

# Somali Diaspora Engagement in Austria

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Basic issues: discussion papers on development policies, international cooperation  
and south-north cultural exchange, as well as anti-racist campaigning.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors,  
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# FOREWORD

Highly-committed diaspora collectives and individuals offer assistance to women and families in their communities, organise sporting and cultural events, and support newcomers to Austria. They provide private health care, education and/or other services in their countries of origin, as well as remittances which enable numerous families to survive. In many countries of the Global South, remittances from the diaspora surpass Official Development Assistance (ODA). This is also the case in Somalia.

Diaspora communities make a significant impact on the economic, social and political development of both their countries of origin and residence. Research shows that when the right policies are in place, there is a positive relationship between integration and participation on one hand, and transnational engagement on the other.<sup>1</sup>

Actors from the diaspora however seldom receive the necessary respect and support from policy makers, nor the attention of the public. Furthermore, scant research work is carried out on the transnational engagement and/or integration services provided by diaspora communities in Austria.

To know “your” diaspora is one of the key recommendations made by international migrant organisations such as the IOM (International Organisation for

Migration). As there is minimal knowledge about and/or dialogue with Somali communities - which make up the second largest group from Sub-Saharan Africa in Austria - this report contributes to filling this gap. As many associations and individuals are involved in integration and transnational engagement, this report includes both.

In order to acquire a greater insight into the activities, priorities and needs of these associations, the VIDC asked two experts from the Somali community to conduct the research. This approach led to the inclusion of issues which had not been obvious to “outsiders” and opened additional doors to the interviewed associations and individuals.

We would like to thank our authors, Jamal Mataan and Dr. Suad Mohamed, for their incredible efforts and passionate work, which has been further challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our thanks also go to all the Somali activists and experts who agreed to be interviewed and kindly provided us with information, knowledge and their experience.

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Franz Schmidjell  
VIDC Deputy Director

1 [https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/ICMPD-Website/Integration/ITHACA\\_2015-1\\_AT\\_Report\\_final\\_\\_2\\_.pdf](https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/ICMPD-Website/Integration/ITHACA_2015-1_AT_Report_final__2_.pdf)  
<https://gsdrc.org/publications/migrantsdiaspora-and-integration/>  
[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4\\_7](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4_7)

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, it was estimated that two million Somalis - 12.9 percent of the entire Somali population - were living outside Somalia. Over the past three decades, Somali diasporas have established in many countries around the globe and are renowned for their high level of transnational engagement.

This report focuses on the activities of the Somali diaspora in Austria and its contribution to the integration and development cooperation sector. It looks at the constitution of the Somali diaspora in Austria; from the first wave of migration following the collapse of the Somali state, up to and including recent arrivals to Europe. An estimated 7.100 persons with Somali background<sup>2</sup> currently live in Austria, including 6.703 Somali citizens.

The Somali diaspora has a strong transnational network oriented towards its country of origin, with organisations and individual initiatives acting as bridge builders. Their activities are diverse, and include the provision of financial remittances which exceed development aid. They act as societal agents, sending expertise back to their homeland, and as networkers between the diaspora, institutions and local communities. They work in many sectors: including humanitarian relief during disasters such as drought, floods and war, peacebuilding, conflict reduction, education, health and gender issues.

The Somali diaspora organisations in Austria highlighted in this report are chiefly engaged in integration-related activities; providing newcomers with information, orientation and support to assist their smooth transition to life in Austria. Focus areas include education, health, gender equality, democracy, participation, religion and sports. Women's associations work pre-

dominantly with women and women-specific issues. There are also informal networks, mosques, businesses and individual initiatives.

Engagement in integration and development activities in various sectors is flexible. The Somali diaspora in Austria is diverse; its scope of work is broad and reflects strong and significant engagement both in Austria and in Somalia.

## **This study recommends that for improved cooperation between actors:**

- Diaspora groups in Austria engage more with each other and create a mutual recognition of each other's work. They should seek more exchanges and expertise from established diaspora networks within Austria and the EU;
- Diaspora communities should actively engage other stakeholders in both integration and development cooperation;
- Greater inclusion of youth and women should be pursued;
- Taking ownership of projects and engagements;
- Both countries of origin and residence should recognise and create policies for the diaspora;
- Consultation and dialogue should be opened between stakeholders;
- This report also recommends further research on emerging diaspora groups in Austria, focusing on the issues of gender justice and women's empowerment, entrepreneurship, economic and labour empowerment, democracy and human rights, remittances and the role of religion in both integration and development cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> We are aware of the problematic nature of the term „background“ and use it in a socio-cultural context.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scholars have studied the significance of diaspora groups; although not always agreed upon, there is a consensus that diaspora groups, refugees, migrants and their descendants are increasingly being recognised as development agents.<sup>3</sup> This report examines the Somali diaspora in Austria; its historical formation, associations, and informal networks. It also looks into the motivations behind the Somali diaspora's engagement, and investigates challenges, shortcomings and good practices.

In 2019, Somalis living outside Somalia numbered 2,054,377 - or 12.9 percent of the total Somali population.<sup>4</sup> Somalis in the diaspora are known to have a high level of transnational engagement. Diaspora communities play a crucial role – beside other activities – in integrating “newcomers”, exercising solidarity within their communities and making a significant impact on the economic, social and political development of their country of origin. Frequently, neither their countries of residence, nor of origin, recognise and/or value the engagement of the diaspora.

This research was led by the following questions:

- A) How is the Somali diaspora in Austria constituted?
- B) How, and to what extent, does the Somali diaspora in Austria engage in integration in Austria? What kind of associations exist, and what do they focus on?
- C) How, and to what extent, does the Somali diaspora in Austria support development and relief work, as well as education and awareness-raising in Somalia? What are the motivations and challenges of the Somali diaspora with regard to this? What is the relationship between the diaspora community and development partners? Who provides funds for Somali diaspora engagement?
- D) What are the lessons learned and what kind of recommendations for whom (key actors) can be drawn from these?

### 2.1. Purpose of investigation

This report aims to provide an insight into Somali communities and diaspora engagement in Austria, as well as a better understanding of the complexity of the Somali diaspora's engagement in their country of origin.

The first section provides facts, figures and information about the Somali diaspora, including the educational and professional backgrounds of its members, and gender issues such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

The second section describes Somali community associations; their goals, motivations and priorities; memberships and constitution; their engagement in development, relief, education and awareness-raising in Somalia, and their management and organisation of community activities and services in Austria. It highlights good practice examples, with the aim of enhancing the competence, self-organisation, and capacity of these associations.

Lessons learned will be identified for the improvement and leverage of Somali diaspora engagement. Recommendations will also be elaborated for the relevant stakeholders; including the Somali diaspora, Austrian and Somali public institutions and civil society in both countries.

Members of the Somali diaspora have both conducted this research and written this report, with the objective of contributing to the discussion about Somali communities and diaspora engagement in Austria.

3 Nyberg-Sørensen, N., Van Hear, N., Engberg-Pedersen, P., (2002). The Migration–Development Nexus: Evidence and Policy Options

4 [https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CF\\_Somalia-v.6.pdf](https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CF_Somalia-v.6.pdf)

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Initial research for this report was undertaken online. Secondary data and statistics were obtained from Statistik Austria, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, international migration and development organisations (OIM, SIDA, ITA), as well as estimates from Somali associations.

