

SOMALIA

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1. OVERVIEW

Somalia, officially the Federal Republic of Somalia, is the easternmost country of Africa, on the Horn of Africa. It extends from just south of the Equator northward to the Gulf of Aden and occupies an important geopolitical position between sub-Saharan Africa and the countries of Arabia and southwestern Asia. The capital, Mogadishu, is located just north of the Equator on the Indian Ocean.

The Republic of Somalia was formed in 1960 by the federation of a former Italian colony and a British protectorate. Mohamed Siad Barre (Maxamed Siyaad Barre) held dictatorial rule over the country from October 1969 until January 1991, when he was overthrown in a bloody civil war waged by clan-based guerrillas. After Siad's fall from power, warfare continued and the country lacked an effective centralized government—problems that persisted into the 21st century. Moreover, a de facto government declared the formation of an independent Republic of Somaliland in the north in 1991. Similarly, in 1998 the autonomous region of Puntland (the Puntland State of Somalia) was self-proclaimed in the northeast.

Decades of civil hostilities have virtually destroyed Somalia's economy and infrastructure and split the country into areas under the rule of various entities. When Somalia's tenuous transitional administration handed power to a new government in 2012, the newly declared Federal Republic of Somalia had only limited control over the country. There was, however, hope that the new government would usher in a new era, one in which peace would be achieved and Somalis could focus on rebuilding their country.

2. GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY OF SOMALIA

Geography is the study of the physical features of the earth and its atmosphere, and of human activity as it affects and is affected by these, including the distribution of populations and resources, land use, and industries.

It is also the nature and relative arrangement of places and physical features.

Demography the study of statistics such as births, deaths, income, or the incidence of disease, which illustrate the changing structure of human populations.

It is also the composition of a particular human population.

2.1. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Due to Somalia's proximity to the equator, there is not much seasonal variation in its climate. However, there are some very unpredictable rainfalls that occur sometimes. Hot conditions prevail year-round along with monsoon (periodic seasonal reversing wind accompanied by corresponding changes in precipitation) winds and irregular rainfall. Mean daily maximum temperatures range from 30 to 40 °C (86 to 104 °F), except at higher elevations and along the eastern seaboard, where the effects of a cold offshore current can be felt. In Mogadishu, for instance, average afternoon highs range from 28 °C (82 °F) to 32 °C (90 °F) in April. Some of the highest mean annual temperatures in the world have been recorded in the country; Berbera on the northwestern coast has an afternoon high that averages more than 38 °C (100 °F) from June through September. Nationally, mean daily minimums usually vary from about 15 to 30 °C (59 to 86 °F). The greatest range in climate occurs in northern Somalia, where temperatures sometimes surpass 45 °C (113 °F) in July on the littoral plains and drop below the freezing point during December in the highlands. In this region, relative humidity ranges from about 40 percent in the mid-afternoon to 85 percent at night, changing somewhat according to the season.

Location

Eastern Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, east of Ethiopia.

Geographic coordinates

10 00 N, 49 00 E

Area

Total: 637,657 sq km

Land: 627,337 sq km

Water: 10,320 sq km

Country comparison to the world: 51

Land boundaries

Total: 2,385 km

Border countries (3): Djibouti 61 km; Ethiopia 1,640 km; Kenya 684 km

Coastline

3,025 km

Maritime claims

Territorial sea: 200 nm; note: the US does not recognize this claim

Exclusive economic zone: 200 nm

Climate

Principally desert; northeast monsoon (December to February), moderate temperatures in north and hot in south; southwest monsoon (May to October), torrid in the north and hot in the south, irregular rainfall, hot and humid periods (tangambili) between monsoons

Terrain

mostly flat to undulating plateau rising to hills in north

Elevation

Highest point: Mount Shimbiris 2,460 m

Lowest point: Indian Ocean 0 m

Mean elevation: 410 m

Natural resources

Uranium and largely unexploited reserves of iron ore, tin, gypsum, bauxite, copper, salt, natural gas, likely oil reserves

Land use

Agricultural land: 70.3% (2018 est.)

