



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	SOMALIA
Main subject	<u>Situation of the Gaboye minority group in Somalia, especially in Somaliland and Puntland</u>
Question(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><u>1. What is the treatment of the Gaboye minority group in Somalia, especially in Somaliland and Puntland?</u><u>2. What is the situation of returnees belonging to the Gaboye minority group in Somalia, especially in Somaliland and Puntland</u>
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The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision-making authorities. The answer was finalised on 30 March 2021. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

COI QUERY RESPONSE - SOMALIA

1. Situation of the Gaboye minority group in Somalia, especially in Somaliland and Puntland

Background of the clan system in Somalia

In Somalia, there are different clans as well as minority groups.¹ The Somali society is structured on the patrilineal lineage type of clans.² According to the anthropology professor I.M. Lewis, an expert in Somalia, 'the clan system is the most important constituent social factor among the nomadic-pastoralist Somalis'.³ The clan system is differentiated into several different levels, including clan families, clans and sub-clans.⁴ According to Lewis, the clans hold a political role and influence the function of society and politics, due to the absence of state structures in certain parts of Somalia. Apart from the 'noble' clans, there are also some minority clans. Somali minorities are diverse and include ethnic minorities, religious minorities and occupational groups.⁵ While the ethnic and religious minorities have a different cultural and language background than Somalis from the pastoralist majority clans, the occupational groups share their background, but practice specific non-pastoralist occupations.⁶ Those occupational groups, known as 'outcaste' groups or by the collective term Sab, are generally non-pastoralist and are considered inferior.⁷ The occupational groups are at the lowest level of the social hierarchy of the Somali society and are traditionally occupied in positions considered impure or dishonourable by the major clans.⁸ Their type of occupation, combined with the fact that they cannot trace their genealogy to Prophet Mohammed, unlike the major clans, contribute to the treatment of the occupational casts as inferior.⁹

According to some of the relevant sources, the Gaboye (also known as Gabooye¹⁰ or Midgaan) is one of the occupational groups in Somalia along with Tumul and Yibro.¹¹ However, it should be noted that the denomination Gaboye is also used, especially in the Northwest Somalia and Somaliland, as a

¹ There are the ethnic nomadic-pastoralist Somalis who speak Af-Maxaa-tiri (i.e. the "noble clans" of the Darood, Hawiye, Dir, and – depending on one's perspective – the Isaaq), which became the official language of Somalia after independence. The other large group is composed of the mainly sedentary agro-pastoralist people, residing in the inter-riverine area between the Juba and Shabelle rivers in Southern Somalia, known as Digil-Mirifle or Rahanweyn. They speak Af-Maay-tiri, which is quite distinct from Af-Maxaa-tiri. ACCORD, Clans in Somalia, December 2009, [url](#), p. 11

² ACCORD, Clans in Somalia, December 2009, [url](#), p. 7

³ Lewis, I. M., *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*, James Currey Publishers, Oxford, 1999 (reprint), p. 4, cited in: EASO Country of Origin Information Report, South and Central Somalia, Country Overview, August 2014, [url](#), p. 20; Gundel, J., *The predicament of the 'Oday': The role of traditional structures in security, rights, law and development in Somalia*, November 2006, [url](#), p. 4-5

⁴ Lewis, I. M., *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*, James Currey. Publishers, Oxford, 1999 (reprint), p. 4, cited in: EASO Country of Origin Information Report, South and Central Somalia, Country Overview, August 2014, [url](#), p. 20; Gundel, J., *The predicament of the 'Oday': The role of traditional structures in security, rights, law and development in Somalia*, 2006, [url](#)

⁵ MRGI, *Somalia: Minorities and indigenous peoples*, n.d., [url](#)

⁶ Hill, M., *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, MRGI, 31 January 2010, [url](#), p. 12

⁷ Kirk, J. W. C., *The Yibirs and Midgans of Somaliland, Their Traditions and Dialects*, *Journal of the Royal African Society*, vol. 4, no. 13, 1904, [url](#), p. 91

⁸ SOMRAF, *Report on Human Rights Violations Against the Somali Marginalized Minority Groups*, 2010, [url](#), p. 2; Hill, M., *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, MRGI, 31 January 2010, [url](#), p. 12

⁹ SOMRAF, *Report on Human Rights Violations Against the Somali Marginalized Minority Groups*, 2010, [url](#), p. 2; Hill, M., *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, MRGI, 31 January 2010, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰ For ease of reference, the spelling variation 'Gabooye' will be used throughout this document.