Additional findings were collected via small-scale empirical research. Eight questionnaire-based discussions were carried out with focus groups comprising two to six association members. Five of these focus groups were conducted face-to-face and three were conducted online via ZOOM. Eight key individuals within the communities were also interviewed: six online and two in person. The ages of those interviewed in both the focus groups and individual interviews ranged from 19-50 years. The focus groups and interviews were conducted with 27 males and 10 women and lasted on average 1.5 hours. Interviews were held in the five federal states (Bundesländer) where the majority of Somalis live: Vienna, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Tirol and Vorarlberg.

Due to limited resources, this report is not exhaustive and does not cover all existing Somali associations in Austria.

Some focus groups and individuals interviewed were previously known to the report's authors, while others were recommended by associations and members of Somali communities. All focus group discussions and interviews were conducted between July and September 2020.

From the outset, the report's authors set out to pro-actively engage and invite women to the interviews.

Based on telephone calls, Somali associations and/or individuals with good practices were selected according to the following criteria:

- Associations are registered in Austria and either led or partly led by members of the Somali community
- Individuals working within the Somali community are widely known for their work in integration and diaspora engagement
- Positive views towards integration and diaspora engagement
- Availability and willingness to take part in the research

### 3.1. Limitations

This is the first report about the Somali diaspora in Austria, therefore it was not possible to compare data. The authors had to rely on interview partners and figures were often estimates. Another limitation was the lack of empirical data from public institutions and Somali embassies in Europe.

The interviews were conducted in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic, which hindered travel to Tirol and Vorarlberg. Conducting focus group and individual interviews required building trust, as many individuals and associations did not understand the purpose of our interest in their activities. As such, it was necessary for the authors to explain their engagement with the Somali community and the activities of the Vienna Institute for Dialogue and Cooperation.

At the beginning, quantitative research was envisioned in order to gather information, however due to the Covid-19 pandemic this was unfeasible. Translating the questionnaire into Somali and creating an opportunity for people to respond online was extremely time-consuming. The second option - to meet potential respondents in person - was also time intensive and contact with many people during a pandemic was undesirable.

There were also barriers which prevented some women from participating. Women who support associations in Upper Austria for example, were unable to come to the focus group discussion because they were working. Women's associations and individuals in Vienna were interested in the research and answering the questions. A grandmother in Vienna asked the researchers to come to her apartment because she was taking care of her grandchildren. In Salzburg, only two women came to the focus group, and the researchers were informed that other women could not participate due to various obligations. The same situation was noted at the Vorarlberg association focus group, where women were few in numbers as most were taking care of their children.

There are also sensitive issues between individuals and associations. Some individuals were of the opinion that the associations are run poorly, do not work effectively, and/or do not speak for them, whereas some associations saw particular individuals as a hindrance to their activities because they work without structures and are critical of their work.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. History of Somali migration

The first wave of Somali migration to Europe began during the colonial era. IN the early twentieth century, Somalis working on British navy merchants' ships took up residency in cities such as Liverpool and Cardiff. After World War II, many soldiers who had fought alongside the British army stayed in Europe, in the UK in particular<sup>5</sup>. During the 1970s and 80s, large numbers of Somalis migrated to the Gulf States in search of work in the oil-rich economies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

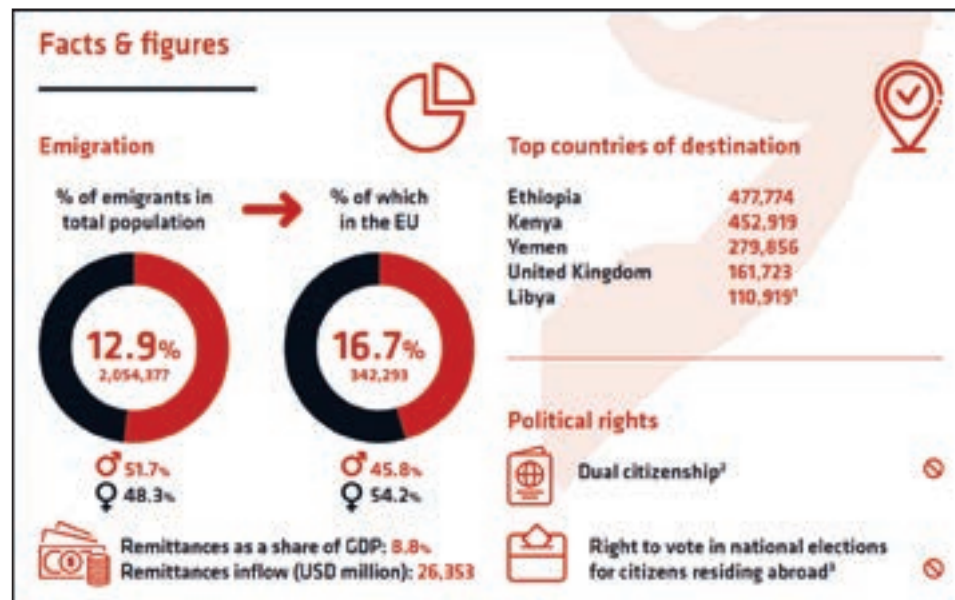
The late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s saw the start of the civil war, along with the collapse of the Somali state and the fall of the Siad Barre government. Over the past three decades, huge numbers of Somalis left their conflict-ravaged country. Many migrated first to the neighbouring countries of Kenya and Ethiopia where international organisations had established centres for refugees; later moving to cities as far away as Minneapolis, Ottawa, and Melbourne. There are now Somali diasporas all around the globe.

Although now reduced in numbers, armed groups still present a serious security threat to Somalia and control large swathes of rural areas. These groups have the capability to carry out large scale attacks, and civilians continue to be subjected to violence, both as deliberate targets and unintended victims.

In the early 1990s and again in 2011, two drought-induced famines claimed over half a million lives. In 2016-

17, another severe drought again put the country at risk of famine. While famine has been averted until now, the drought caused significant losses to livelihoods, and half of the population requires urgent support.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, heavy rains in 2020 adversely affected over 255,200 people across the country and causing widespread internal displacement.<sup>7</sup>

Somalis make up the second highest number of refugees in Africa and the fifth highest in the world, with the majority hosted in Kenya and Ethiopia.<sup>8</sup>



Source: Diaspora for Development<sup>9</sup>

An estimated 342,293 Somali migrants live in the European Union, Norway and Switzerland, constituting 16.7% of the Somali diaspora population.<sup>10</sup> In contrast,

5 ICAR Briefing 2007. The Somali Refugee Community in the UK. London. <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/43583800/icar-briefing-the-somali-refugee-community-in-the-uk>

6 OCHA 2018. Humanitarian Response Plan - July - December 2018, July 2018. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Somalia%20Revised%20HRP%20July%202018-FINAL.pdf>.

7 <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-flash-flooding-update-7-1-june-2020>

8 World Migration Report 2020

9 [https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CF\\_Somalia-v.6.pdf](https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CF_Somalia-v.6.pdf)

10 [https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CF\\_Somalia-v.6.pdf](https://diasporafordevelopment.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CF_Somalia-v.6.pdf)



the United States of America is home to approximately 7% of the world's Somali diaspora population.

As a result of decades of ongoing conflict, young people continue to flee from Somalia. Most often they are drawn to the TAHRIIB model of migration;<sup>11</sup> the crossing of borders, deserts and seas, with hopes for a better future in a country other than Somalia. This type of migration is extremely dangerous, with a high risk of dying from hunger and thirst in the desert, becoming enslaved in detention camps, or drowning while crossing seas.

