**Please cite as:** EUAA, '2.2.3. Lower Shabelle ' in *COI Report – Somalia: Security Situation* , May 2025.

# 2.2.3. Lower Shabelle

## ○ (a) Background

Lower Shabelle region is situated along the coast of south Somalia and shares internal borders with Middle Jubba, Bay, Bakool, Hiraan, Middle Shabelle, and Benadir regions. Lower Shabelle is divided into seven districts: Marka, Wanla Weyn, Afgooye, Qoryooley, Baraawe, Kurtunwaarey, and Sablaale. The region's capital is Marka,762 while the city of Baraawe is the official capital of the South West State.763 Lower Shabelle is known for yielding the country's largest agricultural output764 and is of key strategic importance due to its location along two main roads connecting Mogadishu with Baidoa and Kismayo and the presence of the port towns of Marka and Baraawe.765

As of September 2024, sources variously estimated the population of Lower Shabelle region at 1 593 117 (IPC),766 and 835 126 (IOM).767 The structure of Lower Shabelle's population has been described as highly diverse and complex, encompassing large numbers of Digil-Mirifle subclans, the Biyomaal (Dir) clan around Marka, and numerous Hawiye clans in the east.768 For more detailed background information on Lower Shabelle region, see section 2.2.3. 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**

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 controlled nearly all of the region's central, southern and south-western areas, including the towns of Mubarak, Kurtunwaarey and Sablaale, as well as Basra north of Mogadishu. During the reference period, the group added the previously FGS-controlled town of Awdhegle to its realm of control. Meanwhile, the towns of Marka, Baraawe, Qoryooley, Bulo Mareer, Afgooye and Wanla Weyn remained under the control of the FGS coalition, while control of their rural hinterlands was mostly mapped as being mixed between Al-Shabaab and the FGS coalition. The same could be observed in the rural areas surrounding Benadir/Mogadishu.769

Lower Shabelle has been described as one of Somalia's regions where Al-Shabaab's control was most strongly felt, including through isolation from humanitarian assistance,770 use of force against residents to extort harvested crops as a form of taxation,771 and a high incidence of abductions of children for recruitment into the group's ranks.772

SNA brigades operating in the region during the reference period included the 7th Brigade of the 60th Division,773 the 83rd Brigade,774 and the 143rd Brigade.775 SNA and South West regional forces started to reposition in some areas of Lower Shabelle in spring 2024 as part of their efforts to liberate the region from Al-Shabaab.776

**Conflict dynamics**

Lower Shabelle has been affected by insecurity resulting from Al-Shabaab activity and hostilities between clan militia groups.777 Al-Shabaab 'continued to pose a major threat' in Lower Shabelle and other parts of southern Somalia.778 Al-Shabaab has been using the region as a strategic zone to control food supplies779 and stage attacks across southern Somalia.780 The group's tactics included hit-and-run attacks, IED attacks and ambushing small groups of soldiers.781 A focal area of Al-Shabaab's attacks and ambushes has been the key Mogadishu–Baidoa road782 running through Wanla Weyn.783

As of spring 2023, Lower Shabelle recorded one of the highest incidences of IED attacks among all regions.784 During the early months of the reference period, Al-Shabaab carried out a series of attacks on ATMIS troops, including in Bulo Mareer785 (where Al-Shabab targeted an ATMIS base using vehicle-borne IEDs and claimed to have killed more than 137 soldiers), Janale, Marka, Qoryooley, Baraawe, and the Mogadishu outskirts of Bariirre and Awbocow (April/May 2023)786 and Arbacow (July 2023).787 Moreover, the group launched attacks against the SNA788 and local government and security infrastructure. The group's activities saw another increase in December 2023 and continued at heightened levels into early 2024.789 The second half of 2024 witnessed Al-Shabaab attacking multiple ATMIS positions in Daanow, Bur Colow790 and Bulo Mareer,791 targeting Baraawe airport,792 and ambushing South West regional

forces.793 The group launched a further series of attacks in December 2024794 and re-escalated its operations against military sites in late February 2025.795