¹¹ MRGI, *Somalia: Occupational Groups*, March 2018, [url](#); AI, *Nowhere Else To Go: Forced Returns Of Somali Refugees From Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya*, 14 November 2016, [url](#), p. 26; UNHRC, *Situation of human rights in Somalia: Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia [A/HRC/45/52]*, 24 August 2020, [url](#), para. 59

general term for all occupational groups, instead of the term Sab.¹² According to the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), the Gaboye group includes the Madhibaan, Muuse Dhariyo, Howleh Hawraar Same, and Habar Yaquup groups.¹³

In 2002, a UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) paper reported that approximately 20 000 Gaboye individuals lived in Somaliland. The paper included tables describing their regional distribution in the country, showing Hargeisa and its surrounding region having the largest number of the Gaboye community, with 1 182 households and more than 7 000 individuals.¹⁴

1.1 What is the treatment of the Gaboye minority group in Somalia, especially in Somaliland and Puntland?

In his 2010 report for Minority Rights Group International (MRGI), Martin Hill noted that, in Somaliland, Midgaan began to organise themselves and systematically sent their children to school. He also reported that in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, a private school for Midgaan and other minority group children was opened, financed through a donation by a prominent minority group member, the singer Mariam Mursal.¹⁵

In a 2012 telephone interview with the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), the Secretary of the Gaboye Minority Organisation for Europe and North America stated that ‘discrimination against Gaboye in the south exists but generalized insecurity is a greater risk than targeted persecution. [...] Although the Somaliland government claims that the situation has improved, discrimination against the Gaboye in Somaliland is bad and violence against them continues to occur.’¹⁶ In a 2013 telephone interview with the IRB, an associate with the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology stated that ‘marriage between Gaboye and most other Somali groups is taboo. [...] In Somaliland, this taboo is adhered to rather strictly. In Puntland in the northeast of Somalia, members of the Majeerteen majority clan sometimes marry Gaboye, but not frequently’.¹⁷

In its 2016 report, LandInfo noted that ‘members of the occupational groups do not seem to be significantly more vulnerable to abuses than other Somalis.’ The representatives of the two interest organisations that LandInfo researchers met in Hargeisa stated that rape affects both the majority and the minority, and that their own people can commit abuses as well (against other Somalis and against their own). However, the local researcher that LandInfo met in Hargeisa said that there were probably ‘no cases involving Gaboye abuses against non-Gaboye.’¹⁸ According to a 2016 Amnesty International Report, the Gaboye, as well as other minorities in Somalia, face discrimination and are frequently excluded from access to land and to essential services due ‘to their identity as ethnic minority in a society with dominant clan structures’.¹⁹

In its report covering the year 2018, the US Department of State (USDOS) noted that minority groups ‘continue to be disproportionately subjected to killings, torture, rape, kidnapping for ransom, and

¹² LandInfo, Somalia: Low status groups, 12 December 2016, [url](#), p.3; ACCORD, Clans in Somalia, December 2009, [url](#), p. 15; Vitturini E., The Gaboye Of Somaliland: Legacies Of Marginality, Trajectories Of Emancipation, PhD Thesis, 2017, [url](#), p. 4

¹³ ACCORD, Clans in Somalia, December 2009, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁴ Ambroso, G., Working Paper No. 65: Pastoral society and transnational refugees: population movements in Somaliland and eastern Ethiopia 1988 – 2000, UNHCR, August 2002, [url](#), p. 15-17

¹⁵ Hill, M., No redress: Somalia’s forgotten minorities, MRGI, 31 January 2010, [url](#), p. 18

¹⁶ IRB, Somalia: The Gabooye (Midgan) people, including the location of their traditional homeland, affiliated clans, and risks they face from other clans [SOM104239.E], 4 December 2012, [url](#)

¹⁷ IRB, Somalia: Distinguishing characteristics of the Gabooye (Midgan) people; whether it is possible for a member of the minority clan living in Mogadishu to hide that they are part of the Gabooye from his or her spouse and in-laws, who are members of a majority clan, 7 October 2013, [url](#)

¹⁸ LandInfo, Somalia: Low status groups, 12 December 2016, [url](#), p

¹⁹ AI, Nowhere Else to Go: Forced Returns Of Somali Refugees From Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya, 14 November 2016, [url](#), p. 26

looting of land and property with impunity by faction militias and majority clan members, often with the acquiescence of federal and local authorities'.²⁰ USDOS also reported that people belonging to minority groups face social and economic discrimination.²¹ The same source noted that in Puntland, the authorities, along with civil society and minority clans, called for the abolition of the '4.5 formula', a policy that has further marginalized 'minority' clans and by allowing them to only cover a low number of slots in the federal parliament.²² In a 2019 interview with IRB, a journalist working in the Horn of Africa region indicated that minorities group often 'have dire living conditions, with many located in camps near the urban areas, such as Hargeisa'.²³

