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IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Somalia: Update to SOM200233 on entry and exit requirements at land borders and airports, including documentation required; whether there are checkpoints for domestic and international travel; whether there are travel agencies that facilitate travel within and outside Somalia (2018–January 2022) [SOM200886.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

In an interview with the Research Directorate, a lecturer at King's College London, whose research interests include mobility and migration in Somalia, indicated that land borders are "very porous" and that people can travel across them without documentation (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020* similarly states that al-Shabaab [al-Shabab] "moved freely" throughout the "large parts of Somalia" over which it held "de facto control," and had "launched external operations attacks" across the "porous" border in Kenya (US 16 Dec. 2021, 11, 205). A country information report on Somalia by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) describes Somalia's entry and exit procedures as "not technologically advanced" and states that Somalia does not have a "central database" monitoring illegal departures (Australia 13 June 2017, para 5.17).

A 2018 article by the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that Somalia uses the IOM-developed Migration Data Analysis System [Migration Information and Data Analysis System (US 16 Dec. 2021, 19)] (MIDAS), which has "the capability to collect, process, store and analyse traveler information in real time," at 16 ports of entry (UN 9 Oct. 2018). A 2016 report by the World Bank et al. indicates that there were 57 "recognized" border control points in Somalia (World Bank, et al. 2016, 23). The IOM article quotes an officer with the IOM's Immigration and Border Management program as stating that MIDAS "'does passport reading, it takes the photo of a traveller who's coming in, it also takes the finger prints ... and then runs it over a database to check if you have the right of entry or not'" (UN 9 Oct. 2018).

The US *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020* states that airport police "enhanced their observation and investigative skills in support of airport operations" while they also "improved screening of passengers, luggage, and cargo" entering Mogadishu's Aden Adde International Airport (US 16 Dec. 2021, 38).

2. Entry and Exit Requirements at Land Borders and Airports, Including for Canadians

Sources indicate that passports and visas are required for foreigners entering Somalia (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020; UK 23 Dec. 2021; Canada 16 Dec. 2021). Sources state that the authorities in Somaliland and Puntland issue their own visas (US 12 Mar. 2019; Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020).

A country of origin information report on South and Central Somalia by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that documents "play little or no role" in South and Central Somalia and identity documents are not required for Somali citizens travelling within Somalia (Netherlands Mar. 2019, 28). The Lecturer indicated that "some form of ID" is required for Somali citizens entering Somalia at airports and that a Somali passport allows Somali citizens entry at any airport in Somalia (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020).

According to the Government of Canada's Travel Advisory webpage for Somalia, Canadians "need a visa to visit those areas under the authority of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Somaliland and Puntland" (Canada 16 Dec. 2021).

2.1 Somalia

2.1.1 Arrival and Procedures to Obtain a Visa

Somalia's Immigration and Naturalization Directorate (IND) indicates that foreign nationals entering Somalia are required to have a "copy of valid passport" with remaining validity of at least 6 months, one "passport size photo with white background (for a normal foreigner)," a "[p]ersonal ID (if any)," a copy of the invitation letter from their host, and a completed entry form (Somalia n.d.a).

Somalia's IND provides the following list of documents required of Somali citizens seeking to invite a foreign national into the country:

- a copy of their own "CV with accurate details"
- a signed visa application listing the foreigner's "details" ("passport, nationality, origin"), the reason for and length of the visit, and "proof of guarantee (his/her security, residential, and life)"
- a "copy of the host's passport"
- a "copy of the host's ID card" (Somalia n.d.a).

The webpage of Somalia's IND also provides a link to a page where users can complete an online visa application for a "processing" fee of US\$15 or 1,650 Kenya shillings (KES) [C\$18] (Somalia n.d.b).

The UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) indicates that individuals arriving at the Mogadishu [Aden Adde (Mogadishu Aden Adde International Airport n.d.)] International Airport may require a letter of invitation describing the purpose of the visit and entry can be denied to those without such an invitation; the source notes that a hotel booking "may" satisfy this requirement (UK 23 Dec. 2021).

The UK's FCO states that a single entry one-month visa can be obtained on arrival for US\$60 in cash at the Mogadishu International Airport (UK 23 Dec. 2021). The US Bureau of Consular Affairs indicates that a 60-day tourist visa can be obtained on arrival in Mogadishu for US\$60 (US 7 Jan. 2021). Germany's Federal Foreign Office, in providing advice to German nationals who need a visa to enter Somalia, indicates that obtaining a visa on arrival at Somalia's international airports is [translation] "usually possible, but is not recommended due to frequently fluctuating regulations" (Germany 30 Dec. 2021). The same source adds that an invitation is required for obtaining a visa (Germany 30 Dec. 2021).