Dozens of civilians were killed in drone strikes by the FGS,796 by patrolling ATMIS forces,797 and in artillery crossfire.798 Moreover, there were reports of unattributed explosions resulting in dozens more civilian casualties,799 including a detonation of an unexploded shell in Qoryooley (June 2023),800 and an attack on a bus on the Marka–Qoryooley road (August 2023).801 An increase in child casualties due to mortar fire, unexploded ordnance and remnants of war documented over the summer of 2023 802 continued through late 2023 and early 2024803 with Al-Shabaab reported as the main perpetrator across regions.804 The group also carried out several public executions of individuals it accused of spying.805

While anti-Al-Shabaab operations were announced in the South West State in July 2023, 806 as of early 2024, efforts to combat Al-Shabaab were limited to sporadic aerial operations.807 Later months, however, saw several security operations targeting Al-Shabaab strongholds,808 hideouts809 and checkpoints,810 while aerial strikes reportedly killed a high-ranking Al-Shabaab commander811 and dozens of Al-Shabaab fighters.812

2024 saw a notable increase in clan violence.813 High levels of tension between clan groups were reported in the Baraawe, Qoryooley814 and Wanla Weyn areas,815 escalating into armed violence in June–July 2024,816 including a clash in Qoryooley between the Jiido and Garre clans817 (both part of Digil) 818that reportedly left at least two people dead.819

## ○ (c) Recent security trends

### Security incidents, estimated civilian fatalities and casualties

Between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025, ACLED reported 1 416 security incidents in Lower Shabelle region, including battles, explosions, or other forms of remote violence and violence against civilians, causing 2 122 fatalities. Figure 13 below shows their evolution per type across the reference period.820 At district level, Afgooye recorded the most security incidents (639 incidents) 821, followed by Marka (424 incidents) and Qoryooley (169 incidents).

Security events Lower Shabelle

Figure 13. Evolution of ACLED security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 in Lower Shabelle.822

ACLED recorded 1 302 incidents involving Al-Shabaab (coded as either ‘Actor 1’, ‘Associated Actor 1’, ‘Actor 2’, or ‘Associated Actor 2’). Of these incidents, 832 involved both Al-Shabaab and the Military or Police Forces of Somalia, including five incidents involving Al-Shabaab and Southwest Special Police Forces. A further four incidents involved both Gaaljecel clan militia and Shanta Caleemo clan militia, while another three incidents involved both Gaaljecel clan militia and Rahanweyn-Hubeer subclan militia.823

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

- on 26 May 2023, large numbers of Al-Shabaab fighters carried out a complex attack on Ugandan forces at the ATMIS forward operating base in Bulo Mareer district,824 with the militants claiming that 137 troops had been killed in the attack;825
- on 9 June 2023, a detonation of an unexploded mortar shell in Qoryooley town killed around 27 people, mainly children, and left another 53 injured;826
- on 9 August 2023, an attack by an unidentified armed group on a passenger bus travelling on the Marka–Qoryooley road left at least six people dead and another 12 injured;827
- on 18 March 2024, drone strikes launched during military operations killed 23 civilians of the marginalised Gorgaarte clan near Bagdad village;828
- between 8 and 9 July 2024, a clash between the two clans in Qoryooley district over administrative power in the district829 reportedly left at least two civilians dead.830

**Conflict-related displacement**

Between 1 April 2023 and 16 March 2025, 78 367 individuals were newly displaced from areas of Lower Shabelle due to conflict or insecurity, according to the UNHCR PRMN. Of this group, 32 836 individuals were displaced within the same administrative region, while 45 531 individuals were displaced to other regions, including Benadir, Gedo, Hiraan, Lower Juba, Nugal, and Bari. During the same period, only 167 individuals arrived from other regions (Galgaduud and Bay, all arriving in Afgooye district). At district level, Kurtunwaarey (16 824) and Qoryoley (12 344) were the most affected by individuals leaving for other regions. Kurtunwaarey, by a wide margin, was also the district most affected by intra-regional IDP departures to other locations within Lower Shabelle region (24 063).831 The clashes between the Jiido and Garre clans in Qoryooley district in early July 2024 resulted in the displacement of around 2 100 individuals to Bulo-Mareer and Marka, while others fled to nearby areas within the same district.832

For information on conflict-related displacement prior to April 2023, see section 2.2.3. of the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023).

