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2.2.1. Bakool

(a) Background

Bakool, a rural region⁶²³ predominantly inhabited by agro-pastoralists,⁶²⁴ shares an international border with Ethiopia to the north and internal borders with the regions of Gedo to the west, Bay to the south, Hiraaan to the east, and Lower Shabelle to the south-east. The region is divided into five districts: Xudur, Tayeeglow, Ceel Barde, Rab Dhuure, and Waajid. Its capital is Xudur.⁶²⁵

As of September 2024, sources variously estimated the population of Bakool region at 543 371 (IPC),⁶²⁶ and 392 347 (IOM).⁶²⁷ Bakool is mainly inhabited by various Rahanweyn groups, while the Jajele (Hawiye) are present in a small section in the north ⁶²⁸ and the Aulihan (Ogaden/Darood) clan resides along both sides of the border with Ethiopia.⁶²⁹ For more detailed background information on Bakool region, see section 2.2.1. of the [EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation \(February 2023\)](#).

(b) Actors' presence and conflict dynamics

Al-Shabaab control areas, presence and influence, along with other actors

Al-Shabaab remained in control of large swaths of the region's territory.⁶³⁰ Bakool has been described as one of the country's regions where Al-Shabaab's grip was most strongly felt, including through blockades of humanitarian aid,⁶³¹ heavy tax burdens⁶³² and a high frequency of child abductions for recruitment purposes.⁶³³

According to [Map 3 Somalia - Approximate Territorial Control as of 31 March 2025](#) and [Map 2 Somalia - Approximate Territorial Control as of 1 April 2023](#), Al-Shabaab was in control of the towns of Rab Dhuure and Tayeeglow and of rural territories in eastern and south-eastern Bakool, including the surroundings of Tayeeglow and the region's southeastern corner. During the reference period, Al-Shabaab added large rural swaths south-east of Rab Dhuure town to its realm of control. Meanwhile, the FGS coalition remained in control of a narrow stretch of rural territory in the region's north delimited by the towns of Ceel Barde, Ato, and Yeed. Control over the remaining rural areas of Bakool region was mixed between Al-Shabaab and the FGS. The towns of Xudur, Waajid, Ceel Barde, Yeed, and Ato remained under the control of the FGS coalition.⁶³⁴ However, Al-Shabaab continued to hold sway over the territories surrounding Xudur⁶³⁵ and Waajid,⁶³⁶ keeping these towns in a state of siege.⁶³⁷

Meanwhile, the SNA units operating in the region included the 9th Brigade of the 60th division,⁶³⁸ stationed in the towns of Xudur⁶³⁹ and Waajid,⁶⁴⁰ and the 8th Brigade of the 60th Division.⁶⁴¹ Xudur and Waajid also hosted bases of Ethiopian troops.⁶⁴²

During the reference period, the SNA regained control of several locations previously controlled by Al-Shabaab,⁶⁴³ including in the vicinity of Xudur town,⁶⁴⁴ and ended a blockade of the Xudur-Qurajome road.⁶⁴⁵

Conflict dynamics

Al-Shabaab continued to pose a significant threat in Bakool and other parts of southern Somalia.⁶⁴⁶ Notably, the region's capital Xudur has been a 'focal point' in the persisting conflict between the SNA and Al-Shabaab.⁶⁴⁷

During the reference period, Al-Shabaab carried out multiple attacks against ATMIS troops in Waajid district (including in April/May 2023⁶⁴⁸ and January⁶⁴⁹ and October 2024⁶⁵⁰), Xudur district, and at the Somali-Ethiopian border in Rab Dhuure district (June 2023),⁶⁵¹ while also launching attacks on the SNA (in Waajid in January⁶⁵² and Ceel Barde in June 2024⁶⁵³) and South West State forces (in Waajid in March 2025).⁶⁵⁴

Notably, on 17 September 2023, the group ambushed convoys of Ethiopian ATMIS troops⁶⁵⁵ travelling from Yeed to Waajid and from Ceel Barde to Xudur.⁶⁵⁶ Various sides claimed that around 50 militants⁶⁵⁷ and 167 Ethiopian soldiers had been killed in the attacks and ensuing clashes, although these accounts could not be verified

independently.[658](#) The group further executed five individuals in Tayeeglow, accusing them of spying for the US and Ethiopian governments.[659](#)