Arable land: 1.8% (2018 est.)

Permanent crops: 0% (2018 est.)

Permanent pasture: 68.5% (2018 est.)

Forest: 10.6% (2018 est.)

Other: 19.1% (2018 est.)

Irrigated land

2,000 sq km (2012)

Major aquifers

Ogaden-Juba Basin

Population distribution

Distribution varies greatly throughout the country; least densely populated areas are in the northeast and central regions, as well as areas along the Kenyan border; most populated areas are in and around the cities of Mogadishu, Marka, Boorama, Hargeysa, and Baidoa as shown on this population distribution map

Natural hazards

Recurring droughts; frequent dust storms over eastern plains in summer; floods during rainy season

Map description

Somalia map showing major population centers as well as parts of surrounding countries and the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden.



2.2. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Somalia scores very low for most humanitarian indicators, suffering from poor governance, protracted internal conflict, underdevelopment, economic decline, poverty, social and gender inequality, and environmental degradation. Despite civil war and famine raising its mortality rate, Somalia's high fertility rate and large proportion of people of reproductive age maintain rapid population growth, with each generation being larger than the prior one. More than 60% of Somalia's population is younger than 25, and the fertility rate is among the world's highest at almost 6 children per woman – a rate that has decreased little since the 1970s.

A lack of educational and job opportunities is a major source of tension for Somalia's large youth cohort, making them vulnerable to recruitment by extremist and pirate groups. Somalia has one of the world's lowest primary school enrollment rates – just over 40% of children are in school – and one of world's highest youth unemployment rates. Life expectancy is low as a result of high infant and maternal mortality rates, the spread of preventable diseases, poor sanitation, chronic malnutrition, and inadequate health services.

During the two decades of conflict that followed the fall of the SIAD regime in 1991, hundreds of thousands of Somalis fled their homes. Today Somalia is the world's third highest source country for refugees, after Syria and Afghanistan. Insecurity, drought, floods, food shortages, and a lack of economic opportunities are the driving factors.

As of 2016, more than 1.1 million Somali refugees were hosted in the region, mainly in Kenya, Yemen, Egypt, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Uganda, while more than 1.1 million Somalis were internally displaced. Since the implementation of a tripartite voluntary repatriation agreement among Kenya, Somalia, and the UNHCR in 2013, nearly 40,000 Somali refugees have returned home from Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp – still houses to approximately 260,000 Somalis. The flow sped up rapidly after the Kenyan Government in May 2016 announced its intention to close the camp, worsening security and humanitarian conditions in receiving communities in south-central Somalia. Despite the conflict in Yemen, thousands of Somalis and other refugees and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa risk their lives crossing the Gulf of Aden to reach Yemen and beyond (often Saudi Arabia). Bossaso in Puntland overtook Obock, Djibouti, as the primary departure point in mid-2014.

The following demographic are from the CIA World Factbook, unless otherwise indicated.

Population

12,386,248 (2022 est.)

11,259,029 (July 2018 est.)

10,428,043 (2014 est.)

Age structure

0-14 years: 42.38% (male 2,488,604/female 2,493,527)

15-24 years: 19.81% (male 1,167,807/female 1,161,040)

25-54 years: 30.93% (male 1,881,094/female 1,755,166)

55-64 years: 4.61% (male 278,132/female 264,325)

65 years and over: 2.27% (2020 est.) (male 106,187/female 161,242)

0-14 years: 42.87% (male 2,410,215 /female 2,416,629)

15-24 years: 19.35% (male 1,097,358 /female 1,081,762)

25-54 years: 31.23% (male 1,821,823 /female 1,694,873)

55-64 years: 4.35% (male 245,744 /female 243,893)

65 years and over: 2.19% (male 95,845 /female 150,887) (2018 est.)

Birth rate

37.98 births/1,000 population (2022 est.)

Country comparison to the world: 8th

39.3 births/1,000 population (2018 est.)

Country comparison to the world: 9th

40.87 births/1,000 population (2014 est.)

Death rate

11.62 deaths/1,000 population (2022 est.)

