

Somalia

Country name	Somalia
State title	Federal Republic of Somalia
Name of citizen	Somali
Official languages	Somali (so); Arabic (ar) ¹
Country name in official languages	Somali: Soomaaliya Arabic: الصومال (Aṣ Ṣūmāl)
State title in official languages	Somali: Jamhuuriyadda Federaalka Soomaaliya Arabic: جمهورية الصومال الفدرالية (Jumhūrīyat aṣ Ṣūmāl al-Fidirālīyah)
Script	Somali is written in Roman script Arabic is written in Arabic script
Romanization System	Somali: none required Arabic: BGN/PCGN Romanization System for Arabic ²
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	SO/SOM ³
Capital	Muqdisho (Mogadishu)
Capital in official languages	Somali: Muqdisho ⁴ Arabic: مقديشو (Muqdishū)

Introduction

Somali is located in the Horn of Africa, sharing a border with Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. It has a coastline on the Gulf of Aden to the north, and the Indian Ocean to the east. The Equator passes through the south of the country. Somalia is very largely homogeneous in its ethnic composition. About 85% of the population are ethnically Somali (the remainder being Bantu and Arab).

In the late 19th century, the British and Italian empires gained control of parts of the coast and established the colonies of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. Italian occupation lasted until 1941, yielding to British military administration. British Somaliland remained a British protectorate, while in 1949, Italian Somaliland became a United Nations Trusteeship under Italian administration.

¹ ISO 639-1 language codes

² PCGN policy for Somalia is to use the Somali language place names. Arabic names are unlikely to be encountered. They are provided here for reference only.

³ <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#search>

⁴ Also known locally as Xamar or Hamar

In 1960, the separate colonial territories of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland became independent in quick succession, and they united in the July of that year to form Somalia.

A civilian government ruled the country until 1969, when it was overthrown by the army, which set up a Supreme Revolutionary Council and installed Siyaad Barre as president. Siyaad Barre's autocratic rule lasted for over two decades, until January 1991, whereupon internal unrest forced him to flee the country.

Civil war broke out in 1991 and Somalia had no central government until 2012, when the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) was established.

Geographical Names Policy & Guidance

PCGN policy for Somalia is to use the official Somali language names for places. Somali is written in Roman script so no romanization is necessary.

Anglicised or conventional forms of Somali names may be included in brackets where relevant on cartographic products. In English-language texts, the Somali name should be included with the anglicised or conventional name in the first reference to a place, thereafter the anglicised or conventional name may be used alone. Examples include Muqdisho (Mogadishu), Buur Gaabo (Bur Gavo) and Baydhabo (Baidoa). Omission of the 'c', replacement of the 'x' with 'h' and omission of the doubled consonant or vowel are common anglicisations, e.g. Gaalkacyo (Galkayo), Xaradheere (Haradhere), Shabeelle (Shabelle) and Jubba (Juba). Anglicisation of personal names also occurs, e.g. Cali → Ali, Cumar → Omar and Maxamed → Mohammed.

Spelling conventions for Somali names have changed over the years (see 'language' and 'spelling changes' sections below for further details). Due to Italy's historical presence in the region, Italian-style spellings exist for some place names in Somalia. These may be encountered, particularly on older sources, but should not be used on UK government products.

Geographical Names Sources

As a consequence of the long-term instability in Somalia there is a lack of current official geographical names sources. The US NGA [Geographic Names Server](#) (GNS) is the best available source.

This can be supplemented with mapping produced by the UN or international aid agencies. This mapping has the advantage of being more recent, but care should be taken as these sources do not always use the correct Somali-language spellings.

Soviet "technical advisors" present in Somalia during the early and middle 1970s produced complete cartographic coverage of the country at the scales of 1:100,000 and 1:200,000, both utilising the new orthography. The 1:100,000 series mapping produced in the 1970s by Hoggaanka Kartografigada Wasaaradda Gaashandhigga (Ministry of Defence Cartographic Authority) may be used as a source for Somali names, with UN mapping used to cross-check/confirm spellings and for newer features.

In case of any uncertainty please contact PCGN for guidance.

Languages

The official languages of Somalia are Arabic and Somali⁵. Somali dialects and other Cushitic languages are also spoken within the country. Arabic is the language of Islam and Somalis learn it at school. However, Somali is their mother tongue and the language used for everyday communication and official purposes.

Arabic is a Semitic language, written in Arabic script from right to left.

