec. 2014). The first Somali refugees residing in Kenya to return home under the agreement did so in December 2014 (ibid.).

According to a UNHCR document, the districts of Baidoa, Kismayo and Luuq are the locales in which Somali refugees in Kenya are eligible for assisted repatriation (ibid. Aug. 2014, 2). The UNHCR further stresses that "[t]here is no deadline in the agreement for the returns and the agreement specifies that all returns should be voluntary and take place in safety and dignity" (ibid. June 2014, 1). According to UNHCR statistics, from 8 December 2014 to 1 February 2015, 1,275 individuals, or 277 households, crossed the border from Kenya to Somalia (ibid. n.d.a). Xinhua News Agency reports that, prior to departure, returnees received counselling by the UNHCR and partner agencies on the security situation in Somalia (Xinhua 21 Jan. 2015). The same source notes that returnees received a package containing cash, travel and hygiene kits, food, tools, and other basic necessities (ibid). The UNHCR reports that a total of \$70,400 in livelihood start-up grants and 225 core relief kits were given to returnees from Kenya between 8 December 2014 and 1 February 2015 (UN n.d.a). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Opportunities for Returning Diaspora Somalis

According to sources, many diaspora Somalis are returning to employment opportunities in the public sector (IOM n.d.a; HIPS June 2014, 3). HIPS states that the public and non-profit sectors attract diaspora returnees who wish to contribute to Somalia's revival (ibid.). Sources note that many diaspora Somalis want to play an active role in rebuilding their country (ibid.; UN 28 Nov. 2013). HIPS states that educated Somalis often find their expertise in greater demand in Somalia than their host country (HIPS June 2014, 3).

The Executive Director of SCERDO noted that several senior government officials in Somalia, including the current prime minister of Somalia, president of Somaliland, and president of Puntland, have lived in Western countries (6 Feb. 2015).

A program launched by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) known as QUESTS-MIDA [Qualified Expatriate Somali Technical Support - Migration for Development in Africa (IOM n.d.b)] facilitates the matching of educated members of the Somali diaspora with public sector institutions in Somalia (ibid. n.d.a). The project began in 2009 and has placed 42 participants in public service positions in all three regions of Somalia (ibid).

In a report published jointly by Landinfo: Country of Origin Information Centre, "an independent body within the Norwegian Immigration Authorities" (Norway n.d.), and the Danish Immigration Service, a diaspora researcher in Mogadishu who was interviewed for the report gave this characterization of the movement in relation to Mogadishu: "[D]espite insecurity, there are still many who come home in order to gain and secure economic or political influence. Many want to invest and prices on land are high" (Norway and Denmark Mar. 2014, 22). The researcher also noted that diaspora Somalis earn a salary three to four times higher than that of the locals (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that diaspora Somalis often return to Somalia on a temporary, rather than permanent, basis (HIPS June 2014, 1; UN Oct. 2013, 15). According to OCHA, "returns are largely of a temporary nature, with the majority of the returnees reportedly coming back to conduct seasonal farming activities or to maintain security of land tenure, which they will lose if they are absent for a continuous and prolonged period of time" (ibid.). The same source notes that "[o]nly a few returnees reported intentions to stay in the country" (ibid.). HIPS similarly states that "return is rarely permanent but often circular," while noting that "[c]itizenship [of a foreign country] enables mobility to and from Somalia. Many diaspora Somalis have families in their host countries unable or unwilling to return to Somalia yet. Citizenship enables frequent return trips to visit family members" (June 2014, 1-2).

4. Obstacles to Resettlement Faced by Diaspora Returnees

4.1 Tensions with Local Populations

According to sources, members of the Somali diaspora have experienced problems re-integrating with the local population (DRC and NRC 2013, 45; Norway and Denmark Mar. 2014, 22; HIPS June 2014, 3). The Mogadishu-based researcher interviewed for the joint report by Landinfo and the Danish Immigration Service states that

[t]here is an increasing resentment between the locals and the diaspora, and many locals are harsh against Diaspora people. One reason for this is the common perception among the locals that Diaspora people take all the good jobs. The other reason might be the feeling that the Diaspora left the country while life was hard, while the locals stayed and paid the price. (Norway and Denmark Mar. 2014, 22)

HIPS similarly states that tensions exist between diaspora and non-diaspora Somalis due to "perceptions of a sense of superiority among the diaspora, employment advantages, and segregation in society" (June 2014, 1).