**Other impacts on civilian life**

UNOCHA recorded 19 humanitarian access incidents in Lower Shabelle region between April and December 2023833 and another nine over the year 2024,834 including disruptions of humanitarian activities due to clashes between two clans in Qoryooley and between military actors in the Baraawe area (second quarter of 2024).835 In 2023, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) and Insecurity Insight recorded one case of violence against health care staff by Al-Shabaab in Lower Shabelle, who shot and injured the director of an NGO-run hospital.836

- 762

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

- 763

  Halqabsi News, South West Security Minister arrives in Barawe, 2 August 2023, url; EASO, Somalia – Security Situation, September 2021, url, p. 73

- 764

  Horn Observer, Lower Shabelle Farmers Struggle Between Al-Shabaab Threats and Government Neglect, 29 January 2025, url

- 765

  EASO, Somalia – Security Situation, September 2021, url, p. 79

- 766

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

- 767

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

- 768

  EASO, Somalia – Security Situation, September 2021, url, p. 79

- 769

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

- 770

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

- 771

  Horn Observer, Lower Shabelle Farmers Struggle Between Al-Shabaab Threats and Government Neglect, 29 January 2025, url

- 772

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

- 773

  Hiiraan Online, Somali forces strike al-Shabaab strongholds in Lower Shabelle, 31 December 2024, url; Radio Dalsan, Somali Army Kills Over 50 Al-Shabaab Militants in Operations, 7 October 2024, url

- 774

  SD, SNA forces liberate districts in Janale in Lower Shabelle, 17 December 2023, url

- 775

  SONNA, SNA conducts clearing operations in Afgooye area in the Lower Shabelle region, 3 February 2025, url

- 776

BBC Monitoring, Programme Summary of Somalia's Radio Mustaqbal News 1730 gmt 22 Mar 24, 2 April 2024

- 777

Horn Observer, Lower Shabelle Farmers Struggle Between Al-Shabaab Threats and Government Neglect, 29 January 2025, url

- 778

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

- 779

SMN, Two Soldiers Killed in Al-Shabaab Ambush in Somalia’s Lower Shabelle Region, 12 November 2024, url

- 780

Hiiraan Online, Somali forces strike al-Shabaab strongholds in Lower Shabelle, 31 December 2024, url

- 781

SMN, Two Soldiers Killed in Al-Shabaab Ambush in Somalia’s Lower Shabelle Region, 12 November 2024, url

- 782

Williams, P.D., The Somali National Army Versus al-Shabaab: A Net Assessment, CTC Sentinel, April 2024, url, p. 39

- 783

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

- 784

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/443, 15 June 2023, url, para. 13

- 785

ACLED, Somalia: Al-Shabaab Regains Lost Territories as Tax Dispute Halts Counter-Insurgency Operation, 2 June 2023, url; UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/443, 15 June 2023, url, para. 19

- 786

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

- 787

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

- 788

  International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., url; VOA, Suicide Car Bomb Kills Somali Security Personnel, 21 October 2023, url

- 789

  UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2024/129, 2 February 2024, url, para. 10-11

- 790

  Somali Digest (The), ATMIS Bases in Lower Shabelle Attacked by Al-Shabab, 24 August 2024, url

- 791

  Somali Digest (The), Al-Shabab Launches Attacks on Security Targets in Mogadishu and Lower Shabelle, 28 September 2024, url

- 792

  Mogadishu24, Al-Shabaab Claims Responsibility for Mortar Attacks on Mogadishu's International Airport, 5 September 2024, url

- 793

  SMN, Two Soldiers Killed in Al-Shabaab Ambush in Somalia's Lower Shabelle Region, 12 November 2024, url

- 794

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

- 795

  Hiiraan Online, Al-Shabaab attacks military bases near Afgoye in Lower Shabelle region, 20 March 2025, url

- 796

  Amnesty International, Somalia: Death of 23 civilians in military strikes with Turkish drones may amount to war crimes – new investigation, 7 May 2024, url

- 797

  Radio Dalsan, ATMIS Troops Kill and Slaughter Civilians in Somalia's Lower Shabelle Region, 17 July 2024, url

- 798

Radio Dalsan, Deadly Mortar Attack Kills 10 Civilians in Lower Shabelle Village, 10 July 2024, url

