



Somalia

Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
Fifty-Second Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review
(October 2025)

Submitted on 07 October 2025

Submitted by: *The Arab Council Foundation*

Contact Information

Organization Name:

The Arab Council Foundation

Submission to:

United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

Address:

Rue de l'Est 6,

1207 Geneva, Switzerland

Registered in Geneva under license no. **CHE-228.730.069**

Website:

<https://arabcouncil.foundation/en>

Person Responsible for the Submission:

Almoutassim Al Kilani

Director of the Accountability portal – “*Strategic Litigation*” Program

Email: justice@arabcouncil.foundation

Introduction

This report, submitted by The Arab Council Foundation to the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (Fifty-Second Session, October 2025), aims to shed light on the human rights situation in the Federal Republic of Somalia from two main perspectives: the rights of the child and economic and social rights. The analysis is presented in light of Somalia's international and regional obligations, and the persistent challenges that continue to hinder their effective implementation.

The report shows that Somalia still suffers from a long legacy of armed conflict and internal divisions that have weakened state institutions and negatively affected the government's ability to protect human rights and provide basic services.

Despite Somalia's accession to several key international instruments — such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) — the effective implementation of these obligations remains severely limited due to weak institutional capacity, insecurity, and insufficient funding.

With regard to children's rights, the report highlights that over three million children remain out of school, while child recruitment continues to be practiced by armed groups, most notably Al-Shabaab. It also underscores the persistence of early marriage and sexual violence against children, among the most widespread violations in the absence of an effective protection framework and independent accountability mechanisms.

In terms of economic and social rights, Somalia faces a protracted livelihood crisis: nearly 70% of the population lives below the poverty line, and the majority of households depend on humanitarian assistance.

The worsening food insecurity and recurrent droughts have directly

endangered the lives of millions, especially women and children.

The healthcare system remains nearly collapsed, with the country recording among the highest maternal and child mortality rates globally.

The report concludes that the protection of human rights in Somalia requires a comprehensive and integrated approach based on:

- Strengthening state institutions and building an independent judiciary;
- Reforming national legislation in line with international conventions;
- Adopting a national strategy for the rights of children and women; and
- Developing the health and education infrastructure with international support.

In conclusion, The Arab Council Foundation emphasizes that achieving social justice and sustainable development in Somalia will not be possible without investing in people — especially children and women — as they are the foundation of any genuine and lasting national revival.

Executive Summary

1. The human rights situation in Somalia remains one of the most complex in the region, due to decades of armed conflict, the fragility of state institutions, and worsening humanitarian challenges.

Although Somalia has acceded to several international human rights treaties — including the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* — the implementation of these obligations remains far from effective, mainly due to structural challenges, limited capacity, and persistent instability.

2. This report focuses on two main areas: the rights of the child and economic and social rights.

Data indicate that more than three million children are out of school, and that child recruitment continues to be a widespread practice by armed groups such as *Al-Shabaab*, amid weak accountability mechanisms.

Moreover, early marriage and sexual violence against children remain prevalent, in the absence of effective legal protection or functioning institutions capable of providing support and redress.

3. On the economic and social front, Somalia faces extremely high levels of poverty and unemployment — with around 70% of the population living below the poverty line and a large proportion relying on humanitarian aid.

Chronic food insecurity and recurring droughts continue to threaten the lives of millions, particularly children.

The health system remains severely underdeveloped, as Somalia records among the highest rates of child and maternal mortality worldwide.

Key Recommendations

- Develop a comprehensive national plan for the protection of children, including effective mechanisms to hold accountable those responsible for child recruitment or exploitation.
- Reform national legislation to ensure the prohibition of early marriage and the criminalization of violence against children.
- Increase government spending on education and healthcare, ensuring that essential services are accessible to rural and impoverished areas.
- Adopt a national poverty reduction strategy, with strengthened transparency and accountability in the management of humanitarian assistance.
- Ensure the active participation of Somali civil society organizations in policy-making processes and in monitoring the implementation of human rights commitments.

Methodology

4. This report is based on an extensive review of United Nations reports — including those of *UNICEF*, the *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)*, and reports of the *Special Rapporteurs* — in addition to publications from international organizations such as *Amnesty International* and *Human Rights Watch*.

It also draws on local data and documentation provided by Somali organizations active in the fields of child protection and humanitarian assistance, as well as secondary surveys and information obtained from both local and international media sources.