Somali is a member of the East Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family. It has been written using various writing systems over the years⁶. The Roman alphabet was adopted in 1972 and at the same time Somali was made the official language of Somalia. Prior to 1972 there was no standard orthography for the Somali language. PCGN recommends using the Somali-language place names for HMG purposes. The Somali language incorporates vocabulary (about 20% of the total) imported from the Arabic language. Capital letters are used in almost the same way as in English.

Somali alphabet ⁷

Consonants

Letter	Name	Pronunciation (IPA)	Notes
'	alef	/ʔ/	Glottal stop
B	ba	/b/	
T	ta	/t/	
J	ja	/dʒ/	
X	xa	/ħ/	Sometimes written as 'h' in anglicisations
KH	kha	/χ/	
D	da	/d/	
R	ra	/r/	
S	sa	/s/	
SH	sha	/ʃ/	
DH	dha	/d̪/	
C	ca	/ɕ/	Not pronounced as an anglophone 'c' – In Somali 'c' represents a voiced fricative – equivalent to the Arabic 'ayn.
G	ga	/g/	
F	fa	/f/	
Q	qa	/q/	
K	ka	/k/	
L	la	/l/	
M	ma	/m/	
N	na	/n/	
W	wa	/w/	
H	ha	/h/	
Y	ya	/j/	

⁵ <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf>

⁶ See more detail in the 2001 PCGN paper on Somalia:
https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20140402151900mp_/http://www.pcn.org.uk/Somalia-Where%20Clan%20Families%20Rule-2001.pdf and <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/somali.htm>

⁷ <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/somali.htm>

Notes on the Somali Alphabet

- Doubled consonants in Somali represent the more intense consonants, namely the three stops bb, dd and gg, and the four sonorants ll, mm, nn and rr.
- The Somali alphabet contains three digraphs: dh, kh and sh.
- The characters c, kh, q and x represent sounds that correspond closely to their Arabic counterparts (‘ayn, kha, qaf and ḥa). Apostrophe ‘ is used to represent the hamza.

Vowels

Doubled vowels indicate a long vowel sound in Somali. As noted above, the doubled vowels are frequently omitted from anglicised spellings, e.g. Garoowe/Garowe, Kismaayo/Kismayo, Bu’aale/Bu’ale. However, PCGN recommends the Somali spellings for HMG use.

Letter	Pronunciation (IPA)	Notes
a	/æ/ or /ɑ/ (a in car)	a and e are sometimes used interchangeably in non-standard Somali or anglicized spellings, e.g. Benadir/Banadir
e	/e/ or /ɛ/ (e in bed)	
i	/i/ or /ɪ/ (i in swim)	
o	/ɔ/ or /ɔ/ (o in more)	
u	/ʊ/ or /u/ (as oe in shoe)	
aa	/æ:/ or /ɑ:/	
ee	/e:/ or /ɛ:/	
ii	/i:/ or /ɪ:/	
oo	/ɔ:/ or /ɔ:/	
uu	/ʊ:/ or /u:/	

Notes on word/phrase construction relevant to toponyms

- Nouns are made definite by the addition of the suffix -ka for masculine nouns and -ta for feminine nouns. The spelling of these suffixes is influenced by the final letter of the modified noun, e.g. buug = book, + -ka → buugga = the book (m); bisad = cat, + -ta → bisadda = the cat.
- Somali word order within phrases is extremely fixed. The head noun is found at the beginning of a noun phrase. Adjectives follow the noun they modify, e.g. bisadda yar = the little cat. In the case of two subsequent modifier nouns referring back to the same head noun, one of the conjunctions ‘oo’ or ‘ee’ must be used before the second adjective. The presence or absence of these conjunctions changes the meaning of the phrase. For example, Xarunta Dhaqanka ee Hargeysa = the Hargeysa Centre of Culture, whereas Xarunta Dhanqanka Hargeysa = the Centre for the Culture of Hargeysa.
- There are two ways to denote possession in Somali. For example, ‘Ahmed’s house’ can be expressed as Axmad gurigiisa (lit. Ahmed his house) or guriga Axmed (lit. the house of Ahmed).

