

Somalia

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Overview

Somalia has a population of approximately 17 597 511 and the population is growing at 3.07% per year.¹ Somalia has one of the highest urbanisation rates in the region with 47.32% of the country's population living in cities.² The two main urban areas are Mogadishu (the capital city) and Hargeisa with a population of 2.610 million people and 1.127 million respectively.³ Currently the country is urbanising at a rate of 4.3% annually.⁴ This translates to a growing demand for urban housing and other basic services; an issue that poses considerable challenges for public policymaking in the context of weak institutions and limited economic means. Demand for housing in urban Somalia has further been exacerbated by the prolonged humanitarian crisis in the country including drought, conflict and other related shocks that have resulted in an increase in internally displaced people (IDPs), poor shelter conditions, overcrowding, insecurity of tenure and poverty.⁵

Demand for housing in Somalia remains high while supply is not commensurate. It is estimated that 4.8 million people are in need of shelter in the country.⁶ The susceptibility of the country to recurring environmental shocks including periodic droughts and floods, as well as prolonged insecurity and fragility, has worsened this situation by causing high levels of displacement and increasing the number of IDPs who need to be housed. In 2023 alone the number of those displaced so far is 1.420 million persons.⁷ However, observation on the level of building activities in the main cities suggests a booming construction sector.⁸ Driven by the housing demand from rapid urbanisation, as well as diaspora investments, there is a visible construction spree, predominantly in the capital Mogadishu but also in regional capitals and major towns with rehabilitation and reconstruction of many old areas taking place.⁹

Somalia has a gross domestic product (GDP) of SOS218.043 trillion (US\$383.54 billion) and an annual GDP growth rate of 4.8%. An estimated 54.4% of its population live below the poverty line.¹⁰ The real GDP growth rate dropped to 1.7% in 2022 from 2.9% in 2021 due to drought, insecurity, food and fuel inflation triggered by the Russia-Ukraine conflict.¹¹ Inflation increased to 6.8% in 2022 from 4.6% in 2021 due to high energy and food import prices. Somalia maintains a largely informal economy highly reliant on a number of primary commodities whose demand suffers seasonal effects and unpredictability,¹² such as livestock farming and remittances. In the last quarter of 2022, 76% of the country's total exports were livestock.¹³

In 2022 the Central Bank of Somalia (CBS) estimated that the country's imports had a total value of SOS3.6 trillion (US\$6.4 billion) against an export value of only SOS400 billion (US\$704 million). This implies a high dependency on imports, including construction materials. In the last quarter of 2022, construction materials accounted for the second highest imports into the country at 16%, second only to food at 39% of total imports.¹⁴ Overreliance on imports for construction materials has a direct implication on the cost of housing. In 2022 capital expenditure by the government was very low at 2% of the total expenditure.¹⁵ This indicates very low investments in assets such as public housing and infrastructure, resulting in an overreliance on the private sector as the main player in housing and infrastructure provision. Other

KEY FIGURES

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|--|--|
| Main urban centres | Mogadishu, Hargeysa, Berbera, Kismayo, Marka |
| Exchange rate (1 July 2023): 1 USD = [a] 1 PPP\$ = (2022) [b] | 568.50 Somali Shilling (SOS) 9 083.35 Somali Shilling (SOS) |
| Total population [b] Urban population [b] Population growth rate [b] Urbanisation rate [b] Percentage of urban population living in slums Percentage of female-headed households Unemployment rate (% of total labour force, national estimate) (2021) [b] Percentage of women participating in the labour market formally (2021) [b] Gini coefficient HDI country ranking HDI country score | 17 597 511 8 327 846 3.07% 4.33% n/a n/a 19.9% 21% n/a n/a n/a |
| GDP per capita (Current US\$) [b] GDP (Current US\$) [b] GDP growth rate [b] Inflation rate (2018) [b] Lending interest rate Proportion of adult population that borrowed formally (2014) [b] | US\$461 US\$8 126 million 4.80% 2.80% n/a 57% |
| Number of residential mortgages outstanding Value of residential mortgages outstanding (USD) Prevailing residential mortgage rate Term [e] Maximum LTV on a residential mortgage [e] Ratio of mortgages to GDP Number of residential mortgage providers [f] Percentage of women who own a house alone and/or jointly Number of microfinance loans outstanding Value of microfinance loans [g] Number of microfinance providers [h] | n/a n/a 10-20% 5 years 80% n/a 3 n/a n/a US\$29 million 12 |
| Total number of residential properties with a title deed Number of formal dwellings completed annually Number of residential projects certified by EDGE Price of the cheapest, newly built house by a formal developer or contractor in an urban area in local currency units (2021) [i] Size of cheapest, newly built house by a formal developer or contractor in an urban area in square meters (2021) [i] Typical monthly rental for the cheapest, newly built house (2021) [i] Cost of standard 50kg bag of cement in local currency units [g] Type of deeds registry: digital, scanned or paper (2020) [j] World Bank Ease of Doing Business index rank (2020) [j] Time to register property (days) Cost to register property (2020) [j] World Bank DBI Quality of Land Administration index score (0-30) (2020) [j] | n/a n/a n/a SOS 23 024 349 150m ² SOS 341 101 SOS 4 264 (US\$7.37) Paper 190 188 days 1.40% 7.5 |

