2009



SOMALIA'S MISSING TWO MILLION

THE SOMALI DIASPORA AND DEVELOPMENT 2009 TO 2026

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Somalia's Missing Two Million

The Somali Diaspora and Development

2009 to 2026

A follow-up to Somalia's Missing Million: The Somali Diaspora and Its Role in Development (UNDP Somalia, 2009), prepared for UNDP by Sally Healy and Hassan Sheikh. This is an independent study; it is not a UNDP publication.

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This report was prepared by Mohamed Ibrahim for Somcare.

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First edition, November 2026. Corrections are welcome and will be made in later editions.

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Preface

In March 2009 I sat in a conference room at the Safari Park Hotel in Nairobi with more than ninety others: Somali scholars, fund-raisers, businesspeople, community organisers and officials from the United Nations and donor governments. We had come from five continents to review a study commissioned by UNDP Somalia, written by Sally Healy and Hassan Sheikh, on the role of the Somali diaspora in the life of a country that had then been without a functioning central state for almost two decades. I travelled from Melbourne, and my name appears in the report's list of participants as Mohamed Ibrahim, from Melbourne, Australia.

I did not come to that room as an observer. For several years I had worked with Hassan Sheikh Mohamud at the Centre for Research and Dialogue (CRD) based in Somalia, where he served as a director and I chaired the Board. CRD was one of the few Somali institutions doing research and reconciliation work inside the country at a time when there was no government to do it. I was based in the UAE at the time working in the high-ed sector. Its staff travelled between communities, listened to elders, businesspeople and women's groups, and tried to turn what they heard into practical steps towards peace. That experience taught me that Somalis abroad and Somalis at home are not two separate constituencies. They are one people, divided by distance and joined by obligation.

That conviction shaped what came next. From Melbourne I served as project manager for Somalia's country-code domain registry, .so, and as founding chair of the Internet Society's Somalia chapter. and I worked as a senior policy advisor for four Somali ministers of telecommunication. In 2014, during Hassan Sheikh's first presidency, I served as Minister of Post and Telecommunications. Through Somcare I have since studied the Somali community in Australia, including its census profile, its employment and education outcomes, and the remittance services on which so many families depend.

Australia offers a small but telling example of what the diaspora does. In 2015, when Westpac closed the accounts of the last remittance companies serving the Somali corridor, Oxfam estimated that about 7,500 Somali Australians were sending some A$33.5 million a year to family members. Community leaders, researchers and advocates pressed government and the banks to keep that lifeline open, and the work continues; Somcare's Somali Remittance Directory exists because families still need to know which services are safe and registered.

The giving is not only private. In Melbourne, Somali Australians joined the Rotary Club of Flemington Kensington to ship a forty-foot container of hospital equipment to Jarriban Hospital, extending care to some 40,000 people. Somali students at La Trobe University raised funds for medical missions while building, through Himilo Community Connect, a pathway into university for the next generation.

Australian links have also reached higher education: in 2026 Amoud University in Borama became a full member of the Australia Africa Universities Network, the only Somali institution in the network, a step supported by Somali Australians who helped build its ties with Australian universities. Examples like these, repeated across five continents, are what the 2009 report meant by the missing million.

The 2009 report gave its subject that memorable name. It argued that the Somali economy would have collapsed without the money and support the diaspora sent home, and that the international development community understood this lifeline poorly. Seventeen years later, both claims deserve testing against what has changed. The diaspora has almost doubled. Remittances, once only estimated, are now measured in official statistics. Somalia has a national diaspora policy, a central bank that licenses mobile money, and a federal parliament in which diaspora members remain prominent. Yet many of the questions raised in Nairobi remain open: who the second generation will become, whether remittances can move beyond consumption, and how the diaspora can be a partner rather than only a cash machine.

This report is an independent Somcare study. It is not a revision of the 2009 report, which remains the work of its authors and the copyright of UNDP. It uses the 2009 report as a baseline, setting each of its findings against the best current evidence. Where the evidence is weak, the report says so. Because of my past work with Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who was elected President in 2012 and again in 2022, I declare that connection here. The analysis and views in this report are mine alone.

I thank Sally Healy and Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, whose 2009 study made this follow-up possible; UNDP Somalia, for its prompt agreement to the reuse of the 2009 photographs; WHO and UNHCR, whose photographs are acknowledged here; and the Somali researchers, statisticians and community organisations whose work this report draws on. Any errors are mine.

Mohamed Ibrahim, Melbourne, November 2026

Executive Summary

WHAT HAS IMPROVED SINCE 2009

The diaspora has almost doubled and is now settled, educated and largely citizens of its host countries. Remittances have at least doubled. Somalia's economy grew 4.0 percent in 2024 and an estimated 3.1 percent in 2025, and HIPC debt relief cut external public debt from US$5.3 billion at the end of 2018 to about US$1.5 billion, 11 percent of GDP, in 2025. The Central Bank reports that mobile money reaches 84 percent of adults. Somalia has a National Diaspora Policy (2023), its first household budget survey since 1985 (2022) and a census under way. Life expectancy at birth has risen from 50.9 years in 2006 to 59.0 in 2024 (World Bank). In Australia, Somali unemployment fell and degree attainment rose between 2016 and 2021.

1. In 2009 UNDP Somalia estimated that at least one million Somalis lived abroad, about 14 percent of a population then put at 7.4 million. The United Nations now estimates that 1,935,594 people born in Somalia lived outside the country in mid-2024, against a home population of about 19.7 million in 2025. The diaspora has almost doubled; its share of the population has fallen to about 10 percent only because the population at home has grown faster. These figures count people born in Somalia, so the wider diaspora, including children born abroad, is larger.
2. The geography of 2009 still holds. Kenya, Ethiopia and Yemen host the largest Somalia-born populations, and UNHCR counted 952,930 Somali refugees and asylum-seekers in five neighbouring countries at the end of August 2026. In the West, census counts have risen sharply: 176,645 people identified as Somali in England and Wales in 2021, against the 2009 report's estimate of 93,000 for the whole United Kingdom.
3. The second generation, which the 2009 report said had not yet been researched, is now visible in census data. In England and Wales, 43.5 percent of people identifying as Somali were born in England, almost the same share as were born in Somalia. In Minnesota, people of Somali descent born in the United States rose from 19 percent to nearly 39 percent of the community between 2001 and 2023.
4. Diaspora political engagement, which the 2009 report described as one of the most significant arenas of re-engagement, has persisted. In 2017, 105 of 275 members of the House of the People held foreign passports. Every prime minister from 2000 to 2022 is reported to have held Western citizenship. The constitution approved by parliament on 4 March 2026 now bars the

President, the Prime Minister, the two Speakers and the Chief Justice from dual citizenship, while ordinary MPs may still hold it.

5. Remittances are now officially recorded, but the official numbers disagree. For 2024, the World Bank's World Development Indicators give US$2.12 billion, while the Central Bank of Somalia reports individual remittances of US$2.72 billion, 22 percent of GDP, rising to US$3.13 billion, 24 percent of GDP, in 2025. Every series is well above the roughly US$1 billion of 2004 that the 2009 report cited. The gap between sources is itself a finding (Chapter 12).
6. Fewer households appear to receive remittances than the 2009 report suggested. The 2009 report cited up to 40 percent of households; the 2022 Somalia Integrated Household Budget Survey reports that 20.7 percent received remittances in the previous twelve months. The difference is partly one of measurement, but it supports the 2009 workshop's warning that remittances miss the poorest.
7. The channels have changed more than the volumes. Mobile money, barely present in 2009, is now how most Somalis pay and receive: the Central Bank reports that it reaches 84 percent of adults, and the 2022 household budget survey found that 41.5 percent of remittance-receiving households were paid through a mobile wallet. The Central Bank issued its first mobile money licence in February 2021. At the sending end, banks in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia closed the accounts of Somali money transfer operators from 2013 to 2015, a risk the 2009 report did not anticipate.
8. The policy vacuum of 2009 has partly been filled. Somalia ratified a National Diaspora Policy in 2023, maintains a Department of Diaspora Affairs in its foreign ministry, adopted a National Strategy for Migration in 2024 and a National Labour Migration Policy in 2025. Somaliland has developed its own diaspora policy.
9. Australia, which the 2009 report called a new growth area, now has 18,401 people of Somali ancestry (2021 Census), up 13.8 percent since 2016, with 54.4 percent in Victoria and nearly half born in Australia. Somali Australian unemployment fell from 29.9 percent in 2016 to 23.0 percent in 2021 yet remains about four and a half times the national rate and the highest of 30 African ancestry communities. Somali graduates are unemployed at 10.0 percent, against 3.8 percent for graduates of all African ancestries (Ibrahim, 2026).
10. Of the 2009 workshop's recommendations, the call for better information has been met in part by official statistics, and the call for a policy framework has been met on paper. The calls for a development partnership in which the

diaspora is an equal partner, for organised diaspora business associations and for programmes reaching the poorest remain largely unmet. This assessment is preliminary.