Country comparison to the world: 17th

12.8 deaths/1,000 population (2018 est.)

13.91 deaths/1,000 population (2014 est.)

Total fertility rate

5.31 children born/woman (2022 est.) Country comparison to the world: 9th

5.7 children born/woman (2018 est.) Country comparison to the world: 6th

Population growth rate

2.42% (2022 est.) Country comparison to the world: 27th

2.08% (2018 est.) Country comparison to the world: 45th

1.75% (2014 est.)

Median age

Total: 18.5 years. Country comparison to the world: 210th

Male: 18.7 years

Female: 18.3 years (2020 est.)

Total: 18.2 years. Country comparison to the world: 211th

Male: 18.4 years

Female: 18 years (2018 est.)

Net migration rate

-2.18 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2022 est.)

Country comparison to the world: 171st

-5.6 migrants/1,000 population (2018 est.)

Country comparison to the world: 199th

-9.51 migrants/1,000 population (2014 est.)

Contraceptive prevalence rate

6.9% (2018/19)

Dependency ratios

Total dependency ratio: 97.4 (2015 est.)

Youth dependency ratio: 92.1 (2015 est.)

Elderly dependency ratio: 5.3 (2015 est.)

Potential support ratio: 18.8 (2015 est.)

Urbanization

Main article: List of cities in Somalia by population

Urban population: 47.3% of total population (2022)

Rate of urbanization: 4.2% annual rate of change (2020-25 est.)

Urban population: 45% of total population (2018)

Rate of urbanization: 4.23% annual rate of change (2015-20 est.)

Urban population: 37.7% of total population (2011)

Rate of urbanization: 3.79 annual rate of change (2010-15 est.)

Sex ratio

At birth: 1.03 males/female

Under 15 years: 1 male/female

15–64 years: 1.07 males/female

65 years and over: 0.66 males/female

Total population: 1.01 males/female (2015 est.)

Infant mortality rate

Total: 93 deaths/1,000 live births

Male: 101.4 deaths/1,000 live births

Female: 84.3 deaths/1,000 live births (2018 est.)

Life expectancy at birth

Total population: 55.72 years. Country comparison to the world: 225th male:
53.39 years female: 58.12 years (2022 est.)

Total population: 53.2 years

Male: 51 years

Female: 55.4 years (2018 est.)

Total population: 51.58 years

Male: 49.58 years

Female: 53.65 years (2014 est.)

Major infectious diseases

Degree of risk: very high (2020)

Food or waterborne diseases: bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A and E, and typhoid fever

Vectorborne diseases: dengue fever, malaria, and Rift Valley fever

Water contact diseases: schistosomiasis

Animal contact diseases: rabies

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate

0.1% (2017 est.)

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS

11,000 (2017 est.)

HIV/AIDS – deaths

<1000 (2017 est.)

Major infectious diseases

Degree of risk: high

Food or waterborne diseases: bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A and E, and typhoid fever

Vector-borne diseases: dengue fever, malaria, and Rift Valley fever

Water contact disease: schistosomiasis

Animal contact disease: rabies (2013)

