**Please cite as:** EUAA, '2.2.1. Bakool ' in *COI Report – Somalia: Security Situation* , May 2025.

# 2.2.1. Bakool

## ○ (a) Background

Bakool, a rural region[623] 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, Hiraan 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 burdens 632 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 Xudur 635 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 2023660 and by the FGS in October 2023.661 These operations intensified in several instances, including in November-December 2023662 and over the spring663 and summer months of 2024.664 Multiple SNA operations focused on targeting Al-Shabaab hideouts in Waajid district (including in July 2023,665 March666 and December 2024,667 and March 2025668) and Xudur district (throughout the period from late 2023 to late 2024669), 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 2023690 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

- 623

  CSHRD, Somalia: 01/07/2024: – Human Rights Second Quarter Report 2024, 30 September 2024, url

- 624

  Edle, A., Bay and Bakool: How Somalia's Breadbasket turned into an Epicenter of Humanitarian Crisis, RVI, 2023, url

- 625

  UNOCHA, Somalia Administrative Reference Map, as of 20 July 2023, url

- 626

  IPC, Somalia Acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition analysis July – December 2024, 23 September 2024, url, p. 3

- 627

  IOM, DTM Somalia – Baseline Assessment Dataset – Round 3 (February 2024 – September 2024), 3 December 2024, url

- 628

  EASO, COI report - South and Central Somalia Country overview [clan maps based on Lewis 1955, Abikar 1999], August 2014, url, pp. 52-53

- 629

  EASO, Somalia – Security Situation, September 2021, url, p. 67; EASO, COI report - South and Central Somalia Country overview [clan map based on Lewis 1955], August 2014, url, pp. 52

- 630

  Halqabsi News, Somali Army Claims Success in Hudur City Operation, 6 July 2024, url

- 631

  CSHRD, Somalia: 01/07/2024: – Human Rights Second Quarter Report 2024, 30 September 2024, url

- 632

  Edle, A., Bay and Bakool: How Somalia's Breadbasket turned into an Epicenter of Humanitarian Crisis, RVI, 2023, url

- 633

  UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2024/129, 2 February 2024, url, para. 59

- 634

  PolGeoNow, Somalia Approximate Territorial Control, as of 31 March 2025, n.a.; PolGeoNow, Somalia Approximate Territorial Control, as of 1 April 2023, n.a.

- 635

  UNDP Somalia, How the Town of Hudur is Pioneering Resilience in Somalia, 30 April 2024, url

- 636

  SG, Ethiopian military convoy ambushed in south Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 637

  UNOCHA, Somalia Situation Report (Last updated: 13 Aug 2024), 13 August 2024, url, p. 3; Halqabsi News, Somali Army Claims Success in Hudur City Operation, 6 July 2024, url; SG, Ethiopian military convoy ambushed in south Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 638

  Goobjoog, Somali National Army Crushes Al-Shabaab Militants in Bakool Region Operation, 15 March 2025, url; SMN, Somali Forces Strike Al-Shabaab in Major Operation Near Hudur, 21 September 2024, url

- 639

Halqabsi News, Somali Army Claims Success in Hudur City Operation, 6 July 2024, url

- 640

  SONNA, Somali National Army Foils Khawarij Attacks and Landmine Plot in Wajid District, 21 March 2025, url

- 641

  BBC Monitoring Africa, Programme Summary of Somalia's Radio Risalanews 16:00 GMT 7 Nov 24, 8 November 2024

- 642

  VOA, Al-Shabab Attacks Ethiopian Military Convoys in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 643

  Halqabsi News, Somali Army Claims Success in Hudur City Operation, 6 July 2024, url; SONNA, Somali National Army defeats Khawarij in Bay and Bakool regions, 30 November 2023, url

- 644

  Halqabsi News, Somali Army Claims Success in Hudur City Operation, 6 July 2024, url; Radio Dalsan, Somali military captures several key towns in Hiraan and Bakool regions as operations against the militants continue to intensify, 10 December 2023, url; SONNA, Somali Forces Launch Sweeping Operation Against Al-Shabaab in Bakool Region, 29 November 2023, url

- 645

  Hiiraan Online, Somali forces reclaim key road from Al-Shabaab in Bakool, 17 August 2024, url

- 646

  International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., url

- 647

  Radio Dalsan, Security Forces Foil Alshabaab Attack in Hudur, Preventing Potential Mass Casualty Event, 17 October 2024, url

- 648

  ACLED, Somalia: Al-Shabaab Regains Lost Territories as Tax Dispute Halts Counter-Insurgency Operation [Map], 2 June 2023, url

- 649

Radio Dalsan, Somali army kills Al-Shabaab fighters in fierce battle near Wajid in Bakool region, 14 January 2024, url

- 650

  Garowe Online, Al-Shabaab Militants launch Attack on Ethiopian Military Base in Somalia, 12 October 2024, url

- 651

  ACLED, Somalia: Political Turmoil Threatens the Fight Against Al-Shabaab [Map], 30 June 2023, url

- 652

  Radio Dalsan, Somali army kills Al-Shabaab fighters in fierce battle near Wajid in Bakool region, 14 January 2024, url

- 653

  Mogadishu24, Somali Army neutralizes 7 Al-Shabaab militants, 4 June 2024, url

- 654

  SMN, Al-Shabaab Attacks Security Base in Waajid, Somali Forces Capture Key Operative, 21 March 2025, url

- 655

  AA, Heavy casualties in clashes between al-Shabaab terrorists, Ethiopian peacekeepers in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 656

  VOA, Al-Shabab Attacks Ethiopian Military Convoys in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 657