Somalis in Europe and the USA describe themselves as a diaspora in relation to geography, identity, political mobilisation and activism (van Liempt 2011a; Hammond 2013).

## 4.2. Somali Diaspora in Austria

In comparison to the UK, Italy, the former colonial countries or Sweden (which hosts over 66,000 Somalis), Somali migrants in Austria mainly came as asylum seekers. The first Somalis to migrate to Austria were a few individuals who arrived in the early 1990s after the collapse of the Somali government. This group was primarily from major cities, and many subsequently left Austria for either the UK or Scandinavian countries where there were larger Somali populations. The second group of Somalis to migrate to Austria were predominantly young people who came from all areas of the country. They began to arrive around the year 2000, when the number of Somali asylum seekers rose to 185.<sup>12</sup>

The past two decades have seen a substantial annual increase in the number of applications by asylum seekers from Somalia, with peaks around times of con-

**Table: Applications by Somalis for Asylum from 2000 – 2020**

Year	Applications
2000	185
2001	325
2002	221
2003	191
2004	45
2005	89
2006	183
2007	467
2008	411
2009	344
2010	190
2011	610
2012	481
2013	433
2014	1152
2015	2073
2016	1537
2018	531
2019	740
2020/10	654

Source: Statistik Austria (2020). Asylantraege\_2000 - 2018

flict; such as in 2007-2008 and 2011-2012, and during the EU refugee crisis of 2015. In 2018, the majority of positive asylum decisions were granted to Afghan nationals (4,979), followed by refugees from Syria (4,951), Iran (1,370), Iraq (731) and Somalia (768).<sup>13</sup>

The asylum recognition rate fluctuated between 46 % and 63 % and was 58 % in 2019.<sup>14</sup>

In 2020, the total number of Somali citizens in Austria stood at 6,703. This number does not include naturalised Somali immigrants and unregistered residents. Somalis make up the third largest group of Africans with a migration background in Austria.<sup>15</sup> Females constitute 38.6% of the population (2,590). Males make up 61.4% (4,113). The majority - 3,944 - are aged between 18-34. More than 400 Somalis have been naturalised and now hold Austrian citizenship.<sup>16</sup> In total, the number of Somali citizens together with Somalis holding Austrian citizenship is estimated to be slightly over 7,100 persons.

Austria constitutes a significant settlement country for persons of Somali descent and is by far the largest hub in Central Europe. It is however a relatively

new hub, and the majority of Austria's Somali population was born outside the country. As a result of Austria's policy of dispersing asylum seekers, the Somali community is scattered across the country. Over time however, many Somalis have moved to major cities such as Vienna, Linz, Salzburg and Innsbruck.

11 The Arabic word 'tahriib' is mostly used to refer to the irregular emigration of young Somalis leaving for Europe via Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya, and then across the Mediterranean Sea. <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/57e92d114.pdf>

12 Statistik Austria (2020). Asylantraege\_2000-2018

13 Statistik Austria, BMEIA, OIF (2019). Migration und Integration zahlen.daten.indikatoren 2019

14 <https://www.bmi.gv.at/301/Statistiken/>

15 [https://www.statistik.at/bevoelkerung\\_am\\_1.1.2020\\_nach\\_detaillierter\\_staatsangehoerigkeit\\_und\\_gesch](https://www.statistik.at/bevoelkerung_am_1.1.2020_nach_detaillierter_staatsangehoerigkeit_und_gesch)

16 [https://www.statistik.at/eingebuegerte\\_personen\\_seit\\_2009\\_nach\\_bisheriger\\_staatsangehoerigkeit](https://www.statistik.at/eingebuegerte_personen_seit_2009_nach_bisheriger_staatsangehoerigkeit)

<sup>13</sup> Biffi, G. (2019) Migration and Labour Integration in Austria SOPEMI Report on Labour Migration Austria 2017-18 pg.168

### 4.3. Citizenship, Participation and Integration

According to Statistik Austria 2019, the acquisition of Austrian citizenship by Somali community members has increased, despite Austria having the most restrictive citizenship policy and the lowest naturalisation rates in Western Europe. In 2016, only 1.1% of the non-EU population residing in Austria were naturalised.<sup>17</sup> Naturalisation policies are highly regulated, and access to citizenship requires ten years of uninterrupted residency, or six years for those who are exceptionally well integrated.

The requirements for language proficiency and income, as well as the cost of the naturalisation process, are among the most difficult and expensive in Europe (MIPEX 2015). It should also be noted that it is predominantly long-term migrants from non-EU and low to medium-developed countries who acquire citizenship, either through family reunification or international protection programs (MIPEX 2015).<sup>18</sup>

A new legislation on integration - the *Integration Act* - which also affects the Somali diaspora was adopted in 2017. A complementary *Integration Year Act* for refugees was based on the principles of activation and participation, and the recognition that the state has the obligation to offer opportunities, and in turn, to request the cooperation and participation of refugees in various activities, such as German courses and values-based seminars.

The *Integration Year Act* focused on refugees and asylum seekers with greater chances of being granted asylum in Austria, encouraging them to volunteer at charitable institutions and undertake non-profit community work. This helped the newcomers to practice “work” and understand the system, as well as to communicate with the host society in order to facilitate better integration and future employability. In 2018, the budget for this *Integration Year* was reduced. Since then, integration is increasingly viewed as the obligation of refugees, rather than of the Austrian host society. The reduction of the integration year budget and its complementary employment and social integration programs has made a significant impact on the possi-

bility for the rapid and facilitated integration of new migrants and refugees.

Austria’s Somali community is strongly oriented towards religion. Prof. Filzmaier’s study on Muslim groups in Austria - which includes refugees, immigrants and Austrian-born Muslims - shows that Somali refugees in particular (69%), claim to be very religious, taking prayers, marriage, and the role of Islam in society extremely seriously.<sup>19</sup>

In 2015, after three years of public debate and input from various Muslim associations, Austria adopted the “Islam law”. This law ensures the right to practice one’s religion, and specifies the rights and duties of different Muslim groups. It gives guidelines on registering Islamic religious associations, the education of imams, teachings, institutions and customs, which must not contradict Austrian law. Religious entities must also hold a positive attitude towards society and the Austrian state. Foreign financing within religious associations is prohibited and all funding should be acquired from within the country, however one-time foreign financing is permitted, in particular in relation to inheritance issues.

### 4.4. Organisation of the Somali Diaspora

Over the past decade, Somalis in Austria have connected both formally and informally through various associations and initiatives. It is difficult to provide an exact number of Somali diaspora organisations in Austria due to their often informal and voluntary nature, however this is common in many migrant communities.<sup>20</sup> Somali organisations in Austria are organised on a voluntary basis, along ethnic and linguistic lines, social and/or religious affinities, economic or gender-related concerns, and/or sports. This report includes descriptions of the activities of a total of ten registered associations and eight individuals.

The Somali community in Austria is a relatively new and emerging diaspora, with a large proportion of young people. Diaspora members are active both through voluntary work in various established Austrian organisations, as well as through formalised refugee

17 Caritas Austria 2019, Migration and Development in Austria, Katerina Kratzmann and Katharina Hartl, pg 37

18 Migrant Integration Policy Index | MIPEX 2015

19 Filzmaier, P., Perlot, P. (2017). Muslimische Gruppen in Österreich Einstellungen von Flüchtlingen, ZuwanderInnen und in Österreich geborenen MuslimInnen im Vergleich.pg22

20 Caritas Austria 2019, Migration and Development in Austria, Katerina Kratzmann and Katharina Hartl, pg.24

aid, providing translation services for legal aid organisations, hospitals, education institutions and authorities.