According to the Government of Canada's Travel Advisory webpage, Canadians seeking to visit areas "under the authority of the TFG ... should obtain, in advance, a visa from the Embassy of Somali Republic in Kenya" (Canada 16 Dec. 2021). Sources stated, however, that Canadians can obtain a visa on arrival in Somalia, and that it is not necessary to arrange a visa in advance of travel (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022; SCSC 6 Jan. 2022). According to the same sources, the visa on arrival is available to Canadians when they pay the US\$50 [or US\$60 (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022)] visa fee (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022; SCSC 6 Jan. 2022). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Executive Director of the Somali Canadian Society of Calgary (SCSC), a non-profit serving the needs of refugees, immigrants, and youth in the Calgary area (SCSC n.d.), added that the Somali Embassy in Ottawa does not process visas or accept visa applications for Canadians seeking to travel to Somalia (SCSC 6 Jan. 2022). The same source indicated that upon arrival in Somalia, in addition to presenting their Canadian passport and paying the visa fee, a Canadian traveller will be asked questions by the immigration officer concerning their plans for accommodation in Somalia and who is "providing security" for them while in the country (SCSC 6 Jan. 2022).

Sources stated that Canadians arriving at a Somali airport will have their passports stamped (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022; SCSC 6 Jan. 2022) and "scanned" (SCSC 6 Jan. 2022). Sources indicate the stamp includes

- the date of arrival (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022; SCSC 6 Jan. 2022)
- the name of the arrival city or airport (SCSC 6 Jan. 2022)
- the Somali emblem (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022)
- the signature of the immigration officer [1] (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022).

Sources indicated that foreign passports, including those of Canadians, are also stamped upon their departure from Somalia (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022; SCSC 6 Jan. 2022). The Executive Director of the SCSC added that since there are no immigration officers stationed at Somali land border crossings, it is not possible to obtain a visa or a passport stamp at a land border (SCSC 6 Jan. 2022). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Executive Director of the Somali Canadian Association of Etobicoke stated that while passport stamps are "standard" at "major" Somali airports, at land borders and "smaller" airports a person could "request" that the stamp be placed on the "proof of payment" for their visa instead of their passport (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022).

According to sources, the requirements and procedures for Canadians arriving in Somalia are the same for Somali Canadians who previously held Somali citizenship (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022; SCSC 6 Jan. 2022). The Executive Director of the Somali Canadian Association of Etobicoke added that a Canadian who is not a member of the "Somali diaspora" may be asked why they did not arrange their visa in advance; however, the Canadian traveler will still be permitted to obtain a visa on arrival (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022).

2.1.2 Arrival and Departure by Air

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), a trade association representing approximately 290 airlines (IATA n.d.a), indicates that foreigners aged 12 and over arriving at the Mogadishu [Aden Adde International] Airport must pay a landing fee of US\$50 (IATA n.d.b). The same source further states that air passengers departing Somalia aged two and over are required to pay a passenger service charge of US\$20 for foreigners or 10,000 Somali Shillings (SOS) [approximately C\$22] for Somali nationals and residents (IATA n.d.b).

The website of the Mogadishu Aden Adde International Airport indicates that passengers are required to undergo security screening, which checks whether carry-on items are allowed on board (Mogadishu Aden Adde International Airport n.d.). An article by Voice of America (VOA), a US international broadcaster funded by US Congress (VOA n.d.), quotes the general manager of the Mogadishu Aden Adde International Airport as stating that an air passenger "goes through searches, three scans, sniffer dogs" and that international departures have their "own security gates where further security checks are made" (VOA 25 Apr. 2017).

2.2 Somaliland

The Dutch report indicates that travelers are required to show a passport to enter Somaliland (Netherlands Mar. 2019, 15). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the UNHCR's office in Mogadishu indicated that at land borders in Somaliland, a Somali citizen must produce a national ID and a foreigner must have entry and exit visas (UN 1 June 2020). The same source stated that citizens who have their passports will receive entry and exit stamps from immigration officials at "official entry points" (UN 1 June 2020). According to the Government of Canada's Travel Advisory webpage, Canadians seeking to visit Somaliland and Puntland should "direct [their] visa inquiries" to the people or organization they are visiting there, since there is not an office issuing visas in Kenya (Canada 16 Dec. 2021).

The UK's FCO states that a single entry one-month visa can be obtained on arrival in Somaliland for US\$60 in cash (UK 23 Dec. 2021). A circular issued by the Commissioner of Somaliland's Immigration Department dated 10 March 2019 states that the following individuals can obtain a visa on arrival at all Somaliland ports of entry: diplomatic passport holders; UN passport holders; national service passport holders; travelers from "multilateral agencies," such as the African Union, EU and World Bank; international NGOs registered with the Ministry of Planning; official foreign delegations invited by the Somaliland Government; business investors invited by the Somaliland Ministry of Commerce; individuals of Somali ethnic origin with foreign travel documents; and foreign nationals from European countries, Canada, US, Brazil, China, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) countries [Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda and Eritrea] (Somaliland 10 Mar. 2019).

