Please cite as: EUAA, '3.2. Persons fearing forced recruitment by Al-Shabaab' in *Country Guidance: Somalia*, October 2025.

3.2. Persons fearing forced recruitment by Al-Shabaab

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: October 2025

This profile refers to adult males fearing recruitment by Al-Shabaab against their will. This profile also contains information on individuals refusing to be recruited or provide recruits to Al-Shabaab.

In the case of Al-Shabaab, recruitment takes place for a wide range of purposes, such as fighting, providing administrative support, collecting taxes, propelling outreach, intelligence gathering, etc.

Women hold various roles in Al-Shabaab such as combatants, spies, recruiters, fundraisers, cooks, tailors, cleaners, religious teachers/preachers, zakat (religious tax) collectors, nurses, storing weapons, hiding assassins and/or weapons after attacks, helping with money laundering, assisting also in terror-related activities. In addition, they are involved in the recruitment and brainwash of potential new members. The use of female suicide bombers was reported as rare. Women are commonly recruited by Al-Shabaab through marriage, therefore for more information, see 3.11.4. Child marriage and forced marriage. For child recruitment by Al-Shabaab, see 3.13.2. Child recruitment by Al-Shabaab. For deserters and defectors from Al-Shabaab see 3.3. Deserters and defectors from Al-Shabaab.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI reports: Country Focus 2025, 1.1., 1.1.1.(a); Targeting 2021, 1.1.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

The distinction between voluntary and forced recruitment is not clear-cut. People join Al-Shabaab for a mixture of reasons, such as financial hardship, social discontent, religious indoctrination, military pressure and threats, grievances directed at the government, the international community, or rival clans, as well as coercion and fear of repercussions from Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab recruits both from majority and minority clans.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Forced recruitment amounts to persecution. Al-Shabaab’s means of forcible recruitment included abduction, Islamic school recruitment or via clan elders.

Acts to which individuals refusing forced recruitment could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would also amount to persecution. More specifically, those who rejected the group's authority were forced to flee areas under its control to ensure their safety. Individuals who refused recruitment have been threatened and labelled as infidels who reject Islam and the Sharia law, and, in some cases, they have been killed to set a warning for others in the community. Furthermore, according to older sources, refusal to join Al-Shabaab or to surrender recruits could lead to retaliatory attacks on local communities by the group.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account **risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Age**: The recruited persons are usually between 11 and 25 years old, or even younger. Elders could get also recruited, if they practice a profession, which Al-Shabaab finds useful for the group's needs.

- **Home area and the control or influence of Al-Shabaab**: Recruitment is more easily facilitated in areas where Al-Shabaab has established control over a substantial period of time, mostly in South-Central Somalia areas (in Middle and Lower Shabelle, Middle and Lower Jubba, Bay, Bakool, Hirshabelle and Galmudug). IDPs residing in the outer districts of Mogadishu, where Al-Shabaab has strong influence, are frequently recruited by the group. In areas outside the group's direct control, such as Puntland, the risk of recruitment will be generally lower but personal circumstances and the presence of Al-Shabaab in northern parts (map) are still to be taken into account (see also other bullet points). In Somaliland, in general the risk would not be substantiated. Recruitment outside Al-Shabaab's control areas frequently involves aspects of coercion.

- **(Prior) profession(s) and/or socio-economic status**: Al-Shabaab has a particular interest in medical professionals and persons with social influence, like university and school teachers, especially in Mogadishu, as well as across South-Central Somalia and therefore offers them considerable incentives to join the group. Individuals with low socio-economic status may be pressured by their families to join Al-Shabaab.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

While the risk of forced recruitment as such may not generally imply a nexus to a reason for persecution, the consequences of refusal could lead to persecution which is highly likely to be for reasons of **religion** and/or **political opinion**, as those who refuse recruitment are labelled by Al-Shabaab as infidels who reject Islam and Sharia law.

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