Somali community integration engagement is multi-layered. Individual approaches may include learning the language, participation in the labour market, and acquiring skills. Other approaches to integration are facilitated by Somali associations, often with the assistance of established organisations or authorities such as Diakonie, Caritas, Red Cross, ÖIF, MA17, and others.

Since 2007, Somalis have established cultural associations, networking groups and initiatives that engage in education, health, gender-specific topics, charity work, religious and cultural traditions, sports, and development work in Somalia. The women's associations focus mainly on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), domestic violence and on supporting the empowerment of women and single-mother households. The second chapter explores further these associations and their scope of work.

## 4.5. Employment and Labour

Somali diaspora community engagement in the Austrian labour market has not been studied in depth. Employment opportunities and access to the labour market in Austria is dependent on immigration status. Most foreign labour is from Europe (89%), with only 1.3% coming from African countries.<sup>21</sup> Interviews conducted with the Somali community management board in the city of Linz observed that the majority of those without access to the labour market do not have legal immigration status. Somali asylum seekers who have arrived since 2015 and whose cases have not yet been decided, are generally not permitted to work. Exceptions may be made however in some restricted sectors, such as harvest work on farms. Somalis who are either recognised refugees or who hold subsidiary protection have unrestricted access to the labour market in Austria.

A significant number of Somali diaspora community members in Austria work in sectors dependent on low-skilled labour; such as support services, the accommodation and food sectors, the postal service, logistics and packet delivery, manufacturing and tourism. Interlocutors across Austria noted that a small number of community members have participated in vocational training to acquire skills necessary for employment, while only a few individuals work in highly-skilled positions.

Somalis in Austria have a high level of unemployment, particularly in eastern Austria, including Vienna. In western Austria (Tirol and Vorarlberg), interlocutors noted that informal networks have assisted many Somali men and women to find long-term employment, and as a result, many young people have moved to those areas. The *Somalisches Kulturzentrum Oberösterreich* observed that the majority of young people in Upper Austria are employed. During the Covid-19 pandemic, several members of the Somali community in Vienna moved to Upper Austria, in particular to the capital, Linz, seeking job opportunities.

Somalis in the diaspora are known to be entrepreneurial. Many have set up their own businesses in Austria, including a number of retail shops selling products from Africa and the Middle East, as well as snack restaurants in several Austrian cities. In the transportation sector, an increasing number of young and middle-aged Somali men obtaining taxi licenses can also be observed.

The high levels of unemployment are partially due to the fact that the education and careers of the majority of Somalis were interrupted by the prolonged conflict in their homeland. Specific, context-related issues such as migration status, education and skill levels, health, language proficiency, and a lack of information about the labour market also impact on their chances of finding employment.

Somalis in Austria depend on small, weak networks with limited capacity to find gainful employment. Unemployment is relatively high among women, due to the fact that female refugees face a number of mutually-influencing obstacles. Their education levels and/or their competencies are generally insufficiently recorded and recognised, meaning that they are frequently under-qualified to take up employment opportunities. Additionally, their integration into the labour market is often hindered by negative stereotyping and discrimination.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, many Somali migrants in Austria contribute to the wider society in a variety of ways: as employees (both employed and self-employed), as taxpayers and as social insurance contributors, as well as being consumers.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pg21

<sup>22</sup> Biffi, Gudrun et al (2019). Einstellung, Erwartungen und Ressourcen weiblicher Flüchtlinge  
Grundlagenstudie zu den tatsächlich wahrnehmbaren Möglichkeiten von Frauen mit Fluchterfahrung.

## 4.6. Gender and FGM (Female Genital Mutilation)

The situation for women in Somalia is extremely difficult. The government remains unable to provide security to its citizens, and for women in particular, this is one of their biggest challenges. But women are not only victims. Since the collapse of the government in 1991, Somali women have been actively engaged in supporting peace initiatives and acting as agents of change.

After more than 20 years of conflict however, women's traditional responsibilities and gender roles have been continually stretched to meet changing social, domestic and economic demands. As a result, women have more responsibilities than ever before - with 66% of households now headed by women.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, this increase in domestic responsibilities has not translated into an increase in their influence at decision-making tables and women hold only 38 of the 275 seats in the Somali parliament.<sup>24</sup> The lack of access to labour, agricultural production, education, health services and employment has also served to further disempower the female population.<sup>25</sup>

An additional difficulty facing women in Somalia is that traditional or customary laws frequently take precedence over the state judicial system. This has led to a lack of justice - in particular with regards to sexual and gender-based violence - which in turn leads to cases not being reported. Cultural practices such as early marriages and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) continue to hinder gender equality.<sup>26</sup>

FGM also affects Somali women living in Austria. Also known as female circumcision, FGM refers to surgical procedures carried out on the female genitals. These operations are not performed for therapeutic reasons, but are rather traditional and cultural practices. It is estimated that around 6,000 to 8,000 women with FGM live in Austria, with most coming from Somalia, Egypt, Sudan, and Guinea.<sup>27</sup>

Under Austrian criminal law, FGM is a criminal offence and classified as Intentional Bodily Injury with serious permanent implications. Sentences for violators range from six months to five years imprisonment. FGM is a damaging form of child abuse, and affected girls and women can develop serious health problems. The target group for prevention are people working with girls in kindergartens, schools, after-school care and/or in leisure activities. Women from the Somali community run workshops on the prevention of FGM and provide information on ways to effectively combat the spreading of the practice, as well as promoting discussion of the issue.

The Women's health centre *FEM Süd* has run short-term projects within Austria's Somali community, aimed at breaking the taboo surrounding FGM and promoting the development of expertise in dealing with the issue.

A number of other awareness-raising initiatives have also been undertaken in order to educate both Somalis and their Austrian hosts about FGM and related health concerns. These campaigns - along with Austria's strict ban on the practice - have led to a shift in mentality within the community.

## 4.7. Diaspora engagement in cooperation with Somalia

The global Somali diaspora has established a strong network oriented towards its country of origin. Diaspora activities are diverse, with organisations and individual initiatives acting as bridge builders and transnational agents. The annual Global Somali Diaspora (GSD) Conference brings together diaspora activists from around the world, as well as representatives of the Somali government.

Financial remittances comprise a significant component of the Somali diaspora's engagement. These remittances are estimated at between \$USD1.3-2 billion annually, a figure which dwarfs the amount of development aid sent to Somalia. The country's total GDP is estimated to be USD 6 billion.

Around 40% of households in Somalia receive remittances directly.<sup>28</sup> The majority of beneficiaries live in urban areas, although some recipients send this money further into rural areas. During the 2017 drought crisis, the coordinated response by the diaspora in sending

23 UNFPA Somalia (2016). Population Estimation Survey 2014, Analytical Report Vol. 2

24 Inter Parliamentary Union. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

25 UNFPA Somalia (2016). Population Estimation Survey 2014, Analytical Report Vol. 2

26 Gender in Somalia, UNDP Brief II, pg.3 <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Gender%20in%20Somalia%20Brief%202.pdf>

27 <https://stadtwiengfm.clickandlearn.at/Modul1/>

28 <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2020/04/07/remittances-affect-the-somali-covid-19-response/>

humanitarian assistance to family members and other vulnerable people was essential for the survival of those affected.

