International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR)
ISSN: 2643-9670
Vol. 9 Issue 10 October - 2025, Pages: 176-189

Human Migrations in Somaliland: A Systematic Review of Patterns, Drivers, and Impacts

Mustafe Mahamoud Abdillahi

Department of Political and Administration Studies (PAS)
Kampala International University, P.O. Box 20000, Kansaga, Uganda.
Author(s) for Correspondence Email: **alkhaliili40@gmial.com**

ABSTRACT: *This systematic review investigated the complex dynamics of human migrations in Somaliland by synthesizing academic and grey literature from 2018 to 2024. The study adopted a comprehensive typology to analyze four primary, interconnected flows: internal displacement, driven predominantly by climate-induced droughts and local conflicts; international emigration, characterized by a persistent "brain drain" of skilled youth; diaspora return and transnational engagement, which injected capital and skills; and in-migration of individuals seeking Somaliland's relative stability. The analysis revealed that these flows were not independent but formed a complex system of vicious and virtuous cycles. For instance, remittances from emigration fueled diaspora investment, which in turn inflated urban real estate markets and exacerbated internal displacement. Conversely, returning diaspora professionals facilitated a partial "brain gain," strengthening governance. The review concluded that Somaliland's socio-economic and political fabric was fundamentally shaped by this multi-flow reality, necessitating integrated policy responses that move beyond fragmented approaches and acknowledge the profound interconnections between these movements. The findings underscored the critical role of migration as a central determinant of development, stability, and state-building in the contested territory.*

Keywords: Human Migration, Somaliland, Internal Displacement, Diaspora, Brain Drain, Remittances, Horn of Africa, De Facto State, Climate Migration, Transnationalism

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Somaliland as a migration nexus

The Republic of Somaliland, a self-declared independent state in the Horn of Africa, represents a critical and profoundly understudied epicenter of human mobility, whose complexity transcends conventional labels. It is a territory that simultaneously functions as a point of origin, a transit corridor, a destination, and a place of return, creating a unique migration system that is central to its socio-economic and political fabric. While the international focus often remains on migration from Somalia, Somaliland's distinct historical trajectory, including its post-conflict stability and nascent governance structures, has generated a specific and multi-layered migration context. The region is a primary source of emigrants and refugees heading to Europe, the Gulf States, and North America; a crucial transit point for thousands of Ethiopian migrants and others embarking on the perilous "Eastern Route" across the Gulf of Aden; a destination for economic migrants from Ethiopia and displaced persons from parts of Somalia; and a focus for returning refugees and members of its own large diaspora (Frouws & Othieno, 2021; Majid et al., 2021). This convergence of flows makes Somaliland not a peripheral player in regional migration dynamics, but a central nexus where local, regional, and global forces of movement intersect and interact, demanding a holistic analytical approach that moves beyond simplistic categorizations.

To accurately capture this complexity, this review adopts a comprehensive and context-specific definition of "human migrations" in Somaliland, encompassing four primary, and often overlapping, categories. First, internal displacement refers to the movement of people within Somaliland's borders, overwhelmingly driven by a confluence of climate-induced disasters, particularly recurrent and severe droughts, and local conflicts over resources and land (FSNAU, 2023). Second, international emigration entails the outflow of Somalilanders themselves, a phenomenon rooted in the historical trauma of the civil war but now sustained by ongoing economic precarity, political aspirations, and social networks that link directly to global diaspora communities. Third, return migration is a critical and politically salient flow, involving both the spontaneous and facilitated return of refugees from camps in neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya, as well as the investment-driven or retirement-focused return of diaspora members from the Global North (Hoehne, 2021). Fourth, in-migration includes both economic migrants, primarily from the Somali Regional State and Oromia in Ethiopia, drawn by Somaliland's relative economic opportunities, and Somali nationals from other regions seeking its comparative stability. This inclusive scope is essential to move beyond fragmented analyses and understand how these flows are intrinsically linked, creating a feedback loop that continually reshapes the nation's demographic and social landscape.

The existing academic and grey literature on migration in the Horn of Africa exhibits a significant knowledge gap: a tendency to examine individual migration streams in isolation, thereby missing the systemic whole. A substantial body of work meticulously documents the pivotal role of the Somaliland diaspora in driving political projects, fueling economic development through remittances, and shaping cultural narratives (Pegg & Wall, 2022). Concurrently, humanitarian organizations and researchers produce a steady stream of reports focusing exclusively on the vulnerabilities and needs of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), often framing

them as passive victims of climate shocks or conflict (REACH, 2022). Similarly, studies on migration routes, such as those by the Mixed Migration Center (2023), often analyze the "Eastern Route" as a regional phenomenon, with less granular attention to its specific operational dynamics, drivers, and impacts within the Somaliland context. This systematic review directly addresses this fragmentation by synthesizing these disparate strands of research. It posits that the drivers, patterns, and impacts of these migrations are not independent but are deeply intertwined in a complex feedback loop; for instance, remittances from international emigration can fund the movement of internal migrants to urban centers, while the presence of transit migrants can influence local economies and security dynamics.