11. Seventeen years on, the most basic numbers about Somalia and its diaspora still cannot be stated with confidence. Somalia's last published census dates from 1975; the census launched in 2023 has not yet produced results. Remittance estimates from the World Bank and the Central Bank differ by up to US$1 billion a year. This report therefore makes reliable statistics on population, migration and remittances its first recommendation to the Federal Government of Somalia.
12. The diaspora is already over-represented at the top of Somali politics, but through clan-based selection that gives ordinary Somalis abroad no vote. Italy, France, Portugal, Cape Verde, Algeria and Tunisia reserve parliamentary seats for citizens abroad. This report proposes, for national debate, a small number of seats in the House of the People elected by Somalis abroad in continental constituencies, once a credible register of citizens abroad exists.

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

1.1 Purpose

The 2009 report, prepared for UNDP Somalia by Sally Healy and Hassan Sheikh, combined a desk review, a partial survey of organised diaspora networks and a one-day workshop in Nairobi on 13 March 2009. Its aim was to help the United Nations understand diaspora support well enough to work with it. This study asks a narrower question: what has changed since 2009, measured as far as possible with the same indicators?

1.2 Approach

Each quantitative claim in the 2009 report was extracted into a register (Annex A) with its page reference. For each, the most recent comparable figure was sought from primary sources in the following order: United Nations agencies (UN DESA, UNHCR, UNFPA); the World Bank and IMF; national statistics offices (ONS, the US Census Bureau, Statistics Canada, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Statistics Norway, Statistics Sweden); Somali public institutions (Somalia National Bureau of Statistics, Central Bank of Somalia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Secondary sources, including news reports and encyclopaedic summaries, were used to locate primary data but not as final evidence.

Each figure carries a status: Verified (checked at the primary source), Secondary (reported by a reliable secondary source, primary not yet checked), Conflict (sources disagree), or Gap (no current source found). Annex A shows the status of each key figure, and Annex B explains where the evidence is weakest.

1.3 Limitations

Three limitations carry over from 2009. Counting Somalis abroad depends on whether a country records birthplace, citizenship or ancestry. Ethnic Somalis from Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti are often indistinguishable from Somalia-born migrants. Remittance data rest on balance of payments estimates that cannot fully capture informal transfers. To these must be added the limits of a desk review: this report does not include a survey of diaspora organisations or key informant interviews, which are left for further research.

1.4 A note on images

To show continuity, this report sets each photograph from the 2009 report, faded, beside a photograph from today. The 2009 photographs belong to UNDP, WHO

and UNHCR and are reproduced, with acknowledgement, for non-commercial research and community information. UNDP Somalia confirmed that it had no objection to this use; WHO and UNHCR have also been asked. The people and places in these photographs are Somali, yet the right to show them again belongs, in law, to those who photographed them. That is itself part of the story of who records Somalia's development, and the request process is set out in an accompanying note.



2009 © *B. Bannon/UNHCR/2008. Reproduced from Healy and Sheikh (2009), p.4.*



2026 Graduates *receiving doctorates and master's degrees at a University for Peace ceremony in Mogadishu, 2 December 2022. Higher education has expanded since the 2009 report, though many Somalis question its quality (see somcare.com.au/#universities). ATMIS Somalia, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons.*

2. LOCATING THE DIASPORA: THE MISSING TWO MILLION

The 2009 report put Somalia's population at 7.4 million and its diaspora at more than one million. UNFPA now estimates Somalia's population at 19.7 million in 2025. UN DESA's International Migrant Stock 2024 counts 1,935,594 Somalia-born people abroad in mid-2024, up from 1,237,640 in 2010 and 1,701,493 in 2020. The Migration Policy Institute's tabulation of the same UN data gives a

rounded 1,936,000. An earlier UNDP study, Cash and Compassion (Hammond et al., 2011), estimated the diaspora at between one and 1.5 million.

Measure	2009 report	Latest
Population of Somalia	7.4 million	19.7 million (UNFPA, 2025)
Somalis abroad	At least 1 million	1,935,594 Somalia-born (UN DESA, mid-2024)
Diaspora as share of population	14 percent	About 10 percent

Table 2.1. Size of the diaspora, 2009 and now.

The diaspora has almost doubled since 2009, yet its share of the population has fallen from 14 percent to about 10 percent. The two figures do not conflict. Somalia's own population has grown faster still, from 7.4 million to 19.7 million, so a larger diaspora now forms a smaller part of a much larger nation.

Figure 2.1 shows that the growth has been uneven. The recorded Somali population of the United States has risen about sevenfold, while those of the United Kingdom and Canada have doubled. Part of the difference lies in how each country counts: by birthplace, by ancestry or by self-identification. These figures are therefore best read as orders of magnitude and not as exact comparisons.

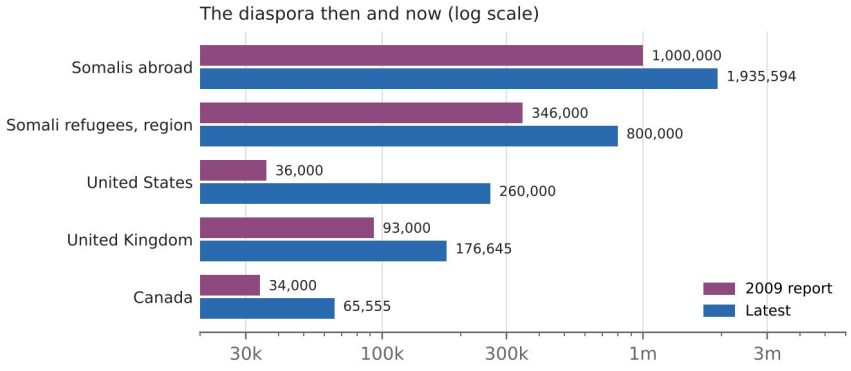


Figure 2.1. The diaspora in 2009 and now. Latest figures use different measures from those available in 2009 and are shown for scale, not as exact change.

Seventeen years after Nairobi, the missing million has become the missing two million.

2.1 The region

As in 2009, most Somalis abroad live in the Horn of Africa and Yemen. UN DESA data show the largest Somalia-born populations in Kenya (401,953), Ethiopia (389,246) and Yemen (285,211), followed by the United Kingdom (119,728), Libya (117,956) and Djibouti (99,940) (Figure 2.2). Refugee figures tell a related but narrower story. On 31 August 2026 UNHCR counted 952,930 Somali refugees and asylum-seekers in five neighbouring countries: 481,801 in Kenya, 364,749 in Ethiopia, 51,276 in Uganda, 41,171 in Yemen and 13,933 in Djibouti (Figure 2.3). The 2009 report counted roughly 346,000 in the five host countries it listed.



Figure 2.2. Where Somalia-born people live: selected countries, latest available year. Map by Somcare.

The 2009 workshop warned that at least half of the one million Somalis abroad were refugees living in hardship, placing a heavy burden on those settled in richer countries. That warning still applies: the refugee population in the region has more than doubled in absolute terms.

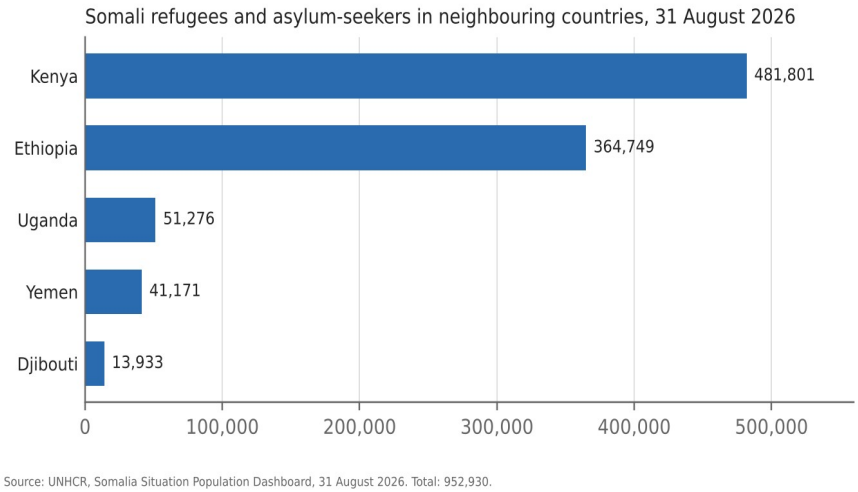


Figure 2.3. Somali refugees and asylum-seekers by country of asylum, 31 August 2026. Source: UNHCR.

2.2 The Gulf and new destinations

The 2009 report noted 20,000 to 100,000 Somalis in the Gulf and a new student migration to Malaysia. No reliable current figure for Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Türkiye or Malaysia was located, which is itself a gap that future data collection should close.

2.3 The West

Country	2009 report	Latest figure	Source and status
United Kingdom	93,000 (2008); London 33,000 (2001)	108,921 born in Somalia; 176,645 identify as Somali (England and Wales, 2021)	ONS, Census 2021. Verified
United States	36,000 (2000 census); up to 150,000 (other estimates)	About 260,000 of Somali descent (2024, race question); 166,000 to 193,000 (ancestry question); 92,401 Somalia-born (2023)	US Census ACS. Difference explained by question type (see text)
Canada	34,000 (2001 census)	65,555 Somali ethnic origin (2021); Toronto 19,810	Statistics Canada 2021 via community tabulation.
Sweden	10,000 (OECD 2005)	70,173 born in Somalia; 31,761 born in Sweden to two Somalia-born parents	Statistics Sweden via secondary summary.