Remittances are used to access credit, support entrepreneurship, repay debts, make business investments and cover household expenses. The diaspora also contributes financially to the private healthcare sector. Some remittances may have funded conflict activities in the past, however precise data is difficult to obtain.<sup>29</sup>

Remittances are also used to cover educational costs such as school fees, as well as being used to fund communal initiatives such as drilling water wells.

Most people interviewed were uncomfortable discussing either the amount of private remittances they send to Somalia, or the identity of the beneficiaries. As such, it is difficult to know the level of remittances sent from Austria to Somalia.

Publicly-available data shows the outflow of total remittances from Austria was 390 million euros in 2010, an amount which increased to 583 million euros in 2017.<sup>30</sup> As the majority of migrants to Austria come from other EU countries and the Balkan region, remittances mainly flow to these countries. A total of 40%

of outgoing remittances from Austria are sent to Third World countries. Of the African nations, Nigeria and Egypt received the greatest share of this amount.<sup>31</sup>

Professionals from the diaspora also engage as societal agents; sending expertise and acting as networkers between the diaspora, institutions and the local communities. They work in the humanitarian relief and livelihood sectors, as well as in the areas of peacebuilding and conflict reduction, education, health and gender equality. The diaspora has also established schools and health centres in Somalia, and some individuals are working in the Somali government.

None of the diaspora representatives interviewed receive support from Austrian development institutions. Although diaspora engagement is highlighted in various documents, including the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* with the *17 Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), the Austrian *Three Year Program* and the *Focus Paper on Migration and Development* by the Austrian Development Agency (see Annex 2), there remains a significant gap in terms of the implementation of diaspora cooperation programs.

29 UNDP Somalia. Hammond, L., Awad, M., Dagane, A., Hansen, P., Horst, C., Menkhaus, K.. Cash and compassion: The role of the Somali diaspora in relief, development and peace-building, Nairobi

30 Caritas Austria 2019, Migration and Development in Austria, Katerina Kratzmann and Katharina Hartl, pg26

31 Caritas Austria 2019, Migration and Development in Austria, Katerina Kratzmann and Katharina Hartl, pg26

## 5. SOMALI DIASPORA ASSOCIATIONS IN AUSTRIA

*Somali community engagement in Austria is organised both formally and informally. Following are examples of a diverse range of initiatives carried out by diaspora associations/ organisations and individuals.*



### Österreichisch-Somalischer Kultur- und Sportverein

Established in 2007, this is one of the oldest Somali organisations in Austria and has the largest number of members. The association's founders wanted to create a meeting place where Somalis could connect with each other, celebrate together and share information and advice. There are now over 300 active members. The association centre is located in Vienna's 15th district and has a prayer room, multipurpose hall, snack bar and offices. There was a suspected arson attack on the centre in May 2020, and the investigation is ongoing. The centre is currently being rebuilt.

#### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The association is registered in Vienna, Austria, and is run by a chairperson, two deputies (a man and a woman), a secretary and a cashier. All work on a voluntary basis. There is an internal election every two years.

#### PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

The centre offers German/Somali language courses and has published a Somali-German language textbook with pictures, words and phrases to help migrants learn German. The centre gives advice on issues of concern to refugees and migrants, and organises sporting events and religious celebrations (such as for Ramadan Iftar and Eid). The association also supports members who have financial or other difficulties, assists with the organisation of funerals, and participates in cultural



exchanges, such as the Wasserfest event organised by Fair-play 1150, Vienna. The association has an agreement with the snack bar that members' food is subsidised, and in case of financial problems members can eat and pay at a later date, with the association taking responsibility. Youths have a space to meet and play games.

The association also collects donations to provide emergency relief during drought and flooding in Somalia. "We see our work within the community as essential work for their wellbeing in Austria". (Muhammed Harawe - Association Chairman)

#### FUNDING

All funds come from membership fees and the association receives no government or integration funding. The association's challenges are primarily a lack of financial resources, as well as a lack of expertise in relation to the conceptualisation of project ideas and writing proposals based on existing needs.

According to the board members interviewed, along with the two arson attacks on the centre, an intimidating letter had been sent to one of their members. "We find the media debates should not encourage the bashing of migrants as this leads to the polarisation of society." (Muhammed Harawe - Association Chairman)

**Contact:** somkulturverein@gmail.com

<https://www.facebook.com/osterreichisch.somalischerkulturverein.7>



## Wadajir Somalischer Frauenverein

The *Wadajir Somalischer Frauenverein* is a Vienna-based women's association. Although it was only registered in 2019, the organisation has been active since February 2018. It is important to note that one of the founders has been working with integration in the community with different organisations in Vienna since 2012. The association aims to provide women and girls with vital assistance in the integration process in Austria.

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Asha Osman is the chairperson of the *Wadajir Somalischer Frauenverein*, Sudi Mohamed is the general secretary, and Fouziya Abdullahi Dirie is the cashier. The association has 80 women members.

### PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

The association runs a variety of projects: including the provision of translation and support, advice on issues relating to family, legal protection, single parents and female victims of domestic violence, as well as assisting with interventions in schools, in particular between teachers and parents. The association also offers informal assistance and information on opportunities for job seekers. The *Wadajir Compass* project reaches 56 members, providing current information on apprenticeships, vocational training and educational opportunities to young women between the ages of 18 to 25. The association also encourages women in this age group to complete secondary school certificates (Hauptschulabschluss). The association's team communicate daily with members, sharing information via a WhatsApp group.

The association also provides humanitarian assistance. In 2019, members collected money for Somalis displaced by the Beledweyne flood, and during the Covid-19 pandemic they held an appeal for a kidney patient in a Mogadishu hospital. The association also provides



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information about Covid-19 in the Somali language via their WhatsApp group.

The *Wadajir Somalischer Frauenverein's* strength is its ability to reach community members quickly and provide assistance when required. They also understand the culture and different aspects of problems faced by women in the Somali community.

### FUNDING

The *Wadajir Somalischer Frauenverein* is challenged by a lack of financial and technical resources. They have no permanent office and the *Somalischer Frauen Café* initiative meeting space is provided by the MA17. The board and members work on a voluntary basis and the association is funded by members who pay an annual membership fee. Donations for humanitarian relief assistance projects are also collected from members and friends.

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<https://www.facebook.com/wadajir.verein>



## BEITU-SALAMA Mosque

Beitu Salama is both a mosque and a resource centre for members of the Somali community based in Vienna.

Established in 2015 by Abdirashid Hussein Mohamed, Mulki Warsame and friends, *Beitu Salama* acts as an information centre for members. The founders were motivated by their personal experiences being unable to find help and support in their native language on their arrival in Austria. There are over 200 members, and both men and women can use the centre. The centre is used for prayer, teaching Somali, German and Arabic, as well as for celebrating religious festivals such as Ramadan Iftar and Eid. The centre also provides informal accompaniment and translation services for members, as well as help with finding accommodation and jobs. It also conducts funerals for members.

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Dayib Ali Farah is the chairman, and is assisted by Mulki Warsame and Abdirashid Hussein Mohamed. The members elect their board every two years. All work on a voluntary basis.

“The centre would like to offer German courses for members whose prospects for learning German formally is difficult, due to their age and lack of prior education. We need to find how this language project can work.” (Abdirashid Hussein Mohamed - Founder)

### FUNDING

The centre is funded by membership fees and donations. There is currently no government or other source of funding.