In her 2020 report on the situation of human rights in Somalia, the UN Independent Expert, Isha Dyfan, stated that 'economic disparities among marginalized and minority groups are pervasive, for example, between the Bantu and Gaboye peoples in Somaliland'.²⁴ In his 2019 report on the situation of human rights in Somalia, the UN Independent Expert, Bahame Tom Nyanduga, stated that he had been informed by representatives of the Gaboye minority clan 'that their land and businesses had been taken over or sold to people from larger clans'.²⁵ MRGI noted that Gaboye are socially being discriminated against, as they are not eligible to intermarry with members of the Somalia clans. It also reported that access to education is limited for Gaboye children, according to estimations of a Somali non-governmental organization, 'only between 30 or 40 Gaboye – out of as many as 10,000 in Hargeisa – are studying or have studied at university'.²⁶

1.2 What is the situation of returnees belonging to the Gaboye minority group in Somalia, especially in Somaliland and Puntland?

Within the time constraints of this query response, no information could be found specifically on the treatment of returnees belonging to the minority group Gaboye in Somalia, especially in Somaliland and Puntland.

It could be worth mentioning that members of the Gaboye minority group had given 'low-key' support to the dictator Siad Barre²⁷, who was the President of Somalia from 1969 until 1991.²⁸ After Barre's ousting in 1991 and the declaration of the independence of the Republic of Somaliland by the fighters of the Somali National Movement (SNM), many of the Gaboye who had stayed in that region and those who had fled to the South, abandoned Somalia, in fear of retaliation by the SNM.²⁹

As of 28 February 2021, UNHCR has received a total of 131 886 Somali returnees from 14 different countries of asylum.³⁰

In a 2019 interview between IRB and a journalist working in the Horn of Africa region, the latter

²⁰ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018 - Somalia, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²¹ USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018 - Somalia, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²² USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018 - Somalia, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

²³ IRB, Somalia: Treatment of returnees in Somaliland by authorities and society; ability of an individual to relocate to Somaliland, including access to employment, housing, and social services (2018-March 2019) [SOM106246.E], 19 March 2019, [url](#)

²⁴ UNHRC, Situation of human rights in Somalia: Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia [A/HRC/45/52], 24 August 2020, [url](#), para. 59

²⁵ UNHRC, Situation of human rights in Somalia: Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia [A/HRC/42/62], 16 September 2019, [url](#), para. 98

²⁶ MRGI, Somalia: Occupational Groups, March 2018, [url](#)

²⁷ Ambroso, G., Working Paper No. 65: Pastoral society and transnational refugees: population movements in Somaliland and eastern Ethiopia 1988 – 2000, August 2002, [url](#), p. 12

²⁸ Britannica, Mohamed Siad Barre, n.d., [url](#)

²⁹ Ambroso, G., Working Paper No. 65: Pastoral society and transnational refugees: population movements in Somaliland and eastern Ethiopia 1988 – 2000, August 2002, [url](#), p.14; Vitturini E., The Gaboye Of Somaliland: Legacies Of Marginality, Trajectories Of Emancipation, PhD Thesis, 2017, [url](#), p. 214

³⁰ UNHCR, Operational Plan: Somalia 1-28 February 2021, February 2021, [url](#), p. 5

indicated that 'returnees from Somalia are generally not accepted unless they originate from Somaliland or are members of local clans'.³¹ In its 2019 report, the USDOS reported that the authorities of Somaliland cooperated with UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration to assist IDPs, refugees, returning refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern, and that the Somaliland president 'kept a presidential advisor on minority problems'.³² The same source also indicated that 'gang rape continued to be a problem in urban areas, primarily perpetrated by youth gangs and male students. It often occurred in poorer neighbourhoods and among immigrants, returned refugees, and displaced rural populations living in urban areas'.³³

³¹ IRB, Somalia: Treatment of returnees in Somaliland by authorities and society; ability of an individual to relocate to Somaliland, including access to employment, housing, and social services (2018-March 2019) [SOM106246.E], 19 March 2019, [url](#)

³² USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2018 - Somalia, 13 March 2019, [url](#)

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