



Diaspora engagement mapping **SOMALIA**

Facts & figures

Terminology: Somalia refers to its diaspora as 'diaspora' in official parlance as the term has been adopted from English, although the term *qurbaha* (Somali for 'diaspora') is also sometimes used.

Political rights



Dual citizenship¹



Right to vote in national elections
for citizens residing abroad²



Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: **14.85%**
Remittances inflow (USD million): **1,735**

Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from [UNDESA \(2024\)](#) and remittances from the [World Bank \(2024\)](#).

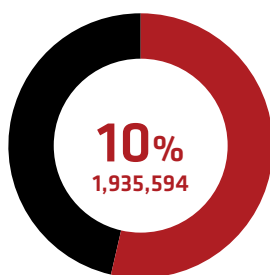
Emigration



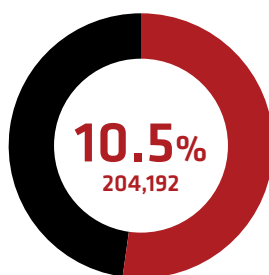
% of emigrants in
total population



% of which
in the EU



♂ 53.7%
♀ 46.3%



♂ 52.4%
♀ 47.6%

Top countries of destination



Kenya	401,953
Ethiopia	389,246
Yemen	285,211
United Kingdom	119,728
Libya	117,956 ³

¹ While Somalia's 1962 law does not permit dual nationality, the provisional constitution of 2012 does allow Somalis to hold another nationality. However, this has not been formally adopted. Full text available here: <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf>

² Provisional constitution of 2012.

³ UNDESA 2019. However, a more accurate reflection of Somali migration trends would list the following top 5 countries of destination: Kenya; US; UK; Sweden; Netherlands. The presence of Libya in the list suggests this is linked to Libyan and EU member state border management policies.

Overview of the policy and legislative framework surrounding diaspora engagement



- 2016** ● **Somali Diaspora Investment Survey Report.** Although Somalia has not published a diaspora policy yet, it makes extensive reference in its Somali Diaspora Investment Survey Report to the need to encourage diaspora return, especially of skilled Somali diaspora. The report also encourages diaspora investment⁴, including in priority sectors such as the sustainable energy and light industry, and it recommends that the government should work closely with the private sector to strengthen existing (and, where needed, advance new) trade and investment laws to encourage greater diaspora investment.⁵
- 2016** ● **Policy on Returnees to Somalia⁶** sets out criteria for voluntary and involuntary return of Somali nationals, including a risk assessment process and safeguards to “safeguard the security gains made in Somalia while upholding the Human rights of citizens and the returnees themselves.”⁷ There is currently no a legislative framework for financial mechanisms to support those who want to return.
- 2017** ● **National Development Plan (NDP8)** focused on poverty reduction, building resilience, and enabling peace and security. This document recognised the importance of diaspora financial and other contributions, and dedicated an entire section to diaspora (Ch. 9.6). It included the following goals: remittances link with social and economic priorities; diaspora expertise support to public sector initiatives; new business development through diaspora capital; and technical expertise and links to international/regional markets.⁸
- 2020** ● **National Development Plan (NDP9)⁹** aims to build on its predecessor in terms of strategy and goals, maintaining a focus on ‘poverty reduction and resilience’. This document is the result of consultations held in Somalia in 2019 (including with diaspora members) and recognises the Somalia diaspora’s financial, skills, and human development contributions to the country. In particular, it acknowledges the importance of understanding the humanitarian-development nexus and the diaspora’s role in providing assistance in times of crisis.
- 2023** ● **Somali National Diaspora Policy.** Somalia ratified their National Diaspora Policy in 2023. The ratification followed a series of consultations held by The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to finalise the Policy. Somali diaspora returnees were directly involved in the consultation meetings being held in all federal states throughout 2021 by the Department of Diaspora Affairs. The Policy aims to support social and economic ties between the country and its diaspora in order to mobilise and unite diaspora networks. The policy covers Diaspora Direct Investment, communication mechanisms, education transfer and trade and tourism.
- National Human Capital Strategy (date tbc)** To support the development of Somalia’s first National Human Capital Strategy, the Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development has conducted studies and some preliminary findings indicate that one priority area for this strategy will include: ‘brain-gain due to large numbers of returning highly skilled Somalis from the diaspora.’¹⁰

4 Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.so/library/publications/> and also <https://shuraako.org/sites/default/files/SDIS-Survey-Report.pdf>
5 Ibid.

