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BRIEFING PAPER

LIVING IN FEAR

CONFLICT-INDUCED DISPLACEMENTS IN SOMALIA: PROTECTION
GAPS, RISKS AND NEEDS

The protection environment in Somalia is characterized by insecurity and volatility, limited basic services capacity and provision, weak or absent protection systems, low awareness of - and respect for - basic rights and rules governing armed conflict, discriminatory and harmful socio-cultural practices relating to gender, access impediments for humanitarian workers, and the socio-economic and political disenfranchisement of minority clans and other marginalized groups.¹

Some 1,599,000 people have been displaced in Somalia within ten months of 2022 (Jan-Oct). This is the highest number of internal displacements recorded since the launch of the Protection Return Monitoring Network (PRMN) in 2015.² Whilst drought and looming famine are reported as the primary drivers of displacement, the renewed escalation of armed conflict has also contributed to an increase in forced displacement. Minorities and other similarly marginalised groups - such as persons with disabilities (PwDs), as well as older people, women and children, are disproportionately affected. Children are particularly at risk of becoming separated from their families or other caregivers.

During this reporting period, the PRMN has reported more than one million drought-related displacements, at least half a million conflict-related displacements and over 6,300 protection violations across Somalia. Women and girls make up the majority of those affected by these violations (57%). The displacement situation as a result of conflict is especially precarious in Hiran, Galguduud, and parts of Lower and Middle Shabelle regions, given that at least 47% of conflict-related displacements reported between January and October 2022 originate from the Hiran region.³ The majority of these households have been displaced within the Hiran region, or have fled to Galgaduud, Middle Shabelle and Banadir regions.

Conflict and insecurity have contributed to increased protection risks. Between August and October 2022 for example, there were reports of an estimated 78 children forcibly recruited by NSAGs.⁴ FGDs and KIs with conflict-displaced families in Mogadishu and Baidoa revealed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict.⁵ Similarly, more than 31 parents from Bakool region, reported that their children escaped from forced recruitment, restriction on movement, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), forced/early marriages, and inadequate housing. During this period, PRMN partners reported estimated 78 children forcibly recruited by NSAGs. FGDs and KIs with conflict-displaced families in Mogadishu and Baidoa revealed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict.⁶ More than 31 parents from Bakool region, for example, reported that their children escaped from forced recruitment.⁷

1 Somalia Protection Cluster (2021). Annual report

2 In 2006, PRMN was known as the Population Movement Tracking (PMT) portal and developed to collect population movement data electronically. In 2014 the system was revised to include protection into population movement tracking. In 2015, PRMN was launched to collect the real-time displacement incidents. Even though there have been two different systems, the PRMN methodology for enumeration has remained largely consistent. <https://unhcr.github.io/dataviz-somalia-prmn/index.html#reason=&month=&need=&preigion=&pdistrictmap=&cregion=Mudug&cdistrictmap=&year=2021>

3 PRMN data (January – September 2022). Hiran region is classified as Integrated Food Security Phase Classification 4

4 PRMN Flash alerts, August-October 2022

5 NRC rapid assessment, Somalia, October 2022

6 NRC rapid assessment, Somalia, October 2022

7 PRMN Flash report, July 27: 27,000 individuals displaced due to increased protection violations in Yeed, Aato and Washaaqo towns in Bakool

COMMUNITY VOICES

In Hiran region, fighting between NSAG and local clans has resulted in massive displacement, and destruction of properties, water sources (barkads, boreholes/wells), and telecommunication facilities, executions, immolation, and arson. In Middle Shabelle, communities described Aden Yabal, Basra, Warmoy, Yaaqle, Mukay, Xawadley, and Masaajid Ali Gaduud as hotspot locations. Some respondents fled following forced recruitments of children by NSAGs, taxation, threats, and targeted killings. Communities resist NSAGs but they fear retaliation. In Diinsoor, travel restrictions by NSAGs have increased with little to no access to the area.⁸



The current awakening by the clans started due to tax payments and child recruitments. However, in some areas local elders would act as collaborators, while in other areas they are the opposition. It also depends on the area.

Somalia has one of the highest incidents of grave violations against children. Children aged between 11 and 17 years, were identified as groups most at risk of forced recruitment. There are reports of clan elders ordered to recruit a certain number of children from their communities to fight alongside the Somalia National Army. NSAGs use intimidation and harassment to threaten parents. PRMN reported the killing of a mother and father in Hiran after they tried to prevent the forced recruitment of their children. Additionally, PRMN reported another incident of the killing of a mother and her son in Marka district. Many families are being separated, while communities also stress that their children live in extreme danger, have insufficient food and water, and are deprived of basic sanitation, healthcare, and education.