NB: Figures are for 2023 unless stated otherwise.

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| [a] Xe.com | [e] Amal Bank |
| [b] World Bank World Development Indicators (as at end 2022) | [f] Office of the president |
| [c] Demographic and Health Surveys, USAID | [g] Central Bank of Somalia |
| [d] United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) | [h] National Economic Council of Somalia |
| | [i] Physical Planning Somaliland |
| | [j] World Bank Ease of Doing Business Indicators |

challenges facing the housing sector in Somalia include land acquisition challenges, lack of proper regulation of the sector; access to financing and unregulated pricing schemes.¹⁶

Access to finance

Even though Somalia has been making strides with the establishment of the Central Bank of Somalia, the country has yet to strengthen its financial infrastructure and laws pertaining to commercial credit, accounting and insurance.¹⁷ The limited capacity to enforce the rule of law has prevented the development of formal contract-based credit in Somalia and has been an impediment to private sector growth. However, the Central Bank of Somalia has tremendously improved its role of licensing and supervision of the financial sector.¹⁸ Commercial banks are becoming relatively active in the economy and are providing various financial products. Currently, the formal financial sector consists of 13 licensed commercial banks, 12 licensed money transfer firms and three licensed mobile money providers.¹⁹ Nine of the 13 registered banks in the country provide housing

finance. As of September 2022, CBS had issued licenses to three mobile money service providers: Hormuud Telecom, Somtel and Somlink.²⁰

Somalia's finance system is dominated by money transfer operators. Three-quarters of the population use mobile money transfer compared to only 15% of the population who have bank accounts with formal banks. Of the 15% of the accounts held with formal banks only 5% of these users are active²¹ and 7% of those who have bank accounts are women.²² Bank deposits grew by 22% to SOS709.1 billion (US\$1 247.4 million) in the fourth quarter of 2022, up from SOS582.7 billion (US\$1 025.1 million) in the corresponding period of 2021 and SOS199 billion (US\$350 million) recorded in the first quarter of 2019.²³ Commercial banks have recorded remarkable asset growth with total assets at the end of the fourth quarter of 2022 increasing by 20% to SOS831.4 billion (US\$1 462.5 million), up from SOS694.1 billion (US\$1 221 million) in the corresponding quarter of 2021.²⁴ Private investment remained resilient despite a drop in foreign direct investment from 8% in 2021 to 7.8% in 2022.²⁵ The banking sector also remained stable even though the non-performing loans ratio rose from 1% in 2021 to 5% in 2022 with capital adequacy and liquidity ratios remaining sufficient.²⁶

Banks in Somalia operate under strict Sharia law.²⁷ Housing and other property loans are accessed under the Murabaha contract system. The buyer is required to pay the cost of the property plus a profit margin that ranges from 12 – 20% depending on the payment duration.²⁸ The repayment period ranges from 2 – 5 years. For bigger commercial projects some banks can offer a repayment period of up to 10 years.²⁹ The borrower is required to raise 10 – 20% of the property cost upfront³⁰ which varies from bank to bank. In addition, the borrower is also required to issue collateral and a guarantee.³¹

The microfinance institutions in Somalia are still in their infancy and still unregulated. Like banks, they also charge a commission, ranging between 10-20% of the amount borrowed, and their loans are usually payable within six months.³² In 2022 the country recorded SOS1.6 billion (US\$2.8 million) in microfinance loans.³³ Some of the major microfinance players in Somalia (either as affiliated subsidiaries of commercial banks or independently registered) are Gargaara, Microdahab, Kobciye, Kaah International Microfinance Services (KIMS)Kaaba Microfinance Institution (K-MFI) Halalmaal microfinance institution, RAAS microfinance and Bushra microfinance.³⁴ The country also has financial cooperatives, especially in rural areas and IDP camps that help drive financial inclusion in the country.³⁵ These are still in the nascent stage and include self-help groups and traditional saving mechanisms known as *ayoto* or *Hagbad* and have played a pivotal role in pooling resources together to acquire land and other resources.³⁶