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## Somalische Frauen Beratungsinitiative

The *Somalische Frauen Beratungsinitiative* is a Somali women’s association located in the Macondo settlement in Vienna’s 11<sup>th</sup> district. The association was founded by Rahma Ahmed Jimale, Fatuma Hersi, Sadio Mohamed and friends.

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Rahma Ahmed Jimale is the chairperson of the *Somalische Frauen Beratungsinitiative* and has been working with the Somali diaspora in Vienna for the past decade. Fatima Hersi is the general secretary. The organisation has 100 women members and supports women and families during their integration process in Austria.

### PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

The association provides translation services and support in finding legal advice, schools and with various social issues. They also provide health awareness workshops to women and organise annual festivals in the Macondo settlement.

In 2019, the association teamed up with Diakonie and collected money to provide assistance to persons displaced by the Beledweyne flood.

“When you see kids on roofs and houses washed away by floods, you can’t leave people like that. You have to help.” (Rahma Ahmed Jimale)

During 2020, the organisation has helped Diakonie and Somali youth organisations to increase awareness of Covid-19 in the Somali language. Members have also offered to buy groceries for Somali community members in the 11th district if they become sick from the virus.

The key strengths of the *Somalische Frauen Beratungsinitiative* are its ability to reach the Somali community and understand its language and needs, as well as to bring the community together through activities and celebrations.





© Diakonie

The *Somalische Frauen Beratungsinitiative* faces a lack of financial and technical expertise, and has no permanent office.

### FUNDING

The association is funded by its members. The board and all members work on a volunteer basis. Donations for the purposes of humanitarian relief are also collected from members and friends.

**Contact:** [Fsomalisch@gmail.com](mailto:Fsomalisch@gmail.com)

<https://www.facebook.com/Somalische-Frauen-Beratung-Initiative-109846010520398/>



## Garasaid – Development Aid for Somalis

The *Garasaid - Development Aid for Somalis* project was registered as an official association in early 2016.

There are no state schools or educational subsidies in Somali, so schooling must be paid for privately. The *Garasaid* project provides financial assistance to the children of single parents, who would otherwise be unable attend school. The association began by supporting seven children - three girls and four boys - between the ages of 10-19, paying not only for their school fees, but also for necessities such as school materials and snacks. The association collected small amounts from members, as well as contributions from friends and family members. According to *Garasaid* founder Abdiwahab Adan, “this is not much by European standards, but in Somalia we were able to improve the lives of many children in a sustainable way.”

In 2018, the association expanded its activities significantly. By the end of the 2018 school year, *Garasaid* had successfully financed school fees and materials for a total of 28 students. Currently, *Garasaid* supports 71 students in four regions (Mogadishu, Baidoa, Afgooye and Xudur) including internally-displaced children in southern and central Somalia. This project has also helped schools and teachers in these areas through an increase in student enrolment.

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Abdiwahab Adan is the founder and chairperson of *Garasaid*, and runs the association together with other students/co-founders in Austria. Students in Turkey and Somalia were also involved in founding the organisation. According to Mr. Adan, one advantage of the project is that several founding members are present on location, meaning the association is in constant contact with children and parents.



## FUNDING

This project is financed by private donations, general donations, and membership fees. The association organises information evenings to solicit donations and also sells traditional Somali food at events such as Christmas markets. Abdiwahab Adan says that “funding is a challenge, as there are a large number of families who approach the project and we have to turn them down. It is also challenging with our local partners who are volunteers and we are unable to pay them a salary for their work”. *Garasaid* projects receive no funding from development partners, institutions or governments.

**Contact.** [info@garasaid.org](mailto:info@garasaid.org)  
<http://www.garasaid.org>



## Somalisches Kulturzentrum Oberösterreich



In 2012, a group of Somalis in Linz attempted to establish a centre for their small community. Several initiatives were proposed over the years but were not realised. The number of Somali migrants increased between 2015 and 2019, and with this increase, integration initiatives were carried out informally by individuals. An estimated 600 Somalis now live in Upper Austria.

Finally in 2019, the Somali community in Linz opened an association centre with a prayer room, as well as an office, kitchen and entertainment room. The aim is to give the community a place to congregare and find solutions to the problems they face as newcomers to Austria. Community members are primarily youths, as well as several families.

### Projects

The centre is a place to share information, seek help, orientation and empowerment, learn the Somali language, get assistance with organising funerals and participate in sporting activities. Association members have taken part in several sports integration events in Vienna and Linz.

### Organisational structure

The organisation is run by a six-member board. Abdillahi and Mustafa Gacuuro manage the centre. The space is open to everyone in the community, including to both paying and non-paying members.

### Funding

The association is voluntarily funded. Members pay whatever they can, and some community members have pledged support in case of financial difficulties. The centre receives no government subsidies or funding from any other integration or government institutions. The association is seeking sponsors for its sporting initiatives.

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## Somalischer Kulturverein Salzburg

Somalischer Kulturverein Salzburg is a Somali cultural centre which also acts as a mosque. The centre was established by friends who saw the need for a communal space and acts as a meeting point for Somali community members in Salzburg.

“It was difficult to establish our own centre. We used to pray and meet in another community space, but due to the space being inadequate for our needs and the difficulty of organising meeting times, we ended up registering our association and finding a rental space.”

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The board of the association and mosque works on voluntary basis and changes every two years. Ketsane Abdiaziz Kosar is the chairperson, Ahmed Dahir is vice-chair and Ali fulfils the role of cashier. There is also a secretary and a spokesperson. The association is registered under the umbrella organisation of the Islamic Religious Authority of Austria (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich - IGGÖ).

### PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

The centre provides a neutral space for all community members within the province of Salzburg, as well as organising religious celebrations for Iftar and Eid. It is also a resource centre for members, which aims to help local Somalis find their way and integrate in their new home. Information on legal and immigration status, housing, jobs, and other integration possibilities in the province is shared, as well as advice on schools and other educational options, including sending members to school directors or the appropriate organisations for guidance. The centre also provides information on refugee and/or migrant organisations which can help during crises, as well as an informal translation service for members.

“Since the beginning of 2020, we have created a youth group that works closely with our board. As we

have significant numbers of youth members, this group is tasked with looking at matters of concern to youths; organising sporting activities for both males and females (including swimming), workshops on the issue of FGM, and finding apprenticeships and training opportunities. Youths are asked to bring proposals outlining their needs to board meetings. Due to disruption during the Corona pandemic, this new youth initiative will need time to materialise.”

### FUNDING

The centre receives no financial assistance from the Austrian government or other institutions and is run using membership fees and donations from members.

**Contact:** somalischekulturverein@gmx.at



## Somalisch-Österreichischer Partnerschaftsverein

The Somalisch-Österreichischer Partnerschaftsverein in Salzburg facilitates intercultural exchange between Somalis and Austrians. Partnerships are on a human level, based on mutual respect, interdependence, food and culture. Somali migrants/refugees create a program and invite the Austrian community, and the Austrians then reciprocate and invite the Somalis.

This cultural exchange also includes visits to museums, such as the Salzburger Freilichtmuseum, and the program helps to develop and improve relations between newcomers and the Austrian host community.

### ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The organisation is run by a four-member board which includes both Austrians and Somalis. Abdullahi Ahmed Osman is the chairperson and Monika Brunner is the vice chairperson.

### PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

*TalkTogether - Zeitung von und für MigrantInnen und Nicht-MigrantInnen.* The magazine *Talk Together* has been published quarterly since 2003 and reports on current and historical social and political topics from Austria and around the world. *Talk Together* aims to encourage discussion and communication between people of different origins and offers contributors the opportunity to publish their thoughts and concerns. The publication is anti-fascist, anti-war and anti-racism. Primary themes include workers' movements, refugees, women's history, international affairs, arts and culture, migration, Austria, political prisoners, society, philosophy, environment, health and the economy. *Talk Together* is a non-profit organisation which aims to create spaces for partnership-based communication and cultural exchange independent of consumer pressure.

The magazine's production is run by a board, with Abdullahi A. Osman as chairman (Obmann), and Beate

Wernegger and Elke-Marie Calic as members. Abdullahi Osman is the author of two books written in Somali and German which bring the Somali experience - with its traditional and modern complexities - to life.

"I wanted to give readers of Somali language a taste of their native language, because of our long tradition in poetry, theatre and songs, and my non-Somali readers a taste of Somali cultural life both old and modern." (Abdullahi Osman)

### FUNDING

*Talk Together's* work is co-funded by the Austrian Press Subsidy of the Federal Chancellery of Austria. The association's intercultural work and the Culture Café is partially funded by the City of Salzburg.

Abdullahi Osman's book writing activities are not funded by any institutions.

**Contact:** [www.talktogether.org](http://www.talktogether.org)

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/talktogether.salzburg/>



## Somalisches Kulturzentrum Tirol

The Somalisches Kulturzentrum Tirol is a registered association, active since 2013. It was established by a group of friends, who started the centre as a prayer room. The association centre is also used to celebrate religious festivals, as well as providing a meeting point for Somali community members where they can share information and play table games.

“We were motivated to create a space where Somali people can meet and even conduct funerals. During Covid-19 members of the community became infected after coming into contact with an infected person. We were able to help the city to contact trace the individuals and to ask them to get tested.”

### ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

The association is run by six people: including a chairperson, secretary, and cashier, all with deputies.

Mohamed Hirsi Jama is the chairperson and Ismail Farah the secretary

### FUNDING

The centre receives funding from its 47 active members, as well as donations from other community members who do not pay monthly membership fees.

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<https://g.co/kgs/Mmvndd>

## Somalischer Kulturverein Vorarlberg

The Somali association in Vorarlberg was initiated by two friends, who collaborated with other individuals in the community to establish a centre. This centre is a meeting point for community members; with a prayer hall - also used as a multi-purpose hall - and offices. The association has over 300 members, but only 70 active members pay fees. It also functions as an information centre, where newcomers can find information informally about legal matters and job opportunities. The centre also invites families to join events, such as Iftar and Eid celebrations.

### ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

The association has a two-tier board; one runs the centre and the other represents community members in different cities in Vorarlberg (Bludenz, Feldkirch, Bregenz, Dornbirn). Altogether there are 20 members.

### FUNDING

The association is funded by membership fees and receives no government funding or subsidies.

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<https://www.facebook.com/Somalisches-Zentrum-f%C3%BCr-Integration-und-Kultur-in-VBG-104604317647081>

## 6. ENGAGED INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITY ROLE MODELS



### Dr. Hassan Ibrahim (Vienna)

Dr. Ibrahim is a medical doctor, community organiser and translator. He was among the first Somalis to come to Austria in the early 1990s, and helped establish the first Somali association reg-

istered in Austria. As a gynaecologist and obstetrician by profession, Dr. Ibrahim works with women's organisations dealing with the complex issue of female genital mutilation (FGM) during pregnancy, as well as helping to prepare women to give birth and advising their midwives. Close to 95% of women who have come to Austria from Somalia have undergone FGM. Dr. Ibrahim also gives lectures and workshops on female genital mutilation and reproductive health.

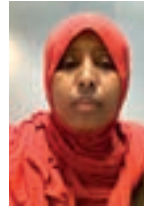


### Rawda Mohamud (Vienna)

Rawda Mohamud teaches Somali and Arabic languages in a public school in Vienna. She works at the Sprachförderzentrum Wien - a department of the Directorate of Education in Vienna

- which is responsible for the management of the Pedagogical Service. The work of the Sprachförderzentrum is based on a responsible approach to multilingualism and cultural diversity. Ms Mohamud helps children learn their native language, supports parents to get better access to education for their children in Austria, and empowers children by improving their self-confidence to enable them to overcome barriers at school and in society. Ms Mohamud also helped to establish the first Somali-language book collection in Vienna at the Simmering Educational Centre library. Previously she was chairperson of the women's association, *Hooyo*.

"During Covid-19 it was difficult to locate some parents and their children, as there was a lockdown and teachers lost contact with some children. The schools contacted me and I was able to speak informally to several parents and inform them about help from the schools, and that in cases where people don't have laptops for their children's schoolwork, the schools will provide them so that their children can continue with education." (Rawda Mohamud)



### Fadumo Zahra Ahmed Rashid (Vienna)

Fadumo Rashid is a family coach and works in cooperation with the child protection authorities. Ms Rashid assists diaspora families in distress, in particular

those who are at risk of having their children taken into state protection. She mediates between the child protection authorities and families in order to create mutual understanding for the benefit of the children. Ms Rashid also advises families on how to find courses or employment through the labour market service (AMS), as well as affordable housing, either through the municipal housing scheme or other reliable housing providers. Fatuma works on a voluntary basis.



### Tajir Abdullahi (Vienna)

Mr Abdullahi is an author who has written two books to help Somali community members and children with no prior knowledge of other languages (such as English, French or Arabic) to

learn German. Mr Abdullahi's books assist learners by using Somali as reference. Currently he is working on books that will cover several levels of German (A1-B2). Mr Abdullahi is very resourceful and contributes to the overall integration of the Somali community.



### Fatima Jamaa (Vienna)

Ms. Jamaa is a student at the University of Vienna, as well as a certified conflict mediator and counsellor on the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM). She is also an accredited youth counsellor.

Ms. Jamaa speaks five languages fluently and has worked as an interpreter for the Somali community in Vienna. She also presents an annual speech about the Somali community at the MA17 (Vienna City Municipal Office for Integration and Diversity). Both governmental and non-governmental officials frequently use her lectures as a source of reference, thereby improving their understanding of the Somali community.



### Hamdi Hassan (Vienna)

Ms. Hassan is Somali freelance journalist and interpreter. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Ms Hassan has broadcast information to Vienna's Somali and Arabic-speaking communities via Radio Orange, as well as translating guidelines and regulations relating to Covid-19 and other topics.



### Abdulrahim Ahmed (Vienna)

Abdulrahim Ahmed is a community organizer and refugee counsellor who has experience in working with refugee and asylum seekers in Yemen, and Austria. He has worked with humanitarian organizations for more than 9 years. He speaks Somalia English, Arabic and German languages. He works as a translator since 2016 for different non-profit organizations.

Abdulrahim Ahmed has experience in legal and social communal interpreting within the Somali community. He worked with the Deserteurs- und Flüchtlingsberatung, Diakonie and UNHCR. Now he is assigned at the Caritas and the Federal Administrative Court of Austria. He has also translated leaflets by UNHCR on the Austrian asylum procedures in Somali.

Mr. Ahmed trains youth workers and assists unaccompanied minors who are waiting for decisions on their asylum applications and/or looking for a family to live with. Mr. Ahmed supports two groups of young adults. One group comprises youths aged between 18-21, who he helps to find language centres, university places and/or scholarships. The second consists of adults over the age of 21, who receive assistance with translating documents and visits to hospitals and/or government institutions.