Children are recruited to be soldiers or spies. They are taught to join the jihad and promised entry into paradise if they die a martyr.

Families have adopted multiple ways to prevent forced recruitment. These include transporting children to major towns where relatives live (Xawilaad); moving to IDP sites for safety reasons; hiding children; and refusal by caretakers and parents to avail their children for recruitment, which can lead to execution. Others try to reduce the risk by seeking negotiation and bargaining. For example, if a family has several children, they keep one and have the other join.

According to PRMN there has been a spike in domestic violence in 2022. Incidents of violence against women and girls happen throughout displacement and are committed by a variety of actors, including intimate partners and other displaced persons. Violations include rape, physical assault, forced marriages, and female genital mutilation (FGM).

⁸ Xudur has been under a severe siege for the last seven years with the main supply routes blocked and controlled by NSAGs.



A group of newly arrived women stand in front of their temporary shelters in Luglow IDP settlement, in the outskirts of Kismayo, Somalia. © NRC/Abdulkadir Mohamed

The lack transportation exposes them to risks, as many are compelled to flee on foot. In July for example, PRMN reported an estimated 51 lactating mothers that had fled from Bakool region due to conflict crossed into Ethiopia as they could not travel long distances on foot and/or lacked essential lifesaving supplies for their infants. Girls remain at high risk of early marriage and school dropout. Parents cannot afford to pay school fees and education facilities remain inadequate. Before the drought, more than 70% of school-aged children⁹ were already out of school, and the national enrolment rate for primary education remains low for girls mainly due to cultural practices in the community and gender stereotypes.¹⁰ Moreover, community leaders in some regions have reported that an estimated 25 girls under the age of 18 years were forcibly married in the past two months.

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“Our girls are being given away as motivation for soldiers. They are seen as incentives.”

9 https://www.intersos.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/BARRIERS-TO-GIRLS-EDUCATION-IN_SOUTH-CENTRAL-SOMALIA-Annex-1.pdf

10 <https://plan-international.org/blog/2022/08/15/education-cant-wait-drought-girls-somalia/>

Besides, women and children, particularly female-headed households in IDP sites do not feel safe. They live in makeshift shelters that provide inadequate physical protection from the weather elements and security from invasion. The lack of police posts in IDP settlements, lighting on routes leading to latrines, water points, and firewood collection areas is a risk factor enabling abuse, exploitation, and violence. Likewise, the lack of adequate gender-segregated latrines/ hygiene facilities as well as absence of door locks contribute to insecurity in IDP sites. Due to fear of stigmatization and repercussions, GBV incidents remain highly under reported.



Images from a Core Relief Items distribution to persons affected by severe drought in Ladan IDP camp, Doolow. © UNHCR

KEY ACTIONS: PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

- Strengthen **protection analyses** using data collected from existing protection systems used in Somalia to inform evidence-based response and advocacy.
- Undertake a **joint comprehensive assessment** to document the impact of the ongoing armed conflict and unique vulnerabilities of the affected families and young children fleeing from conflict areas. Ensure targeted dissemination with findings shared with the Humanitarian Country Team, Inter Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG), donors, international and national partners.
- Women and children are central to the current emergency response and their unique protection needs should be prioritised by all actors. It is critical to continue prioritising evidence generation through the collection of **age, sex, and disability disaggregated data** to identify and respond to specific needs and unique vulnerabilities, ensuring stronger integration of protection principles across all emergency programmes alongside specialised standalone responses.
- The immediate cessation of attacks on civilians and infrastructure, including water points, health, education and telecommunication facilities, properties, businesses, as well as restriction on freedom of movements, arbitrary arrests and detention and uphold the principles of international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Considering the potential long-term impact of the ongoing crisis, stronger commitment from donors on multi-year predictable funding from the emergency phase onwards is critical. This will ensure continuity of protection services and the implementation of a holistic and integrated approach.
- Humanitarian and development donors and actors should strengthen their coordination to ensure a **nexus approach**, which balances short-term life-saving assistance with longer term support to local actors and government structures.
- Scale up **protection services for persons with specific needs**, including PwDs and older persons, and those with minority clan affiliations, in areas affected by this surge in armed conflict and in areas receiving the newly displaced.
- Prioritise the establishment of **coordinated area-based inter-agency systems** for the safe identification, referral, and provision of protection services.
- Scale up **child protection** prevention, risks mitigation and response services as part of a multi-sectoral emergency response. For example, psychosocial support and care for children in extremely vulnerable situations, support for community-based protection mechanisms, case management, rehabilitation and reintegration of released children with their families and advocacy for children associated with armed forces and armed groups.¹¹
- Empower **community-based support structures** to improve engagement and participation in delivery of protection services with a specific focus on prevention and risk mitigation.
- Train health, justice, and social service providers on the specific needs of displaced and other conflict-affected communities, including how to safely identify, refer, and assist them in a survivor-centred and gender-responsive manner.

