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Somalia: Language & Culture

NYS Statewide Language Regional Bilingual
Education Resource Network (RBE-RN) at
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IDENTIFICATION, LOCATION AND GEOGRAPHY

Somalia is named for the legendary father of the Somali people, Samaal (or Samale). It is on the outer edge of the Somali Peninsula, also called the Horn of Africa, on the East African coast. It is bordered on the north by the Gulf of Aden, on the east by the Indian Ocean, on the southwest by Kenya, and on the west and northwest by Ethiopia and Djibouti. It is approximately 246,200 square miles and its coastline extends about 1,800 miles.

Climate

Somalia is hot for most of the year, with four seasons:

- the *gu*, or main rainy season (from April to June);
- the *dayr* (from October to December);
- the dry season—the *iilaal* (from December to March); and
- the *xagaa* (from June to September).



Facts on Somalia

	Area	Population	Capital	Chief of State	Government	Symbols	GDP* (per capita)	Flag
Somalia	637,657 sq. km.	9,558,666 (July 2008 estimated)	Mogadishu	Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (President)	No permanent national government; transitional parliamentary national government	Camel (it provides transportation, milk, meat, income, and status to a majority)	\$600	Light blue with a large white 5-pointed star in the center

**Gross Domestic Product*

HISTORY

Background

There were three waves of migration into Somalia that occurred.

1. The Cushites from the Middle East migrated across the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden into the Horn of Africa. By the beginning of the 11th Century A.D., these communities expanded, creating the ancestor communities of present day Somalia;
2. Bantu speakers, who had reached the east African coast by the 5th century A.D., settled on the Somali lowlands as far north as Mogadishu. Although the Bantu have culturally been assimilated by the Somali (with regard to religion and language), they are distinguished as a separate group; and
3. By the 9th century A.D., immigrants from Arabia and Persia had settled on the east coast as a result of trade across the Indian Ocean and helped to found cities and states, such as Mogadishu, Brava, Merka and Kismayu. They intermixed with Bantu and Somali to create the Bajuni/Waswahili (currently an economically important group) that consists of a small portion of Somalia's population.

Governance

The Somali people are divided into five major clans (Darood, Dir, Hawiye, Isaaq , and Digil-Mirifle). Somalia developed a decentralized political structure, organized around lineage identity that was invested in clan elders. Their primary responsibility was to negotiate disputes with other clans. They relied on *xeer* (or customary law) binding neighboring clans into precedent-based rulings on how to address a range of grievances and disputes. Over the centuries, due to constant migration and civil upheaval, Somali clans sub-divided into sub-clans and scattered throughout Somalia. Clan identity remains strong and continues to play an important role in Somalia.

In 1960 two independent former colonial territories (British Somaliland and Italian Somalia) merged to form the Republic of Somalia. However, the democratically elected government was weakened among the ruling elite to organize governance

largely on clan-based relationships. In 1969, following a *coup d'état*, Siyaad Barre took over the Presidency and resorted to maintaining his position by strong-arm tactics. He also encouraged disputes and tension among other clans, while confining most appointments in key public positions to members of his Darood-Marehan clan. The resulting divisions within the Somali society were worsened by the defeat in the 1977-78 Ogaden war with Ethiopia. In the 1980s opposition to the regime—civil war led to the overthrow of Barre in January 1991. This resulted in the flight of public officers, destruction of buildings, equipment and official documents. In May 1991, northwest Somalia declared itself to be the Independent Republic of Somaliland, but for the next 4 years, it suffered from fighting among different clans. The clan system has proved to be a divisive and destructive force when manipulated for economic and political gain. However, in the absence of a state structure, the clan system has been the only source of law and order.

Twenty percent of the Somali population are minorities. They are outside the clan system and are marginalized and subject to attacks and violations by the dominant clans. They are divided into two main groups: the first group includes the Midgan, Tumul, Yibir, Gaheyle, Galgale and Boni; the second group includes the Bantu, Benadiri and Eyle.