- 799

  UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/758, 13 October 2023, url, para. 59; Raxanreeb, Three Civilians Killed in Landmine Explosion in Somalia's Lower Shabelle Region, 18 November 2024, url

- 800

  New Arab (The), Mortar shell explosion kills 27 people in Somalia, mainly children, 10 June 2023, url

- 801

  Al Jazeera, At least six killed, 12 wounded in targeted Somali bus explosion, 9 August 2023, url

- 802

  UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/758, 13 October 2023, url, para. 59

- 803

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

- 804

  UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/758, 13 October 2023, url, para. 59; UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2024/129, 2 February 2024, url, para. 59

- 805

  Garowe Online, Somalia: Al-Shabaab publicly executes suspected 'spies', 16 November 2024, url; SMN, Al-Shabaab executes 5 men on espionage charges, 16 June 2023, url

- 806

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

- 807

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

- 808

  Hiiraan Online, Somali forces strike al-Shabaab strongholds in Lower Shabelle, 31 December 2024, url

- 809

SONNA, SNA conducts clearing operations in Afgooye area in the Lower Shabelle region, 3 February 2025, url

- 810

  Hiiraan Online, Somali forces raid Al-Shabaab checkpoints, free civilians in Lower Shabelle, 14 February 2025, url; ACLED, State officials in Somalia crack down on clan militia checkpoints, 30 September 2024, url; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., url

- 811

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

- 812

  AA, Somali forces kill 82 al-Shabaab terrorists in airstrikes, 21 March 2025, url

- 813

  ACAPS, Somalia: Impact of clan conflicts [Map], 19 March 2025, url, p. 2

- 814

  Mustaqbal Media, Somalia: South West administration brokers peace deal between two warring clans in Diinsoor, 20 April 2024, url

- 815

  Horn Observer, Somalia Lower Shabelle: Clashes Spark Fear of Full-Fledged Clan Conflict, 22 August 2024, url; Mustaqbal Media, Somalia: South West administration brokers peace deal between two warring clans in Diinsoor, 20 April 2024, url

- 816

  International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – Somalia: April 2023 – March 2025, n.d., url; Muibu, D., Somalia's Stalled Offensive Against al-Shabaab: Taking Stock of Obstacles, CTC Sentinel, February 2024, url, p. 24

- 817

  UNHCR Somalia, Protection and Return Monitoring Flash Alert #13, 11 July 2024, url, p. 1

- 818

  Somali Digest (The), Qoryoley Clashes Reveal Clan Mobilization Consequences, 19 June 2024, url

- 819

UNHCR Somalia, Protection and Return Monitoring Flash Alert #13, 11 July 2024, url, p. 1; Somali Digest (The), Qoryoley Clashes Reveal Clan Mobilization Consequences, 19 June 2024, url

- 820

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

- 821

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

- 822

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.

- 823

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

- 824

UNSG, Situation in Somalia, S/2023/443, 15 June 2023, url, para. 19

- 825

Horn Observer, Uganda initiates inquiry after deadly al-Shabaab raid on Somalia's Buulo Mareer army base, 28 May 2023, url

- 826

New Arab (The), Mortar shell explosion kills 27 people in Somalia, mainly children, 10 June 2023, url

- 827

Al Jazeera, At least six killed, 12 wounded in targeted Somali bus explosion, 9 August 2023, url

- 828

Amnesty International, Somalia: Death of 23 civilians in military strikes with Turkish drones may amount to war crimes – new investigation, 7 May 2024, url

- 829

UNHCR Somalia, Protection and Return Monitoring Flash Alert #13, 11 July 2024, url, p. 1

- 830

  UNHCR Somalia, Protection and Return Monitoring Flash Alert #13, 11 July 2024, url, p. 1; Somali Digest (The), Qoryoley Clashes Reveal Clan Mobilization Consequences, 19 June 2024, url

- 831

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

- 832

  UNHCR Somalia, Protection and Return Monitoring Flash Alert #13, 11 July 2024, url, p. 1

- 833

  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

- 834

  UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: January – December 2024, 22 January 2025, url, p. 1

- 835

  UNOCHA, Somalia: Humanitarian Access Snapshot: 01 April to 30 June 2024, 8 August 2024, url, p. 2

- 836

  SHCC and Insecurity Insight, Critical Condition. Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2023, May 2024, url, p. 94

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