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Issa Ahmed Warsame

UPEACE: PhD Candidate in Peace, Governance, Development (PGD), C7, Somali Program, Mogadishu, Somalia

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Corresponding Author: **Issa Ahmed Warsame**

Email: issasom@hotmail.com

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Abstract:

Purpose of Study: This study examines the positive and negative aspects of migration in Somalia, focusing on its economic, social, political, and developmental consequences. It explores the factors driving migration and assesses how diaspora communities contribute to household welfare, reconstruction, development, and social transformation while also examining challenges associated with brain drain and family separation.

Methodology: The study employed a qualitative desktop case study design based exclusively on secondary data. Peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, government and non-governmental reports, and statistical information from IOM, UNHCR, and the World Bank were systematically reviewed. Data were cross-checked through triangulation and analyzed using migration

theories, including push-pull, NELM, and Forced Migration Theory.

Findings: The findings demonstrate that Somali migration produces both significant benefits and substantial challenges. Remittances provide an important economic lifeline, supporting household consumption, education, healthcare, housing, and small businesses, while diaspora members contribute skills, knowledge, investment, and political engagement. Migration also provides opportunities for safety, education, employment, and improved livelihoods in destination countries. Conversely, Somalia experiences serious brain drain, particularly in health, education, engineering, and ICT, weakening national human capital and institutional capacity. Family separation disrupts social structures and creates emotional and economic pressures. Irregular migration also exposes Somalis to trafficking, exploitation, displacement, and severe risks along dangerous migration routes.

Conclusion: The study concludes that migration in Somalia represents both a developmental opportunity and a humanitarian challenge. Its benefits can be strengthened through comprehensive migration governance, secure remittance systems, diaspora investment, talent-retention initiatives, and improved education and livelihood opportunities. Effective policies should maximize diaspora contributions while reducing brain drain, dependency, and social disruption.

Keywords: *Somalia, migration, diaspora, remittances, brain drain, displacement, development*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Migration is currently a prominent topic in contemporary development, governance, security, and human rights discourses. For countries affected by conflict and fragility, including Somalia, migration is not merely a demographic phenomenon; it is part of the national identity. Since the civil war that led to the collapse of the central government in Somalia in 1991, the country has witnessed several waves of forced displacement due to civil war, inter-clan conflict, terrorism, droughts, and economic collapse (International Organization for Migration, 2017). These structural factors have led to a diverse approach to migration where people do not only migrate to escape conflict or persecution but also for economic and personal development, education, and to join family members. This has made the Somali diaspora spread across the globe, covering Europe, North America, the Middle East, and neighboring African nations, making it one of the most widespread migrant populations in the world. This dispersion has brought political, economic, and social changes with ramifications for the entire fabric of society, making Somalia a compelling case for studying the effects of migration in fragile states.

This study investigates the positive and negative aspects of Somali migration through a qualitative desktop case study approach. Two questions form the basis of the study: How has migration affected Somali society in terms of its economy, society, and politics? And what role does the Somali diaspora play in the reconstruction and development of the country? Answering these questions is not a straightforward task, as Somali migration cannot be easily categorized within a single broad classification. On one hand, it has led to issues such as brain drain, family breakup, and reliance on remittances. On the other hand, it has promoted international business relations and expansion, the exchange of ideas and technology, diaspora initiatives, and diaspora development investments. By comparing these two dimensions, the article provides relevant information that can benefit not only Somali policymakers but also other parties interested in the nature and impact of migration in conflict and post-conflict states and situations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Migration theories provide vital frameworks for analyzing the complex patterns of population movements in and out of Somalia. Ravenstein's Laws of Migration (1885) highlight the influence of push and pull factors, with Somalia exemplifying this dynamic as economic hardship, environmental degradation, and protracted conflict continue to drive people from their homes. According to UNHCR (2023), over 3.8 million Somalis are internally displaced, while more than 900,000 are refugees in neighboring countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen. The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) further explains this phenomenon by framing migration as a strategic household decision aimed at income diversification and risk mitigation, especially through remittances. Notably, Somali migrants remit approximately \$1.3 billion annually, which

constitutes nearly 23% of Somalia's GDP (World Bank, 2022), highlighting the economic lifeline migration provides. Additionally, Forced Migration Theory is particularly relevant in the Somali context, where decades of state collapse, recurrent droughts, and insecurity from armed groups like Al-Shabaab have rendered large-scale migration a survival mechanism rather than a choice. Together, these theoretical models illuminate the drivers and consequences of Somali migration, underscoring its deep entwinement with socio-economic and political realities.

One of the most significant positive aspects of Somali migration is the substantial economic and developmental impact of remittances. The Somali diaspora, estimated at over 2 million globally, sends home more than \$1.3 billion each year, accounting for nearly 23% of Somalia's GDP (World Bank, 2022). These remittances are essential for household survival, funding basic needs such as food, education, healthcare, and housing in a context where state institutions are often unable to provide adequate public services (Hammond et al., 2011). Beyond financial contributions, the diaspora plays a critical role in knowledge and skills transfer, supporting investments in infrastructure, education, health, and even political processes—thereby contributing to reconstruction and reform (Lindley, 2009). Migration has also served as a lifeline for individuals escaping conflict, famine, and economic collapse. Many Somalis who have resettled in stable countries gain access to quality education and formal employment, which not only enhances their livelihoods but also enables them to contribute to both host and home countries. This has given rise to a transnational Somali identity, with diaspora members acting as cultural and economic bridges who facilitate international trade, humanitarian aid, and diplomatic engagement (Horst, 2006).