Currently, as a result of civil upheaval in Somalia, Somalia-wide government is non-existent. Consequently, they are unable to collect public revenue systematically in most areas. The majority of the Somali population has been impoverished and forced to move to new areas, either as refugees in neighboring countries or Internationally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Some of their basic needs are being met through resources from the international donor community, facilitating dependency. This has led to the creation of armed militias and bands that are a constant threat to Somalis.

CULTURE

Overview

Somalia's culture is an amalgamation of traditions indigenously developed or accumulated over a period of time as a result of their interaction with Ethiopia, Yemen, India and Persia. Somali commercial enterprise can be detected in its exotic cuisine, which contains Southeast Asian influences. Since Somali did not exist in a written form until 1972, the Somali people have acquired and cultivated the art of memorizing and speaking for long hours. They are extremely keen listeners and learners. Poetry and prose are represented in the form of plays, proverbs, sayings, stories, lectures, and songs. Due to the Somali people's love for and facility with poetry, Somalia has been referred to by scholars as a "Nation of Poets" and a "Nation of Bards".¹ They have a story-telling tradition.

Somalis have a rich musical heritage centered on traditional Somali folklore. Their art is the artistic culture of the Somali people, both historical and contemporary. These include artistic traditions in pottery, music, architecture, wood carving, etc.

Religion

An important aspect of contact with the Middle East was the spread and adoption of Islam. Islam is the primary religion in Somalia, and the majority of Somalis are Sunni Muslims, with most subscribing to the body of doctrines that regulate the lives of those who profess Islam. The five pillars of Islamic faith are:

1. faith or belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of the prophet Muhammad;
2. prayer five times a day;
3. giving 2.5% of one's income to charity;
4. making a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, at least once in one's lifetime; and
5. fasting from dawn until dusk every day during the period of Ramadan.

Although Somali women were initially excluded from the many male-dominated religious orders, the all-female institution, Abay Siti (a religious association

¹ A poet held by tradition and popular acclaim to represent the identity, beliefs and principles of a particular national culture.

created by a group of women), was formed in the late 19th century, incorporating Somali tradition and Islam.

Family

Traditionally, Somali marriages have been considered a bond between not just a man and women, but also between clans and families. The majority of marriages were arranged by an older man with wealth and the father of a young woman. The groom usually pays a price to the bride's family (usually livestock or money). The bride usually lives with her husband's family, with her parents providing the home and household goods; however, the bride keeps her family name. Islamic law permits a man to have up to four wives if he can provide for them and their children equally. The couple signs an agreement giving the wife a certain amount of property just in case they get divorced. If the wife initiates the divorce, she has to relinquish her right to the property. A man can divorce his wife by repeating "I divorce you" three times. However, the wife is given a three-month grace period in case she should be pregnant. Currently, many urban Somalis choose a mate based on love and common interests rather than accepting an arranged marriage.

Languages of Somalia

Somali is the official language of Somalia since 1972, gaining official status with standardization (Standard Somali). In the Afro-Asiatic family of languages, Somali is an Eastern Cushitic language.² The Somali language is spoken by ethnic Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Yemen and Kenya. In addition to Somali, many Somalis speak Arabic, due to centuries-old ties with the Arab World, the far-reaching influence of the Arabic media, and religious education. A small percentage of Somalis also speak Italian, and a growing number speak English. Educated young adults from well-to-do urban families may speak five or more languages. In addition to the languages mentioned above, there are many other languages spoken in Somalia, as follows:

² A branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family spoken in Somalia, Ehtiopia, Eritrea and northern Kenya, including Beja, Oromo, and Somali.