Country	2009 report	Latest figure	Source and status
Norway	11,000 (OECD 2005); 20,000 (Horst 2008)	28,554 immigrants and 14,719 Norwegian-born to Somali parents (2020)	Statistics Norway via secondary summary. Latest figure located
Australia	Described as a new growth area	8,101 born in Somalia; 18,401 Somali ancestry (2021)	ABS, Census 2021. Verified
Netherlands, Denmark	14,000; 11,000 (OECD 2005)	No current figure located	CBS; Statistics Denmark

Table 2.2. Somali populations in selected Western countries.

The 2009 report relied on press estimates for cities, many of which exceeded official counts, for example 20,000 Somalis in Bristol. Census 2021 found 9,167 people identifying as Somali in Bristol, the fourth-largest Somali population of any local authority in England and Wales. The lesson of 2009 still stands: community estimates and official statistics measure different things and should not be mixed.

The United States shows how much the measure matters. In 2024 the American Community Survey added Somali as a detailed group under its race question for the first time. On that basis an estimated 260,000 people of Somali descent lived in the United States, about 107,000 of them in Minnesota. The older ancestry question, used by most earlier studies, gives figures between about 166,000 and 193,000 depending on the table and year, and the 2020 Census recorded 221,043 people identifying as Somali alone or in combination. None of these is wrong; each counts a different thing. This report uses the race-based 2024 figure as the best current measure of the Somali American community.

3. MOVEMENT SINCE 2009

The 2009 report described three waves of migration: labour migration to the Gulf in the 1970s, the refugee exodus after 1988 to 1991, and onward movement to the West through asylum and family reunion. It noted the diaspora was still on the move. Since 2009, four patterns stand out.

- Continued displacement. Drought, conflict and floods have kept internal displacement high: UNHCR estimated about 3.3 million internally displaced people in Somalia in January 2026. Internal displacement feeds onward movement.
- Return. UNHCR has supported 96,625 Somali refugees to return since December 2014, mainly from Kenya and Yemen, with a further 44,331 monitored as returning spontaneously (UNHCR, June 2025).

- Somalia as a host. Somalia now hosts refugees itself: 46,352 refugees and asylum-seekers in November 2025, mostly from Ethiopia and Yemen (UNHCR).
- Secondary and circular movement. The 2009 report observed European Somalis moving to the UK. Movement between Western countries, and seasonal or long-term return of diaspora professionals to Mogadishu, Hargeisa and Garowe, has continued. No systematic data on this movement were located.

4. CHARACTERISTICS AND THE SECOND GENERATION

The 2009 report distinguished the first generation, children raised or born abroad, and recent arrivals, and argued that the attitudes of the second group would decide the diaspora's long-term role. It noted that detailed empirical research on this group remained to be done. Census data now allow a first answer on size, if not on attitudes.

- England and Wales (2021): 43.5 percent of people identifying as Somali were born in England and 43.1 percent in Somalia. Those born in England were young, with 83.8 percent aged under 20.
- Minnesota (2001 to 2023): US-born people of Somali descent rose from 19 percent to nearly 39 percent of the state's Somali community, while the share who were not citizens fell from over 76 percent to 9 percent.
- Norway (2020): 14,719 Norwegian-born people with two Somalia-born parents, alongside 28,554 Somalia-born immigrants.
- Australia (2021): 49.5 percent of Somali Australians were born in Australia, one of the highest Australian-born shares among African ancestry communities, and 35.5 percent of the community was under 15 (Ibrahim, 2026). Australian-born Somali Australians recorded higher unemployment (29.4 percent) than the overseas-born (21.3 percent): a second-generation penalty that the 2009 report could not have observed.

Socio-economic outcomes remain difficult in most host countries. In England and Wales, a local authority summary of Census 2021 reports that 55 percent of Somalia-born residents were economically active, 12 percent worked in professional occupations against 20 percent nationally, and 49 percent of Somalia-born households were overcrowded. The 2009 workshop linked low socio-economic status partly to the burden of remitting; that link remains untested.

The attitudes of the second generation towards remitting, return and Somali politics remain largely unresearched. This is the main question for future research.

5. POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

In 2009 the diaspora was highly visible in Somali state institutions. The report counted the Prime Minister and 18 of 37 ministers in the February 2009 federal cabinet as diaspora returnees, and in Somaliland ten of 29 ministers, the head of the Guurti and 30 of 82 members of the House of Representatives. It called the diaspora a double-edged sword: a funder of clan conflict at times, and of reconciliation at others.

The pattern has continued. According to the parliamentary database Wakiil, the House of the People elected in 2016 included 105 of 275 members holding foreign passports, down from 198 in the previous parliament, with British, American and Kenyan passports the most common. Every prime minister appointed from 2000 to 2022 is reported to have held Western citizenship. The current federal parliament, sworn in in April 2022, has 275 members in the House of the People and 54 in the Upper House. No published count of the diaspora share of the 2022 parliament or the current cabinet was located.

The most significant change is legal. The constitution approved by both houses of parliament on 4 March 2026, and signed into law on 8 March, bars the President, the Prime Minister, the two Speakers and the Chief Justice from holding dual citizenship and requires formal renunciation, while ordinary members of parliament may keep a second nationality. In mid-2026 the President also ordered cabinet ministers to surrender foreign passports or resign. This marks the first formal limit on a practice that the 2009 report treated as a defining feature of Somali politics, and it reflects the criticism, already noted in 2009, that returnees can leave when problems arise.

The diaspora's role in Somaliland's institutions and its 2024 presidential election, and in Puntland, deserves separate study and is outside the scope of this report.

6. REMITTANCES

6.1 Volume

In 2009 there was no official remittance series for Somalia. The report quoted estimates of US$750 million to US$1 billion for 2004 and, from Lindley (2007), US$1.6 billion to Somalia and US$700 million to Somaliland. Workshop participants doubted figures above US$2 billion, noting that much might support Somalis outside the country. Two official series now exist: the World Bank's, based on IMF balance of payments data, and the Central Bank of Somalia's, compiled from reporting by banks and money transfer businesses. They do not agree.

Source and definition	2024	2025
World Bank WDI, personal remittances received	US$2.12bn (17.7% of GDP)	Not yet published
Central Bank of Somalia, individual remittances	US$2.72bn (22% of GDP)	US$3.13bn (24% of GDP)
Central Bank of Somalia, all inward transfers (individual, business, NGO and other)	US$6.43bn	US$6.78bn
Central Bank Governor, public statement on annual remittances	About US$3.2bn a year	

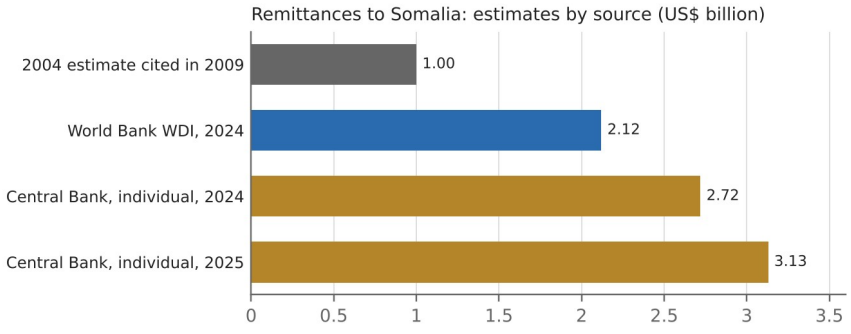
Table 6.1. Remittance estimates for Somalia. Sources: World Bank WDI (series BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT); Central Bank of Somalia, Annual Report 2025, Table 11; Governor's statement as reported by Garowe Online and Caasimada.

The WDI series stood at US$1.30 billion in 2018 and US$2.12 billion in 2024, after a peak of US$2.18 billion in 2023. The Central Bank's figure for individual remittances in 2024 is about US$600 million higher than the World Bank's. The Central Bank's figure for all inward transfers, three times the World Bank's, includes business payments and NGO funds and should not be read as remittances.

Some of the difference is definitional, and some reflects different data vintages and coverage, including whether Somaliland's inflows are fully captured. Whichever series is used, remittances have at least doubled since the 2004 estimate cited in 2009 and remain about a fifth of GDP or more. The 2009 report called Somalia the fourth most remittance-dependent country; on the WDI series it now ranks 16th of 185, a fall in rank driven by faster GDP growth, not by lower inflows.