3. ECONOMICS

3.1. GDP information for the past 3 years

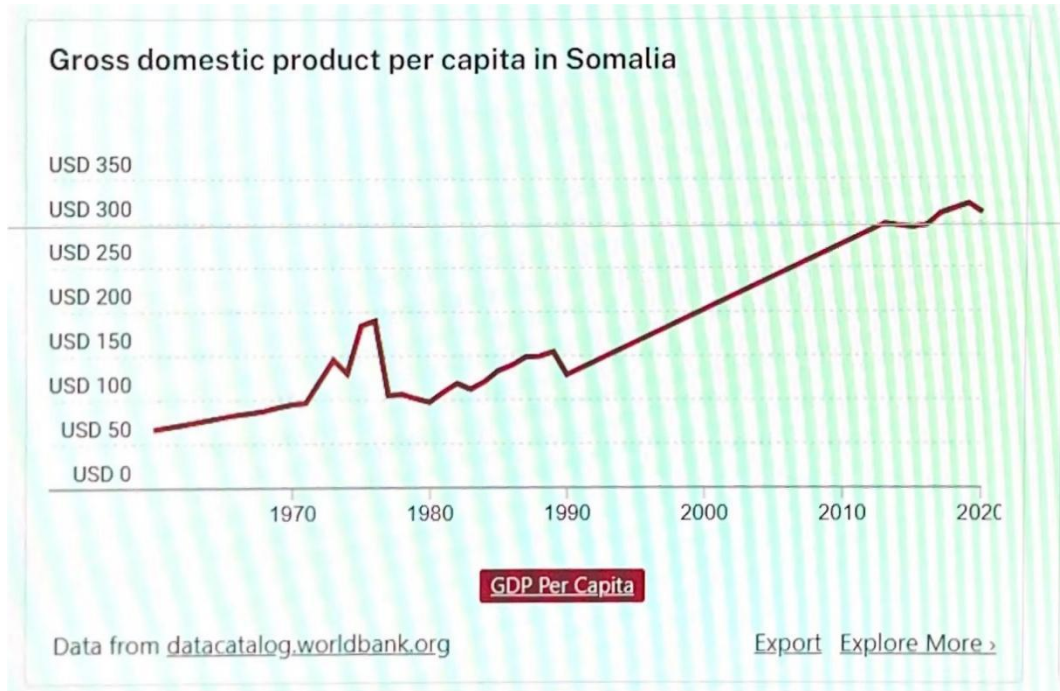
Somalia is classified by the United Nations as a least developed country, with the majority of its population being dependent on agriculture and

livestock for their livelihood. The economy of Somalia is \$4.918 billion by gross domestic product as of 2020. For 1994, the CIA estimated it at purchasing power parity to be approximately \$3.3 billion.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is the total monetary or market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period. As a broad measure of overall domestic production, it functions as a comprehensive scorecard of a given country's economic health.

Though GDP is typically calculated on an annual basis, it is sometimes calculated on a quarterly basis as well.





Real GDP (purchasing power parity)

\$13.19 billion (2020 est.)

\$13.39 billion (2019 est.)

\$13.01 billion (2018 est.)

Note: data are in 2156017 US dollars

Country comparison to the world: **Real GDP per capita**

\$800 (2020 est.)

\$900 (2019 est.)

\$900 (2018 est.)

Note: data are in 2017 dollars

Country comparison to the world: 228

3.2. MAIN INDUSTRIES OF THE COUNTRY CONTRIBUTING TO GDP.

Agricultural Sector

Agriculture is the most important economic sector. It accounts for about 65% of the GDP and employs 65% of the workforce. Livestock contributes about 40% to GDP and more than 50% of export earnings. Other principal exports include fish, charcoal and bananas; sugar, sorghum and corn are products for the domestic market. According to the Central Bank of Somalia, imports of goods total about \$460 million per year, and have recovered and even surpassed aggregate imports prior to the start of the civil war in 1991. Exports, which total about \$270 million annually, have also surpassed pre-war aggregate export levels but still lead to a trade account deficit of about \$190 million US dollars per year. However, this trade deficit is far exceeded by remittances sent by Somalis in the diaspora, which have helped sustain the import level.

Manufacturing Sector

The modest industrial sector, based on the processing of agricultural products, accounts for 10% of Somalia's GDP.

Prior to the outbreak of the civil war in 1991, the roughly 53 state-owned small, medium and large manufacturing firms were foundering, with the ensuing conflict destroying many of the remaining industries. However, primarily as a result of substantial local investment by the Somali diaspora, many of these small-scale plants have re-opened and newer ones have been created. The latter include fish-canning and meat-processing plants in the north, as well as about 25 factories in the Mogadishu area, which manufacture pasta, mineral water, confections, plastic bags, fabric, hides and skins, detergent and soap, aluminum, foam mattresses and pillows, fishing boats, carry out packaging, and stone processing.