Aweer
 Boon
 Dabarre
 Garre
 Jiddue
 Maay
 Mushungulu
 Oromo, Borana-Arsi-Guji
 Swahili
 Tunni



Ethnologue Languages of the World
http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name-SO

Dialects

Somali dialects are divided into two main groups: The standard dialect, spoken by most Somalis, and the Digil/Raxanweyn dialect, spoken primarily in the inter-riverine areas (vicinity of the Shabelle or Juba Rivers) of the south (who are also familiar with standard Somali). Thus, language provides a channel of communication. Somali has adopted many Arabic words, both modern phrases to deal with modern institutions, such as government and finance, and older Arabic terms to discuss international trade and religion. In addition, Somali also contains old Qahtani words, common to Cushitic and Semitic languages.

Writing

The Somali language had no official written alphabet until the former President of Somalia, Siad Barre, formally introduced the Somali Latin alphabet in October 1972. Shire Jama Ahmed (Shire Jaamac Axmed) is credited with the invention of this spelling system, and his system was chosen from among eighteen competing new orthographies. At the same time, Somali was made the sole official language of Somalia.

'	B b	T t	J j	X x	Kh kh	D d	R r	S s	Sh sh	Dh dh
[ʔ]	[b]	[t]	[ɗ]	[ħ]	[x]	[d]	[r]	[s]	[ʃ]	[d̪]
C c	G g	F f	Q q	K k	L l	M m	N n	W w	H h	Y y
[ʕ]	[g]	[f]	[q]	[k]	[l]	[m]	[n]	[w]	[h]	[j]
A a	E e	I i	O o	U u	Aa aa	Ee ee	Ii ii	Oo oo	Uu uu	
[a]	[e]	[i]	[o]	[u]	[a:]	[e:]	[i:]	[o:]	[u:]	

Note: The Somali alphabet uses all the letters of the English alphabet, except *p*, *v* and *z*.

The Somali Latin alphabet was introduced to promote literacy. This made Somali different from the languages spoken in neighboring areas, which still use the Geez or Arabic alphabet. Somali is written in the Latin script today, which is written from left-to-right.

EDUCATION IN SOMALIA

Early Childhood Development

Early Childhood Development (ECD) falls within the category of basic education and entails the essential skills of literacy and numeracy upon which further learning is built (ages 0-5).

Before Somalia was colonized, most education was provided by Koranic schools.³ The Ministry of Education is officially responsible for education in Somalia, with about 15% of the nation's budget allocated to scholastic instruction. The autonomous Puntland and Somaliland macro-regions maintain their own Ministries of Education.

With the outbreak of a civil war in 1991, there was a complete breakdown of the formal education system. Most school buildings were completely or partially destroyed, all educational materials and equipment were looted, and many teachers and students were displaced. With the exception of Koranic schools, no formal education took place for at least two years (1991-1992). In addition, most secondary level institutions and universities ceased to operate. With international donor assistance, a measure of recovery has been achieved in the educational sector. However, factionalism and civil upheaval continue to be major hindrances to the evolution of a national education system.

Enrollment

Currently, there is no official entry age for primary school in Somalia. Entrants into grade 1 fall within a wide age range, with some entrants being older than 14 years of age (regarded as the final year in the United States for grade 8). This delayed entry stems from parental/community expectations that a child should master the teachings of the Koranic schools before proceeding to formal primary school. Therefore, there is a very low primary school enrollment, with about 1 girl for every 2 boys.

³ A stable local, non-formal education providing basic religious and moral instruction to a large number of school children between 5 and 14 years of age.

A survey on the education of youths aged 14-18 years of age, found that 39% were currently or previously participating in a vocational or private course to learn a particular skill (UNICEF-Somalia, 1998). English was reported to be the most popular subject, with other subjects including sewing/tailoring, computer, metalwork/carpentry and secretarial.