6 Full text available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.so/policy-issues/returnee-policy/>

7 Ibid. The policy is aimed predominantly at involuntary returnees, and stipulates that these may not be returned unless certain criteria are met, including that each returnee should be given \$10,000 USD by the deporting state.

8 <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5b431554.pdf>

9 Full text available at: <http://mop.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NDP-9-2020-2024.pdf>

10 Full text available at: <http://mop.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NDP-9-2020-2024.pdf>

- 2024** ● **National Strategy for Migration in Somalia**¹¹ aims to organise Somalia's migration governance framework and facilitate policy coherence and coordinated action across the already existing policies and structures. Under its fourth strategic goal titled "Engage the diaspora in sustainable development and reduce remittance costs", this strategy seeks to complement the National Diaspora Policy by providing broader policy directives geared towards both diaspora engagement for sustainable development and reduction of remittance costs. It outlines three main objectives, including: 1) incentivising returns, even short-term ones, to transfer knowledge; 2) reducing costs of receiving remittances; and 3) leveraging diaspora investments for development.
- 2025** ● **National Labour Migration Policy** In 2025¹², Somalia adopted a National Labour Migration Policy, establishing a comprehensive framework for managing labour mobility. Developed with support from the International Labour Organisation, the policy promotes safe, orderly and regular migration through a rights-based, gender-responsive and inclusive approach, while aiming to strengthen migration governance and maximise the contribution of the Somali diaspora to national development. In the same year, Somalia also adopted Regulations Governing Private Employment Agencies (PrEAs), introducing standards for licensing, oversight and worker protection, and marking a key step towards formalising recruitment practices and promoting safer migration.

Practices

Explore 520+ practices by country, SDG or sector of engagement in the [interactive database!](#) 

Somali Diaspora Engagement Programmes in Denmark and Sweden

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has implemented a diaspora programme since 2012 working with Somali and Afghani diaspora in Denmark to facilitate, support and enhance the role of diaspora as agents of humanitarian assistance and development in their countries of origin.

The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) finances two programmes catering to the large Somali diaspora in Sweden, making it possible for Swedish Somalis to contribute to the reconstruction of their country.¹³ In partnership with the International Organisation for Migration, they support diaspora graduates to return to Somalia to work in ministries and government departments, both at the federal level as well as in Somaliland and Puntland. SIDA also runs a small grants scheme to support Somali diaspora groups in Sweden to deliver development activities in Somalia.

Global Somali Diaspora's International Conference 2016 - ongoing

Inaugurated in 2016, the Global Somali Diaspora's International Conference is an annual conference run by the non-profit Global Somali Diaspora (GSD) as a platform for Somali delegates from across the world to come together and exchange ideas, share insights and network with professionals from all walks of life including government officials, business entrepreneurs and international development personnel. In 2024, the Conference was held on 28 and 29 September in Istanbul under the theme "The Role of the Somali Diaspora", aiming to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the GSD as well as the significant contributions of the Somali diaspora to their countries of heritage and destination. Through the reflection of their past achievements, the Conference fostered a renewed vision of collective action among the Somali diaspora.