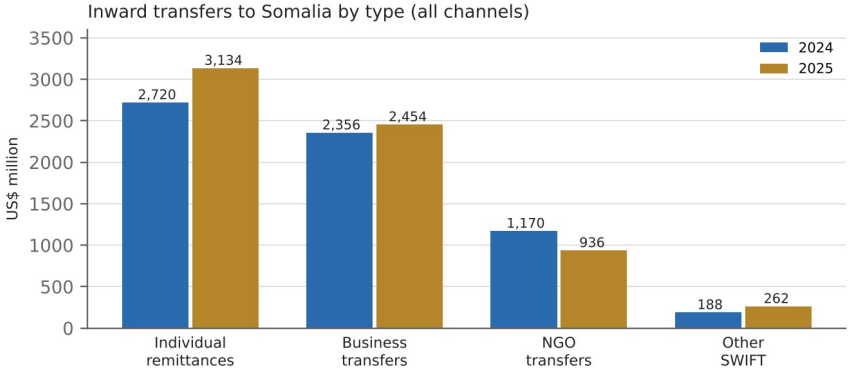
The Central Bank Governor has put annual inflows at about US$4.2 billion, of which US$3.2 billion is remittances and US$1 billion aid. The Central Bank's

own breakdown (Figure 6.2) shows why the totals are so different: in 2025 individual remittances were US$3.13 billion of US$6.79 billion in inward transfers, with business transfers of US$2.45 billion and NGO transfers of US$0.94 billion. NGO transfers fell by a fifth between 2024 and 2025, consistent with the reduction in foreign aid that the Central Bank and the IMF both note.



Sources: Healy and Sheikh (2009); World Bank WDI BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT; Central Bank of Somalia, Annual Report 2025, Table 11.

Figure 6.1. Remittances to Somalia: World Bank and Central Bank of Somalia estimates compared with the 2009 report's figure.



Source: Central Bank of Somalia, Annual Report 2025, Table 11 (banks plus money transfer businesses). Totals: US$6,434m (2024); US$6,786m (2025).

Figure 6.2. Inward transfers to Somalia by type, 2024 and 2025. Source: Central Bank of Somalia, Annual Report 2025, Table 11.

6.2 Reach

The 2009 report cited remittances as 23 percent of household income and reaching up to 40 percent of households. Later household surveys give lower

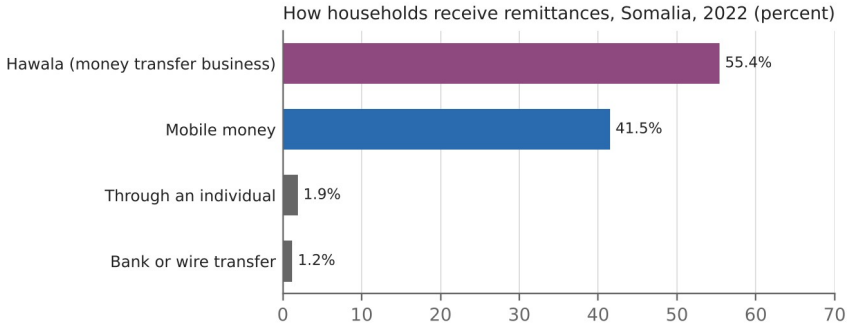
reach. The World Bank's Somali High Frequency Survey (Wave 2, 2017) found about 15 percent of households receiving remittances. The 2022 Somalia Integrated Household Budget Survey, the first national budget survey since 1985, reports that 20.7 percent of households received remittances, from within Somalia or abroad, in the previous twelve months, with nomadic households far less likely to receive them than urban or rural households. A 2017 survey for the World Bank found 37 percent of Somalis had received international remittances in the past year, which shows how much the figures depend on the question asked.

The distributional finding of 2009 holds. Urban households are more likely to receive international remittances, and households that receive them are less poor: 58 percent of recipient households were poor in 2017, against 71 percent of those that did not receive. The 2009 workshop's concern that remittances fail the poorest therefore remains valid. A 2026 analysis of 2017 survey data found that informal support, mainly remittances and zakat, reached twice as many households as formal aid (64 against 32 percent), while 29 percent of households received neither.

6.3 Channels: mobile money

The 2009 report did not mention mobile money; Hormuud Telecom launched EVC Plus only in 2011. By 2017 a survey commissioned by the World Bank found that 73 percent of Somali adults used mobile money, and the Central Bank now reports that mobile money reaches 84 percent of adults. On 27 February 2021 the Central Bank issued its first mobile money licence, to Hormuud, bringing EVC Plus under formal regulation. By the end of 2025 the Central Bank supervised 13 domestic commercial banks, one international bank branch, 14 money transfer businesses and six mobile money operators, and had introduced the Somalia Instant Payment System (SIPS) with a national QR standard, SOMQR.

Hawala has not been displaced. Among households that received remittances in the month before the 2022 household budget survey, 55.4 percent were paid through a money transfer business and 41.5 percent through mobile money; fewer than 2 percent used a bank (Figure 6.3). Nomadic households relied most on mobile money (72.3 percent), urban households most on hawala (62.0 percent).



Source: Somalia National Bureau of Statistics, SIHBS 2022 Main Report (2023), Table 10.3. Households that received remittances in the previous month.

Figure 6.3. How households receive remittances, 2022. Source: SNBS, SIHBS 2022 Main Report, Table 10.3.

Remittances now commonly arrive in mobile wallets, linking the diaspora directly to the digital economy inside Somalia.

6.4 Channels: de-risking

The 2009 report's risk list was an ageing diaspora, generational change, donor fatigue and the economic crisis in the West. It did not foresee the closure of bank accounts held by Somali money transfer operators. Barclays in the United Kingdom closed its accounts with Dahabshiil in 2014. In early 2015 Merchants Bank of California, which handled an estimated 60 to 80 percent of US remittances to Somalia, closed its Somali accounts, and Westpac, the last Australian bank serving Somali remittance companies, followed. Regulators' anti-money-laundering pressure, not evidence of misuse by individual senders, drove these closures. The consequence, documented by Oxfam and others, was higher costs and a shift towards cash and less visible channels.

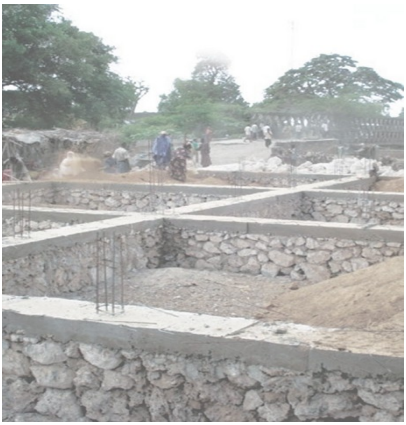
7. INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The 2009 report found the diaspora to be the main investor in Somalia, supplying 80 percent of start-up capital for small and medium enterprises and between 30 and 40 percent of the shareholders of one major telecommunications company. It listed telecommunications, remittances, construction and trade as leading sectors, and noted the absence of formal banking.

The economy is larger and more formal than in 2009. The Central Bank estimates real GDP growth at 4.0 percent in 2024 and 3.1 percent in 2025, with average inflation of 3.7 percent in 2025. Licensed banks and mobile money operators now

work under the Central Bank. Hormuud Telecom, the largest private employer, reports more than 12,000 Somali shareholders, many of them abroad, against 283 at its founding in 2002. Somalia reached the HIPC completion point in December 2023, securing about US$4.5 billion in debt relief; external public debt stood at US$1.48 billion, about 11 percent of GDP, at the end of 2025.

No current estimate of the diaspora share of SME start-up capital, or of diaspora investment by sector, was located. The World Bank's 2023 Migration and Development Brief discusses diaspora finance for private capital mobilisation in general terms; a Somalia-specific estimate would require survey data.



2009 © *UNDP. Reproduced from Healy and Sheikh (2009), p.15.*



2026 Mogadishu *skyline, 2026: more than 6,000 buildings went up in the city in five years. Photo: Isma4l, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons.*

8. HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT AND SERVICE DELIVERY

The 2009 report described fast, informal diaspora responses to emergencies, often mobilised through Somali media and telecommunications companies, and steady support for schools, hospitals and universities in home districts. It described this as becoming part of the traditional obligation to those left behind.

That role has grown with the scale of crises: the 2011 famine, and the droughts of 2017 and 2021 to 2022. Fundraising has moved from radio appeals to mobile money and social media, and mobile money is now also a channel for humanitarian cash transfers. The 2011 UNDP study Cash and Compassion documented how the 2011 famine galvanised diaspora giving, both individual and collective.

No inventory exists of the schools, hospitals and universities founded or sustained by the diaspora since 2009, and no direct successor to the UNDP QUESTS programme, which recorded 505 diaspora placements in 2007 and 826 in 2008, was identified. Building such an inventory, with IOM Somalia, universities and the Ministry of Health, would be a practical first task under the National Diaspora Policy.

9. THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

In 2009 there was no Somali government policy on the diaspora. The workshop's recommendations were addressed to UNDP and donors. Since then, a formal framework has emerged.

Year	Instrument	Notes
2016	Foreign policy naming diaspora engagement as a pillar	Reported at the time by advisers to the foreign minister
2023	National Diaspora Policy ratified by cabinet	Developed by the Department of Diaspora Affairs with IOM, after consultations in all federal member states during 2021
2024	National Strategy for Migration	Includes reducing remittance costs and diaspora engagement
2025	National Labour Migration Policy	Developed with ILO support
2025	Somaliland National Diaspora Policy finalised	Validation workshop held in Hargeisa

Table 9.1. Diaspora policy instruments since 2009. Sources: EU Diaspora for Development country factsheet; Somaliland ministry reporting.