In 2001, investments in light manufacturing have expanded in Bosaso, Hargeisa and Mogadishu, in particular, indicating growing business confidence in the economy. To this end, in 2004, an \$8.3 million Coca-Cola bottling plant opened in Mogadishu, with investors hailing from various constituencies in Somalia. Various other sectors have also attracted foreign investment from the likes of General Motors and Dole Fruit.

Services Sector:

Airline industry: Following the start of the civil war, all of Somali Airlines' operations were officially suspended in 1991. By 2014, there were over six Somali-owned private carriers filling the gap. These included Daallo Airlines, Jubba Airways, African Express Airways, East Africa 540, Central Air and Hajara. Daallo and Jubba merged as the African Airways Alliance in 2015.

Despite reports of preparations to relaunch Somali Airlines in 2012 and 2013, Al Arabiya reports discussing the merger of Daallo Airlines and Jubba Airways in February 2015 said there was no official Somali flag carrier after the demise of Somali Airlines in 1991.

Construction: As a result of improved security conditions in Mogadishu, the Economist Intelligence Unit reported in 2015 that construction of new infrastructure and repairs to previously abandoned villas was occurring in the city. However, the Central Intelligence Agency's The World Factbook states that development has not spread to other parts of Somalia, and that security is a major concern for businesses in Mogadishu.

Telecommunications: Somalia's telecommunications system was destroyed during the fighting which took place in 1991. By 2010 various new telecommunications companies were providing this missing infrastructure. Funded by Somali entrepreneurs and backed by expertise from People's Republic of China, Japan, EU and Korea. These nascent telecommunications firms offer affordable mobile phone and internet services that are not available in many other parts of the continent. Customers can conduct money transfers and other banking activities via mobile phones, as well as easily gain wireless internet access. However, the operations of the companies were constrained by the continuing fighting.

Prominent Somali telecommunications companies include Golis Telecom Group, Hormuud Telecom, Somafone, Nationlink, Netco, Telkom and Somali Telecom Group. Hormuud Telecom alone grosses about \$40 million a year. To dampen competitive pressures, three of these companies signed an interconnectivity deal in 2005 that allows them to set prices and expand their networks.

A 2010 report stated that the expansion of Somalia's telecom industry provided one of the clearest signs that the country's economy was growing.

As of 2015, there were also 20 privately owned Somali newspapers, 10 radio and television stations, and numerous internet sites offering information to the public.

Finance: The Central Bank of Somalia is the official monetary authority of Somalia. In terms of financial management, it is in the process of assuming the task of both formulating and implementing monetary policy. In 2013 the African Development Bank assessed that the Somali Central Bank was "handicapped by the lack of adequate human, material and financial resources", but that it would be able to reduce the rate of inflation once it assumed control of monetary policy and issued a new currency. At this time Somaliland also had a central bank, though its main roles were to serve as a treasury to the government and print currency.

Somalia has had no central monetary authority for upwards of 15 years between the outbreak of the civil war in 1991 and the subsequent re-establishment of the Central Bank of Somalia in 2009. Bank-to-bank transfers are not possible, which led to the rise of private money transfer operators (MTO) that have acted as informal banking networks.

GDP - composition, by sector of origin

Agriculture: 60.2% (2013 est.)

Industry: 7.4% (2013 est.)

Services: 32.5% (2013 est.)

3.3. TRADE ORGANIZATIONS THE COUNTRY HAS JOINED SO FAR:

Group of 77, the largest Third World Coalition in The United Nations to articulate and promote its collective economic interests (G-77)

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

International Development Association (IDA)

International Development Bank (IDB)

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)
International Labor Organization (ILO)
International Monetary Fund (IMF)
Organization of African Unity (OAU)
United Nations (UN)
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
Universal Post Union (UPU)
World Federation of Trade Union (WFTU)
World Trade Organization (WTO (observer))

3.4. FINANCING AND BANKING ENVIRONMENT

About 10 commercial banks and 11 money transfer businesses (MTB) were licensed by the Central Bank of Somalia (CBS). According to the IMF, at the end-September 2017, the commercial banks' total assets and credit to the private sector were about 4 percent and 1.3 percent of GDP, respectively. Nonetheless, banks' assets have continued to improve since 2015, and their capitalization remains broadly adequate. The loan-to-deposit ratio reached 40.1 percent, up from 33.3 percent in September 2016, and credit to the private sector increased to 31.2 percent (as a share of total assets), from 24.8 percent in the previous year.