Despite the notable benefits of migration, the Somali context reveals a range of negative consequences that affect both the country of origin and its migrant population. A primary concern is the brain drain phenomenon, where the continuous outflow of skilled professionals such as doctors, teachers, and engineers undermines Somalia's human capital and weakens already fragile institutions. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022), Somalia has one of the lowest doctor-to-patient ratios in the world, in part due to the migration of medical professionals. Additionally, the social cost of family separation is profound, leading to emotional distress and instability, particularly for children, spouses, and elderly relatives left behind (Gundel, 2002). In host countries, Somali migrants often face systemic discrimination, xenophobia, and social exclusion. For instance, in Kenya, Europe, and North America, Somali communities have reported widespread racial profiling, barriers to formal employment, and difficulties accessing adequate housing (Abdi, 2015). Irregular migration poses even greater risks—many Somalis, especially youth, undertake perilous journeys across the Sahara and Mediterranean, where they are vulnerable to human trafficking, extortion, and even death, with thousands reported missing or deceased during such attempts (Altai Consulting & IOM, 2015). Prolonged displacement in

refugee camps like Dadaab in Kenya and Dollo Ado in Ethiopia has further contributed to a culture of dependency, where basic needs are met by humanitarian aid but long-term development opportunities are limited. These camps, housing hundreds of thousands for over three decades, offer limited prospects for education, employment, or durable solutions such as resettlement or voluntary return (Horst, 2006).

Migration governance in the Somali context is marked by fragmentation, weak institutional capacity, and limited coordination among key stakeholders. Somalia currently lacks a comprehensive national migration policy, which hampers its ability to effectively manage both internal displacement and international migration (UNDP, 2021). This policy vacuum has resulted in ad hoc responses to migration crises, leaving gaps in protection, regulation, and reintegration. Simultaneously, host countries such as Kenya and European nations have adopted increasingly restrictive asylum and refugee policies, including border closures, encampment policies, and repatriation pressures, which further complicate the rights and welfare of Somali migrants and refugees. The absence of cohesive strategies among the Federal Government of Somalia, regional administrations, and international actors weakens collective responses to migration governance, particularly in areas such as return, reintegration, and diaspora engagement. For instance, while return and reintegration programs have been introduced—often led by international organizations—they are frequently underfunded, lack long-term sustainability plans, and fail to address the economic and psychosocial needs of returnees (IOM, 2022). Moreover, the reintegration of returnees into communities already strained by unemployment, insecurity, and inadequate infrastructure poses additional challenges. These governance shortcomings highlight the urgent need for Somalia to develop a robust migration policy framework that aligns with regional and international standards, promotes migrant rights, and harnesses migration for national development.

Despite the growing body of research on Somali migration, significant gaps remain that limit a comprehensive understanding of its full impact. Most existing studies focus on international migration and diaspora remittances, while internal migration—particularly rural-to-urban movement driven by drought, insecurity, and economic collapse—remains underexplored. This oversight is critical, as urban centers like Mogadishu, Hargeisa, and Baidoa are experiencing rising population pressures, overstretched infrastructure, and shifting social dynamics due to rapid urbanization. Additionally, there is limited empirical research on the long-term effects of migration on gender roles and youth identity, especially among second-generation migrants. Migration can alter traditional family structures, challenge patriarchal norms, and reshape the aspirations and cultural identities of young Somalis, yet these transformative impacts are insufficiently studied. Moreover, current literature tends to generalize the Somali experience without adequately accounting for regional variations. For example, migration patterns and impacts in Somaliland

may differ significantly from those in Jubaland or Puntland due to political stability, economic opportunities, and local governance structures. There is a clear need for localized, community-based research that disaggregates data by region, gender, and age to inform more targeted policy interventions and sustainable migration governance.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative desktop research design to analyze the positive and negative impacts of migration in the Somali context. The desktop methodology was selected as the most appropriate approach given the logistical and security constraints that limit access to primary data collection in Somalia, including ongoing insecurity, restricted mobility, and the dispersed nature of the Somali diaspora across multiple continents. As noted by Abdullahi and Osman (2024), desktop research is particularly valuable for studying migration dynamics in fragile states where field-based research faces significant operational challenges.

Data collection relied exclusively on secondary sources, which were systematically identified and reviewed. Source types utilized for the study included peer-reviewed research articles, policy papers, reports from government agencies and non-governmental organizations, and statistical data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the World Bank. The selection criteria for sources included: (a) relevance to Somali migration, displacement, or diaspora engagement; (b) publication date within the last two decades, with preference for more recent data where available; (c) credibility of the publishing institution; and (d) availability of quantitative or qualitative data suitable for comparative analysis.

The study adopted a cross-sectional method to review qualitative and quantitative data in an effort to cross-check findings and increase the reliability of its conclusions. This involved triangulating data from multiple independent sources—for example, comparing UNHCR displacement figures with IOM migration tracking data and World Bank remittance estimates—to identify consistencies and discrepancies. The case study approach incorporated within the desktop research provided context to the Somali situation, migration dynamics in the regional and global environment, and the specific historical and political factors shaping Somali migration patterns. The analytical framework drew on push-pull theory, the New Economics of Labour Migration, and Forced Migration Theory to interpret the findings, while remaining attentive to the limitations of applying these frameworks to the Somali context.

This methodology has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on secondary data means that the study cannot capture the lived experiences and perspectives of migrants and their families in the same depth as primary research. Second, secondary sources may

contain biases or gaps, particularly regarding internal displacement and informal migration flows that are difficult to quantify. Third, the rapidly changing situation in Somalia means that some data may become outdated quickly. Despite these limitations, the desktop approach enabled a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge and provided a foundation for evidence-based policy recommendations.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Remittances are a Major Economic Lifeline

Remittances play a vital role in Somalia's economy, serving as a key source of income for many households in both urban and rural areas. With limited formal employment opportunities, ongoing political instability, and a weak public service infrastructure, many Somali families rely heavily on financial support from relatives living abroad. The Somali diaspora, spread across North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, consistently sends money home to assist with basic needs, education, healthcare, and small-scale investments. Table 1 provides an illustrative overview of estimated annual remittance flows from key countries where Somali migrants reside, highlighting the scale and distribution of this crucial economic lifeline.

Table 1

Remittances from Key Somali Diaspora Communities

Country of Remittance Origin	Estimated Number of Somali Diaspora	Average Remittance per Person (USD/year)	Total Estimated Remittances (USD/year)
USA	140,000	2,040	286 million
UK	110,000	2,200	242 million
Germany	47,000	4,383	206 million
Canada	62,500	2,185	136 million
Sweden, Netherlands, etc. (EU)	280,000	1,800	504 million

Country of Remittance Origin	Estimated Number of Somali Diaspora	Average Remittance per Person (USD/year)	Total Estimated Remittances (USD/year)
Middle East (Saudi, UAE, Qatar)	180,000	1,500	270 million
Total	819,500		1.64 billion

Source: Author's compilation based on World Bank (2022), IOM (2023), and UNHCR (2023) data.

