



1.7. Type of sites, management, role of gatekeepers, and ‘rent’

All IDP settlements in Mogadishu are informal. There is no public land formally allocated by the local government or the FGS to host formal IDP camps.⁷⁶ These settlements lack formal agreements of landownership/rent and a formal camp administration. International organisations come and go, depending on their financial means, changing goals, and the networks they are embedded in.⁷⁷

Upon arrival, most IDPs set up housing structures on vacant private land - *goof* in Somali⁷⁸ - where they are constantly threatened with eviction.⁷⁹ These settlements are referred to in popular and humanitarian jargon as *barakacayaasha* camps or neighbourhoods of ‘the displaced’.⁸⁰ People living in these camps are referred to as *barakac* or *barakacayaal*. Key to their definition is the fact that they were forced to leave their place of origin and relative clan support.⁸¹

Those IDPs residing on public or government land are also exposed to eviction.⁸² According to the ‘Mogadishu Eviction Risk Assessment’ quoted by Refugees International in a study from 2019, this group would represent 6 % of all IDPs residing in Mogadishu.⁸³ Later reporting from 2023 corroborates this point, indicating that public land in Mogadishu is basically scarce and not available.⁸⁴ For further information on Evictions see section [2. Evictions in Mogadishu and impact on civilians](#).

○ Humanitarian assistance, issues of marginalisation, and aid cuts

IDPs mostly rely on ‘daily labour, often in the informal sector; support from neighbours and family, either in places of origin or abroad; and – for some, but not all – small amounts of humanitarian assistance’.⁸⁵

Nowadays, mobile cash payments are the most common form of humanitarian aid in Somalia, with aid agencies biometrically registering camp dwellers and offering them SIM cards, even mobile phones at times.⁸⁶ Humanitarian agencies have adopted

different digital registration platforms in the absence of a foundational ID system – see section [4. IDs and access to services](#) for further details. The registration process of individuals or households is typically based on a two-staged approach, whereby geographical targeting is followed by community-based targeting. The selection of recipients of cash transfers, where, among other actors, gatekeepers play a crucial role, ‘is influenced – sometimes strongly - by factors such as elite capture, corruption, favouritism... and clan power dynamics’.[87](#)

According to Minority Rights Group, aid interventions do not reach minorities equally or in proportion to their needs, due to aid diversion, theft or corruption.[88](#) Among others, issues with digital literacy and absence of physical cash have an impact on the camp life of marginalised groups,[89](#) while not owning a phone, not being aware of cash programmes, or language barriers were identified as factors influencing access to aid and complaint mechanisms among minority groups.[90](#)

As of August 2025, the impact of US funding cuts had begun to affect the levels of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) provided in Eastern Africa, including in Somalia, ‘with CVA programmes in some areas scaled back or terminated entirely’.[91](#) The 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) prioritises 1.6 million people facing extreme intersectoral needs (severity level 4) in 21 priority districts, out of 4.8 million people estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance.[92](#) Within prioritised areas, Mogadishu included, only 80 % of severity level 4 and 30 % of severity level 3 districts will be targeted.[93](#) IDPs would reportedly face closures of health facilities, reduced nutrition programs, and food aid disruptions.[94](#)

Within this context, CVA, including Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) remained crucial in areas with high intersectoral severity (levels 3 and 4), and where markets and financial services are accessible.[95](#)

○ **Site management and gatekeepers**

IDP sites in Mogadishu are de facto managed by gatekeepers or informal settlement leaders. The informal settlement leaders work as subleaders, under the gatekeeper’s supervision, and can either belong to the same clan of the gatekeeper, be a leader of the hosting community, or be a representative of the hosted population appointed by the gatekeeper.[96](#)