When the National Economic Council of Somalia carried out research on access to finance seeking to establish whether firms had access to credit for running business, only 17% of the respondents indicated that they had access to business loans. Of the surveyed informal firms, only 16.5% of the firms applied for business loans; some of the reasons cited by those who didn't apply for the loans included "didn't have required guarantees", "the bank charges are too high", and "application procedures are complex".³⁷ These are representative of some of the challenges encountered in accessing finance in Somalia.

Affordability

In 2022, Somalia recorded an unemployment rate of 21.4%³⁸ which is an increase from the 18.8% rate recorded in 2019 by the World Bank.³⁹ In urban areas, the IDPs experience a higher prevalence of poverty. Although urban residents have lower poverty levels, they account for over half (54.6%) of the total poor population in the country.⁴⁰ Female-headed households in urban areas have a higher prevalence of poverty at 48.2% as compared to male-headed households at 43.5%.⁴¹ The high poverty levels are driven by conflict, natural disaster, insecurity and weak rule of law and poor governance.⁴²

The average income is higher in the urban areas than the rural areas and so is expenditure on housing.⁴³ The majority of the employed population live in urban areas⁴⁴ with 77% of the population working in the informal sector.⁴⁵ Expenditure on housing for urban households takes the second largest share coupled together with electricity, water and gas, accounting for an average of 19% of their total expenditure.⁴⁶ Over half (56%) of the household expenditure is spent on food.⁴⁸ In 2022, remittances to the country were estimated at 20.6% of the total GDP and 37% of household private consumption was mainly boosted and supported

by remittances.⁴⁹ A study by International Organization for Migration (IOM) that explored youth employment and migration in Baidoa, Kismayo and Mogadishu found that although the capital offers opportunities for higher income, the cost of living is also very high⁵⁰ and a skilled worker would earn approximately SOS284 251 (US\$500) per month⁵¹ with living expenses estimated at SOS 296 258 (US\$522) for a single person, excluding rent.⁵²

The monthly rent for a one bedroom apartment within the city centre ranges between SOS85 275 – SOS142 125 (US\$150 – US\$250) and SOS28 425 – SOS85 275 (US\$50 – US\$150) outside the city centre. A three bedroom apartment within the city centre ranges from SOS198 976 – SOS284 251 (US\$350 – US\$500) and from SOS85 275 – SOS198 976 (US\$150 – US\$350) outside the city.⁵³ To buy an apartment within the city centre costs SOS6 317 199 – SOS37 202 799 (US\$11 112 – US\$65 440) per square metre while outside the city centre, the price ranges from SOS5 685 024 – SOS28 311 421 (US\$10 000 – US\$49 800) per square metre. The cost of land in urban areas differs by location. According to a key informant interview, Mogadishu is divided into security zones and districts; green zone, yellow zone and red zone. Green zone, being the most secure, hosts most government and development organisation offices and residences. Land in the green zone attracts the highest value, costing as much as SOS540 077 (US\$950) per square metre. In Waberi district for instance cost per square metre is SOS341 101 (US\$600) while in Hodon or Wadajir it is more than SOS397 952 (US\$700).⁵⁴

Housing supply

According to a real-estate overview report done by Amal Real Estate in 2017, Somalia has a housing supply deficit of 2 million units.⁵⁵ Due to land challenges, informal settlements are a very common phenomenon in all the urban areas with 74% of the urban population living in informal settlements.⁵⁶ Lack of urban planning and infrastructure development are some of the challenges faced by the housing sector in the country. Additionally, no building code exists to guide the type of construction materials to be used in the country and current building material choices in the sector lead to high levels of imports, while research in developing local solutions for building materials remains limited.⁵⁷

An analysis of shelter typology in the city in 2019 revealed four main housing typologies in urban areas:⁵⁸ The Buuls or temporary shelters made of mud, sticks cartons plastic or cloth, the corrugated iron sheet housing, the apartments and villas. The 2017/2018 Somalia High Frequency Survey (SHFS) revealed a strong correlation between poverty and the quality of housing in Somalia. Poor households mostly have a floor of mud or wood and are less likely to have a sheet metal roof. Less than half (43%) of Somali households have a floor of mud, wood or other material while the majority have a roof of metal sheets (57%).⁵⁹

