

## **A quick look at Abdi's homeland**

Somalia is a “7”-shaped strip of land forming the easternmost part of the so-called Horn of Africa. The Horn of Africa is the roughly triangular-shaped peninsula that lies along the southern side of the Red Sea and juts out into the Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea, just south of the Saudi Arabian peninsula.

The country we know as Somalia didn't exist until 1960, when The Republic of Somalia was formed by the federation of a former Italian colony and a British protectorate.

In 1991 (when Abdi was 6), a de facto government declared an independent Republic of Somaliland in the north. And in 1998 (when Abdi was 13), the [autonomous](#) region of Puntland (the Puntland State of Somalia) was self-proclaimed in the northeast.

However, neither country is internationally recognized.

Likewise, Somalia's western border was determined arbitrarily by the colonial powers and is still a source of dispute. Because lands traditionally occupied by Somali people were divided by this border, Somali communities also exist in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya.

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the history of what is now Somalia is somewhat limited and obscure, and it is linked in significant ways with the history of neighboring Ethiopia. Because of their strategic locations, the northern and eastern Somali coasts were for centuries open to the outside world. Between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> century, immigrant Muslim Arabs and Persians developed a series of trading posts along the coasts.

Intensive exploration of the area, however, really began only after the occupation of Aden by the British in 1839 and the ensuing decades-long scramble for Somali possessions by Britain, [France](#), and [Italy](#). This is when things get complicated and ever-changing.

Fast-forward to World War II, when the British protectorate was evacuated (1940) but then recaptured with Italian Somalia in 1941. With the exception of French Somaliland, all the Somali territories then were united under British military administration. In 1950 the Italians returned to southern Somalia. Together, these two groups had 10 years to prepare the country for independence under a United Nations trusteeship.

### **For more about the history of Somalia (ancient or modern)**

**A chronological timeline of key events (BBC):** <https://bbc.in/2RVRYd3>

**Narrative history (Britannica):** <https://bit.ly/3i5Fqu9>

### **For updates on current conditions in Somalia**

**Peace Direct:** <https://bit.ly/33XHuiR>

**Human Rights Watch:** <https://bit.ly/3cw4c5k>

**Aljazeera:** <https://www.aljazeera.com/where/somalia/>

**BBC:** <https://www.bbc.com/news/topics/cnx753jejqwt/somalia>

**Euronews:** <https://www.euronews.com/news/africa/somalia>

**Voice of America:** <https://www.voasomali.com/>

### **A few fast facts about Somalia**

**People:** The [Somali](#) people are clan-based Sunni Muslims, and about three-fifths follow a mobile/nomadic way of life. Somalia has a relatively young population, with more than two-fifths under age 15. The current population is about 16 million.

**Political leadership:** A bicameral Federal Parliament was formed in 2012. The last presidential election was held in 2017. [Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed](#) — an American bureaucrat who had applied for and won asylum in 1988 — won in a surprise result. He appointed former humanitarian worker and businessman [Hassan Khaire](#) as his Prime Minister. (Read more about Mohamed [here](#).)

**Terrain:** Apart from a mountainous coastal zone in the north and several pronounced river valleys, most of the country is extremely flat.

**Climate:** The Somalian capital, Mogadishu, is located just north of the Equator. Unlike typical Equatorial climates, conditions in Somalia range from arid to semiarid. In fact, Somalia has some of the highest mean annual temperatures in the world.

**Animal life:** The progressive destruction of plant life has hurt animal habitats and reduced forage for livestock like the goats and camels tended by Abdi's parents and ancestors, though many species of wild animals still roam: hyenas, foxes, leopards, lions, warthogs, ostriches, small antelopes and a large variety of birds. Unfortunately, giraffes, zebras, oryx, hippopotamuses, [rhinoceroses](#) and, above all, elephants have been decimated.

**Health:** The country has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world. The average life expectancy is only about 50 years, considerably lower than that of neighboring countries. Decades of conflict, severe drought and famine continue to take their toll. Chronic food shortages have led to high rates of malnutrition, and much of Somalia does not have adequate water supplies or sanitation. Cholera, [measles](#), [tuberculosis](#) and malaria are widespread. Because of a higher level of stability, health care in the two self-governing regions (Somaliland and Puntland) is a little better.

**Trade:** Somalia has a large trade deficit. Its chief export commodities are livestock and bananas, mainly sent to Arab countries. Other exports include hides and skins, fish and frankincense and myrrh. Almost everything is imported, even food — for the urban population in particular.

**Education:** Civil war and anarchy left Somalia's state education system in shambles. Private schools still function, and some Islamic schools (like the one Abdi completed) are operational, but they typically do not provide secular education. Only about one-fifth of Somalis aged 15 and older are literate, making Abdi's learning of English even more remarkable.

**Culture:** As we saw with Abdi's mother, Somalia has a rich oral tradition of passing along stories, myths, traditions and genealogies. Astrology is also very important. Cultural traditions of poetry, folk dancing, the performance of plays and singing continue in rural areas, but in towns and cities, they are superseded by imported modern influences like television, cinema, and bars and restaurants.

Urban Somalian cooking has been strongly influenced by Italian cuisine, and young townspeople are influenced largely by Western fashion. Football (soccer) is a popular sport.

**Media/publishing:** Press, radio, and television are still controlled by the state. Books in general are hard to obtain, and the printing quality of the few books available in the Somali language is very poor.

**Source:** *Britannica.com*