The UNHCR office in Mogadishu stated that foreigners entering through Somaliland airports must have a valid passport and entry visa for Somaliland (UN 1 June 2020). According to the German Federal Foreign Office's advice to German nationals, 30-day visas for Somaliland can be applied for upon arrival at the airports in Berbera, Borama, Burao [Burco], Erigavo [Erigabo] and Hargeisa [Hargeysa] (Germany 30 Dec. 2021). The same source adds that an invitation is required for obtaining a visa (Germany 30 Dec. 2021). The UNHCR office in Mogadishu noted that Somali citizens not originating from Somaliland are required to pay the visa fee (UN 1 June 2020).

2.3 Puntland

The UNHCR office in Mogadishu indicated that an ID card is required for a Somali national to enter Puntland at land borders (UN 1 June 2020). The same source stated that all foreigners need to apply for an entry visa, which is only valid for Puntland (UN 1 June 2020).

According to the UNHCR office in Mogadishu, Somali nationals travelling by air are required to present their national ID cards and are exempt from the migration office fees, with the exception of those flying to Hargeisa in Somaliland, who are required to present the Somali passport and visa fees (UN 1 June 2020). The same source added that the visa requirement led to the suspension of "most flights" to Hargeisa (UN 1 June 2020). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Checkpoints

The *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020* by the US Department of State indicate that checkpoints maintained by "government forces, allied groups, armed militias, clan factions and al-Shabaab inhibited movement and exposed citizens to looting, extortion, harassment, and violence" (US 30 Mar. 2021, 20). The same source further states that checkpoints operated by armed groups and attacks on humanitarian workers "severely restricted movement" and aid delivery in the Southern and Central regions (US 30 Mar. 2021, 21). The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicates that the "prevalence of checkpoints and improvised explosive devices significantly limits road access" across Somalia (UN Jan. 2020, 32).

The UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea describes the taxation system at al-Shabaab checkpoints as "applied consistently" and "accountable," including providing receipts to drivers, whereas checkpoints maintained by the forces of the Federal Government of Somalia or federal member state forces "doubl[e] tax drivers" who have already paid at another checkpoint (UN 9 Nov. 2018, para. 86).

The Dutch report indicates that identity cards are not required at checkpoints in South and Central Somalia; rather, the individual's clan background is evaluated (Netherlands Mar. 2019, 28). The Lecturer stated that, though there "may be consistency" in Somaliland, at the national level there is no consistent procedure at checkpoints in Somalia, where individuals may be taxed or have their identity verified through identification documents or "other methods" (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020). The same source indicated that in cities located on an international border, an individual's documentation will be checked in offices located on either side of the border; however, the existence of border control is inconsistent due to the length of the border (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020).

3.1 Mogadishu

The UNHCR office in Mogadishu stated that the Federal Government's forces control the "[m]ain checkpoints" inside Mogadishu (UN 1 June 2020). The Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Landinfo, an independent body within the Norwegian Immigration Authorities, indicates that the police were operating checkpoints on most of Mogadishu's main roads during Landinfo's visit in September 2017, and the primary purpose of the checkpoints was to prevent attacks by al-Shabaab on government agencies (Norway 15 May 2018, 2, 11). An article on safety tips for humanitarians working in Somalia by Iman Elman, former Director of External Affairs at Somalia's Ministry of Internal Security and Head of Programs and Security for CTG, a "private sector company enabling humanitarian and development projects in conflict settings" (CTG n.d.), states that security checkpoints in Mogadishu are commonly located every one to two kilometers, including at airport compounds (CTG 22 Jan. 2019). The same article indicates that identification documents ensure the ability to "freely travel" across Mogadishu (CTG 22 Jan. 2019). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3.2 Somaliland

The Dutch report states that checks are conducted along all access roads and the security apparatus in Somaliland is "effective" (Netherlands Mar. 2019, 15). The UNHCR office in Mogadishu indicated the following:

1. Each district and counts [*sic*] may have several entry and exit checkpoints.
2. The checkpoint authorities check the travel documents of passengers or driver's licenses of the drivers. They also ask about the destination and the origin of the trip. Besides, they record the plate numbers of the vehicles as well and their contact numbers. These procedures are consistent.
3. Immigration and police authorities operate at the checkpoints. It shall be noted that some borders (with Ethiopia) are relatively porous and migrants might enter Somaliland without documentation. This practice has been curbed, but in the past, it was common to enter through illegal entry points. (UN 1 June 2020)

3.3 Puntland

The Lecturer indicated that there are checkpoints operated by the police between Puntland and Somaliland (Lecturer 29 Apr. 2020). The UNHCR office in Mogadishu stated that checkpoints are located between each state, such as between Puntland and Somaliland and between Puntland and Galmudug (UN 1 June 2020). The same source indicated that Somali nationals are required to present national ID cards and foreigners are required to present visas (UN 1 June 2020).