Somali Glossary of Useful Terms

bad = sea (badda = the sea)
 bari = east
 buur = hill, mountain
 ceel = well
 deked = harbour
 dheer = long
 dhexe = middle
 dowlad/dawlad = state
 dugsiya = school
 galbeed = west
 gobol = region/province (sometimes also translated as 'state')
 hoose = lower
 il = spring/stream (also means 'eye')
 jamhuuriya = republic
 koonfur = south
 magaalo = city (magaalada = the city)
 masaajid = mosque
 waqooyi/woqooyi = north
 webi = river
 weyn = big, large
 xeeb = coast (xeebta = the coast)
 yar = small

Spelling Changes

During the colonial era, when the country was divided between Italian and British rule, geographical names were spelt in accordance with Italian spelling conventions within Italian Somaliland, and in accordance with English spelling conventions within British Somaliland. Therefore, the same Somali toponym would be spelt differently in Italian and English, e.g. Jubba (som) = Juba (eng) = Giuba (ita); Kismaayo (som) = Kismayo (eng) = Chisimàio (ita). Names might also have been translated into English and/or Italian, e.g. Shabeellaha Dhexe (som) = Middle Shabelle (eng) = Medio Scebeli (ita).

The table below provides some examples of how the spellings (and sometimes the entire name) have changed during the different periods of Somali history.

Examples of name and spelling changes in Somalia

Colonial Spelling	Early post-independence spelling	Current Somali spelling	Location
Alula	‘Alūla	Caluula	11°57'58"N 50°45'25"E
Bender Cassim [name change]	Bōsāso	Boosaaso	11°17'03"N 49°10'54"E
Burao	Bur’o	Burco	09°31'20"N 45°32'01"E
Diglei	Ḍiglēy	Dhigleey	04°14'00"N 42°55'00"E
Erigavo	‘Ērigābo	Ceerigaabo	10°36'58"N 47°22'05"E
Oddur	Ḥuddur	Xuddur	04°07'17"N 43°53'22"E

Administrative structure

There are multiple overlapping claims and administrative structures in Somalia.

Prior to the outbreak of civil war in 1991, Somalia was divided into eighteen regions (*gobollada*, singular: *gobol*). These cover the whole area of the country, including the areas claimed by Somaliland and Puntland (see more on p9). This regional structure can be shown on HMG mapping or used for reference as required.

Regions of Somalia



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

No.	Region	ISO 3166-2 code	Administrative centre	PPLA location
1	Awdal	SO-AW	Boorama*	9°56'10"N, 43°10'58"E
2	Bakool	SO-BK	Xuddur	4°07'17"N, 43°53'22"E
3	Banaadir	SO-BN	Muqdisho (Mogadishu)	2°02'46"N, 45°20'03"E
4	Bari	SO-BR	Boosaaso	11°17'03"N, 49°10'54"E
5	Bay	SO-BY	Baydhabo (Baidoa)	3°06'50"N, 43°38'59"E
6	Galguduud	SO-GA	Dhuusamareeb	5°32'10"N, 46°23'12"E
7	Gedo	SO-GE	Garbahaarrey	3°19'44"N, 42°13'15"E
8	Hiiraan	SO-HI	Beledweyne	4°44'09"N, 45°12'13"E
9	Jubbada Dhexe	SO-JD	Bu'aale	1°05'00"N, 42°35'00"E
10	Jubbada Hoose	SO-JH	Kismaayo	0°21'29"S, 42°32'43"E
11	Mudug	SO-MU	Gaalkacyo (Galkayo)	6°46'11"N, 47°25'51"E
12	Nugaal	SO-NU	Garoowe	8°24'19"N, 48°29'04"E
13	Sanaag	SO-SA	Ceerigaabo	10°36'58"N, 47°22'05"E
14	Shabeellaha Dhexe	SO-SD	Jawhar (Jowhar)	2°46'51"N, 45°30'02"E
15	Shabeellaha Hoose	SO-SH	Marka	1°42'57"N, 44°46'18"E
16	Sool	SO-SO	Laascaanood	8°28'39"N, 47°21'35"E
17	Togdheer	SO-TO	Burco	9°31'20"N, 45°32'01"E
18	Woqooyi Galbeed	SO-WO	Hargeysa	9°33'36"N, 44°03'54"E

* Boorama is recognised as the administrative centre of Awdal as a region of Somaliland. Some older sources cite Baki (9°53'31"N, 43°23'07"E) as the centre.

Language notes on region names:

1. In Somali, the definite article is attached to the end of a noun, with no space between the noun and the article. As noted above, the masculine article is -ka; the feminine is -ta. Depending on the final letter of the noun proper, these articles may mutate into -ga or -ha (masculine) and into -da (feminine). For example, the article is present in the words Jubbada (9 & 10 above) and Shabeellaha (14 & 15 above). These are both the names of rivers in the south of Somalia.
2. Dhexe, meaning 'middle' and Hoose, meaning 'lower' occur in region names in combination with the definite river names Jubba (9 & 10 above) and Shabeelle (14 & 15 above).
3. Names based on compass points are Woqooyi Galbeed, meaning 'north-west' and Bari, meaning 'East'.