SOMALI SPEAKING POPULATION IN THE USA, NYS AND NYC

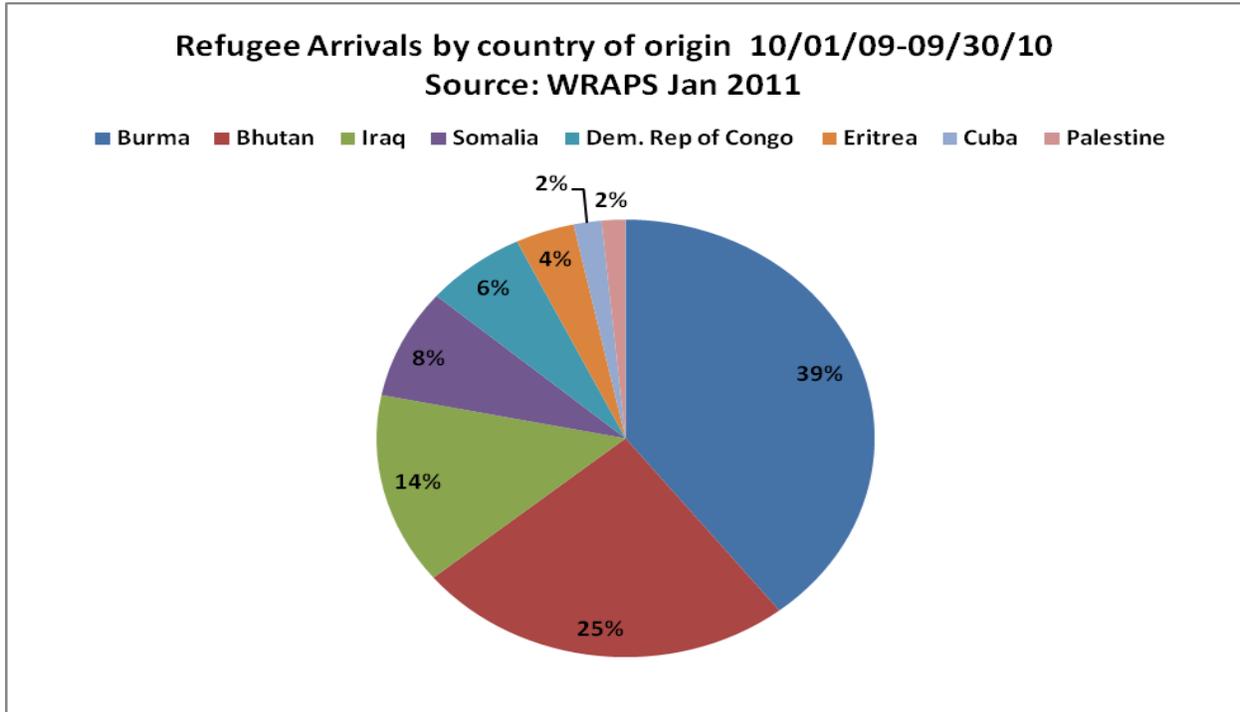
Somali People in the United States

According to the 2010 American Community Survey, there are 85,700 people with Somali ancestry in the United States, which is the seventh largest in the world.

<u>States With High Somali Population</u>	<u>Cities</u>	<u>2011 Refugee Arrivals (If applicable)</u>
Arizona	Phoenix and Tucson	195
California	San Diego and San Francisco	114
Colorado		105
Florida		N/A
Georgia		149
Illinois		28
Kentucky		105
Maine	Portland	116
Maryland		94
Minnesota	Minneapolis and St. Paul	304
Missouri		155
New York	Buffalo, New York City and Syracuse	194
Ohio	Columbus	138
Oregon		112
Tennessee		162
Texas		290
Utah		142
Virginia		51

Somali People in New York State

A total of 4,560 refugees resettled in New York State in FFY 2010, a 3% increase over 2009. Upstate New York resettled 4,099 refugees (90%) and NYC resettled 461 refugees (10%). Of these refugees, 8% are from Somalia.