Implementation is the open question. The EU's country factsheet notes a continuing lack of diaspora-targeting programmes despite the policy.

10. CASE STUDY: SOMALI AUSTRALIANS

The 2009 report named Australia as a new growth area. Australia is the base of this study, and Somcare has already examined the community in detail, so it serves as a case study of change since 2009.

This chapter draws on the Somcare Follow-Up Study (Ibrahim, 2026), which updated the 2020 La Trobe University study with 2021 Census data from ABS TableBuilder Pro, using the Ancestry Multi Response (ANCP) variable, and on the book Somali Australians: From Belonging to Participating (Ibrahim, 2026). All Census values are subject to ABS perturbation.

10.1 Size and location

The 2021 Census recorded 18,401 people of Somali ancestry, up 13.8 percent from 16,175 in 2016. Ancestry is the better measure for this community because many Somali Australians were born in Kenya, Ethiopia or Djibouti: The Census counted only 8,101 people born in Somalia. Victoria held 54.4 percent of Somali Australians, followed by Queensland (16.5 percent), Western Australia (16.3 percent) and New South Wales (9.7 percent). Arrivals peaked in 2001 to 2010, when Australia's humanitarian programme prioritised the Horn of Africa, after a first wave in the 1990s.

The community is young and increasingly Australian-born. In the Follow-Up Study's settlement table, 8,833 of 17,831 Somali Australians (49.5 percent) were born in Australia, and 35.5 percent of the community was under 15, about double the national share of 18.2 percent.

10.2 Education and employment

La Trobe University's 2020 study (Harvey, Szalkowicz and Luckman) found that Somali Australians accessed vocational and higher education at higher rates than other Australians, but that employment outcomes were stubbornly poor. It reported that a Somali Australian with a bachelor's degree was about as likely to be unemployed as an Australian who had left school at Year 10 or earlier.

The Follow-Up Study finds improvement and a persistent gap:

Indicator, 2021 Census	Somali Australians	Comparison
Unemployment rate	23.0% (1,562 of 6,794 in the labour force)	National 5.1%; all African ancestries 7.9%; Kenyan Australians 5.7%
Change since 2016	29.9% to 23.0%	Different age ranges in the two studies; broad comparison only
Australian-born unemployment	29.4% (45.7% in 2016)	Overseas-born Somali Australians 21.3%
Rank among 30 African ancestry communities	Highest unemployment	Range 4.6% (Malawian) to 23.0%
Labour force participation	58.4%, lowest of 30	All African ancestries 74.3%; Kenyan 86.2%
Bachelor's degree or higher, persons 15+	16.6% (13% in 2016)	National 26.3%
Bachelor or higher, of those with a non-school qualification	40.9%	All African ancestries 52.0%; Kenyan 65.7%
Unemployment of bachelor graduates	10.0%	3.8% for graduates of all African ancestries

Table 10.1. Somali Australians in the labour market. Source: Ibrahim (2026), Follow-Up Study and book, Appendix B.

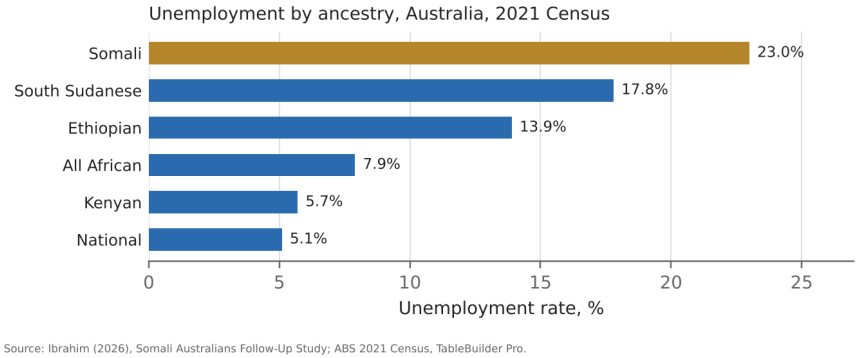


Figure 10.1. Unemployment by ancestry, Australia, 2021 Census. Somali Australians recorded the highest rate of 30 African ancestry communities.

Education does not close the gap. Somali tertiary attainment is similar to that of Ethiopian and South Sudanese Australians, whose unemployment rates (13.9 and 17.8 percent) are well below the Somali rate. The Follow-Up Study therefore treats migration stream, employer behaviour and discrimination as leading explanations, while noting that Census cross-sections establish association rather than cause and proposing a correspondence audit study to test name-based discrimination directly.

For this report the Australian findings matter in two ways. First, they show the second-generation question raised in 2009 in hard numbers: a generation born and educated in Australia is entering the labour market at a disadvantage. Second, they bear on remittances: households with unemployment near one in four, and participation below 60 percent, carry the obligation to remit from a narrow income base, the burden the 2009 workshop described.

10.3 Remittances from Australia

Oxfam estimated in 2015 that around 7,500 Somali Australians sent about A$33.5 million a year to Somalia, more than double Australia's humanitarian aid to Somalia in 2014. The closure of Westpac's remittance accounts in 2015 removed the last major Australian bank from the corridor. Somali Australians continue to send money through remittance providers, which must register with AUSTRAC,

and Somcare's Somali Remittance Directory lists providers serving the corridor. Access to banking for these providers remains the corridor's main risk.

11. THE 2009 RECOMMENDATIONS REVISITED

The 2009 workshop produced short-term actions for UNDP and recommendations from four working groups. The table gives a preliminary assessment, to be tested through interviews.

2009 recommendation (summarised)	Preliminary assessment, 2026
Better communication and information sharing between the UN and diaspora groups	Partly met. Official data on population and remittances now exist; structured UN to diaspora channels are limited.
Map and catalogue diaspora projects on the ground	Not met at national scale.
Partner with diaspora organisations for service delivery; build their capacity to work with donors	Partly met through IOM and NGO programmes.
Support business associations and chambers of commerce; promote research on Somali business	Unclear. No current evidence was located.
Find ways to support remittances, transport and telecommunications businesses	Mixed. Telecoms and mobile money have flourished; remittance banking access deteriorated after 2013.
Target the poorest, who receive no remittances	Not met. Recipient households remain less poor than non-recipients.
Consult the diaspora on the constitution; include it in peace talks	Met in part. Diaspora politicians are central; the 2026 constitution now limits dual citizenship in top offices.
Revamp QUESTS and involve the diaspora in its design	Not met. No successor programme was identified.
Establish an e-network of workshop participants	No active network was identified.

Table 11.1. Status of the 2009 recommendations.

12. COUNTING SOMALIA: THE DATA PROBLEM

This report set out to replace the estimates of 2009 with measured facts. For the diaspora's host countries, it largely succeeded: censuses in Britain, Australia, Canada, the Nordic countries and the United States count Somalis directly, even if each counts in its own way. For Somalia itself it often could not. The difficulty

is not a lack of effort by researchers. It reflects the absence of the basic statistical infrastructure that most states take for granted.

Somalia's last census to publish results was held in 1975 and counted 4.2 million people. A second census in the mid-1980s was carried out but its results were never released. The 2014 Population Estimation Survey, supported by UNFPA, was the first large household survey in decades but was not a census. In May 2023 the Federal Government launched a Population and Housing Census, planned for 2024 to 2025, with enumeration to begin in late 2024. As of this report, no census results have been published. Every population figure for Somalia in this report, including the denominator for the share of Somalis living abroad, is therefore a model-based projection rather than a count.

Every population figure for Somalia in this report is a model-based projection rather than a count.

The same problem runs through the other indicators. Remittance estimates for a single year, 2024, range from US$2.12 billion to US$2.72 billion depending on the institution, a difference of about US$600 million in an economy of about US$12 billion. The share of households receiving remittances ranges from about 15 percent to 40 percent depending on the survey and the question. There is no official figure for the number of Somali citizens abroad, for how many hold dual nationality, or for how many have returned. Data on diaspora members in parliament come from an independent database, not from parliament. Diaspora investment, the core finding of the 2009 report, is not measured at all.

Unreliable numbers are not a technical inconvenience. They weaken the case Somalia makes to host-country regulators and banks that remittance corridors are safe and transparent, the case at the centre of the de-risking crisis described in Chapter 6. They leave the Federal Government unable to show its diaspora what it contributes, or to plan services, elections and revenue around an accurate population. And they allow figures to be quoted selectively, by every side, in debates about aid, remittances and migration.

This report therefore proposes, as its first outcome, that the Federal Government of Somalia treat diaspora and remittance statistics as a national priority, with the following tasks:

- Complete and publish the Population and Housing Census, including a module on household members living abroad, the most direct way to count the diaspora from home.