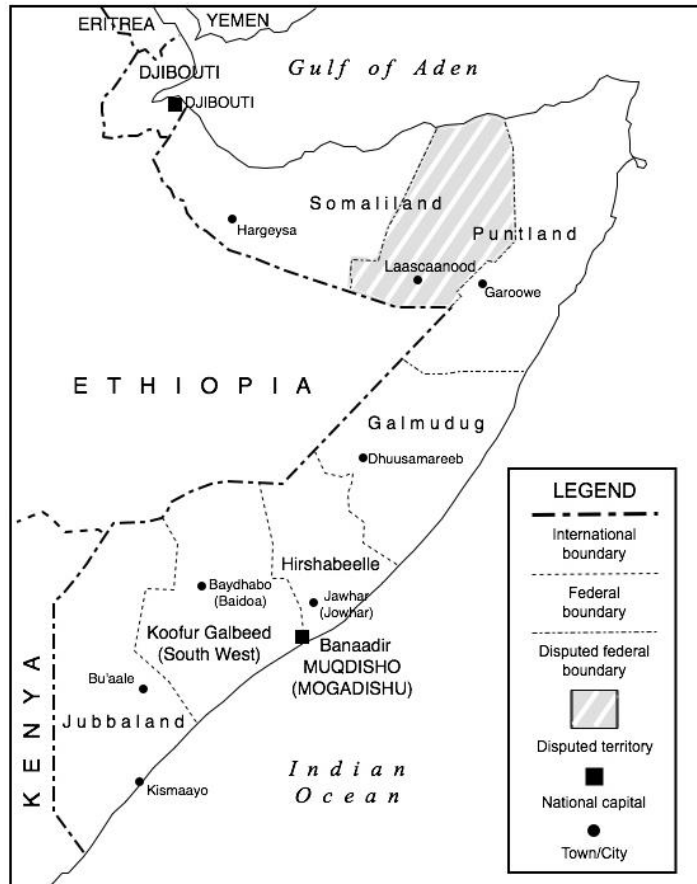
Federal Structure

Following the outbreak of civil war in 1991, Somalia was without an effective central government and was controlled by a number of different factions, including regional administrations, clan-based groups and various Islamist militant groups. There were various regional administrations claiming varying degrees of autonomy.

Attempts to bring this disorder to an end resulted in the establishment in 2004 of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which was in exile in Kenya until 2006. The concept of regional administrations or "mini states" within a federal structure was raised as part of a decentralised system

of government in the 2004 TFG Charter⁸. The TFG was replaced in August 2012 by a formal Federal Government, and a Provisional Constitution was approved. The [2012 Provisional Constitution](#) reinforces this federal approach by providing for two levels of elected government - at Federal Government level and Federal Member State level. Continuing insecurity hampers the ability of the FGS to complete the interim set up of a fully federated Somalia.

Map of Somalia (federal structure)



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The Somali government currently lists six (6) federal member states plus Banadir Regional Administration (BRA) as forming the Federal government.⁹ Banadir is an administrative region in southeastern Somalia, covering the same area as the city of Mogadishu, Somalia’s capital.

The federal member states can be shown on HMG mapping when required but with a note as to their status: “Federal Member States established, though issues of formalisation still pending.” A note on the status of Somaliland should also be included (“Somaliland claims independence but is not internationally recognised”). Somaliland is included by the Somalia government within its federal structure, but Somaliland claims independence (see more below).

⁸ <https://peacemaker.un.org/somalia-transitionalcharter2004#:~:text=It%20represents%20the%20transitional%20federal,Government%20and%20articulates%20its%20functions>

⁹ <https://mop.gov.so/federal-member-states/>

The English and Somali language names of the Federal States of Somalia are listed in the table below.