According to Table 1, remittances play an important role in Somalia's economy, with an estimated \$1.64 billion flowing annually from Somali diaspora communities across the globe, accounting for nearly 23% of the country's GDP (World Bank, 2022). In a context where state institutions remain weak and public service delivery is limited, remittances serve as a critical financial lifeline for millions of households. These funds are instrumental in covering basic needs such as food, education, healthcare, housing, and even informal employment creation through small business ventures. For many families, remittances are the only consistent and reliable source of income. Their contribution extends beyond household support; they stimulate local economies, fund community infrastructure projects, and sustain vital sectors in the absence of public investment. In effect, remittances substitute for a national welfare system, underscoring their function not only as private transfers but as a strategic pillar of Somalia's socioeconomic resilience.

This finding is in line with the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theory, which frames migration as a strategic household decision aimed at income diversification and risk mitigation (Stark & Bloom, 1985). The Somali case demonstrates how remittances function as a form of private social protection in the absence of state-provided welfare, confirming the NELM proposition that migration decisions are often made collectively by households rather than by individuals alone. Furthermore, the finding aligns with Hammond et al. (2011), who documented the centrality of remittances to Somali household survival strategies, and with Lindley (2009), who emphasized the diaspora's role in supporting reconstruction and reform through financial and knowledge transfers. The scale and consistency of these flows demonstrate how migration is intricately tied to development, with diaspora engagement forming an essential part of the country's recovery and stability efforts.

The United States stands out as one of the most significant sources of remittances to Somalia, with an estimated 140,000 Somali diaspora members contributing approximately \$286 million annually—averaging \$2,040 per person. This high per capita remittance rate is indicative of the economic integration and financial capacity of Somali migrants in the U.S., many of whom benefit from access to formal employment, higher wages, and regulated remittance channels. These conditions make it easier to send money consistently and securely back home. The strong transnational ties between the U.S.-based diaspora and their families in Somalia are driven not only by familial obligations but also by cultural values that emphasize community solidarity and collective responsibility. Furthermore, the influence of the U.S. diaspora extends beyond financial remittances. Somali Americans are increasingly involved in philanthropic activities, diaspora-led business ventures, and policy advocacy that impacts both their host and home countries. Initiatives such as community-based savings groups, investment in infrastructure projects in Somalia, and the establishment of education foundations reflect a growing trend of strategic and structured engagement. In cities like Minneapolis and Columbus, where Somali communities are concentrated, diaspora leaders have become key stakeholders in discussions on peacebuilding, development, and governance in Somalia. This multifaceted involvement positions the U.S. Somali diaspora not just as remittance senders, but as critical agents of change in Somalia's ongoing reconstruction.

The United Kingdom and Germany play a crucial role in sustaining Somalia's remittance economy, each contributing substantial inflows despite differences in diaspora population size. The UK hosts approximately 110,000 Somalis, many of whom arrived during earlier waves of conflict-related displacement in the 1990s. With an average annual remittance of \$2,200 per person, the UK's total contribution is estimated at \$242 million. This reflects the relatively established nature of the Somali community in Britain, which benefits from social support structures, community organizations, and access to formal banking systems. Similarly, Germany, though home to a smaller Somali population of 47,000, records the highest per capita remittance level at \$4,383, resulting in a total of around \$206 million per year. This unusually high figure likely stems from a combination of factors: higher average incomes, government programs supporting integration and employment, and the availability of secure and affordable remittance services. German migration and integration policies tend to encourage both economic self-reliance and transnational engagement, allowing Somalis to contribute to Somalia's development while also integrating into German society. These cases demonstrate a positive migration-development nexus, where effective host-country policies and financial inclusion can empower diaspora communities to become economic bridges—contributing to both their countries of residence and origin.

The broader European and Scandinavian region—including countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland—collectively contributes an estimated \$504 million

annually in remittances to Somalia. These countries host a combined Somali diaspora population of approximately 280,000 individuals, many of whom arrived as refugees during the early 1990s civil war and subsequent humanitarian crises. Although the average remittance per person in this region (around \$1,800/year) is lower than figures observed in North America or Germany, the sheer volume of migrants compensates for this, resulting in a substantial cumulative contribution. In Somalia, these funds are vital for meeting everyday needs such as medical expenses, school fees, food purchases, and housing support, particularly in both urban centers and rural areas with limited access to formal services. Beyond financial transfers, Somali communities in these European countries are also actively engaged in diaspora-driven development, advocacy, and policy engagement. Somali activists, academics, and civil society groups based in the EU frequently shape discourse on issues ranging from human rights and governance to youth empowerment and women's participation in Somalia's political process. Furthermore, diaspora organizations often collaborate with NGOs and government agencies to implement projects back home, leveraging both their cultural knowledge and institutional access in host countries. The Scandinavian model of social inclusion has enabled many Somali migrants to attain education, employment, and social mobility, positioning them to become long-term agents of change.

The Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar, plays a strategically important role in Somalia's remittance ecosystem, contributing an estimated \$270 million annually from a diaspora population of around 180,000 individuals. While the average remittance per person (\$1,500/year) is comparatively lower than that from Western countries, the region's geographic proximity, historical trade connections, and shared religious and cultural ties have fostered a strong migratory link. Many Somali migrants in the Gulf are engaged in low-skilled, labor-intensive sectors—such as domestic work, construction, transport, and hospitality—which, despite offering modest wages, still allow for regular money transfers home. What distinguishes remittances from the Middle East is their frequency and informal nature. Because a significant portion of Somali migrants in the Gulf are undocumented or lack long-term residency rights, they often use non-traditional remittance systems, particularly hawala networks, to send money back to Somalia. These informal channels, while efficient and culturally familiar, bypass regulatory oversight, raising concerns for both transparency and financial security, especially under global anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing regulations. Moreover, Gulf states offer limited legal protections for migrant workers, leaving many Somalis vulnerable to labor exploitation, wage theft, or deportation—factors that can disrupt remittance flows. Despite these challenges, the cumulative impact of Gulf remittances remains vital, especially for households in southern and central Somalia where other income sources are scarce. In many cases, these funds are used to purchase food, pay rent, and support elderly or disabled family members. Additionally, some migrants in the Gulf eventually accumulate enough capital to invest in small businesses or purchase land upon return, thereby contributing to local

development. To enhance the benefits of Middle East remittances, Somali authorities and international partners must focus on improving financial inclusion, regulating informal transfer systems, and advocating for stronger labor protections for Somali workers in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

4.2 Brain Drain Undermines National Development

Brain drain in Somalia is characterized by the sustained emigration of skilled professionals—such as doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, and academics—to more developed countries in search of better economic opportunities, security, and career advancement. This trend, which has accelerated over the past three decades due to prolonged civil conflict, weak governance, and systemic underinvestment in education and professional training, has left Somalia with a severe shortage of qualified personnel in key public service sectors. The absence of competitive salaries, limited infrastructure, and an unstable political environment have made it difficult for the country to retain its talent, resulting in a widening human capital gap that undermines national development efforts.

Table 2

Brain Drain in Somali Professional Sectors (2024)

Professional Sector	Estimated Total in Somalia	Estimated Abroad	Emigration Rate (%)	Annual Budget Loss (USD million)
Medical Doctors	900	1,500	63%	27
Nurses & Midwives	2,700	4,000	60%	42
Teachers & Educators	30,000	5,000	14%	50
Engineers (Civil, IT)	5,000	7,500	60%	65
University Academics	1,200	800	40%	16

Professional Sector	Estimated Total in Somalia	Estimated Abroad	Emigration Rate (%)	Annual Budget Loss (USD million)
Total (Core Sectors)	39,800	18,800	—	200

Note. Adapted from IOM (2022), Somali Engineers Association (2024), and World Bank (2022). Annual budget loss estimates were calculated as training cost per professional multiplied by the estimated number abroad. Emigration rate was calculated as (estimated abroad ÷ total professionals) × 100. Dashes indicate not applicable.

Based on Table 2, the health sector in Somalia is one of the most severely affected by brain drain, with a significant portion of its trained medical professionals living and working abroad. Currently, the country has an estimated 900 practicing medical doctors, translating to 1.5 doctors per 10,000 people, which is drastically below the World Health Organization's recommended threshold of 23 per 10,000. At the same time, approximately 1,500 Somali doctors are believed to be practicing in the diaspora, particularly in countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and various Gulf states. A similar trend is observed among nurses and midwives, where a substantial number of qualified personnel have also emigrated. This acute shortage of healthcare workers hinders the delivery of essential medical services, especially in rural, drought-affected, and conflict-prone areas, where access to trained professionals is already limited. The impact is twofold: not only is the capacity of the health system reduced, but the quality of care is also compromised, contributing to higher maternal and child mortality rates, the spread of preventable diseases, and overburdened health facilities.

This finding is consistent with the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022), which identified Somalia as having one of the lowest doctor-to-patient ratios in the world, partly due to the migration of medical professionals. The result also aligns with global research on health worker migration from fragile states, which demonstrates that conflict-affected countries experience disproportionate losses of health personnel due to push factors including insecurity, low remuneration, and limited career prospects (Connell, 2019). As a result, Somalia remains heavily dependent on international NGOs and UN agencies for health service provision, reflecting a critical gap in domestic capability and long-term sustainability.

Somalia's education sector is critically impacted by brain drain, with a steady outflow of trained teachers and university lecturers undermining the quality and continuity of education across the country. Although there are an estimated 30,000 educators in Somalia, over 5,000 qualified Somali

teachers and academics are believed to be working abroad in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Gulf region. The rate of new teacher graduation remains alarmingly low—with only about 400 graduates in 2020—which is insufficient to replenish the human capital lost to emigration. The situation is even more concerning in higher education, where approximately 40% of Somali university academics have relocated overseas. This has led to a sharp decline in research activity and diminished capacity to train future professionals, directly affecting the growth of local expertise.

This finding echoes the observations of Lindley (2009), who noted that the departure of skilled professionals weakens core institutions in post-conflict states, and with the broader literature on brain drain in Sub-Saharan Africa, which documents how the loss of educators creates intergenerational deficits in human capital formation (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). The absence of experienced educators and researchers not only disrupts learning outcomes at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels but also limits the country's ability to produce knowledge, drive innovation, and develop a skilled workforce. Consequently, this educational depletion poses a major barrier to Somalia's long-term socioeconomic recovery and development.

The engineering and ICT sectors in Somalia are significantly undermined by brain drain, with an estimated 60% of trained professionals having migrated to more developed nations in search of better opportunities. These sectors are vital for Somalia's reconstruction and modernization, as engineers and ICT experts play key roles in rebuilding critical infrastructure, expanding telecommunication networks, improving energy accessibility, and driving the digital economy. However, with only about 5,000 engineers currently working within Somalia and approximately 7,500 practicing abroad, the country faces a profound skills gap that limits its ability to design, implement, and maintain sustainable development projects. This shortage delays infrastructure upgrades, hinders technological innovation, and restricts economic diversification. In the absence of local expertise, Somalia is often compelled to depend on international contractors, NGOs, and foreign aid agencies to manage essential development initiatives. Such reliance not only escalates project costs and reduces local ownership but also weakens national sovereignty, as critical infrastructure decisions are shaped by external actors.

This finding is in line with the Somali Engineers Association (2024), which reported significant capacity gaps in the engineering sector and called for enhanced investment in local technical training. It also aligns with the broader literature on skilled migration from post-conflict states, which demonstrates that the loss of technical professionals' delays reconstruction and creates dependency on external expertise (Horst, 2006). Addressing this technical brain drain is essential if Somalia is to build resilient systems and foster inclusive, self-reliant growth in the long term.