¹¹ <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/national-strategy-migration-somalia-english.pdf>

¹² <https://www.ilo.org/publications/national-labour-migration-policy-somalia>

¹³ <https://www.sida.se/English/where-we-work/Africa/Somalia/Our-work-in-Somalia/>

2nd Conference of Diaspora Returnees 2023

In July 2023 the Department of Diaspora affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation held the 2nd Conference of Diaspora returnees. The theme of the conference was “The role of the Somali diaspora in the reconstruction of the country and encouraging the relationship of the diaspora returnees”. Discussion included meaningfully engaging and including the diaspora in national development plans, creating a platform to gather information on diaspora, programmes and investment opportunities and foster inter-governmental cooperation to connect with the Somali diaspora abroad. The government expressed their interest in the return of their diaspora to invest in the country, embrace the opportunities in Somalia and encourage young people in the diaspora to return to their homeland and contribute to its development.

Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) FINNSOM Health and Education Project - Phase 3 2023 - 2025

Building on the success of MIDA programme implementation since 2008, the IOM has launched Phase 3 of the MIDA FINNSOM project, covering the period between 2023 and 2025, to harness the expertise and knowledge of the Somali diaspora to enhance the capacity of Somalia’s health and education systems. Under this phase, 40 highly qualified Somali diaspora experts will be assigned to the short-term assignments to mentor and train at least 40 local Somali professionals and 40 recent graduates.

This phase of the MIDA FINNSOM project is funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Human Services and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education of the Federal Government of Somalia.

Connect Somalia 2023 - ongoing

Connect Somalia is a human capital initiative that aims to mobilise the skills and resources of the Somali diaspora to support development efforts in Somalia. As one of its key components, the Diaspora Engagement Portal is developed to serve as a digital platform for fostering collaboration between the diaspora and local communities. Through this portal, diaspora members are able to share their skills and expertise, connect with local partners, and engage in development initiatives. In addition, Connect Somalia operates through multi-stakeholder networks, including government agencies, civil society and the private sector, to ensure that the programme is well-aligned with local needs and priorities.

Connect Somalia is a joint programme between the Somali Federal Ministry of Health and Human Services, Nomad Innovation Lab (NIL), the SPIDER centre, Rinkeby Folkets Hus, and the Somali Institute for Development and Research Analysis (SIDRA).

The Somali Diaspora Investment Council (SDIC) 2024 - ongoing

Established as a non-profit organisation with headquarters in Mogadishu, the SDIC serves as a bridge between Somali diaspora worldwide and their homeland, aiming to channel their resources, expertise, and networks toward sustainable socio-economic development of Somalia. The purposes of the SDIC include advocacy for Somali diaspora businesses, promoting investment opportunities in Somalia, providing support for Somali returnees, and fostering a network of Somali diaspora investors and entrepreneurs.



Observations

The “Observations” and “Obstacles” sections contain additional information on the context of diaspora engagement that does not fit directly into the other sections. They are based on a combination of literature review and comments from the authors. New information is incorporated during the annual updates. Readers are invited to verify the relevance of the information at the time of reading, as the context may have evolved.

The Somali diaspora responded to the collapse of the government during the civil war by becoming major providers of funding and other support. Diaspora remittances, skills transfer, voluntarism, and humanitarian response have proved a lifeline to the country during the long period of civil war and insecurity, a process that continues to this day. In most cases these tend to be informal diaspora initiatives. Somalia is one of the most remittance-dependent countries worldwide¹⁴ But remittances are deployed within households for primary needs, educational purposes and healthcare.

The Somali diaspora possesses the potential to become a great source of growth-driven investment in Somalia, as is recognised in its NDP8 and NDP9 strategies (see above). Investments, financial remittances and political engagements have been a crucial part in achieving bottom-up development outcomes.

Diaspora investments in the establishment of new industries and companies have created important employment opportunities for Somalis, which directly led to improvements in the livelihoods of many families in the country, and encouraged a number of diaspora entrepreneurs to return.¹⁵

There is an extensive presence of the Somali diaspora in government. As Ismail observed in 2011, 19 out of 29 heads of state or regional states, or state ministers were from the diaspora, a trend that has not changed.¹⁶ Nevertheless, to date there has been a lack of diaspora-targeting policies and programmes from the Somali government. The Department of Diaspora Affairs (DODA) is small and has limited capacity, and very few Somalis are aware of its existence.