5. The report incorporates the use of comparative assessments (before/after) issued by UN agencies to evaluate developments in the situation of children's rights and economic rights.

All information presented adheres to international documentation standards, with a strong emphasis on neutrality, accuracy, and objectivity in both data collection and analysis.

General Background

6. Since the collapse of the central government in 1991, Somalia has experienced a protracted armed conflict that has led to the fragmentation of state institutions and the emergence of de facto authorities across several regions.

The Al-Shabaab movement, affiliated with *Al-Qaeda*, continues to control large areas of the country and carries out frequent armed attacks targeting civilians and critical infrastructure.

7. The fragile security and political situation has resulted in the internal displacement of more than three million people, while over six million individuals rely on urgent humanitarian assistance for survival.

Environmental crises — particularly recurrent droughts and floods — have further deepened social vulnerability and directly impacted the overall human rights situation.

8. Although Somalia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other key human rights treaties, implementation remains severely limited due to weak institutions, lack of political will, and ongoing conflict.

Children and impoverished communities remain the most affected segments of the population, making the protection of children's rights and economic and social rights an urgent priority in any future human rights review process.

Children's Rights

9. Education: The education sector in Somalia remains critically weak. According to UNICEF estimates, more than three million Somali children are out of school, primarily due to ongoing conflict, large-scale displacement, poor infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified teachers.

Primary school enrollment rates do not exceed 30% in some rural areas. Girls are disproportionately affected, as many are pushed into early marriage rather than continuing their education.

10. Child Recruitment and Use in Armed Conflict: The recruitment and use of children by *Al-Shabaab* and other armed groups remains a widespread violation. United Nations reports document hundreds of cases annually, where children are forced to fight or provide logistical support.

Some government forces have also been accused of using child soldiers. The absence of effective accountability mechanisms perpetuates the cycle of

violence, leaving children trapped in armed conflict without protection or justice.¹

11. Violence Against Children and Early Marriage: Estimates suggest that approximately 45% of Somali girls are married before the age of 18, in the absence of clear legislation prohibiting early marriage or protecting children from exploitation.

Sexual violence against children, particularly in conflict-affected areas and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, remains alarmingly prevalent.

There is a severe shortage of psychosocial and social support centers, leaving many victims without access to care or legal redress.

12. Health and Malnutrition: Hundreds of thousands of children face acute malnutrition each year due to chronic food insecurity caused by recurring droughts.

According to UN data, Somalia records one of the highest under-five mortality rates in the world.

The country's healthcare infrastructure is unable to meet basic needs — many regions lack hospitals or primary health facilities, leaving millions of children without essential health services.

Recommendations on Children's Rights

- Develop an urgent national action plan to combat child recruitment, including strict accountability mechanisms for perpetrators and comprehensive reintegration programs for former child soldiers.
- Reform personal status laws to ensure a legal ban on early marriage, with clear and enforceable penalties for violations.
- Increase investment in primary education, with targeted support programs for girls and displaced families to promote equitable access to schooling.

¹ **United Nations Secretary-General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict (2023)**
(*Children and Armed Conflict – 2023*)

- Strengthen child health infrastructure, with a particular focus on malnutrition prevention and treatment programs.
- Establish a national mechanism for the protection of internally displaced children, ensuring their access to education, healthcare, and essential social services.

Economic and Social Rights in Somalia

13. Poverty and Unemployment:

Poverty remains the greatest challenge facing Somali society. According to World Bank estimates, nearly 70% of the population lives below the poverty line.²

Unemployment is widespread, particularly among youth, where rates exceed 67%, pushing many to resort to irregular migration or even joining armed groups as a means of survival.³

14. The absence of clear national strategies to address poverty has left the population heavily dependent on humanitarian aid, further increasing its vulnerability to economic and political shocks.

15. Food Security: Somalia is among the countries most affected by climate change and drought, with more than six million people suffering from acute food insecurity.⁴

Children and women are the most vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. Recurring droughts destroy crops and force hundreds of thousands into internal displacement, while the absence of effective agricultural policies has left the country heavily reliant on external assistance.

16. The food crisis is no longer an exceptional situation but a chronic condition, requiring an urgent national plan for sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

² World Bank: Somalia Poverty Assessment (2022)

³ UNDP Report on Youth and Unemployment in Somalia (2021)

⁴ FAO and WFP Joint Report on Somalia (2023)

17. Right to Health: Somalia's health system is extremely fragile. According to World Health Organization (WHO) reports, the country records one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world — 829 deaths per 100,000 live births — and an under-five mortality rate of 115 deaths per 1,000 children.⁵

18. Health infrastructure is on the verge of collapse: more than half of the population lacks access to basic health services.