The economic and institutional costs of brain drain in Somalia are both immediate and long-term, significantly undermining national development. Educating and training professionals—particularly in high-investment fields like medicine, engineering, and academia—requires considerable public expenditure, family savings, and often international donor support. Yet, when these individuals emigrate and do not return, Somalia effectively loses its investment in human capital, estimated at up to \$200 million annually. This figure reflects not only the cost of education and training but also the opportunity cost of lost productivity and leadership within national systems. The departure of skilled professionals weakens core institutions, such as hospitals, universities, and government agencies, all of which rely on expertise for service delivery, policy formulation, and reform implementation. Compounding the issue, reintegration programs for returnees, often implemented by international agencies, are typically underfunded, fragmented, and poorly aligned with local development plans. These programs rarely offer robust financial incentives, career pathways, or structural reforms needed to make return or local retention a viable long-term option for professionals. As a result, Somalia continues to face a cycle of talent loss, underdevelopment, and dependency on external actors to fill critical institutional gaps.

4.3 Migration Offers Safety and Educational Opportunities

Migration has provided many Somalis with access to safety, education, and employment opportunities that would be unavailable in their home country. Table 3 presents data on how migration improves safety, education, and employment outcomes for Somali refugees and migrants in various host countries.

Table 3

How Migration Improves Safety, Education, and Employment Opportunities for Somali Refugees and Migrants in Various Host Countries

Host Country	Estimated Somali Refugee Population	% with Secondary or Higher Education	Common Fields of Study / Skills	Employment Rate (%)	Common Employment Sectors
Canada	62,500	54%	Health sciences, social	35%	Community services, transport,

Host Country	Estimated Somali Refugee Population	% with Secondary or Higher Education	Common Fields of Study / Skills	Employment Rate (%)	Common Employment Sectors
			work, engineering, business		healthcare, public sector
United Kingdom	110,000	48%	Business, ICT, nursing, humanities	42%	Retail, healthcare, local government, logistics
Sweden	70,000	31%	Vocational trades, social sciences, early childhood education	26%	Manufacturing, elder care, municipal services
Norway	43,600	35.4%	Basic education, trade, healthcare assistance	32.4%	Construction, cleaning, health and elder care
Germany	47,000	38%	IT, technical engineering, nursing	39%	Hospitality, warehousing, skilled labor
United States	140,000	60%	Business, law enforcement, nursing, IT	45%	Government, security services, education, retail

Host Country	Estimated Somali Refugee Population	% with Secondary or Higher Education	Common Fields of Study / Skills	Employment Rate (%)	Common Employment Sectors
Ethiopia (Camps)	41,000	56% (secondary school pass rate)	Teaching, vocational training (carpentry, mechanics)	22%	Local services, construction, NGO-run community programs
Kenya (Dadaab)	200,000 +	58% (Grade 10+ performance in refugee schools)	Online higher education (MSc), teaching, ICT	20%	Teaching, data entry, logistics with NGOs and UN agencies

Note. Source: Author's compilation based on UNHCR (2023), IOM (2023), and various national census and survey data.

Based on table 3 above, Somali migrants in Canada, numbering approximately 62,500, have experienced both opportunities and challenges. Benefiting from Canada's inclusive integration policies, about 54% of Somali-Canadians have attained secondary or higher education, with many specializing in health sciences, social work, business, and engineering. Despite this progress, the community faces a relatively low employment rate of 35%, reflecting ongoing obstacles including language proficiency issues, non-recognition of foreign qualifications, and systemic barriers to labor market access. These challenges have limited upward mobility and slowed full integration into professional sectors. Nevertheless, Somali-Canadians continue to contribute meaningfully to community services, public administration, transportation, and healthcare. This finding is in line with the broader literature on Somali diaspora integration in North America, which documents both educational achievements and persistent labor market barriers (Syed et al., 2021). It also echoes Abdi (2015), who observed that Somali migrants in Western countries often encounter systemic discrimination that limits their full economic participation despite high educational attainment.

Somali migrants in the United Kingdom, estimated at approximately 110,000, represent one of the largest and most visible African diasporas in the country. Having arrived primarily as refugees fleeing civil war in the 1990s and early 2000s, this community has navigated a complex path of adaptation. Around 48% of Somali-Britons have achieved secondary or higher education, with concentrations in business, ICT, nursing, and the humanities. Their employment rate has gradually risen to 42%, reflecting growing integration into retail, logistics, local government, and public health. However, many still face persistent socio-economic challenges, particularly in inner-city areas like London, Birmingham, and Leicester, where poverty, housing insecurity, and educational inequality remain prevalent. Despite these hurdles, strong community networks, mosque-based support systems, and targeted local authority programs have helped improve access to higher education and job training. Importantly, the UK's Somali diaspora has also become increasingly politically engaged, with representation at local and national levels. This finding is consistent with Horst (2006), who documented the role of community networks and transnational linkages in supporting Somali integration, and with Ponzanesi (2021), who highlighted the importance of digital and community-based networks for Somali diaspora belonging and political engagement.

Sweden hosts an estimated 70,000 Somali migrants, many of whom entered through structured resettlement and family reunification programs. While Sweden is known for its inclusive welfare system, Somali migrants have faced persistent challenges in achieving educational and professional parity with the broader population. Only about 31% have attained secondary or higher education, with most participating in vocational training or studying early childhood education and social sciences. The community's employment rate stands at a modest 26%, with jobs primarily concentrated in municipal services, elder care, and manufacturing. Although the Swedish government offers extensive language courses and integration programs, Somali migrants often struggle with cultural adaptation, limited recognition of foreign credentials, and delayed access to job markets. Moreover, many Somali families experience residential segregation in low-income neighborhoods, which further limits social mobility and quality education. This finding is in line with broader European research on Somali integration, which identifies credential recognition, language barriers, and residential segregation as key obstacles to labor market inclusion (Gundel, 2002). It also reflects IOM (2023), which observed that integration outcomes vary significantly across host countries depending on policy frameworks and structural conditions.