Most diaspora contributions to Somalia remain diaspora - rather than state - led, and informal in nature. Somalia's current objective, to build up formal diaspora engagement frameworks and initiatives, promises benefits in terms of harnessing patterns of diaspora resource mobilisation, philanthropy, investments, skills and voluntarism, if it can build on existing patterns of diaspora involvement.

14 Somalia does not report remittance data to the World Bank, but based on data provided by Nisar Majid, Khalif Abdirahman, and Shamsa Hassan (2018), it would be the sixth most remittance-dependent nation worldwide according to World Bank data. See : <https://www.xpressmoney.com/blog/industry/countries-that-rely-most-on-remittance/>

15 Full text available at: <http://mop.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NDP-9-2020-2024.pdf>

16 Ismail, Abdirashid A. 2011. “Diaspora and Post-War Political Leadership in Somalia.” *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 20 (1): 28-47

Obstacles¹⁷



According to the Somali Diaspora Investment Survey 2017, there are 14 main obstacles preventing diaspora engagement in Somalia.¹⁸ These may be grouped around five main areas:

- **Lack of security and political instability:** are probably the biggest obstacles to diaspora engagement in Somalia at the current time.
- **Fragile state:** as a result of the protracted insecurity and conflict in the country, further exacerbated by regional droughts and cyclones in 2014 and 2019, the Somali government remains fragile and lacking in capacity and resources.¹⁹
- **Corruption and bureaucracy:** government bureaucracy is slow, and there is a lack of effective contract enforcement and weak rule of law, leading to widespread corruption.
- **Financial challenges:** The banking system is inadequate and there remains a lack of confidence surrounding money transfer processes. There are inadequate channels to send money to the country; costs of transfer fees are high; and there are concerns over diversion of funds (inadvertently or otherwise) for use by illicit groups.
- **Lack of reliable information about investment opportunities** inside Somalia, as well as barriers to accessing investment capital for investments in the country.

¹⁷ For a fuller description of obstacles, see Somali Investment Report (2016, available at) <https://shuraako.org/sites/default/files/SDIS-Survey-Report.pdf>

¹⁸ Benson, Jay B. Lindsay L Heger, Lee C. Sorensen and Alexandria E. Wise. 2017. Somali Diaspora Investment Survey Report: Typologies, Drivers & Recommendations. Accessed May 10, 2019. <https://shuraako.org/sites/default/files/SDIS-Survey-Report.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/diaspora-has-big-role-as-somalia-rebuilds-economy-global-ties-finance-minister-2020-3?r=US&IR=T>

Annex:

List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 520+ institutions](#)

Diaspora related institutions

- **At regional level**

AU Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (AU CIDO)

Somalia nominates a diaspora focal point to the AU CIDO Continental Meetings.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

Somalia is a member of IGAD which includes governments from the Horn of Africa, Nile Valley and the African Great Lakes. IGAD is a principal supporter of the Federal Government of Somalia through the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) initiative.

- **National institutions**

- At ministerial level

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is responsible for Somalia's foreign, and International Cooperation policy and is the lead ministry for diaspora engagement.

- At sub-ministerial level

The Department of Diaspora Affairs (DODA)

The Office of Diaspora Affairs was established in 2013 and is responsible for coordinating diaspora engagement policies and programmes.

- At state level

Somalia has a federal system under which individual Somali states have their own administration, in some cases including diaspora offices.

Galgumudug State Ministry of Diaspora and Foreign investment aims to attract diaspora and other investors to the region.²⁰

South West State Ministry of Resettlement & Diaspora Affairs has worked with NGOs and diaspora organisations to provide assistance and support to Internally Displaced People and refugees.