Some of these private banks are a mixture of money transfer businesses and banking at the same time. Some examples of the mixture services of hawala and banking are Dahabshil Bank International (DBI), Salaam Bank and Amal Bank. Dahabshiil is one of the old money transfer companies in Somalia, and Salaam Bank is a sister organization of Hormuud telecom. On the other hand, Premier Bank and International Bank of Somalia (IBS) are new financial institutions that are only offering banking services. These two banking institutions currently provide Master and Visa Cards that consumers

can use worldwide transactions. The majority of these financial institutions are headquartered in Mogadishu with branches in the regions.

MTBs play a crucial role in providing financial services in Somalia. In 2017, MTBs provided trade finance amounting to about US\$ 2.1 billion. Due to this demand, money transfer businesses continue to dominate the formal and informal financial sector and facilitate the transfer of remittances from the Somali diaspora, donor resources, and foreign investments, and are flourishing.

Despite the fact that Somali Shillings (SOSh) is not widely used for business transactions, CBS is responsible for regulating the dollarized transactions in the private financial institutions.

In addition to the aid that the country receives due to lack of strong mechanism for local revenue collections, remittances remain the highly dependent income mainly for household consumption. As it is indicated in the Ministry of Planning report on aid flows in Somalia published on May 2019, the ODA to GDP ratio in 2018 was 27%. On the other hand, inflows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), according to the preliminary report, are rising as is domestic revenue collected by the Federal Government; however, relative to GDP, their levels remain low at 5.5% and 2.6% respectively in 2018.

In 2016, the Federal Government of Somalia has passed into law the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act which was a critical legislation in improving financial sector confidence.

4. CULTURE

The culture of Somalia is an amalgamation of traditions in that were developed independently since the proto-Somali era through interaction with neighboring and far away civilizations, including other parts of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Indian subcontinent. The hypernym of the term

Somali from a geopolitical sense is Horner and from an ethnic sense, it is Cushite.

The cultural diffusion of Somali commercial enterprise can be detected in its exotic cuisine, which contains Southeast Asian influences. Due to the Somali people's for and facility with poetry, Somalia has often been referred to as a "Nation of Poets" and a "Nation of Bards", as, for example, by the Canadian novelist Margaret Laurence. Somalis have a story-telling tradition. According to Canadian novelist and scholar Margaret Laurence, who originally coined the term "Nation of Poets" to describe the Somali Peninsular, the Eidagale clan were viewed as "the recognized experts in the composition of poetry" by their fellow Somali contemporaries.

Somalis have a rich musical heritage centered on traditional Somali folklore. Most Somali songs are pentatonic; that is, they only use five pitches per octave in contrast to a heptatonic (seven note) scale such as the major scale. Somali art is the artistic culture of the Somali people, both historic and contemporary. These include artistic traditions in pottery, music, architecture, wood carving and other genres. Somali art is characterized by its aniconism, partly as a result of the vestigial influence of the pre-Islamic mythology of the Somalis coupled with their ubiquitous Muslim beliefs. The country's shape gives a united country the nickname toddobo (seven).

4.1. Religions

With very few exceptions, Somalis are entirely Muslims, the majority belonging to the Sunni branch of Islam and the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence. Merca is an ancient Islamic center in Somalia.

There are two theories about when Somalis began adopting Islam. One states that Islam probably arrived in Somalia in the 7th-century when followers of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) came over to escape persecution from the Quraysh tribe in Mecca.

An alternate theory states that Islam was brought to the coastal settlements of Somalia between the 7th and the 10th century by seafaring Arab and Persian merchants.