### Zaynab Hirsi (Tirol)

Ms. Hirsi trained as a nurse in Somalia and Jordan and has lived in Tirol since 2008. From 2009 - 2013 she worked as a volunteer in a hospital in Tirol and later as a medical assistant. Zaynab Hirsi actively engages with the Somali community on integration issues, especially with women, offering services as a translator and providing emotional support for female refugees. Ms. Hirsi has worked with different organizations like Zentrum für interkulturelle Psychotherapie in Tirol (NKYRA), Frauen helfen Frauen, Dowa für Frauen,

Refugee Midwifery Services (RMS). She accompanied refugee women through pregnancy, in particular when there are complications within the Somali community.

Zaynab Hirsi also works with the Red Cross as an advisor counsellor on issues of gender-based violence by giving community members advice, support, workshops, gymnastics for women as well as referrals to established organizations where members of the community get legal aid. Zaynab also advises parents, especially those with special needs children. She assists with raising and educating children and finding support for such cases.

"It is a moral obligation from those of us who can help people in need." (Zaynab Hirsi)



### Ahmed Mahamud (Tirol)

Mr Mahamud came to Tirol in 2012 and works with the Red Cross in Innsbruck.

Between 2012-2015 there were very few Somalis in Tirol and most of them were living in asylum seekers shelters and had no immigration status that allowed them to work or engage in organizing community and events. After 2015, community support became important due to the influx of Somali in Tirol and their specific needs. Ahmed is part of a group of friends who work informally to assist the community.

Complementing his work at the Red Cross, Ahmed and his friends established a voluntary group in Innsbruck that shares information on where to find legal aid, German courses, jobs, family reunion and other migrants or refugee issues. They organise religious, cultural and sport events and have sent football teams to Munich, Vienna, and Norway to represent the Somali community in Tirol. They have created WhatsApp group for the purpose of disseminating information to over 80 people, especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic. It is an informal network within the Somali community in Tirol.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This research has shown that the Somali diaspora in Austria has increased rapidly over the past decade, with an estimated 7,100 persons currently living in Austria. The interviews highlighted that Somali diaspora associations are primarily engaged in integration-related activities; providing newcomers with information, orientation and assistance to enable their smooth transition into life in Austria, as well as support in cases of difficulties. Other association activities include providing guidance on issues of education, health, gender, democracy and participation, as well as the collecting of funds for disaster relief. Women's associations work predominantly with women and women-specific topics. There are also informal networks, mosques, businesses and individual initiatives.

Diaspora engagement in integration and development activities is flexible and diverse: reflecting strong engagement in Austria, and simultaneously a substantial engagement in Somalia. The research found that individual diaspora members tend to support development activities in their country of origin through the sending of remittances to their families, while diaspora

associations support small community-based activities such as education, health, gender, democracy and participation, as well as the provision of humanitarian relief at times of natural disasters.

This report also highlighted that diaspora community members carry out important work, and this is reflected by the large number of registered associations and active individuals across Austria. The research found the majority of these associations are funded primarily through donations and membership fees and do not receive funding from government institutions. Additionally, this research found that a substantial number of mosques and prayer spaces are simultaneously used by organisations as resource centres and meeting places for community members. Board members emphasised the difficulties of running associations on a voluntary basis with meagre funds. Both individuals and associations however expressed their moral motivations to engage in these activities, and see their strengths - in relation to Austrian integration institutions - in their understanding of the complexities, especially the cultural context, of Somali diaspora groups in Austria.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendations for associations and individuals**

Associations and individuals within Austria's Somali diaspora should connect with each other in order to create mutual recognition of each other's work, share their expertise and experiences, and to establish modalities for cooperation. This should lead to them working together on projects and activities.

Associations and individuals should seek out more exchanges and knowledge-sharing opportunities from established diaspora communities - both Somali and non-Somali - within Austria and the EU, in order to gain information on good practices.

Associations and individuals should actively engage other stakeholders in both integration and develop-

ment cooperation, as well as take part in programs, workshops, conferences and seminars that could help increase the capacity of their engagement.

Youths make up the highest proportion of the diaspora community, and therefore should be more engaged in associations and activities, not only as beneficiaries but also as decision makers.

Gender equality and justice should be pursued across the board - from individuals to associations - in particular in larger associations, which have a majority of male members; in order to enable association decisions to be inclusive. The empowerment of women through study, work and establishing careers should be encouraged.



Taking ownership of projects and activities helps them to succeed, however this should be considered in cooperation with other stakeholders. Planning and implanting projects provides an opportunity for job training.

### Recommendations to the Somalian government

The *National Development Plan 2017-2019*, as well as the *NDP 2020-2024*, recognise Somali diaspora contributions to the development of the country, which include financial contributions, the provision of skills and expertise, and also relief assistance at times of humanitarian disasters. The high number of diaspora returnees in government positions - both as parliamentarians and executive members - is also noted. As such, the Somali government should create a consistent and comprehensive policy towards the diaspora.<sup>32 33</sup>

Gender and social inclusion through improved security, as envisioned in the *Somali National Development Plan 2020-2024*, should be pursued, in addition to the strengthening of reforms to the rule of law, in particular for women and ethnic minorities; in the security and social economic sectors, as well as enhancing and raising awareness by pursuing rights for traditionally excluded groups in compliance with international conventions.

The government should improve the security situation and create mechanisms for the possible return of diaspora members, and diaspora initiatives should be both encouraged and supported.

### Recommendation for Austrian organisations and institutions:

Channels of consultation and dialogue should be opened between stakeholders during the design of integration and diaspora engagement programs. This enables actors in the Somali community - and other diasporas in Austria - to collaborate and utilise their potential and expertise.

Diaspora engagement is multi-layered, meaning multiple priorities must be considered simultaneously. With

regards to engagement, religious conviction should be seen as a potential contribution. Priorities should be considered empirically, rather than being predetermined.

Capacity development in project management, as well as the simplification of funding applications and reporting procedures, along with a flexible and adaptive approach that meets capacity of diaspora organisations should be considered, in order to lay the groundwork for long-term engagement. Institutional support programs for emerging diaspora groups should be encouraged.

Established Austrian organisations and institutions should extend their engagement to individuals and associations within the Somali diaspora.

Specific gender-oriented courses, workshops and projects for both associations and individual members of the Somali diaspora should be extended to organisations run by both women and men.

This report also recommends that further research be carried out on this emerging diaspora group in Austria, focusing on:

- Gender equality / justice and women's empowerment;
- Entrepreneurship, economic empowerment and labour (migrant) rights;
- The impact of remittances and diaspora investments;
- The role of religion in both integration and development cooperation

32 <http://mop.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/NDP-2017-2019-1.pdf>

33 <http://mop.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/NDP-9-2020-2024.pdf>

## THE AUTHORS



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### Annex

## QUESTIONNAIRES

### Interview questions for associations and association focus groups.

- a) What is the name of your association and your scope of work?
- b) How is your organisation structured?
- c) How is your organisation funded?
- d) What are your motivations for your integration/development work?
- e) What are your challenges?
- f) What are your strengths?
- g) Do you receive any support from governments or any other major development institutions?

### Interview Questions for Individuals:

- Please introduce yourself and your work within the Somali diaspora community?
- Do you work as an individual or in an organisation/association?
- What motivates you to engage in the work you do?
- How is your engagement funded?



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