- Have the Central Bank of Somalia and the World Bank and IMF publish one reconciled remittance series, with a published note explaining definitions, coverage of Somaliland and other regions, and revisions.
- Mandate the Somalia National Bureau of Statistics and the Central Bank to produce an annual Diaspora and Remittance Statistics release, drawing on UN DESA, host-country censuses and domestic surveys.
- Through the Department of Diaspora Affairs and Somali embassies, build a voluntary diaspora register and request Somali-specific tabulations from host-country statistics offices, as Australia's ABS, Britain's ONS and others already produce.
- Measure diaspora investment through business and enterprise surveys, so that the role the 2009 report identified as most important can finally be quantified.

13. A WIDER ROLE FOR THE DIASPORA, AND A VOICE IN PARLIAMENT

13.1 From cash to partnership

The 2009 workshop hoped the diaspora would move from reactive giving to proactive, development-minded engagement. The evidence in this report shows how much that engagement could offer. The diaspora is Somalia's largest source of foreign exchange, its most willing investor in high-risk conditions, and the first responder in drought and conflict. It holds skills Somalia lacks: doctors, engineers, teachers, financial regulators and statisticians trained in other systems. It is also Somalia's most effective advocate abroad. Somali communities in Washington, London, Ottawa and Canberra are the constituents who can persuade host governments to keep remittance corridors open, recognise qualifications and support Somali development.

A partnership of this kind requires more than a policy document. It needs channels through which the diaspora can invest with protection, contribute skills without losing residence rights abroad, and hold the state to account for how its contribution is used. The most direct of those channels is representation in the national legislature.

13.2 Representation today: influence without accountability

The diaspora is already over-represented at the top of Somali politics, as Chapter 5 showed: 105 of 275 members of the 2016 House of the People held foreign passports, and successive prime ministers held Western citizenship. But these

members are selected through clan-based indirect processes inside Somalia. They do not answer to the Somalis living abroad, who have no vote of their own. The 2026 restriction on dual citizens in the four highest offices responds to public suspicion of returnee politicians, but it does nothing to give ordinary diaspora members a voice. The result is the worst of both: diaspora influence without diaspora accountability.

13.3 How other countries do it

A number of countries reserve seats in their national parliaments for citizens abroad, elected by those citizens in constituencies drawn by region of the world.

Country	Seats for citizens abroad	How the world is divided
Italy	8 deputies and 4 senators since 2022 (12 and 6 from 2006 to 2020), about 2% of seats	Four zones: Europe; South America; North and Central America; Africa, Asia, Oceania and Antarctica. Members must live in the zone they represent
France	11 deputies in the National Assembly since 2012	Eleven single-member constituencies covering the world
Portugal	4 deputies	Two for Europe, two for the rest of the world
Cape Verde	6 deputies	Two for Africa, two for the Americas, two for Europe and the rest of the world
Algeria	8 of its parliamentary seats	Constituencies abroad, many voters in France
Tunisia	18 of 217 in the 2011 Constituent Assembly	Six constituencies abroad, including France, Italy, Germany, the Americas and the Arab world

Table 13.1. Selected overseas constituencies. Sources: Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; IDEA; published summaries of national electoral law.

Italy's system is the closest model for Somalia because its diaspora, like Somalia's, is large relative to the home population and spread across every continent. It is not fixed: the 18 overseas members (12 deputies and six senators) were cut to 12 (eight deputies and four senators) when Italy reduced the size of its parliament by referendum in 2020, with effect from the 2022 election. The lesson is that overseas seats are a political choice that must be defended and periodically reviewed.

13.4 An option for Somalia

This report proposes, for national debate, that Somalia consider reserving a small number of seats in the House of the People for Somali citizens abroad, elected by them in continental constituencies. At around 2 percent of the House, as in Italy,

this would mean five or six seats. One illustration, reflecting where Somalis abroad live, would be:

- Africa: Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Uganda, South Africa and the rest of the continent, home to the largest Somali populations abroad, including most refugees.
- Middle East and Asia: Yemen, the Gulf states, Türkiye, Malaysia and the rest of Asia.
- Europe: the United Kingdom, the Nordic countries, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and the rest of Europe.
- North America: the United States and Canada.
- Oceania: Australia and New Zealand, possibly combined with Asia given their size.

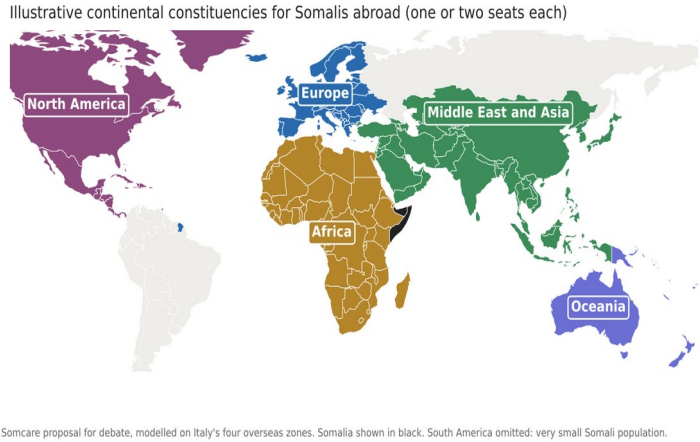


Figure 13.1. Illustrative continental constituencies for Somali citizens abroad. A Somcare proposal for national debate, not a recommendation on boundaries.

Several conditions would have to be met first, and each links to a finding of this report. Somalia would need a credible register of citizens abroad, which depends on the census and diaspora register proposed in Chapter 12. It would need a transition from clan-based indirect selection to direct elections for overseas seats to mean what they do elsewhere. Registration and voting would need to reach refugees in Kenya, Ethiopia and Yemen as well as citizens in the West, or the seats would represent only the most comfortable part of the diaspora. And the arrangement would need to address Somaliland, whose diaspora is among the most organised but whose government does not recognise federal institutions.

There are serious objections, and the debate should hear them. Overseas seats could import clan competition into diaspora communities abroad. Low registration could give a handful of voters a seat each, as critics have argued in other countries. Citizens at home may resent representatives who do not live with the consequences of the laws they pass. Host countries may be wary of foreign election campaigns on their soil. None of these objections is decisive, and several are answered by design choices such as residence requirements, minimum registration thresholds and independent electoral supervision. Formal, accountable representation of the diaspora would be more transparent than the informal over-representation that exists today.



2009 © *UNDP Somalia. Reproduced from Healy and Sheikh (2009), p.22.*



2026 Graduates *at a University for Peace ceremony in Mogadishu, where 166 Somali students received doctorates and master's degrees, 2 December 2022 (cropped). ATMIS Somalia, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons.*

Diaspora influence without diaspora accountability is the worst of both. Formal representation would be more transparent than the informal over-representation that exists today.

14. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is, above all, a story of progress. Somalia in 2026 is not the collapsed state of 2009: it has a federal government, a central bank, rising revenues, debt relief, a growing private sector and an expanding school system. Much of that progress was financed, staffed or led by the diaspora.

The missing million has become the missing two million. The diaspora is larger, more settled and more visible in official statistics than in 2009. It still sustains a large part of household consumption in Somalia, still dominates the top of Somali politics, and still funds emergency response faster than the international system.

The changes are in the institutions around it: mobile money, a regulating central bank, a national diaspora policy and the first legal limits on dual citizenship in high office. The risks have also changed: the threat of 2009 was an economic crisis in the West; the threat that materialised was the withdrawal of banks.

Recommendations:

- Statistics, the first outcome of this report: the Federal Government should complete and publish the census, reconcile the official remittance series and produce an annual Diaspora and Remittance Statistics release, as set out in Chapter 12, so that the figures in this report never again have to be rebuilt from scattered and conflicting sources.
- Remittance corridors: host governments, including Australia, should treat safe remittance corridors to Somalia as development infrastructure, and regulators should give licensed Somali money transfer operators predictable access to banking.
- Implementation of the National Diaspora Policy: the Department of Diaspora Affairs should publish an implementation plan with measurable targets, including a register of diaspora-founded institutions.
- Second generation: governments and universities in host countries should fund research on the attitudes of Somalis born abroad, the question the 2009 report left open.
- Representation: the Federal Government and parliament should open a national debate on reserving a small number of seats in the House of the People for Somali citizens abroad, elected in continental constituencies on the Italian model, once a credible register of citizens abroad exists (Chapter 13).
- Reaching the poorest: humanitarian and social protection programmes should be designed on the assumption that remittances do not reach the poorest households.
- Australia: Australian governments should address the gap between Somali Australians' education and employment, since Somali graduates are unemployed at more than two and a half times the rate of all African-ancestry graduates, through employer partnerships, recognition of overseas qualifications and pathways for young Australian-born Somalis.
- Somcare: Somcare will publish the data behind this report, invite corrections from Somali institutions and the diaspora, and seek partners for the survey of diaspora organisations and the second generation that this report could not undertake.