Usually, gatekeepers or informal camp managers - also referred to as ‘camp owners’,[97](#) ‘petty humanitarian entrepreneurs’,[98](#) ‘black cats’,[99](#) or just ‘entrepreneurs’[100](#) -

access vacant land through personal or clan connections and set up informal IDP camps, where they intentionally attract newcomers to settle.¹⁰¹ The ‘camp owner’ obtains the land upfront from the landowner (or claimant), usually on a rental basis and through a notary agreement that often lasts for 5 years. After securing the land, the camp owner pays a fee for the camp to be registered with the local authorities, including the CCCM.¹⁰² Then, gatekeepers usually offer access to a small plot of land and assistance with setting up a basic shelter to the IDPs. In exchange for this, often through mobile transactions, IDPs residents pay back their rent to gatekeepers.¹⁰³ This ‘IDP business model’, as it is referred to in the literature, is typical of Mogadishu (and Baidoa).¹⁰⁴ See section [1.7.\(c\) Paying for living in the camp](#) for further details.

In essence, in Mogadishu, gatekeepers control the hard management of the IDP sites. The CCCM Cluster, which comes into play for many but not all IDP sites in Mogadishu, deals with soft management only, such as service mapping and assistance, including cash assistance and food aid.¹⁰⁵ Based on UNOCHA data, as of November 2025, the CCCM Cluster co-managed 1 669 IDP sites across Mogadishu, with the rest being self-managed.¹⁰⁶

Gatekeepers in Mogadishu are mostly women belonging to the Hawiye clan family, but there are also cases of IDP gatekeepers belonging to other clan families, such as Digil-Mirifle, although they are limited.¹⁰⁷ The role of gatekeepers as ostensibly providers of (tenure) security and as intermediaries between humanitarian organisations and IDPs, including the exploitative nature of this relationship, is well documented in the literature and dates back several years.¹⁰⁸ Already in 2017 more than 130 gatekeepers were reportedly operating in Mogadishu,¹⁰⁹ with similar estimates confirmed in 2019.¹¹⁰

○ **Paying for living in the camps**

In the context of the informal management system detailed above, camp dwellers who receive humanitarian assistance have to digitally transfer a percentage of the aid they receive to camp leaders or gatekeepers.¹¹¹ Until a few years ago, when food aid was still mostly distributed in-kind to camp households, camp committees nominated by the camp leader used to go from door-to-door to collect a percentage of that aid, which was then resold on Mogadishu’s markets.¹¹²

Typically, informal camp managers provide access to a plot of land, basic services - e.g. water and sanitation - and some protection in exchange for either cash or a proportion

of humanitarian assistance, up to 60 % in some cases.[113](#) According to a recent study submitted to the Somali Cash Consortium,[114](#) such financial return for the camp owners follows a pre-agreed social arrangement, with the following most common breakdown: 50 % claimed by the camp owner and 50 % of a cash/voucher entitlement for the 'beneficiary'. The amount of cash/voucher intended for the camp owner is reallocated on the following basis: '10 % rent; 10 % security; 10 % local authority/NGO/UN; 20 % camp owner'.[115](#)

An opinion article published by The New Humanitarian in 2023 provided a similar estimate, suggesting that the “rent” fee can amount to as much as 50 % of the aid allotted for each beneficiary – half of a ration that is calculated as the bare minimum a person can survive on'.[116](#) This would leave IDPs 'with less than they require to meet their basic needs', for instance between 30 and 40 USD a month out of 120 USD as a cash voucher on some accounts.[117](#) For previous periods, different reporting settled this 'tax' at different levels, in average between up to 50 %, [118](#) 30 %, [119](#) 20 %, [120](#) and 10-15 % of the received humanitarian aid, although with sensible fluctuations.[121](#)

○ **Unregistered camps dwellers**

While the existence of IDP populations outside formal humanitarian assistance or oversight is well documented, information on camps and camps dwellers which or who are not registered with the humanitarian sector/ NGO/UN could not be found within the research timeframe. Based on UNOCHA data, as of November 2025, about 800 IDP sites in Mogadishu were self-managed.[122](#)

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