According to a joint report on a fact-finding mission published in 2013 by the Danish Refugee Council and the Norwegian Refugee Council, "tribalism" was often "highlighted as an obstacle to return and reintegration" (2013, 45). Conversely, the 2014 joint report by Landinfo and the Danish Immigration Service, attributing the opinion to an unnamed international NGO, states that "clan is no longer an issue for Diaspora people coming back to Mogadishu. Clan plays a more important role in other areas of Somalia, especially in rural areas" (Norway and Denmark Mar. 2014, 21). Further information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4.2 Land and Property Rights

Sources state that returnees to Somalia faced disputes with local Somalis over land and property rights (UN 17 July 2012; DRC and NRC 2013, 45). A 25 November 2013 article by the UN's Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) says that "[r]eturnees are finding the properties they abandoned during the conflict now inhabited by internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom fled rural homes for the relative safety of urban areas." According to the 2013 report by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC),

[h]ouses and land left behind, that have often been occupied, are said to be difficult to regain. This has created tensions and conflicts between returnees and those who stayed behind. It was often stressed that those who still had access to their land had relatives looking after it. (45)

The 25 November 2013 IRIN article states that "[I]and disputes are now the biggest source of conflict in Somali towns" (UN 25 Nov. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

A July 2012 article by IRIN quoted "local authorities" in Mogadishu as saying that at least 80 percent of properties "squatted" during the war had been restored to their rightful owners (ibid. 17 July 2012). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Other sources indicate that due to an influx of returnees, forced evictions of internally displaced Somalis have become commonplace in Mogadishu (ibid. n.d.b, 3; AI Feb. 2014, 9). Amnesty International (AI) notes in a February 2014 report that, "[s]ince the beginning of 2013, forced evictions have gained pace. Tens of thousands of people have been driven out of their shelters, often with no notice, with the threat or use of force, and with no appropriate alternative location provided" (ibid.). The UNHCR reports that, from January to November 2014, there were 52,608 forced evictions from Mogadishu and Kismayo [in southern Somalia] (UN n.d.b, 1). According to the November 2014 report by OCHA, 34,254 people were evicted in Mogadishu between January and September 2014 (ibid. Nov. 2014, 9). The same report states that "[m]ost displaced people are in urgent need of improved transitional and permanent shelters that offer more protection, privacy and dignity over longer periods of time" (ibid.).

4.3 Employment Opportunities

Sources state that employment opportunities are scarce for some Somali diaspora returnees (UN Oct. 2013, 15; IPS 27 May 2014). The October 2013 report published by OCHA states that "[I]velihoods and economic opportunities are extremely limited or not existing in many of the areas of intended return, thereby leaving the people in these areas vulnerable to shocks" (UN Oct. 2013, 15). Inter Press Service (IPS), a "Southern-focused" news agency that covers issues including development, globalization, the environment and human rights (IPS n.d.), similarly states that Somalia's youth unemployment rate is one of the highest in the world at 67% and that the country "does not have the capacity to receive and integrate large numbers of returning refugees and deportees" (ibid. 27 May 2014). Sources state that returnees are vulnerable to recruitment by Al Shabaab due to limited economic opportunities (ibid.; AI Feb. 2014, 33).

4.4. Security Situation

Amnesty International reported in October 2013 that "[t]hough Al Shabaab no longer controls parts of Mogadishu, it engages in guerrilla warfare, routinely using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and carrying out grenade and suicide attacks" (ibid. 23 Oct. 2013). An April 2014 IRIN report states that "often-deadly attacks attributed to Al Shabaab occur with great frequency in the capital" (UN 9 Apr. 2014). February 2015 media sources indicate that Al Shabaab continues to pose a threat in Mogadishu (Reuters 20 Feb. 2015; Al Jazeera 21 Feb. 2015). An article by Al Jazeera states that at least 25 people were killed by an Al Shabaab

attack on a hotel in Mogadishu in February 2015 (ibid.). The same article states that "Al Shabaab continues to wage a deadly campaign against Somalia's government" (ibid.). For further information on the security situation in Mogadishu, see Response to Information Request SOM104995.

According to sources, Al Shabaab has made threats specifically against diaspora returnees (HIPS June 2014, 2; Norway and Denmark Mar. 2014, 22). The 2014 joint report by Landinfo and the Danish Immigration Service quotes Al Shabaab commander Ali Mohamed Hussein on December 29, 2013 as stating that "returnees 'will be killed and fought against in the same manner' that Al Shabaab fights against the Somali government" (ibid., 23). According to HIPS, these "specific threats made against returnees" by Al Shabaab often serve to "deter returnees from settling permanently" (HIPS June 2013, 2).

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.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: The following were unable to provide information within the time constraints of this Response: International Organization for Migration; Somali Return Consortium; United Nations – UNHCR-Somalia.

Attempts to contact the following were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Action Africa Help; Agency for Peace and Development; Canadian Somali Congress; Center for Research and Dialogue Somalia; Human Development Concern for the Horn of Africa; KAAALO Aid and Development; Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention; Sahar Research and Development Organization; Social Life and Agricultural Development Organization; Somali-Canadian Association of Etobicoke; Somali Canadian Society of Calgary; Somali Peace Line.

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[Top of Page](#)

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