



3.3. Composition of prison population in Mogadishu

As noted by expert Zakia Hussein, clan composition of the prison population is very difficult to ascertain but the general assumption is that it reflects the general composition of the population in Mogadishu - thus it is more likely to have a higher proportion of Hawiye, Rahanweyn, and Jareer clans than Isaaq and Darood for instance.[244](#)

Within this context, Abdirizak Farah Mohamed notes that the prison population in Mogadishu includes a significant number of individuals from minority communities, particularly the Jareer minority, as well as detainees originating from the South West State, including members of the Digil and Mirifle (Rahanweyn) clans. While these groups appear to be disproportionately represented in detention facilities, he indicates that this reflects broader social and structural patterns that may influence who is more likely to be arrested, detained, or lack adequate legal safeguards.[245](#) Both Abdirizak Farah Mohamed and Zakia Hussien also maintain that there is a correlation between the prison population and the IDP population in Mogadishu.[246](#)

Sources point to two main reasons. On the one hand, IDP settlements are often locations where 'serious crimes occur due to the vulnerability and poverty of the residents', notes Abdirizak. As a result, police operations in these areas sometimes lead to the arrest of individuals 'simply because they live in the camps'.[247](#) In addition, many IDPs lack access to legal assistance. In the absence of free legal aid, accused persons must hire private lawyers, which most IDPs cannot afford. This contributes to a higher number of IDP residents being detained without the ability to effectively defend themselves in court.[248](#) Along similar lines, Zakia notes that one of the strongest links between the IDP and the prison population is the rise of *Ciyaal Weero* (youth/street gangs). High unemployment rates amongst the IDP population means that many young IDPs, particularly in the districts in the periphery (Dayniile, Kahda), are recruited into neighbourhood gangs. Massive security operations targeting youth gangs would mean higher proportion of IDP youths arrested and convicted.[249](#)

On the other hand, Zakia Hussien points out that IDP populations are 'at the crosshairs of government security operations against Al-Shabaab' as well. IDPs from rural areas who fall under the militants' control are often viewed more suspiciously. In particular, during the cordon-and-search operations, IDP youths who lack proper identification or clan protection in Mogadishu are more likely to be detained for long periods at the CID or Godka Jilacow until their backgrounds are verified.[250](#) In 2024-2025, when Al-Shabaab had regained territory and reverted the 2022-2023 federal military gains, military operations switched from the battlefield to security sweeps in the capital with NISA conducting mass arrests to root out sleeper cells in

Mogadishu - leading to delayed detentions and overcrowding at the Godka Jilacow detention centre.[251](#)

More in general, Abdirizak notes that a considerable number of detainees held in Mogadishu's prisons are individuals accused of, or convicted of, terrorism-related offences. Their arrest stems from security operations conducted in areas previously influenced or controlled by Al Shabaab.[252](#) Based on OPR, these areas would include Bay, Bakool, Hiraan, Middle and Lower Shabelle regions.[253](#) Zakia, notes that, during the 2022-2023 SNA major offenses against Al-Shabaab, there was a significant spike in detentions, where thousands of suspects were captured and transferred to Mogadishu leading to prison overcrowding.[254](#)

- [244](#)

Zakia Hussen, Telephone interview and email exchange, 11, 24 March 2026

- [245](#)

Abdirizak Farah Mohamed, Email exchange, 25, 29 March 2026

- [246](#)

Abdirizak Farah Mohamed, Email exchange, 25, 29 March 2026; Zakia Hussen, Telephone interview and email exchange, 11, 24 March 2026

- [247](#)

Abdirizak Farah Mohamed, Email exchange, 25, 29 March 2026; see also UNHCR and FGS, Internal Displacement Profiling Mogadishu, April 2016, [url](#), pp. 6, 41-42

- [248](#)

Abdirizak Farah Mohamed, Email exchange, 25, 29 March 2026

- [249](#)

Zakia Hussen, Telephone interview and email exchange, 11, 24 March 2026

- [250](#)

Zakia Hussen, Telephone interview and email exchange, 11, 24 March 2026

- [251](#)

Zakia Hussen, Telephone interview and email exchange, 11, 24 March 2026; see also OPR, Annual report assessment on human rights violations in Mogadishu prisons and detention facilities, December 2025, [url](#), p. 5

- [252](#)

Abdirizak Farah Mohamed, Email exchange, 25, 29 March 2026

- [253](#)

OPR, Annual report assessment on human rights violations in Mogadishu prisons and detention facilities, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 5, 9

- [254](#)

Zakia Hussen, Telephone interview and email exchange, 11, 24 March 2026; OPR, Annual report assessment on human rights violations in Mogadishu prisons and detention facilities, December 2025, [url](#), p. 5