The Sunni-Shia split within Islam occurred before Islam spread among Somalis, and Sunnis constitute the overwhelming majority of contemporary Somalis. Somali Sufi religious orders (tariqa) – the Qadiriyya, the Ahmadiya

and the Salihyya – in the form of Muslim brotherhoods have played a major role in Somali Islam and the modern era history of Somalia.

Of the three orders, the less strict Qaadiyya tariqa is the oldest, and it is the sect to which most Somalis belonged. The Qaadiyya order is named after Shaikh Muhiuddin Abdul Qadir Gilani of Baghdad. I. M. Lewis states that Qaadiyya has a high reputation for maintaining a higher standard of Islamic instruction than its rivals.

Ahmadiyah and its sub-sect Salihyyah preached a puritanical form of Islam, and have rejected the popular Sufi practice of tawassul (visiting the tombs of saints to ask mediation). B. G. Martin states that these two orders shared some of the views of the Wahhabis of Arabia. The religious differences between Qaadiyya and Salihyya were controversial, as Salihis continued to oppose the Qadiris' practice of tawassul, and claimed the act to be invalid and improper religious activity.

The Ahmadiyah has the smallest number of adherents of the three orders.

Qur'anic schools (also known as dugsi) remain the basic system of traditional religious instruction in Somalia. It is delivered in Arabic. They provide Islamic education for children. According to the UNICEF, the dugsi system where the content is based on Quran, teaches the greatest number of students and enjoys high parental support, is oftentimes the only system accessible to Somalis in nomadic as compared to urban areas. A study from 1993 found, among other things, that "unlike in primary schools where gender disparity is enormous, around 40 per cent of Qur'anic school pupils are girls; but the teaching staff have minimum or no qualification necessary to ensure intellectual development of children". To address these concerns, the Somali government on its own part subsequently established the Ministry of Endowment and Islamic Affairs, under which Qur'anic education is now regulated.

The Somali community has produced important Muslim figures over the centuries, many of whom have significantly shaped the course of Islamic learning and practice in the Horn of Africa and the Muslim world.

4.2. OFFICIAL LANGUAGE AND OTHER LOCAL LANGUAGES

The Somali language is the official language of Somalia. It is a member of the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family, and its nearest relatives are the Afar and saho languages. Somali is the best documented of the Cushitic languages, with academic studies of it dating from before 1900.

Somali dialects are divided into three main groups: Northern, Benaadir and Maay. Northern Somali (or Northern-Central Somali) forms the basis for Standard Somali. Benaadir (also known as Coastal Somali) is spoken on the Benadir coast from Adale to south of Merca, including Mogadishu, as well as in the immediate hinterland. The coastal dialects have additional phonemes which do not exist in Standard Somali. Maay is principally spoken by the Digil and Mirifle (Rahanweyn) clans in the southern areas of Somalia.

Since Somali had long lost its ancient script, a number of writing systems have been used over the years for transcribing the language. Of these, the Somali alphabet is the most widely used, and has been the official writing script in Somalia since the government of former President of Somalia Siad Barre formally introduced it in October 1972.

The script was developed by a number of leading scholars of Somali, including Musa Haji Ismail Galal, B. W. Andrzejewski and Shire Jama Ahmed specifically for transcribing the Somali language, and uses all letters of the English Latin alphabet except p, v and z. Besides Ahmed's Latin script, other orthographies that have been used for centuries for writing Somali include the long-established Arabic script and Wadaad's writing. Indigenous writing systems developed in the twentieth century include the Osmanyaa, Borama and Kaddare scripts, which were invented by Osman Yusuf Kenadid, Sheikh Abdurahman Sheikh Nuur and Hussein Sheikh Ahmed Kaddare, respectively.

In addition to Somali, Arabic is an official national language of Somalia. Many Somalis speak it due to centuries-old ties with the Arab World, the far-reaching influence of the Arabic media, and religious education.

English is also widely used and taught. Italian used to be a major language, but its influence significantly diminished following independence. It is now

most frequently heard among older generations who were in contact with the Italians at that time or later as migrants into Italy. Other minority languages include Bravanese, a variant of the Bantu Swahili language that is spoken along the coast by the Bravanese people.