²⁰ <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5b4315554.pdf> It is not known how successful this Ministry has been in attracting investment, as the state has been affected by conflict in the ongoing insurgency in recent years., c.f. ARC (2018): Situation in South and Central Somalia (including Mogadishu): January 2018, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a6f16d44.pdf>

Diaspora organisations in Europe

Read more about diaspora organisations in "[Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation](#)"



Anti Tribalism Movement: Heal Reconciliation UK 2010

Development activities

ATM was founded by young Somalis who wanted to fight tribe-based discrimination.²¹ Since then it has grown into an international movement with 140,000 members who strive to combat prejudice, tribalism, inequality, and violence around the world. Its Heal Reconciliation is a programme of reconciliation and forgiveness workshops run by diaspora experts that take place in South and Central Somalia.

Associazione Soomaaliya Onlus

Development activities

Associazione Soomaaliya Onlus was founded in 2002 in Turin to improve outcomes for disadvantaged populations in Somalia through cooperation in development, education, healthcare, environmental protection, culture, and art. Operating nationally and internationally, the organisation aims to create and support organised local communities that achieve food self-sufficiency, schooling and health care.

Associazione di volontariato Kariba

Development activities

Integration activities

Kariba is a non-governmental association based in Trento Province, which aims to promote social justice, sustainable development and community empowerment. Working at the national and local levels in Africa and Italy, it seeks to encourage an active role of the diaspora in developing its country of origin, integrating new migrants/refugees in Italy, and promoting global education in the local community in Italy.

Federation of Somali Associations in the Netherlands (FSAN) Netherlands

Development activities

FSAN is a Somali-Diaspora led organisation that focusses on the integration and participation of the Somali community in the Netherlands. The organisation organises workshops, conferences and lectures. FSAN also works to combat female genital mutilation both nationally and internationally.

Global Somali Diaspora

Development activities

Integration activities

Established in 2014, Global Somali Diaspora (GSD) is a global not-for-profit organisation working to bring together and mobilise members of the Somali Diaspora for positive action. GSD advocates and promotes the full integration of Somali Diaspora communities within their host nations while also remaining connected to their cultural heritage. The organisation is based in the UK but has representatives from Somali communities around the world.

²¹ <https://www.theatm.org/work/international-reconciliation-workshops-seminars/>
<https://www.nbe.com.eg/en/Default.aspx?AID=66&CID=8#Title>

Himilo Relief & Development Association (HIRDA) Netherlands UK

Development activities

HIRDA is a Somali diaspora organisation that delivers a range of projects in Somalia including maternal and child health services; campaigning against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM); coordinating access to clean water, as well as food distribution in times of crisis; and supporting internally displaced people, including education for IDP children. Results of these programmes have included revitalising local economies, as well as improved child health, and better livelihoods for urban and pastoral populations.²²

Somaliska Akademiker Sweden

Somaliska Akademiker is a Somali led and Sweden-based organisation which focusses on empowering Somali graduates to advocate for the Somali diaspora community in Sweden.

Somaliska Ungdomsförbundet i Sverige (SUIS) / Somali Youth League

Integration activities

Somali Youth League of Sweden (SUIS) is a non-profit organisation with 17 member associations and over 1500 members throughout Sweden. Founded in 2013, SUIS is a voice for young Somalis and aims to help children and young people to realise their dreams by organising themselves.

Somaliska ungdomsföreningen i Sverige (SRFS) / Somali National Association in Sweden

Development activities

Integration activities

SRFS is a democratic national organisation that is politically and religiously independent. It was founded in 1995 through the merger of various local Somali associations in Sweden. The main activities of the Federation are directed towards the Swedish-Somali group with the aim of promoting the group's development in Sweden and in Somalia.

Stichting Nomad Netherlands

Development activities

This civil society organisation focusses on the needs of the Somaliland community both in the Netherlands and Somaliland. It has strategies for the creation of a united Somaliland Diaspora community in the Netherlands. Furthermore, Stichting Nomad aims to strengthen the positions of the diaspora's youth in academic and professional fields. The organisation promotes Somali identity, culture and religion within the community.

²² <http://hirda.nl/en/home/>

SXB Global

Development activities

SXB Global is a platform that brings together individuals and organizations who share a common passion for business, networking, and community engagement.

Original research:
AFFORD (2020)
Editing & update:
EUDiF (2026)



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