Federal Member States of Somalia

Short form names	Long form names	PCGN recommended cartographic form	Administrative centre
Jubaland (eng) Jubbaland (som)	Jubaland State of Somalia (eng) Dowladda Jubbaland ee Somaaliya (som) ⁱ	Jubbaland ⁱⁱ	Bu'aale (<i>de jure</i>) Kismaayo (<i>de facto</i>)
South West (eng) Koofur Galbeed (som)	South West State of Somalia (eng) Goboleedka Koonfur Galbeed Somaaliya (som)	Koofur Galbeed (South West)	Baydhabo (Baidoa)
Hirshabelle (eng) Hirshabeelle (som)	Hirshabelle State of Somalia (eng) Dowlad Goboleedka Hirshabeele ee Soomaaliya (som)	Hirshabeelle ⁱⁱ	Jawhar (Jowhar)
Galmudug (eng & som)	Galmudug State of Somalia (eng) Dowladda Galmudug (som)	Galmudug	Galmudug
Puntland (eng & som) ⁱⁱⁱ	Puntland State of Somalia (eng) Dowladda Puntland/ Dowlad Goboleedka Puntland ee Soomaaliya (som)	Puntland	Garoowe
Banadir (eng) [sometimes Benadir] Banaadir (som)	Banadir Regional Administration (and Mogadishu Municipality) (eng) Maamulka Gobolka Banaadir iyo D/Hoose Ee Xamar (som)	Banaadir ⁱⁱ	Muqdisho (Mogadishu)
Somaliland (eng) Soomaaliland (som) ⁱⁱⁱ	The government of the Republic of Somaliland claims independence (not recognised by HMG), using the names: Republic of Somaliland (eng) Jamhuuriyadda Somaliland (som)	Somaliland ⁱⁱ	Hargeysa (sometimes spelt Hargeisa)

ⁱ The name of Jubbaland/Jubaland derives from the river named Jubba in Somali, which suggests Jubbaland as the Somali name. Note that the state’s own website spells its name as Jubaland in both English and Somali.

ⁱⁱ For these states, as the Somali and the Anglicised names are so similar, it seems superfluous to include both spellings. However, if required it would be fine to add the anglicised name in brackets, although the Somali name should remain the primary name.

ⁱⁱⁱ See below for further details on Somaliland and Puntland

Somaliland and Puntland

The power vacuum, arising during the 1990s, saw the creation within the territory of Somalia of two self-proclaimed “states”. Somaliland was created in May 1991 under the leadership of Ibraahim Cigaal. Puntland came into being in the spring of 1998. The areas claimed by these two states overlap.

Somaliland (calling itself the Republic of Somaliland) was established as a breakaway independent state in May 1991 with its capital at Hargeysa. A Constitution was adopted on 31st May 2001 which identified the area of Somaliland as coinciding with that of the former Somaliland Protectorate. Its eastern “boundary” is disputed as there is some overlap with the territory claimed by the Puntland administration, namely over parts of Sool, Sanaag and Togdheer regions¹⁰.

Puntland (the Puntland State of Somalia) was declared by its leaders as an autonomous region in 1998. It considers itself to be a part of a federal Somalia and has its administrative centre at Garoowe. The area it claims overlaps with parts of that claimed by Somaliland to its west as well as Galmudug in the south. Puntland comprises the administrative regions of Bari, Nugaal, and northern Mudug. The districts of Sool, eastern Sanaag and south-eastern Togdheer are contested (politically and sometimes militarily) between Somaliland and Puntland.

Somaliland has repeatedly asserted its independence and stated that it will never rejoin Somalia. Puntland, by contrast, stated in its 1998 charter and 2009 constitution that it does not seek independence or secession; it wishes the whole of Somalia to be administered in the same manner as it is itself, with a government chosen by all the people. The contrast is evident in the titles each accords itself: Republic of Somaliland but Puntland State of Somalia.

¹⁰ <https://www.govsomaliland.org/article/consitution-and-laws>

Useful references

- BBC Somalia Country Policy: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094503>
 - CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/somalia/>
 - Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com (for information on languages)
 - International Organization for Standardization (ISO): www.iso.org
 - ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui#home>
 - National Library of Australia – maps of Somalia produced by Italy’s Istituto geografico militare (1910): <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/7338289>
 - Omniglot www.omniglot.com (for information on languages and scripts)
 - PCGN Country Names list: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/country-names>
 - PCGN Policy & Information paper *Federal Republic of Somalia: “mini states” and their administration* (February 2013) [available on request]
 - PCGN paper *Somalia: Where Clan Families Rule* (November 2001):
https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20140402151900mp_/http://www.pcgn.org.uk/Somalia-Where%20Clan%20Families%20Rule-2001.pdf
 - Somalia Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation: <https://www.mfa.gov.so/>
 - Somalia Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development:
<https://mop.gov.so/federal-member-states/>
 - Somalia National Bureau of Statistics: <https://microdata.nbs.gov.so/index.php/home>
 - US Board on Geographic Names Geographic Names Server:
<https://geonames.nga.mil/geonames/GNSHome/index.html>
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Compiled by PCGN
info@pcgn.org.uk
www.gov.uk/pcgn
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