ANNEX 1: SUMMARY OF PROTECTION VIOLATIONS DUE TO CONFLICT-INDUCED DISPLACEMENT

Source: PRMN partners | Period: July – October 2022

July 21-24	An estimated 27,000 individuals, from Yeed and Aato villages fled their homes to Baraag, Buur Haash, Baarey, Godgod, and Shidaad in the Somali Ethiopian region, while others were settled in Idow, Gaalshire, Wajid, Boqol Garas, Lehelow, Elberde and Xudur due to generalized insecurity after fierce fighting between the Somali National Army (SNA) and Liyu Police Forces against non-state actor operating in the area. At least 10 civilians were killed (three women, three children and four men), and nine children were reported missing. NSAGs also attacked Washaaqo village by firing 18 mortar shells at the village.
August 5-9	25,272 individuals displaced from 14 villages in Maxaas and Matabaan districts in Hiran region. Maxaas district remains a crucial supply route between Belet Weyne and Galkacyo. Humanitarian access to this area is limited with access available by air. NSAGs destroyed three boreholes, creating water scarcity in the area. More than three telecommunication towers were destroyed, cutting off communication and affecting commerce. Four villages were torched resulting in destruction of shelters and other physical assets. Communication equipment was destroyed, suspending household communication and routine business transactions.
September 8	Over 28,920 individuals displaced from Adakibir and surrounding villages following increased attacks and insecurity in Galgaduud region. The war against NSAGs by local clan militias led to attacks on civilian and public facilities that provide essential services, such as telecommunication towers, boreholes, and vehicles transporting food, resulting in disrupted travel to the regions. Demolition of Adakibir's communications towers and the kidnapping of an estimated 150 individuals, including children. 10 persons abducted from Ceel-Bur and surrounding locations were executed. Adakibir and Marsamaga boreholes, the primary water sources for nearby villages, were destroyed by NSAGs. In Hiran, more than 10 trucks transporting humanitarian aid and public goods were burnt by NSAGs, and killings of 20 civilian travellers between Belet Weyne and Maxaas districts were reported. More than 28 children were reportedly kidnapped for forced recruitment by NSAGs and clan militias. In August 2021, NSAGs had seized control of Adakibir. The ensuing violence resulted into two deaths, four severe injuries, and displacement of more than 11,100 persons. In early May 2021, a similar incident occurred in Bacadweyne and Wisil, Hobyo district. NSAGs entered the towns and fired indiscriminately at local residents, resulting in two deaths, multiple injuries, and displacement of more than 12,000 individuals.
September 18	NSAGs arson attacks destroyed more than 75% of Ceel-Jiigoow village in Maxas district in Central Hiran through arson attacks. More than 34,352 people fled fourteen villages in Bulu-Burto, Beled Weyne and Maxas districts following intense fighting between the NSAGs and clan militias. Agro pastoral communities around Bulu Burto and Beled Weyne have been adversely affected by the ongoing conflict and drought. Non-state actors forcibly took away more than 20,000 goats and camels. They faced multiple forced evictions by the NSAG accusing the local communities of spying for the Somali National Army and clan militias. Increased abductions, abuse, harassment, and restriction of movement of affected populations by NSAGs. 13 civilian deaths, including children and women fatalities reported and over 100 houses, businesses, and boreholes destroyed. An unknown number of children kidnapped and forcibly recruited by the non-state actor.
October 22	More than 17,016 individuals from Hiran, Bakool, and Lower Shabelle were forced to flee to Mogadishu. NSAGs have been raiding livestock and farm produce from local residents as a form of zakat collection. Men and children were forcibly recruited. An estimated 50 children have been forcibly recruited in the past two months. Young girls have been forcibly married off.



An aerial view of Kaam Jiroon IDP camp in Baidoa. This settlement is one of the hundreds of IDP camps hosting drought-displaced families. © NRC/ Abdulkadir Mohamed

