

Please cite as: EUAA, 'The role of clans in Somalia' in *CGS for TCDS*, November 2023.

The role of clans in Somalia

GUIDANCE NOTE
Last update: June 2022

Layered in all aspects of life, the clan is both a tool for identification and a way of life. Clans define the relationship between people and belonging to a strong clan matters in terms of access to resources, political influence, justice, and security.

Somalis are roughly divided in five large family clans: the Dir, the Isaaq, the Darood, the Hawiye and the Rahanweyn. Large segments of the Somali population are considered as minorities, either in local context or in Somalia in general, living amongst larger clans. Somalis are traditionally attached to a territory where their kin are supposed to be more numerous. Until today, most Somalis still rely on support from patrilineal clan relatives.

Clans often compete against each other, as well as against other actors. Clan militias are also important actors of political life across Somalia. Under the *xeer* system, clan elders act as mediators or arbiters, and play a central role in the resolution of local and intra-clan disputes.

Read more in the common analysis

© European Union Agency for Asylum 2026 | Email: info@euaa.europa.eu