Ongoing armed conflict hampers humanitarian access, while psychosocial and social support for conflict victims and internally displaced persons (IDPs) remains virtually non-existent.

19. Right to Education: Although education is a core child right, it also constitutes a fundamental social right.

Weak infrastructure, limited funding, and widespread displacement have left millions of children out of school.

The shortage of qualified teachers and the absence of updated national curricula exacerbate the crisis.

Public investment in education remains extremely low, not exceeding 2% of GDP, far below the internationally recommended level of 4–6%.⁶

20. Housing and the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): Internal displacement has become a protracted humanitarian crisis in Somalia, with over three million IDPs living in informal settlements that lack the most basic conditions of adequate housing.⁷

These displaced communities are deprived of education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Women and children in IDP camps are particularly exposed to violence and exploitation, in the absence of effective protection mechanisms or national policies to address displacement and ensure durable solutions.

⁵ World Health Organization (WHO) – Somalia Data (2023)

⁶ UNICEF – Somalia Education Report (2022)

⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – Somalia IDPs Report (2023)

Legal and Institutional Framework

21. The Provisional Constitution of Somalia (2012) serves as the primary legal reference, guaranteeing a range of fundamental rights, including the right to education, health, and a life of dignity.

However, the practical implementation of these constitutional rights remains extremely weak, largely due to institutional fragility, limited administrative capacity, and the absence of the rule of law.

22. At the international level, Somalia ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 2015, but it has not yet ratified the Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the sale of children, or their exploitation in pornography.

Somalia is also a State Party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); however, the domestic implementation of its provisions remains very limited, primarily due to the absence of complementary national legislation and effective institutional mechanisms for enforcement.

Role of Civil Society

23. Despite the fragile security situation and weak institutional structures, Somali civil society continues to play an increasingly vital role in monitoring human rights violations, delivering basic services, and raising awareness about human rights.

Local organizations, often in partnership with international actors, are active in education, documentation, and humanitarian assistance programs.

However, the operating environment remains highly insecure and restrictive, due to security threats, administrative barriers, and limited government support for independent civil action.

Previous International Recommendations (UPR 2021)

During the previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2021, Somalia received dozens of recommendations focused on:

- Strengthening the protection of children's rights, particularly in combating child recruitment and early marriage;
- Improving healthcare and education services;
- Addressing poverty and food insecurity.

However, implementation progress has remained very limited.

There has been no significant advancement in most of these areas, particularly regarding access to education for children and improving the living conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Comprehensive Recommendations

At the General Level:

- Align national legislation with international human rights obligations, and accelerate ratification of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensuring stronger protection for vulnerable groups.
- Support and empower civil society as a key partner in designing and implementing human rights policies, while ensuring a safe and transparent environment for its work.
- Establish an effective national mechanism to monitor the implementation of UPR recommendations, in cooperation with civil society, to ensure that international commitments are translated into concrete national policies.

At the Level of Children's Rights:

- Adopt a comprehensive national child protection plan, addressing child recruitment, early marriage, and sexual violence.
 - Develop a national education system ensuring that girls and displaced children have access to schooling.
- Increase investment in child health and nutrition programs.

At the Level of Economic and Social Rights:

- Develop a national poverty reduction strategy, focused on job creation for youth and strengthening the local economy.
- Adopt a sustainable agricultural plan to combat drought and ensure food security.
- Increase national budget allocations for health and education in line with international standards.
- Develop a national policy on internal displacement, guaranteeing adequate housing and access to essential services for displaced populations.
- Ensure the active participation of civil society organizations in the design and implementation of social and economic policies.

24. Conclusion:

The overall human rights situation in Somalia reflects deep structural fragility stemming from decades of armed conflict, natural disasters, and institutional collapse.

The most affected populations remain children and impoverished communities, trapped in cycles of poverty, violence, and food and health insecurity.

25. Despite Somalia's international human rights commitments, implementation remains severely limited.

However, the Universal Periodic Review process provides a crucial opportunity to refocus international and national attention on these violations, and to encourage practical steps by both Somali authorities and the international community toward tangible change.

26. Addressing the rights of children and economic and social rights is not merely a legal obligation, but rather the foundation for lasting peace, stability, and development in Somalia.