ANNEX A. DATA REGISTER, 2009 AND NOW

Indicator	2009 (page)	Latest	Status
Population	7.4m (p.3)	19.7m (2025)	Verified
Somalis abroad	1m+, 14% (p.3)	1,935,594 (2024), about 10%	Secondary
Refugees in region	About 346,000 in five countries (p.3)	952,930 (Aug 2026)	Verified
UK	93,000 (p.5)	108,921 born; 176,645 identify (2021)	Verified
External public debt	Not covered	US$1.48bn, 11% of GDP (2025)	Verified
USA	36,000 (p.5)	About 259,000 descent (ACS 2024); 193,061 ancestry	Verified
Canada	34,000 (p.5)	65,555 (2021)	Secondary
Sweden	10,000 (p.5)	70,173 born	Secondary
Norway	11,000 to 20,000 (p.4 to 5)	28,554 plus 14,719 (2020)	Secondary
Australia	Growth area (p.1)	18,401 ancestry; 8,101 born (2021); unemployment 23.0%	Verified
Remittances	US$1.6bn plus US$0.7bn (p.9)	US$2.12bn to US$2.72bn (2024) by source	Unreconciled: see Ch. 12
Remittances, % GDP	4th most dependent (p.9)	17.7%, 16th (2024)	Secondary
Households receiving	Up to 40% (p.10)	20.7% (SIHBS 2022)	Verified
SME start-up capital	80% (p.10)	None found	Gap
Share of income remitted	11%, London (p.18)	None found	Gap
Diaspora in cabinet	18 of 37 (p.8)	None found	Gap
MPs with foreign passports	Not given	105 of 275 (2016 parliament, Wakiil)	Secondary
Mobile money use	Not covered	84% of adults (CBS, 2025)	Verified
QUESTS placements	505; 826 (p.16)	None found	Gap
Diaspora policy	None	Ratified 2023	Verified
IDPs	Not covered	About 3.3m (Jan 2026)	Verified

ANNEX B. NOTES ON THE EVIDENCE

This report relies on the best figures that could be located from Melbourne in 2026. Readers should note the following, and Somcare welcomes corrections for later editions.

- Diaspora size: UN DESA counts people born in Somalia; children born abroad are not included, so the true diaspora is larger.
- Remittances: World Bank and Central Bank of Somalia figures differ by up to US$1 billion a year (Chapter 6 and Chapter 12). Central Bank figures are taken from its Annual Report 2025. The two series measure different things and are not reconciled here.
- Population: Somalia has no published census since 1975; all population figures are projections.
- Western countries: some figures for Canada, Sweden and Norway come from secondary tabulations of official data, and the years differ between countries.
- Law and policy: statements on Somalia's 2026 constitution, electoral law and overseas constituencies elsewhere rest on published summaries and analysis rather than the legal texts.
- Scope: this is a desk review. It does not include a survey or interviews, and it does not cover Somaliland and Puntland in depth.

Annex C

Permission to Look Back: A Note on the 2009 Photographs

Why this annex

This report follows Somalia's Missing Million, published by UNDP Somalia in 2009. To show continuity, its design sets each photograph from the 2009 report beside a recent photograph of the same theme: a girl in 2005 beside a girl sitting her national examinations in 2021; a building site beside the Mogadishu skyline of 2026. Before using the four 2009 photographs, Somcare sought permission from the agencies credited with them. This annex records that process, with the full correspondence, because the process itself says something about how knowledge of Somalia is produced, owned and shared.

Somcare respects copyright and has followed the rules throughout. The purpose here is not to complain about individuals, who were courteous and, in UNDP's case, quick. It is to describe, calmly and on the record, the world in which Somali researchers work.

What happened

Date	Step
14 November 2026	Somcare writes to UNDP Somalia's Head of Communications, copied to WHO, requesting permission for the four photographs and offering to share the draft.
14 November	UNDP Somalia refers the request to a colleague.
15 November	Somcare asks the colleague to assist. WHO sends an automatic reply: its publications since 2016 are open access, but WHO photographs may not be reproduced in any medium without permission, requested through an online form.
15 November	Somcare submits WHO's online form and writes to the WHO Photo Library with the context.
15 November	UNDP asks to see the photographs. Somcare sends all four, with a sheet showing credits, pages and proposed use, and a preview of the cover.
15 November, 9.41 pm	UNDP replies: "These are older photos. If they are being used for non-commercial research purposes, we have no objection to use."
16 November	The WHO Multimedia Library replies that the 2005 photograph is not in its archives and cannot be located and suggests choosing an alternative image from its library and applying again through the permission form.
At publication	UNHCR: no reply.

In three days, then, the three agencies gave three different answers. UNDP Somalia agreed to non-commercial research use. WHO, having directed the request to an online form, replied that it could not find its own photograph. UNHCR has not replied. UNDP's answer was quick and generous, and WHO's was courteous and prompt. The structure behind all three answers is the subject of the rest of this annex.

Who was asked in 2005 and 2008?

Copyright in a photograph belongs to the photographer, or to the organisation that employs or commissions them. It does not belong to the person photographed, to the school in which a lesson was taking place, or to the street on which a building stood. In the 2009 report the four photographs are credited to a photographer and an agency: a WHO photographer in 2005, a UNHCR photographer in 2008, and UNDP. The people in them, a girl in a plum headscarf, a smiling boy, schoolgirls at their desks, are not named, and the report does not say how their consent was obtained.

That omission may well be protective. WHO's own guidance requires photographers to obtain informed consent and to put the best interest of a child first, and anonymity can protect children in a conflict. The point is not that consent was absent; it is that the record which survives shows rights running in only one direction. When the picture was taken, the community gave something. When the picture was published, ownership passed to the institution, and the community's part in the image disappeared from the record.

The irony

Seventeen years later, a Somali researcher who took part in the 2009 workshop that reviewed the original report wishes to show how Somalia has changed. To do so, he must ask agencies headquartered in New York and Geneva for permission to show Somali children and Somali places to Somali readers. The girl in the 2005 photograph, now a young woman, has no standing in that decision. Nor do her school, her family or her city. The researcher must write, wait, complete forms and send the photographs back to the institutions that hold them.

These agencies are publicly funded, including by taxpayers in Australia, where Somcare is based, and the 2009 report was itself a public-interest study. Its own rights notice allows not-for-profit research use with acknowledgement. Yet the

burden of proof rests entirely with the person asking, and the absence of a reply carries the same practical force as a refusal.

It is hard not to see in this an older pattern, in which knowledge about Africa was produced by outsiders, held by outsiders and licensed back to Africans. The agencies do not intend this, and their rules apply equally to everyone. The effect, however, is not neutral. Where the subject, the setting and the history are Somali, and the right to reuse belongs elsewhere, Somalis become petitioners for their own past.

The photograph that no one can find

WHO's reply adds a twist that would be comic if the principle were not serious. The photograph of the girl on the cover of the 2009 report is still credited to WHO, and under WHO's rules it may not be reproduced in any medium without WHO's permission. Yet WHO has told us, politely and promptly, that the photograph is not in its archives and cannot be located because it dates from 2005. The institution that holds the right to say yes no longer holds the picture. It has neither granted permission nor refused it; it simply cannot answer the question.

Meanwhile the photograph itself is not lost at all. It sits on the cover of a report that UNDP still publishes, free of charge, on its own website. Anyone in the world can download it, view it and print it for private use. What no one can do, under the rules as written, is show it again in a new study of the same subject without the permission of an owner who cannot find it. In copyright terms the photograph has become something close to an orphan work, the term lawyers use for a protected work whose rights holder cannot practically be traced. Here the rights holder is known; it is the work that has been lost to its owner.

WHO's suggested remedy is to choose another image from its library. That advice makes sense for a magazine looking for an illustration. It makes no sense for a study whose purpose is to set one particular Somali girl, photographed in 2005, beside a Somali girl sitting her examinations in 2021. The point of the comparison is continuity. Any other photograph would break the line the report is trying to draw between then and now.

Set out plainly, the position is this. The girl, now an adult, was never asked whether her picture could be reused and is not asked now. The agency that claims the right to decide cannot find the picture. The agency that published it has no objection. The researcher, who attended the workshop that reviewed the original report and who is himself Somali, has spent three days, more than ten emails and

two online forms seeking leave to reprint four faded photographs in a non-commercial study. None of this protects the girl in the photograph. All of it protects a claim of ownership that its owner can no longer exercise.

The case for the rules

There are good reasons for this system, and they deserve to be stated fairly. Copyright rewards the skill of photographers, many of whom are freelancers who depend on licensing. Control over reuse allows agencies to prevent an image of a vulnerable child from being taken out of context, used in advertising or attached to a misleading story; WHO grants photo permissions only where the use reflects the context and identity of the people shown. Australian law also makes room for research and review through fair dealing. In this case the system worked as designed: UNDP responded within two days and agreed.

These are real protections, and Somcare accepts them. They protect the photographer and the institution well, and the subject in part. They give the community photographed no voice at all. And, as the WHO reply shows, they can outlive the institution's own record of what it owns, so that a rule designed to protect people ends by protecting nothing but a credit line.