<http://otda.ny.gov/programs/bria/documents/population-report.pdf>

Clockwise:

39%	-	Burma
25%	-	Bhutan
14%	-	Iraq
8%	-	Somalia
6%	-	Dem. Rep of Congo
4%	-	Eritrea
2%	-	Cuba
2%	-	Palestine

Somali People in New York City

According to the New York City and Boroughs 2010 American Community Survey, total ancestry categories tallied for people with one or more ancestry categories reported there were an estimated 491 people of Somali descent in New York City, as follows:

Brooklyn	79
Manhattan	0
Queens	293
Staten Island	0
The Bronx	<u>119</u>
TOTAL	<u>491</u>

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

Health and Immunization Terms

Somali

Bus-buska
Cagaarshowga, Joonis
Cuno xanuun
Dabayl, Duf
Furuq
Gowracato
Gurra dhaabsis, Qaamow-Qashiir,
Qanja Barar
Hablobaas
Haemophilus nooca b
Infilowense
Jadeeco
Jadeeco been, Jadeeco jarmalka
Kix, Xiiqdheer
Qaaxo-Tiibi
Sambabaja, Wareento
Tallaakla Qaaxada
Taytano

English

Varicella
Hepatitis
Diphtheria
Polio
Smallpox
Diphtheria

Mumps
Varicella
Hib
Influenza
Measles
Rubella
Pertussis
Tuberculosis
Pneumonia
BCG
Tetanus

Source: Vaccinations in Refugee Children, New York State and New York City
Recommendations and Guidelines

Somali Words and Phrases

Hello (or Hi)	Iska warran/Weeye (ama Sidee tahay)
Good morning	Subax wanaagsan
Good afternoon	Galab wanaagsan
Good evening	Caways wanaagsan
Goodbye	Nabadgelyo
Good night	Habeen wanaagsan
How are you?	Iska warran?
I am fine, thank you	Waan fncnahay, mahadsanid
And you?	Adiguna?
I am fine, too.	Aniguna waan fiicnahay
Thank you (very much)	Waad mahadsantahay (aad iyo aad)
You are welcome	Adaa mudan
Don't mention it	Ha iilmaamin/Michna malaha
Thanks	Mahadsanid
Thanks a lot	Aad baad u mahadsantahay
Excuse me	Raalli iga ahow
Pardon me	li dulqaado
What's your name?	Magacaa?
Where are you from?	Xageed ka timid?
Where are you going?	Xageed tagaysa

Source: English-Somali Phrasebook with Useful Wordlist (for people from Somalia).

See: <http://www.cal.org/co/publications/english-somali-phrasebook-with-useful-wordlist.pdf>

Muslim Holidays

Mawlid al-Nabi

Observance of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad's birthday

Lailat al Miraj

Are the two parts of a Night Journey that, according to Islamic tradition, the Islamic Prophet Muhammad took during a single night around the year 621 A.D.

Lailat al Bara'a

The date when Imam al-Mahdi was born, the 12th, final and current Shia Imam and also the Mahdi, a very important Islamic figure who is believed by all Muslims to bring absolute justice to the world by establishing Islam as the global religion.

Ramadan

Is the Islamic month of fasting, in which participating Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sex during daylight hours and is intended to teach Muslims about patience, spirituality, humility and Submissiveness to God.

Lailat al Kadr

The 27th night of Ramadan, the Night of Power – the night in which the 1st verses of the Koran are believed to have been revealed to the Islamic Prophet Muhammad in the year 610 A.D.

Quds Day

Commemorated on the last Friday of Ramadan. It is a day that Muslims from all around the world show their support for the oppressed Muslims of the world and, in particular, Palestine. Rallies are held in every capital of the world.

Eid al-Fitr

An Islamic festival marking the end of Ramadan

Eid al-Adha

An Islamic festival marking the sacrifice made by Abraham and the end of the Annual pilgrimage to Mecca traditionally celebrated by the sacrifice of sheep

Al-Hijra/Muharram

Islamic New Year

Ashura

Is marked by Muslims as a whole, but for Shia Muslims, it is a major religious festival that commemorates the martyrdom at Karbala of Hussein, a grandson of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad

Note: In the Muslim calendar, a holiday begins on the sunset of the previous day.