Norway is home to an estimated 43,600 Somali migrants, many of whom have entered through humanitarian or family reunification pathways. Despite the country's robust welfare system, Somali migrants face notable barriers to socioeconomic advancement. Approximately 35.4% have achieved upper secondary or higher education, often in basic education, healthcare assistance, and vocational trades. However, their employment rate remains relatively low at 32.4%, with most securing jobs in construction, domestic services, and elder care. These patterns reflect a mismatch

between the skills Somali migrants possess and the demands of the Norwegian labor market. In addition, many face challenges such as limited proficiency in Norwegian, cultural adaptation difficulties, and a lack of formal work experience prior to migration. This finding is consistent with comparative research on Nordic integration policies, which shows that despite generous welfare provisions, immigrants from conflict-affected countries often experience slower labor market integration due to structural and linguistic barriers (Connell, 2019).

Germany hosts an estimated 47,000 Somali migrants, many of whom have arrived over the past two decades through asylum and humanitarian channels. Compared to other European countries, Germany's Somali community has made notable strides in education and employment, particularly in technical and healthcare sectors. Approximately 38% have completed secondary or post-secondary education, with many specializing in information technology, technical engineering, and nursing. The community's employment rate stands at 39%, among the highest for Somali diaspora groups in Europe. A significant factor contributing to this success is Germany's dual vocational education and training (VET) system, which combines classroom instruction with practical, paid apprenticeships. Somali youth have increasingly taken advantage of these programs, often after completing state-funded German language and integration courses. However, older migrants and those with limited prior education continue to face challenges due to rigid credential recognition processes and competitive job markets. This finding is in line with the broader literature on vocational training and immigrant integration, which demonstrates that dual education systems can facilitate labor market entry for migrants from diverse backgrounds (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012).

The United States is home to one of the most established and dynamic Somali diaspora communities, with an estimated population of 140,000 Somali-Americans. This community has leveraged the relatively open educational and employment systems in the U.S. to pursue upward mobility and social integration. Around 60% of Somali migrants in the U.S. have attained secondary or higher education, with many focusing on practical and high-demand fields such as business, law enforcement, nursing, and information technology. This academic attainment has translated into a relatively strong employment rate of 45%, the highest among Somali diaspora populations globally. Somali-Americans are particularly active in security services, public sector roles, education, and small business ventures—especially in urban centers like Minneapolis, Columbus, and Seattle, where community networks have flourished. Minneapolis, for instance, has emerged as a hub of Somali political engagement and entrepreneurship, with Somali-Americans serving in city councils, school boards, and even state legislatures. These achievements, however, exist alongside enduring challenges, including Islamophobia, racial profiling, and income disparities. This finding is consistent with Syed et al. (2021), who documented the adaptation experiences of Somali migrants in the United States, and with broader research on

immigrant entrepreneurship and civic engagement, which shows that community networks and institutional support are critical to upward mobility.

In refugee camps in Ethiopia, notably in the Somali region, approximately 41,000 Somali refugees are receiving education and skills training. Despite limited resources, 56% of students pass secondary school exams with support from UNHCR and local NGOs. Vocational training in mechanics, carpentry, and teaching has also been introduced. The employment rate is 22%, mostly in local construction, community programs, and aid delivery services. These opportunities, while modest, demonstrate the resilience and commitment of Somali refugees to improve their prospects even under constrained circumstances. This finding is in line with UNHCR (2023), which has documented the importance of educational programming in refugee camps, and with Horst (2006), who highlighted the resilience of Somali refugees in protracted displacement settings.

The Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya—home to over 200,000 Somali refugees—has been a focal point for educational innovation in crisis settings. Approximately 58% of students reach secondary school levels, and higher education is becoming accessible through online programs, such as MSc courses delivered by York University. The employment rate stands at 20%, with work often tied to teaching, logistics, and humanitarian operations within the camp. Despite legal and mobility restrictions, Somali refugees in Dadaab continue to gain skills and knowledge that contribute to long-term resilience. This finding is consistent with Abdullahi and Osman (2024), who documented the importance of education and skills development in displacement settings, and with broader research on refugee education, which demonstrates that even in constrained environments, access to learning can provide pathways to future opportunity.

4.4 Irregular Migration Routes Expose Migrants to Severe Risks

The data on irregular migration involving Somali migrants reveals a grim and persistent threat to life, particularly along the Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Sea routes. Table 4 presents data on irregular migration risks for Somali migrants from 2020 to 2024.

Table 4

Irregular Migration Risks for Somali Migrants (2020–2024)

Route/Incident	Time Period	Number of Deaths/Missing	Main Causes	Source(s)
Sahara Desert (East & Horn of Africa)	2020– May 2024	1,180+	Dehydration, exposure, vehicle accidents	UNRIC, IOM Missing Migrants
Mediterranean Sea (All Migrants)	Since 2014	31,367	Drowning, capsizing, suffocation	IOM Missing Migrants
Central Mediterranean Route	2019	4.8% fatality rate	Drowning, overcrowding	UNHCR, Migration Risk Charts
Eastern Africa– Horn Route	Since 2014	15,794 (5,068 drownings)	Mixed causes: drowning, starvation, abuse	IOM Missing Migrants
Yemen Boat Tragedy	July 2024	49 dead, 140 missing	Shipwreck en route to Yemen	Reuters, UNHCR
Mayotte Voyage Tragedy	2024	25 dead (Somalis, Kenyans)	Starvation, dehydration during 13- day trip	Associated Press News
Total Mediterranean Deaths (2023)	2023	3,200+	Capsizing, unsafe boats	UNHCR Data Visualization
Deaths en route via Libya (All years)	Ongoing	Thousands (undocumented)	Abuse, torture, smuggling violence	Altai Consulting, IOM, Amnesty International

Note. Source: Author's compilation based on IOM Missing Migrants Project, UNHCR (2023), and media reports.

