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1.4. Minorities

Minority groups in Somalia were subject to structural marginalisation and social discrimination, including racism and slavery from the 19th century onward.374 They were deprived of access to economic or political resources.375 Discrimination continued throughout the 20th century, with exceptions in the 1970s and 1980s under the government of Mohamed Siyad Barre.376 It directly led into the widespread exploitation and abuse of minority group members by armed militias belonging to majority clans in the early 1990s.377 Regarding this time, the Bertlesmann Foundation found: 'Entire population groups (e.g., the Jareer and Somali Bantu, and Benadiri minority groups along the southern Somali coast) have been forcibly displaced from their homes and land, subjected to forced and bonded labour, and many killed.'378 This situation has gradually changed and since the early 2000s, members of minority groups are not systematically persecuted any more by clan militias.379 Still, they are being subjected to various forms of severe discrimination and the dominance of majority groups until the present (early 2025).380 For more background information see the EASO COI Report Somalia: Targeted Profiles, published in September 2021.381

Group-belonging is important in Somalia. Against the backdrop of decades of state failure and civil war, primary solidarity lies with patrilineal relatives. For protection or gaining access to resources or the job market, most Somalis rely on support by their clan or lineage.382 Lineage and clan elders mediate conflicts and distribute compensations or mobilise for defence.383 The power of the Somali government in Mogadishu is so limited that in most parts of Somalia people have to rely on self-help to defend themselves and their property. Self-help is organised primarily among close patrilineal relatives.384 Strong groups and those featuring 'long' genealogies (Somali: laan dheere), which automatically translates into many living members today, and thus man-power, are privileged.385 If a group additionally has access to weapons it can dominate others. Groups whose members do not have such an elaborate genealogical tree, are (putatively) smaller in numbers and have no or not much access to weapons, are underprivileged.386 It is worth here to note that the whole discourse about minorities in Somalia also has a political dimension. The term 'minority' (in Somali: dadka laga tirade badan yahay, which literally means 'people who are small in numbers') is used by dominant groups to justify their privileges.387 This translates in factual power differences, including the very limited (if at all) representation of those categorised as minorities in the government (at federal level and at member state level).388 Even where members of minority groups hold some positions in regional or federal government structures in Somalia, they hardly can speak about abuses their people suffer at the hands of majority group members.389 Most minority group members cannot expect effective protection from official side including from the judiciary.390

The US Department of State found in 2024 that ‘Minority groups, often lacking armed militias, were disproportionately subjected to killings, torture, rape, kidnapping for ransom, and looting of land and property with impunity by faction militias and majority clan members, often with the acquiescence of federal and local authorities.’ It added that minority communities frequently lived in deep poverty and ‘suffered from numerous forms of discrimination and exclusion.’391 It is believed that resentment over abuses made minority clans more vulnerable to recruitment by al-Shabaab (see also section on 1.1 Recruitment and desertion/defection).392

Generally, members of minority groups are excluded from the political and economic sphere and there are reports of issues such as including dispossession, bonded labour and killing by other Somalis.393 They face numerous problems, including ‘high levels of poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity’. It is hard for them to access land and secure property rights. This worsens their economic vulnerabilities.394 Stigmatisation results in limited school enrollment of minority group children (between 25 and 50%) and a relatively low literacy rate (between 35 and 60%). 395 Health care for minority group members is limited due to insufficient services and cultural biases.396 Access to justice is problematic for minorities. Moreover, ‘many minorities live in informal settlements or IDP camps, where they face forced evictions, lack of tenure security, and unequal access to humanitarian aid.’397 Members of these groups are under-represented in government. There, members of the four major clan families - Dir, Darood, Hawiye and Rahanweyn - receive an equal number of seats,398 while all minorities groups together get only half of the seats of each major clan group, under the so-called 4.5 formula,399 with minorities being ‘0.5’.400 According to Hoehne, even when minority group members have a seat in the Parliament or in the cabinet, their power and weight remains very limited.401 Minority group belonging intersects with other forms of discrimination and risk across Somalia. Women and girls belonging to minority groups are at a comparatively higher risk of sexual abuse and violence. 402 Group belonging in combination with gender-based discrimination also influences access to education. Girls in communities like, e.g. Bantu (Jareer), Gaboye, and Eyle typically are hindered in their education not only by group-based discrimination but also by early and/or forced marriage preferentially practiced in those groups.403

Somali society is stratified mainly along lines of descent/group belonging and gender. With regard to minorities, there are ‘caste’ groups or occupational minorities (e.g. those belonging to the Gaboye-spectrum), ethnic minorities originating from outside of Somalia and keeping some cultural difference (e.g. Somali Bantu/Jareer) and other minority groups such as the original inhabitants of Mogadishu (who go back to intermarriages between local women and Arabic, Persian or European travellers) and others. Regarding more background on the notion of ‘minority’, see section 4 of the EASO COI Report Somalia: Targeted Profiles, published in September 2021.404

- 1.4.1. Low Status Occupational Minorities
- 1.4.2. Ethnic minorities
  (a) Bantu/Jareer
  (b) Bajuni
- 1.4.3. Minority clans
  (a) Benadiri/group in the local context

(b) Tunni, Eyle, Geledi and Begedi
(c) Shiidle

- 1.4.4. Clans specialised in Islamic services
- 1.4.5. Mixed-marriages, implications and sanctioning

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