  VOA, Al-Shabab Attacks Ethiopian Military Convoys in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url; AA, Heavy casualties in clashes between al-Shabaab terrorists, Ethiopian peacekeepers in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 658

  VOA, Al-Shabab Attacks Ethiopian Military Convoys in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 659

  Frontier Online, Al-Shabaab executes five men for espionage in Bakool region, 12 June 2023, url

- 660

Hiiraan Online, Somali Army kills 25 al-Shabab militants, including five foreign fighters in Bakool region, 26 July 2023, url

- 661

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2024/129, 2 February 2024, url, para. 12

- 662

Radio Dalsan, Somali military captures several key towns in Hiraan and Bakool regions as operations against the militants continue to intensify, 10 December 2023, url; SONNA, Somali Forces Launch Sweeping Operation Against Al-Shabaab in Bakool Region, 29 November 2023, url

- 663

Halqabsi News, SNA Intensifies Operations Against Al-Shabaab in Bakool, 29 April 2024, url

- 664

Mustaqbal Media, Somali Armed Forces Clash with Al-Shabaab in Bakool Region, Capture Suspects, 21 September 2024, url

- 665

Hiiraan Online, Somali Army kills 25 al-Shabab militants, including five foreign fighters in Bakool region, 26 July 2023, url; SONNA, Somali National Army kills 25 Al-Shabaab militants near Wajid district, 25 July 2023, url

- 666

Mogadishu24, Government forces kill over 80 Al-Shabaab militants, 28 March 2024, url

- 667

SMN, SNA Dismantles Al-Shabaab Trenches in Bakool Region Operation – defense ministry, 19 December 2024, url

- 668

Goobjoog, Somali National Army Crushes Al-Shabaab Militants in Bakool Region Operation, 15 March 2025, url

- 669

BBC Monitoring, Programme Summary of Somalia's Radio Risala news 16:00 GMT 7 Nov 24, 8 November 2024; Mustaqbal Media, Somali Armed Forces Clash with Al-Shabaab in Bakool Region, Capture Suspects, 21 September 2024, url; SMN, Somali National Army Strikes Blow Against Al-Shabaab in Bakool Operation, 24 July 2024, url; Halqabsi News, SNA Intensifies Operations Against Al-Shabaab in Bakool, 29 April 2024, url; Radio Dalsan,

Somali military captures several key towns in Hiraan and Bakool regions as operations against the militants continue to intensify, 10 December 2023, url; SONNA, Somali Forces Launch Sweeping Operation Against Al-Shabaab in Bakool Region, 29 November 2023, url; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., url

- 670

  International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., url

- 671

  Mustaqbal Media, Somali Armed Forces Clash with Al-Shabaab in Bakool Region, Capture Suspects, 21 September 2024, url; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., url

- 672

  SMN, SNA Dismantles Al-Shabaab Trenches in Bakool Region Operation – defense ministry, 19 December 2024, url; Radio Dalsan, Somali military captures several key towns in Hiraan and Bakool regions as operations against the militants continue to intensify, 10 December 2023, url

- 673

  SMN, Al-Shabaab fighters surrender to Somali government, 2 January 2024, url

- 674

  SMN, Somali Forces Strike Al-Shabaab in Major Operation Near Hudur, 21 September 2024, url

- 675

  SMN, Fresh Airstrikes Target Al-Shabaab in Bakool Region, 22 June 2024, url; Airwars, USSOM405, 22 September 2023, url

- 676

  Airwars, USSOM405, 22 September 2023, url

- 677

  Horn Observer, At least 10 killed as rival armed groups clash in Elbarde town of Somalia, 14 June 2023, url

- 678

  BBC Monitoring, Programme Summary of Somalia’s Radio Risala news 16:00 GMT 19 Nov 24, 25 November 2024

- 679

EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Somalia, data covering 1 April 2023 to 21 March 2025, as of 26 March 2025, url

- 680

EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Somalia, data covering 1 April 2023 to 21 March 2025, as of 26 March 2025, url

- 681

EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Somalia, data covering 1 April 2023 to 21 March 2025, as of 26 March 2025, url. Please note that data covering the entire month of March 2025 was not yet available during the drafting of this report.

- 682

EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Somalia, data covering 1 April 2023 to 21 March 2025, as of 26 March 2025, url

- 683

AA, Heavy casualties in clashes between al-Shabaab terrorists, Ethiopian peacekeepers in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 684

VOA, Al-Shabab Attacks Ethiopian Military Convoys in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 685

VOA, Al-Shabab Attacks Ethiopian Military Convoys in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url; AA, Heavy casualties in clashes between al-Shabaab terrorists, Ethiopian peacekeepers in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 686

VOA, Al-Shabab Attacks Ethiopian Military Convoys in Somalia, 17 September 2023, url

- 687

Halqabsi News, Targeted Airstrike Kills High-Ranking Al-Shabaab Leader in Bakool Region, 22 September 2023, url

- 688

Airwars, USSOM405, 22 September 2023, url

- 689

UNHCR, PRMN Datafile – Somalia, as of 21 March 2025, url

- 690

  UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: October – December 2023, 1 January 2024, url, p. 1; UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: July to September 2023, 2 November 2023, url, p. 1; UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: April – June 2023, 25 July 2023, url, p. 1

- 691

  UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: January – December 2024 [Map], 22 January 2025, url, p. 2

- 692

  UNOCHA, Somalia Situation Report (Last updated: 13 Aug 2024), 13 August 2024, url, p. 3

- 693

  UNOCHA, Somalia Situation Report (Last updated: 13 Aug 2024), 13 August 2024, url, p. 3; UNDP Somalia, How the Town of Hudur is Pioneering Resilience in Somalia, 30 April 2024, url

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