4. Travel Agencies that Facilitate Travel Within and Outside Somalia

The UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) indicates that there are over 150 travel agencies operating in Somalia (UN 7 Jan. 2018). The same source quotes a Mogadishu-based tour operator who has been working in the industry since 2013 as stating that he has been "'hosting a lot of people from the European Union, the United States and Asia'" (UN 7 Jan. 2018). A September 2016 article by

Quartz, an international online business publication with headquarters in New York and London (Quartz n.d.), states that the Somali Tourism Association, a non-profit organization "dedicated to making tourism accessible to all Somalis," have organized tours outside of Mogadishu for domestic tourists (Quartz 27 Sept. 2016). The same source indicates that Untamed Borders, a British "adventure travel company," conducted organized tours to Mogadishu, Somaliland and Puntland for foreign tourists, who are accompanied by "high-level personal security, a translator, and a fixer [2] to show them around" (Quartz 27 Sept. 2016).

Information on services offered by travel agencies to Somali citizens, including assistance in obtaining travel and identity documents, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

5. Travel Restrictions Related to COVID-19

Australia's DFAT indicates that as of 5 January 2022, international and domestic flights were operational (Australia 5 Jan. 2022). Sources state that domestic flights resumed on 5 July 2020 (WorldAware 2 July 2020; UN 13 July 2020). The IOM states that Somalia discovered its first confirmed case of COVID-19 on 16 March 2020 and suspended all international flights on the same date (UN 13 July 2020). The US Embassy in Somalia reports that flight restrictions were implemented on 18 March 2020 (US 20 July 2020). Sources indicate that international flights were suspended until 2 August 2020 (Somalia 8 Aug. 2020; WorldAware 1 Aug. 2020). Sources report that a "COVID-19 [n]egative certificate" (Somalia 8 Aug. 2020) or "negative" COVID-19 test (Australia 5 Jan. 2022) taken a maximum of 96 hours before a flight is required to enter or exit the country (Somalia 8 Aug. 2020; Australia 5 Jan. 2022). Other sources, however, indicate that foreign nationals arriving in, and departing from, Somalia must present a negative COVID-19 test result taken within 72 hours of travel (UK 23 Dec. 2021; Crisis24 29 Dec. 2021).

A website on the COVID-19 response in Somalia by Somalia's Ministry of Health, OCHA and the WHO states that as of 30 December 2021, 3 of 6 land borders are closed and all 9 airports are open for passengers (UN and Somalia 30 Dec. 2021). According to the Government of Canada's Travel Advisory webpage for Somalia, as of 16 December 2021 the Somalia-Kenya land border "remains closed," while "air traffic between the two countries is subject to special procedures by the Kenyan government" (Canada 16 Dec. 2021). The same source states that "Mogadishu Aden Adde International Airport is often closed with little or no warning due to fighting" (Canada 16 Dec. 2021).

The Ministry of Health, OCHA and WHO COVID-19 response webpage states that as of 26 January 2022, there were 1,319 deaths related to COVID-19 and 25,388 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (UN and Somalia 26 Jan. 2022). The same source indicates that there were 8,585 cases in Somaliland, followed by 7,820 cases in Banadir, 5,792 cases in Puntland, 1,367 cases in Jubaland State, 631 cases in Hir-Shabelle State, 635 cases in Galmudug State, and 558 cases in South West State (UN and Somalia 26 Jan. 2022).

According to sources, all incoming travellers to Somaliland must present a "negative" COVID-19 test results taken within 96 hours of travel (UK 23 Dec. 2021; Crisis24 29 Dec. 2021).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] According to the Executive Director of the Somali Canadian Association of Etobicoke, immigration officers do not always sign the entry stamp in a foreigner's passport as they are supposed to (Executive Director 6 Jan. 2022).

[2] A fixer acts "as a source of local knowledge," providing logistical assistance for media and other organizations in foreign countries (ICFJ 9 May 2017).

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Internet sites, including: African Union – Mission in Somalia; Al Jazeera; Asylum Research Centre; Austrian Red Cross – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation; Denmark – Danish Immigration Service, Ministry of Immigration and Integration; *The EastAfrican*; ecoi.net; EU – European Asylum Support Office; Factiva; Garowe Online; Hiiraan Online; International Crisis Group; *International Journal of Political Science*; Rift Valley Institute; Somalia – embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, embassy in Washington, DC; Somaliland.com; Somaliland – Somaliland Diaspora Agency; Somaliland Travel; UK – Home Office; UN – Refworld, ReliefWeb, World Food Programme; VisaHQ; Visit Mogadishu.

ecoi.net summary:



Query response on
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