The government is not actively involved in the supply of basic services such as water; delivery is entirely private, or supplied by humanitarian agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).⁶⁰ Urban households fare better in access to electricity, water, and improved sanitation than rural households. With respect to access to improved water sources, 78% of the population have access to improved water sources while 63% have access to improved sanitation facilities.⁶¹ This is highly skewed by the high access in Mogadishu that masks the low access in other urban areas.⁶² Sixty-two percent of the population have access to electricity with a majority (79%) being those living in urban areas.

Property markets

A scan through the internet shows that the structure of the construction sector is diversifying. Alongside the traditional constructors and humanitarian shelter solutions, in recent years, many medium-scale construction companies such as Amal Real Estate Developers⁶³ and Horn Property⁶⁴ have emerged. They are capable of constructing with high standards, increasingly specialising in a market niche such as high-end housing, small-scale housing, offices, business units, and the provision of construction-related services like architecture, design, or landscaping. Strikingly, although financing for high-end housing is increasingly becoming available, innovative financing schemes for affordable housing by the private sector are missing.⁶⁵ There is a concern about the lack of access to quality housing among the poor. There are also real estate agents who have greatly sustained the market while acting as a link between developers/landlords and buyers/renters. There is however no recognised body for real estate agents.⁶⁶

PRICE OF BUILDING MATERIALS AND CONSTRUCTION COST INFLATION – SOMALIA

The high cost of construction is often cited as a key factor undermining housing affordability. The need to import materials instead of purchasing those produced locally, the shortage of and high cost of local skills, and the absence of financial mechanisms that allow for materials to be bought in bulk – all these factors impact on construction costs and may create cost overruns.

Strikes or fuel shortages also increase the price of building supplies, by driving up transport costs. High inflation rates, as are being seen across the continent in 2023, also undermine affordability. As a result, low-income households may not be able to afford the price of construction materials in order to build their own home incrementally.

CAHF has been collecting a few basic housing cost indicators for the past decade, including the price of key building materials, the price of the cheapest, newly-built house in an urban area by a private developer and the average size of this house (see Key Figures section).

Wholesale price of a standard 50kg bag of OPC cement (strength class 32.5N)

SOS 4 264 (US\$7.50)



Price of ceramic floor tiling (per sq metre)

SOS 6 822 (US\$12.00)



Price of steel profiled roof sheeting per sq metre

SOS 5 685 (US\$10.00)



Price of roof tiling (per sq metre)

SOS 9 664 (US\$17.00)



Price of cheapest, newly-built house by a private developer in an urban area

SOS 23 024 349 (US\$40 500)



Cautionary notes

This data was collected by Yearbook authors as part of their research. Authors were asked to contact three building material supply stores and ask for the price of the product, and then, based on the responses received, estimate the typical cost of the material. The figures given are therefore not formal averages but informed estimates, based on the canvassing of a handful of suppliers in urban areas.

Urban land in Somalia is governed through a mix of formal, customary and Sharia law.⁶⁷ Leasing, rental, purchase, and inheritance currently form the commonest ways of accessing land and property. Property leasing is mostly informal as there are no laws for land leasing that exist. Renting property (housing) is also largely informal and the intricacies vary with location. In some cases, residents have to produce a personal identification document (ID), a fee of SOS5 685 (US\$10) to the regional administrator, a guarantee and an upfront payment of 1 – 3 months of rent.⁶⁸ Land purchases can be done privately in the case where the owner has a title deed. The sale can either be formal with a notary, guarantor and witness, or informal where parties draft sale agreements themselves and effect them in the presence of a witness.⁶⁹

Different legal texts in the country affirm women's rights to own property as part of equitable treatment before the law.⁷⁰ While women are recognised to have a range of housing, land and property rights by law, a combination of chronic poverty, social turmoil, and patriarchal institutions have made such rights difficult to realise.⁷¹ Women face particular challenges in terms of property rights and access to housing not because the law does not recognise these rights but due to the patriarchal nature of Somali society. The Somalia Poverty Report 2023⁷² also indicates that women are less able to afford housing given that four out of every five females (79.7%) are outside the labour force.⁷³