Meanwhile, new operations against Al-Shabaab were announced in the South West State by the South West administration in July 2023[660](#) and by the FGS in October 2023.[661](#) These operations intensified in several instances, including in November-December 2023[662](#) and over the spring[663](#) and summer months of 2024.[664](#) Multiple SNA operations focused on targeting Al-Shabaab hideouts in Waajid district (including in July 2023,[665](#) March[666](#) and December 2024,[667](#) and March 2025[668](#)) and Xudur district (throughout the period from late 2023 to late 2024[669](#)), but were also reported along the Bakool-Bay border (December 2023).[670](#) There were ensuing reports of clashes,[671](#) dismantling of Al-Shabaab hideouts,[672](#) and surrendering of defecting Al-Shabaab fighters.[673](#) Following SNA operations in September 2024, tensions remained at heightened levels in the Xudur area as military and insurgent activities continued.
[674](#)

The region further witnessed some airstrikes targeting Al-Shabaab positions,[675](#) including a strike by FGS forces in Wajid district that, according to Al-Shabaab, killed eight civilians.[676](#) Moreover, clashes along clan lines between SNA and Dervish forces left at least 10 people dead in Ceel Barde,[677](#) with further clan feuds were observed around Xudur.[678](#)

○ (c) Recent security trends

Security incidents, estimated civilian fatalities and casualties

Between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025, ACLED reported 284 security incidents in Bakool region, including battles, explosions, or other forms of remote violence and violence against civilians, causing 583 fatalities. Figure 11 below shows their evolution per type across the reference period.[679](#) At district level, Xudur recorded the most security incidents (149 incidents), followed by Waajid (87 incidents) and Ceel Barde (26 incidents).[680](#)

Security events in Bakool

Figure 11. Evolution of ACLED security events coded 'battles', 'explosions/remote violence' and 'violence against civilians' between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 in Bakool.[681](#)

ACLED recorded 277 incidents involving Al-Shabaab (coded as either 'Actor 1', 'Associated Actor 1', 'Actor 2', or 'Associated Actor 2'). Of these incidents, 205 involved both Al-Shabaab and the Military or Police Forces of Somalia, including eight incidents involving Al-Shabaab and Southwest Special Police Forces.[682](#)

For incidents involving fatalities, including alleged civilian deaths, please see below an illustrative and non-exhaustive list:

- on 17 September 2023, Al-Shabaab group ambushed convoys of Ethiopian ATMIS troops[683](#) travelling from Yeed to Waajid and from Ceel Barde to Xudur.[684](#) Various sides claimed that around 50 militants and 167 Ethiopian soldiers had been killed.[685](#) These accounts could not be verified independently;[686](#)
- on 22 September 2023, an airstrike carried out by FGS forces in Wajid district killed a prominent Al-Shabaab leader and his seven bodyguards (as claimed by Somali Ministry of Defence)[687](#) or eight civilians (as claimed by Al-Shabaab).[688](#)

Conflict-related displacement

Between 1 April 2023 and 16 March 2025, 20 284 individuals were newly displaced from Bakool due to conflict or insecurity, according to the UNHCR PRMN. Of this group, 9 657 individuals were displaced within the same administrative region, while 10 627 individuals were displaced to other regions, including Bay, Benadir, Bari, Gedo, Galgaduud, Hiraan, and Nugal. At district level, Rab Dhuure was the most affected by individuals leaving for other regions (3 467), while Waajid was the only affected by displacement from other regions (3 510, all displaced from Gedo's Luuq district in July 2024). Ceel Barde, by a wide margin, was the district most affected by intra-regional

IDP departures to other locations within Bakool region (7 736, including 5 400 who were displaced in June 2023).[689](#) For information on conflict-related displacement prior to April 2023, see section 2.2.1. of the [EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation \(February 2023\)](#).

Other impacts on civilian life

UNOCHA recorded eight humanitarian access incidents in Bakool region between April and December 2023[690](#) and one further incident over the year 2024.[691](#) In August 2024, UNOCHA reported that Al-Shabaab blocked and controlled the main supply routes to Xudur town,[692](#) restricting the flow of food and other commodities into the town to airlifted aid and items smuggled into the town by donkey carts.[693](#)

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