

# RESEARCHED AND COMPILED BY THE REFUGEE DOCUMENTATION CENTRE OF IRELAND ON THE 9 SEPTEMBER 2024

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## DISCLAIMER

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. All COI Query Responses are compiled in line with the Common EU Guidelines (2008) and the EUAA Methodology (2023). This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. Please refer to all documents cited.

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## COI QUERY RESPONSE

### SOMALIA - REPORTS ON AL SHABAAB SEEKING TO FORCIBLY RECRUIT YOUNG MEN, ESPECIALLY IN MOGADISHU.

*African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC)* issued research on Mogadishu stating: “The conflict between the Somali state and al-Shabaab over the past 17 years has made Mogadishu the focal point for IDPs. Al-Shabaab's influence in the city is marked by frequent and violent attacks, exploiting young people's frustrations and reflecting deeper systemic issues.”<sup>1</sup>

The *UN High Commissioner for Refugees* reported on an attack against Al-Shabaab in July 2024 stated that: “There is also a high risk of forced recruitment by AS, as a form of retaliation should the counterattack occur.”<sup>2</sup>

It further reports that: “The displaced people have voiced concern that the risk of AS forcibly recruiting men and boys including children from the conflict-affected areas as a form of retaliation is very high.”<sup>3</sup>

A report from July 2024 from *Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)* states that: “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.”<sup>4</sup>

A news report by the *Conversation* in June 2024 commented that: “...while al-Shabaab's true strength remains unknown, the militants have consistently replenished their losses through forcible recruitment and attracting new supporters.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) (23 August 2024) Mogadishu: City report, p.25

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR (24 July 2024) UNHCR Somalia Protection and Solutions Monitoring Network (PSMN) Flash Alert #14

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (14 July 2024) The World Factbook 2024 - Somalia

<sup>5</sup> The Conversation (19 June 2024) Somalia army vs al-Shabaab: as African Union troops leave, which is the stronger military force?

In June 2024 the *US Department of State* reported: “The dire security situation and restrictions on movement of humanitarian and human rights actors continued to hamper comprehensive efforts to address the unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers. Al-Shabaab continued to commit the vast majority of violations...”<sup>6</sup>

In April 2024 the *US Department of State* reported: “Al-Shabaab recruited and forced children to participate directly in hostilities, including suicide attacks. According to UN officials, al-Shabaab committed most abuses related to the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Al-Shabaab raided schools, madrassas, and mosques and harassed or coerced clan elders and family members to recruit and use children in direct combat and support roles.”<sup>7</sup>

*Bertelsmann Stiftung* reported in March 2024 that: “...the group has resorted to violence in order to coerce communities and elders to hand over young recruits from their villages and clan groups.”<sup>8</sup>

The *European Union Agency for Asylum* in 2023 stated: “Although Al-Shabaab predominantly recruits from territories under its control, there have also been reports of recruitment from government-controlled areas, especially Mogadishu. Recruitment outside Al-Shabaab's own territory frequently involves aspects of coercion. Forced recruitment has also been reported in areas controlled by the group.”<sup>9</sup>

It also reported: “People who refused requests of recruitment, including local community members who refused to provide younger members of their families to the organisation, have been threatened and labelled as infidels who reject Islam and the Sharia law and some have been killed to set a warning to others in the community. In other instances, Al-Shabaab relies on elders who, facing the threat of retaliation, attacks, arrests and forced displacement in case of refusal, cannot refuse to deliver dozens or even hundreds of young people from their clan to the organisation.”<sup>10</sup>

In June 2023 the *Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs* reported: “...the distinction between ‘voluntary’ and ‘forced’ membership of al-Shabab was not obvious. The sources show the recruitment by al-Shabab was firstly based on economic and social discontent among the population. That discontent could be fuelled and exploited by al-Shabab, leading recruits to join the group apparently on their own initiative. For example, people could be inspired to join the group by a combination of factors such as religious zeal, poor socio-economic prospects, grievances against dominant clans, grievances against the federal authorities or the international community, and fear of repercussions from al-Shabab.<sup>207</sup> It was not possible to state unequivocally in all these cases to what extent they had joined under duress”<sup>11</sup>

A report from February 2023 by the *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* states that: “Boys and young men from minority groups have also been reported to be at

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<sup>6</sup> US Department of State (24 June 2024) *Trafficking in Persons Report 2024: Somalia*, p.4

<sup>7</sup> US Department of State (22 April 2024) *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Somalia*, p.9

<sup>8</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung (19 March 2024) *Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2024 Country Report – Somalia*, p.15

<sup>9</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (23 August 2023) *EUAA Country Guidance: Somalia - Common analysis and guidance note (August 2023) [3. Refugee status]*

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (June 2023) *General country of origin information report on Somalia*, p.34

higher risk of forced recruitment and use by armed forces as they have lower levels of clan protection networks and support.”<sup>12</sup>

The *European Union Agency for Asylum* published a report in 2021 stating: “...the most important target groups for recruitment have been boys and young men between the age of 12 and 24.”<sup>13</sup>

It also stated: “...the organisation has stepped up recruitment efforts among unemployed young men since 2017...”<sup>14</sup>

It further stated: “...young men are the main target for recruitment.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (9 February 2023) *Somalia Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 [Part 3: Sectoral Analysis]*, p.20

<sup>13</sup> EUAA (September 2021) *Country of origin information report | Somalia: Targeted profiles*, p.17

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.17

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.18

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