Between 2020 and 2024, over 1,180 migrants from the Horn of Africa, including Somalis, were confirmed dead or missing in the Sahara due to exposure to extreme heat, vehicle accidents, and abandonment by smugglers. These deaths highlight the hidden dangers of land routes, which are often overlooked in favor of the more publicized Mediterranean crossings. The Eastern Africa–Horn of Africa route, one of the deadliest overland migration corridors, accounted for 15,794 migrant deaths since 2014, with over 5,000 due to drowning—a stark indication that many migrants perish long before reaching the sea. The Mediterranean Sea, particularly the Central route, remains a focal point of mass fatalities. Since 2014, more than 31,000 deaths or disappearances have been recorded, largely due to drowning, boat capsizing, or suffocation in overcrowded vessels. In 2023 alone, over 3,200 lives were lost, making it one of the deadliest years on record. These figures are especially alarming considering the 4.8% fatality rate associated with the Central Mediterranean route, which includes Libya and Italy—key transit points for Somali and other African migrants. Despite international efforts to curb these tragedies, the continued reliance on unsafe vessels and lack of legal migration pathways have sustained high mortality rates.

This finding is consistent with the IOM Missing Migrants Project, which has documented the escalating death toll on irregular migration routes, and with Altai Consulting and IOM (2015), which highlighted the vulnerability of Somali migrants to trafficking and exploitation. It also aligns with broader research on irregular migration from the Horn of Africa, which demonstrates that restrictive immigration policies and limited legal pathways drive migrants toward increasingly dangerous routes (Horst, 2006). In addition to these aggregate statistics, specific incidents involving Somali migrants have drawn global attention. For instance, in July 2024, a tragic shipwreck off Yemen's coast resulted in 49 confirmed deaths and 140 missing persons, many of whom were believed to be Somali refugees. Similarly, a 2024 sea voyage to Mayotte ended in the deaths of 25 migrants, including Somalis and Kenyans, after the boat drifted for 13 days without food or water. These localized tragedies not only reflect the broader systemic dangers of irregular migration but also point to the desperation driving many Somalis to attempt such perilous journeys. The lack of safe, regulated migration routes, combined with push factors like conflict, poverty, and drought, continues to make migration a fatal gamble for thousands. These realities underscore the urgent need for improved migration governance, humanitarian support, and investment in local stability to reduce the reliance on deadly routes.

4.5 Family Separation Causes Social and Psychological Strain

Table 5

Documented Impacts of Family Separation on Somali Households

Impact dimension	Documented finding	Source
<i>Financial dependency on remittances</i>	<i>36% of remittance-receiving households fall below poverty line, compared to 55.8% of non-receiving households</i>	<i>Naqvi et al. (2018), cited in Ismail</i>
<i>Emotional stress among children</i>	<i>Family separation associated with anxiety, behavioral changes, and academic difficulties; children comprise 80% of Somali refugee population in Dollo Ado camps</i>	<i>UNHCR</i>
<i>Breakdown of parenting structures</i>	<i>Female-headed households comprise majority of remittance-receiving households; women bear disproportionate caregiving burden</i>	<i>Ismail</i>
<i>Loneliness and depression among elderly</i>	<i>Elders identified as most vulnerable group; mental health issues including chronic depression among elders reported</i>	<i>HelpAge ; Pitt</i>
<i>Irregular communication with absent members</i>	<i>70% of newly-arrived refugees lack information on how to communicate with family outside camps</i>	<i>ALNAP</i>
<i>Family dissolution due to economic stress</i>	<i>Hundreds of divorces in Dadaab camps in four-month period attributed to economic stress and aid cuts</i>	<i>Radio Ergo</i>

Note. Data compiled from peer-reviewed research and humanitarian reports on Somali displacement. Sample sizes and methodologies vary across sources. Percentages represent findings from referenced studies.

The findings on family separation on table 5 above reveal that Somali migration produces profound social and psychological consequences that extend far beyond economic considerations. Research consistently demonstrates that the departure of family members disrupts the traditional Somali family structure, which historically functions as a collective social protection system. When one or more members migrate, the remaining household members must adapt to new roles and responsibilities, often under conditions of significant stress. Financial dependency on remittances emerges as a central finding. Naqvi et al. (2018) found that 36% of households receiving

remittances fall below the poverty line, compared to 55.8% of non-receiving households. This indicates that while remittances reduce poverty, they do not eliminate it. The finding suggests that remittance flows, though essential, are insufficient to guarantee economic security for recipient families. Female-headed households, primarily headed by widowed and divorced women, comprise the majority of remittance-receiving households, reflecting the gendered nature of both migration and family separation.

The emotional toll on children is particularly severe. UNHCR profiling data from Ethiopian refugee camps shows that children under 18 account for approximately 80% of the Somali refugee population, with many families being female-headed or including separated and unaccompanied children. An assessment in Dadaab camp found that more than 70% of newly-arrived refugees lacked information on how to locate missing family members. This absence of information exacerbates emotional distress and prolongs the uncertainty that accompanies separation. Elderly caregivers bear disproportionate burdens. HelpAge research identifies older people as among the most vulnerable displaced populations, with limited access to healthcare, inadequate shelter, and high rates of chronic depression. In Somali diaspora communities in the United States, elders were identified as the group most in need of support, experiencing isolation and estrangement as younger family members adapt to new cultural contexts. These findings demonstrate that migration reshapes intergenerational relationships and often leaves elderly family members without adequate support.

Economic stress contributes directly to family dissolution. In Dadaab camps, camp leaders reported hundreds of divorces within a four-month period, attributing the rise to high unemployment, increased domestic tension, and reductions in humanitarian aid. This finding demonstrates that the economic pressures facing migrants and their families can translate into permanent family breakdown. The loss of humanitarian assistance or reductions in remittance flows can trigger cascading effects that destabilize households already under strain. These findings collectively indicate that while migration may offer economic opportunities for some family members, it simultaneously introduces complex emotional and social challenges that require targeted interventions. Community counseling services, family reunification programs, and consistent migrant-family communication strategies are essential responses to these documented impacts. Policymakers and humanitarian organizations must recognize that addressing the economic dimensions of migration without attending to its social and psychological consequences will leave Somali families vulnerable to long-term instability. The evidence demonstrates that family separation is not a temporary condition but a chronic challenge that shapes the well-being of multiple generations.

