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3.11.4. Child marriage and forced marriage

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: October 2025

This profile assesses the risk of women and girls in relation to forced marriage by multiple actors. Since Al-Shabaab most commonly recruits women and girls through marriage, this profile also covers such cases.

The analysis below is based on the following EUAA COI report: Country Focus 2025, 1.2.1.; Country Guidance should not be referred to as a source of COI.

Forced and child marriage are amongst the most common forms of GBV in Somalia.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Forced and child marriage amount to persecution. As of 2024, Al-Shabaab remains the perpetrator with the highest recorded incidents of forced marriage. The practice of early marriage continues to be pervasive as in theSomali society in general, one’s date of birth is not viewed as a decisive criterion for when a person is considered an adult, with puberty being the marker of adulthood. The 2020 ‘Sexual Intercourse Related Crimes Bill’ allows parents to marry off their children once they reach puberty, which could be as young as 10 years old. Forced marriage is also prevalent among persons with disabilities.

The severity and/or repetitiveness of other acts that women and girls could be subjected to by the community, such as social stigma as a result of refusing a forced marriage, and whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures, should be considered.

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

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for women and girls under this profile to face persecution **in the whole of Somalia, including South-Central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland**, should take into account **risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Prevalence of the practice in the home area and control or influence of Al-Shabaab**: Child marriage is widespread in Somalia. Early and forced marriage in Somalia reaches approximately 45 %. Girls originating from nomadic and rural communities are particularly affected. Specifically in relation to Al-Shabaab, marriage is more likely in areas where Al-Shabaab has established control over a substantial period of time, mostly in South-Central Somalia. The group can demand support from local families, who regard supporting Al-Shabaab as ‘normal'. In areas outside the Al-Shabaab's direct control, such as Puntland, the risk of forced marriage to members of the group will be generally lower but personal circumstances and the presence of Al-Shabaab in northern parts (see map) are still to be taken into account (see also other bullet points). In Somaliland, in general the risk of forced marriage to Al-Shabaab would not be substantiated. Recruitment/marriage outside Al-Shabaab's control areas frequently involves aspects of coercion.

- **Age**: Regarding early marriage, some girls marry before the age of 15. In traditional pastoralist communities, early marriage is common, with girls often marrying as young as 12 or 13. Also, young women and teenagers between the ages of 11 - 25 are at higher risk to be forcibly married to Al-Shabaab members.

- **Clan and family traditions**: Forced and early marriage is more common for girls and women coming from minority groups, such as Bantu/Jareer, Gabooye and Eyle clans. Furthermore, girls and women who belong to the Bantu/Jareer clan have a higher risk to be forcibly recruited by Al-Shabaab than other clans; union to Al-Shabaab fighters has been described in their case as sexual and domestic slavery. Additionally, women are involved in blood compensation (*diya*) under the *xeer* system, as well as under the practice of ‘wife inheritance’ or the widower’s right to marry a deceased wife’s sister. See also Individuals involved in clan disputes.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Persecution of this profile may be for reasons of **religion**, as early marriage is perceived to be both a cultural and a religious requirement, and/or for reasons of **membership of a particular social group**. For example, refusal to enter into a marriage may result in persecution for reasons of membership of a particular social group in relation to a common background which cannot be changed (refusal to marry) and/or a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it (the right to choose whom to marry) and their distinct identity in Somalia (e.g. stigmatisation). In the case of Bantu/Jareer women, persecution may also be for reasons of **race/nationality**.

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