Land prices are estimated to have increased – perhaps as much as tenfold – since 2012.⁷⁴ Factors underpinning this rapid price increase are all related to the unregulated land sector which creates a situation where speculation and an individual's ability to pay go a long way in determining who ends up gaining ownership of property. The presence of foreigners, including from international development agencies and diaspora returnees, has contributed to this trend as they are able to pay higher prices for properties. While notaries and regional administrators are responsible for keeping records on property and rental housing in the city, it is difficult to know exactly how much land is privately owned and by whom, as land transfers have been taking place outside of formal procedures for many years.⁷⁵

Policy and legislation

The legal frameworks and regulations governing the land and housing sector remain a major weakness holding back access to affordable housing and housing finance in Somalia.⁷⁶ The sector is highly unregulated. This includes aspects such as building codes to support and regulate housing in the city, housing policy, land policy, urban planning regulations and finance sector frameworks and laws.⁷⁷ However, the government is in the process of implementing a number of strategies that offer promising support structures to the housing sector. These include the National Durable Solutions Strategy (2020-2024)⁷⁸ which has put in place means to create acceleration for Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) towards housing and other public services, issuing guidelines on evictions, creating a database for good practices on affordable housing in Somalia and piloting innovative approaches to security of tenure as well as creating a land inventory. The ninth National Development Plan (NDP9) 2020-2024⁷⁹ has drawn the nation's path towards economic growth and poverty reduction.

Opportunities

The existing deficit and the ever-growing demand for housing in Somalia present an opportunity in the housing sector. Given the population distribution in Somalia, there is room for low cost and high-end housing as well as rental and home ownership. Rebuilding the country after the conflict comes with the need for the reconstruction of government buildings.⁸⁰ The expanding business community requires offices, production and service spaces and small-scale manufacturing spaces.⁸¹ This presents an opportunity to innovate around commercial space provision alongside residential communities (mixed-use development). Other specific opportunity areas are the lack of sector-wide statistical and analytical information which make it difficult to quantify the sector's contribution to the economy.⁸² This presents an opportunity for open-source housing data management in the country.

Although financing for high-end housing is increasingly becoming available, (innovative) financing schemes for affordable housing are missing. There is an opportunity for innovative financing and design for low-cost housing. Based on the plan to accelerate the use of PPPs for housing and other infrastructure services as highlighted in the National Durable Solutions Strategy (2020-2024), there is a great opportunity for the private sector to partner with the government to invest in infrastructure services for housing support as well as in housing development.

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Availability of data on housing finance

Access to housing data and statistical analysis on the housing sector and its contribution to the national economy in Somalia is a challenge that has been acknowledged even in government reports. A lot of available information is also outdated. Some of the data gaps identified include data on mortgages in the country, housing stock, demand and supply and number of registered properties.

Some key sources for housing finance data include the Central Bank of Somalia which provides data on the banking sector, and financial performance as well as a quarterly economic overview of the country. Annual and quarterly reports are also available and the website also provides policies governing the banking and finance sector. The Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development provides information on the economic outlook of the country, including on the construction sector. The Somalia National Bureau of Statistics provides data on the national census (currently outdated), poverty and inequality, including housing poverty and migration data. Finally, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) provides data on migration and displacement in Somalia.

Examples of innovation: Heliwaa social housing project

The Banadir Regional Administration (BRA) and the Municipality of Mogadishu have partnered with the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) under the durable housing solutions plan to implement the Heliwaa social housing project. The project, which was commissioned in 2019, comprises of 300 housing units for approximately 1500 people. The site is located in Heliwaa district which was selected on the basis of its closeness to existing social facilities, physical accessibility and projected future development plans in the area. The project was meant to start facilitating the transition from a humanitarian approach to housing, to more sustainable housing approaches. Given that the biggest cause of the housing crisis in Somalia is the IDP question, the project is an innovative approach to housing in a humanitarian recovery context.

The main innovative aspects of the project include:

- (i) The integration of the project into the existing city development through the choice of a site close to social amenities which in turn reduced the need to budget for the same in the project (which would affect the cost of development);
- (ii) The sustainability principles of economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions achieved by the project through the construction materials used, the designs adopted for both internal and external spaces, and the use of mixed-density housing typologies (4 typologies) to integrate the various social economic groups of the population;
- (iii) The use of PPPs to provide on-site infrastructure services such as electricity; and the post-construction management and maintenance as the project is supposed to be self-sustaining through highly-subsidised rents and cross-subsidisation from commercial spaces and the land tenure management and governance is through a committee comprising municipality and community representatives.⁸³

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