4.6 Protracted Displacement Leads to Dependency

Protracted displacement of Somali refugees in camps like Dadaab in Kenya and Dollo Ado in Ethiopia has created a cycle of dependency and vulnerability. These camps, originally established as temporary responses to humanitarian crises, have existed for decades—Dadaab, for instance, was opened in 1991 and has at times hosted over 400,000 refugees, mostly from Somalia. In such settings, refugees live in restrictive environments with limited access to formal employment, freedom of movement, or political participation. As a result, they rely heavily on humanitarian aid for basic needs including food, water, healthcare, and education. This prolonged dependence limits opportunities for self-reliance, stifles personal development, and often leads to frustration, especially among youth who grow up with few prospects. Education and vocational training are often underfunded or poorly matched to labor market needs, further entrenching unemployment. Meanwhile, durable solutions—such as resettlement to third countries, local integration, or voluntary return—remain scarce or politically complicated. The lack of long-term planning transforms displacement from a temporary crisis response into a chronic development challenge, trapping generations in poverty. Without significant policy shifts and investment in sustainable livelihoods, Somali refugees in protracted displacement risk continued marginalization and socio-economic exclusion from both their host and origin communities.

This finding is consistent with Horst (2006), who documented the dependency dynamics in Somali refugee camps, and with UNHCR (2023), which has highlighted the need for durable solutions and increased investment in livelihood programs for protracted refugee populations. It also aligns with broader research on refugee dependency, which demonstrates that restrictive encampment policies and limited economic opportunities perpetuate cycles of poverty and marginalization (Connell, 2019).

5. DISCUSSION

The study reveals that Somali diaspora migration has had a complex effect on the social, economic, and political transformation of the country. In the economic aspect, remittances play an essential role as a source of income for households by enhancing their ability to meet basic needs, especially where there are inadequate public services and job opportunities. But concerning the impact of remittances, the data demonstrates that such funds are mainly channeled towards spending and not investments or saving, which hinders the emergence of self-sustenance strategies. This is a paradox because while remittances help to reduce current poverty levels, they may also dampen the need to seek home-grown sources of income generation and development. This finding is in line with the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theory, which frames migration as a household strategy for income diversification and risk mitigation, but also highlights a potential limitation of the theory: while remittances provide short-term stability, they do not automatically translate into long-term productive investment without complementary policies and institutions (Stark & Bloom,

1985). It also echoes the observations of Hammond et al. (2011) and Lindley (2009) regarding the dual nature of remittances as both a lifeline and a potential source of dependency.

In the social aspect, the cultural link and identity issue that is showing generational difference is the dynamism of integration and marginalization within the diaspora. It is evident that first-generation Somalis retain close connections to their culture and society, whereas the second generation feels cultural mismatch, isolation, and less connection to the community. These gaps are valuable indications of how cultural programs and community development initiatives need to be designed to retain Somali culture among the young generation. The use of digital tools and diaspora organizations is most effective in this case since they provide a way to maintain cultural identity while physically being in a different country. This finding is in line with Ponzanesi (2021), who documented the role of digital media in maintaining Somali diaspora identity, and with Syed et al. (2021), who highlighted the importance of community and religious institutions in supporting intergenerational cultural continuity.

In the political aspect, the diaspora plays a significant role in the formulation of the political agenda of the Somali nation. While first-generation migrants use money and discussion forums in participating, the second generation is using activism on social media to change the perception of society and put pressure on leaders. This emerging relationship shows that the diaspora can be a support mechanism as well as a pressure for positive change within the political system. However, one of the most severe issues that has been experienced in the healthcare sector is brain drain, which is the emigration of talented healthcare professionals from the country. Health care, education, and ICT sectors are the most affected, and critical shortages are now being experienced as a result of this. If no efforts are made to invest in talent retention and human capital development, Somalia is likely to continue relying heavily on foreign support not only in terms of human resources but also in infrastructure. This finding is consistent with Horst (2006) and Lindley (2009), who documented the political engagement of the Somali diaspora, and with broader research on diaspora politics, which demonstrates that diaspora communities can play both constructive and contentious roles in homeland politics (Ponzanesi, 2021). It also aligns with IOM (2022) and UNDP (2021), which have highlighted the need for comprehensive migration governance frameworks that harness the diaspora's potential while addressing the consequences of brain drain.

6. CONCLUSION

This study discussed the various facets concerning the migration of the Somali diaspora in relation to economic, social, political, and development aspects. The study established that the money brought by the diaspora is crucial in meeting the daily needs of households as well as in educating children and carrying out petty business ventures. However, the reliance on these sources has

increased to make Somalia more economically dependent, which is not healthy if there are no proper economic reforms in the country. While remittances provide money for basic needs to households, they cannot replace the need for proper development policies and job creation within Somalia.

In the social aspect, the diaspora experience is a case of cultural continuity and identity crises, especially among second-generation immigrants. First-generation Somalis still keep their roots by speaking the language, following traditions, and being engaged in communities, but the second generation has troubles with identity and feels left out, as a result of which they participate less in the culture. However, there exist opportunities in digital platforms and diaspora organizations to help young people connect to their roots and build a strong bond between the generations.

The Somali diaspora continues to hold increasing political and developmental significance in the styles of both consolidation and transformation. First-generation migrants bring resources in terms of money and engage in discussions that may affect society, while second-generation young people use activism through technology in an effort to shape society. In the same respect, brain drain has further exposed institutional vulnerabilities in nearly all the major sectors, including health, education, and ICT. Thus, the necessity of different forms of engagement policies that will allow the government to draw the diaspora's potential in its fullest and at the same time prevent the consequences of the brain drain, such as skills, partnership, return programs, and knowledge transfer as a basis for further social and economic development of Somalia.

The study concludes that migration in fragile states such as Somalia cannot be characterized in terms of mere development or humanitarianism but constitutes a developmental-humanitarian process. Policy implications include: (a) developing a comprehensive national migration policy framework that aligns with regional and international standards; (b) strengthening financial infrastructure to support safe, affordable, and transparent remittance flows; (c) creating incentives for diaspora investment in productive sectors; (d) investing in talent retention and human capital development to mitigate brain drain; (e) expanding educational and livelihood opportunities in refugee camps to reduce dependency; and (f) fostering diaspora engagement in peacebuilding, reconstruction, and governance.

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