What would be fairer

Three modest changes would address most of the problem without weakening the protections. First, agencies could release photographs in publicly funded reports under the same non-commercial open licence many now use for text, as WHO already does for its publications. Second, captions could record, where safe, that consent was obtained and from whom, so that the people in an image are acknowledged as participants rather than scenery. Third, requests from researchers and institutions in the countries photographed could be handled through a simple, free and time-limited process, in which silence after a set period counts as consent for non-commercial research. Fourth, where an agency can no longer locate a photograph in its own archive, it should say plainly that it will not object to non-commercial reuse with acknowledgement, rather than leave the requester with neither a yes nor a no. The European Union created a limited route of this kind for orphan works in 2012; international agencies could adopt a simple version of their own.

A further step lies with Somalis themselves. A Somali national photographic archive, or a commons of openly licensed images contributed by Somali photographers, would mean that the next report on Somalia need not ask permission to show it.

Conclusion

This report reproduces all four 2009 photographs, faded and acknowledged, for non-commercial research and community information. UNDP Somalia has confirmed it has no objection. WHO has confirmed that it cannot locate its photograph and so has neither granted nor refused permission. UNHCR has not replied. Somcare will amend or remove any photograph promptly if its owner asks. The correspondence that follows is reproduced so that readers can judge the process for themselves. It is a small episode, but it shows the world in which Somali research is done: courteous, rule-bound and, in its structure, still unequal.

The correspondence

Reproduced in full or in extract. Personal email addresses are removed; officials are identified by role.

1. Somcare to UNDP Somalia, copied to WHO, 14 November 2026

Subject: Permission request: reuse of four photographs from "Somalia's Missing Million" (UNDP Somalia, 2009) in a non-commercial follow-up report

Dear Mr Sigdel, and colleagues at WHO and UNHCR,

I am writing to request permission to reproduce four photographs from "Somalia's Missing Million: The Somali Diaspora and Its Role in Development" (Sally Healy and Hassan Sheikh, UNDP Somalia, 2009) in a non-commercial follow-up study.

I took part in the Nairobi workshop of 13 March 2009 that reviewed the original report, and I am listed among its participants. Somcare, the Melbourne-based non-profit I founded, is now preparing "Somalia's Missing Two Million: The Somali Diaspora and Development, 2009 to 2026". It sets each finding of the 2009 report against current evidence. To show continuity, it pairs each original photograph, reproduced in faded form, with a recent photograph showing what has improved since 2009.

The photographs are: Cover photograph, credited "© N. Mediratta/WHO Somalia/2005"; Page 4 photograph, credited "© B. Bannon/UNHCR/2008"; Page 15 photograph, credited "© UNDP"; Page 22 photograph, credited "© UNDP Somalia".

Proposed use: A non-commercial research report, published by Somcare in print and as a free PDF, with legal deposit at the National Library of Australia. Each photograph is reproduced unaltered except for fading, with its original credit and a reference to the 2009 report. No use in advertising, fundraising or campaigns.

The 2009 report grants permission for not-for-profit teaching and research use where the copyright owners are acknowledged. I would be grateful for written confirmation that this use is acceptable to UNDP, WHO and UNHCR. As the WHO and UNHCR

photographs appear in a UNDP publication, I would also welcome guidance from UNDP on whether it can clear all four, or whom else I should contact.

The 2009 report was a publicly funded contribution to understanding the Somali diaspora. Our aim is to build on it in the same public-interest spirit and to acknowledge its authors and the agencies involved. I would be glad to share the draft and to include any credit wording you prefer.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kind regards, Dr Mohamed Ibrahim, Founder and Director, Somcare, Melbourne, Australia

2. UNDP Somalia, Head of Communications, to Somcare, 14 November 2026

Dear Mohamed,

Please contact Ilyas copied here for the photos/permission.

Best regards, Kamal

3. Somcare to UNDP Somalia colleague, 15 November 2026

Dear Ilyas,

Please see email thread below and assist in getting the permission to reproduce the photographs mentioned below. Thanks.

Regards, Mohamed

4. WHO permissions mailbox, automatic reply, 15 November 2026 (extract)

IMPORTANT: This is an automatically generated email, note that this mailbox will not be checked periodically.

WHO materials post Open Access: Permission IS NOT required for the reuse of WHO materials issued under the CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence subject to the reuse being for NON-COMMERCIAL purposes and any adaptations are licensed under the same or similar licence.

It is important to note, that while most of the content in WHO publications is owned by WHO, there may be materials that are credited another source. It is your responsibility to determine whether permission is needed for reuse and subsequently obtain permission from the copyright holder.

WHO Photos and Videos. WHO photographs and videos are copyrighted and are not to be reproduced in any medium without first obtaining permission from WHO. Permission may be granted for use so long as the usage accurately reflects the context and identity of all subjects depicted in the photograph. To request permission, please complete our online permissions form.

5. Somcare to WHO Photo Library, copied to UNDP Somalia, 15 November 2026

Subject: Permission request: WHO Somalia photograph (N. Mediratta, 2005) for a non-commercial research report

Dear WHO Photo Library team,

I have submitted a request through the WHO online permissions form and am writing to provide context.

The request concerns one photograph credited "© N. Mediratta/WHO Somalia/2005". It appeared on the cover of "Somalia's Missing Million: The Somali Diaspora and Its Role in Development" (Sally Healy and Hassan Sheikh, UNDP Somalia, 2009). I do not have the WHO image reference number; the photograph shows a young Somali girl in a plum headscarf.

Somcare, a Melbourne-based non-profit, is preparing a follow-up study, "Somalia's Missing Two Million: The Somali Diaspora and Development, 2009 to 2026". To show continuity with the 2009 report, its cover reproduces the original photograph in faded form, unaltered otherwise, beside a 2021 photograph of a Somali girl sitting her national primary examinations. The use reflects the same context as in 2009, and the report makes no statement about the person shown.

Proposed use: cover of a non-commercial research report, in print and as a free PDF, in English, distributed worldwide, with legal deposit at the National Library of

Australia. Credit: "© N. Mediratta/WHO Somalia/2005", with any wording WHO prefers. No sale, advertising or fundraising use.

I would be grateful for written permission, and I am happy to share the draft cover.

Kind regards, Mohamed Ibrahim

6. UNDP Somalia colleague to Somcare, 15 November 2026

Dear Mohamed,

Thanks for your email. Could you please share the photos for which you are seeking permission to reproduce?

Best, Ilyas

7. Somcare to UNDP Somalia colleague, 15 November 2026

Dear Ilyas,

Thank you for your help. Please find attached the four photographs, as they appear in "Somalia's Missing Million" (UNDP Somalia, 2009): 1. Cover photograph (PDF page 1), credited "© N. Mediratta/WHO Somalia/2005"; 2. Page 4 (PDF page 9), credited "© B. Bannon/UNHCR/2008"; 3. Page 15 (PDF page 21), credited "© UNDP"; 4. Page 22 (PDF page 28), credited "© UNDP Somalia".

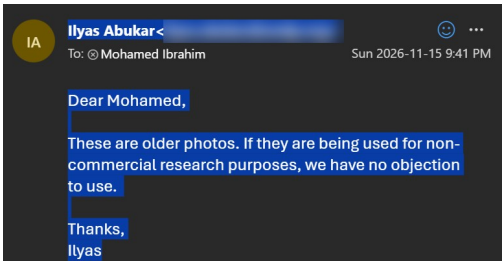
I have also attached a one-page sheet showing each photograph with its credit and proposed use, and a preview of the proposed cover. Each photograph would be reproduced faded, with its original credit, beside a recent photograph of the same theme, to show progress since 2009. The report is non-commercial and will not be used for advertising, fundraising or campaigns.

I understand UNDP can confirm permission for photographs 3 and 4 directly. For photographs 1 and 2, which are credited to WHO and UNHCR, I have submitted a request through WHO's permissions form and would be grateful for any help UNDP can offer in reaching the right contacts at WHO and UNHCR.

A written confirmation by email would be sufficient for our records.

Kind regards, Mohamed Ibrahim

8. UNDP Somalia colleague to Somcare, 15 November 2026, 9.41 pm (screenshot)



Email address obscured.

9. WHO Multimedia Library to Somcare, 16 November 2026

Dear Mohamed Ibrahim,

Regarding the requested image, I'm afraid we are unable to assist. The photograph is not available in our archives, and as it dates to 2005, more than 20 years ago, we have been unable to locate it.

You are welcome to browse the WHO Multimedia Library (multimedia.who.int) for alternative images. If you identify an image you would like to use, you can request permission through our official licensing process by completing the WHO Permission Request Form and including the relevant image Reference ID.

Hope this helps and best regards,

WHO Multimedia Library

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M*Ai* *expanding Somali stories to the world, one star at a time.* *Photo courtesy of the author.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mohamed Ibrahim, also known as **M*Ai***, is a researcher at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne and the founder and director of Somcare. He took part in the 2009 Nairobi workshop that reviewed the original study, and later served Somalia as Minister of Post and Telecommunications. He wrote this report to bring the story of Somalia's diaspora up to date, seventeen years on.

About this report

Somalia's Missing Two Million builds on *Somalia's Missing Million: The Somali Diaspora and Its Role in Development* (UNDP Somalia, 2009), by Sally Healy and Hassan Sheikh. It keeps the look of that report and brings its evidence up to 2026. It is an independent Somcare study and is not a UNDP publication.

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