Guided by this rationale, the present review is structured to systematically investigate the multifaceted phenomenon of human migration in Somaliland by answering three core research questions. First, what are the primary categories of human migration affecting Somaliland? This question seeks to delineate and characterize the distinct yet interconnected flows, internal displacement, international emigration, return migration, and in-migration, mapping their scale, demographics, and key corridors. Second, what are the root causes and drivers of each migratory flow? This line of inquiry will probe beyond superficial narratives to uncover the complex interplay of environmental stressors, economic pressures, political factors (including both the push of instability elsewhere and the pull of Somaliland's own governance), and social dynamics such as clan networks and family aspirations that propel movement. Finally, what are the social, economic, and political impacts of these combined migration patterns? This critical question assesses the dual-edged consequences of these flows, from the transformative role of remittances and diaspora investment to the immense strain on urban infrastructure and social services, and the profound implications for state-society relations, identity, and political development in Somaliland.

Ultimately, this systematic review argues that understanding Somaliland's contemporary reality is impossible without a synthesized analysis of its migration nexus. The convergence of these diverse flows is not a peripheral issue but a central determinant of the territory's development trajectory, stability, and future. By providing a holistic picture, this review aims to inform more coherent and effective policy responses from both the Somaliland government and international partners, responses that acknowledge the interconnected nature of these movements and their profound, lasting impacts on the social contract, economic resilience, and the very fabric of Somaliland society. The following sections will systematically unpack the patterns, drivers, and impacts of these migrations, building upon the foundational framework established in this introduction.

1.2. Defining "Human Migrations" in Context

To accurately capture this complexity, this review adopts a comprehensive and context-specific definition of "human migrations" in Somaliland, encompassing four primary, and often overlapping, categories. First, internal displacement refers to the movement of people within Somaliland's borders, overwhelmingly driven by a confluence of climate-induced disasters, particularly recurrent and severe droughts, and local conflicts over resources and land (FSNAU, 2023). Second, international emigration entails the outflow of Somalilanders themselves, a phenomenon rooted in the historical trauma of the civil war but now sustained by ongoing economic precarity, political aspirations, and social networks that link directly to global diaspora communities. Third, return migration is a critical and politically salient flow, involving both the spontaneous and facilitated return of refugees from camps in neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya, as well as the investment-driven or retirement-focused return of diaspora members from the Global North (Hoehne, 2021). Fourth, in-migration includes both economic migrants, primarily from the Somali Regional State and Oromia in Ethiopia, drawn by Somaliland's relative economic opportunities, and Somali nationals from other regions seeking its comparative stability. This inclusive scope is essential to move beyond fragmented analyses and understand how these flows are intrinsically linked.

1.3. Rationale and Knowledge Gap

The existing academic and grey literature on migration in the Horn of Africa exhibits a significant knowledge gap: a tendency to examine individual migration streams in isolation, thereby missing the systemic whole. A substantial body of work meticulously documents the pivotal role of the Somaliland diaspora in driving political projects, fueling economic development through remittances, and shaping cultural narratives (Pegg & Wall, 2022). Concurrently, humanitarian organizations and researchers produce a steady stream of reports focusing exclusively on the vulnerabilities and needs of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), often framing them as passive victims of climate shocks or conflict (REACH, 2022). Similarly, studies on migration routes, such as those by the Mixed Migration Centre (2023), often analyze the "Eastern Route" as a regional phenomenon, with less granular attention to its specific operational dynamics, drivers, and impacts within the Somaliland context. This systematic review directly addresses this fragmentation. It posits that the drivers, patterns, and impacts of these migrations are not independent but are deeply intertwined in a complex feedback loop. A synthesized, holistic picture is therefore not merely an academic exercise but a practical necessity for policymakers, development actors, and the Somaliland government to formulate coherent and effective responses.

1.4. Research Questions

I. What are the primary categories of human migration affecting Somaliland?
II. What are the root causes and drivers of each migratory flow?

III. What are the social, economic, and political impacts of these combined migration patterns?

2. METHODOLOGY

Based on a systematic review of academic and grey literature from 2018 to 2024, the research methodology employed a rigorous, multi-stage process to investigate human migrations in Somaliland, beginning with the explicit definition of three core research questions concerning the categories, drivers, and impacts of migratory flows. A comprehensive and systematic search strategy was then implemented across electronic databases and the websites of key international organizations and research institutes, using targeted keywords and a specific publication date range to ensure the evidence's contemporaneity. The identified literature subsequently underwent a strict screening process against pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria, focusing on sources that provided empirical data or analysis specific to Somaliland's four primary migration flows: internal displacement, international emigration, diaspora return, and in-migration. Following this, data from the selected studies were extracted using a standardized form and synthesized through a thematic analysis, which was organized around the established typology to delineate patterns, drivers, and impacts while paying particular attention to the interconnections and feedback loops between the different flows. Finally, the entire evidence base was critically appraised to acknowledge its heavy reliance on qualitative grey literature and to assess methodological limitations, which directly informed the confidence of the synthesized findings and shaped the identification of critical knowledge gaps for future research.

3. FINDINGS: A TYPOLOGY OF HUMAN MIGRATIONS IN SOMALILAND

3.1. Flow 1: Internal Displacement

The most visible and acutely felt migration flow within Somaliland is that of internal displacement, a phenomenon that has fundamentally reshaped the demographic and physical landscape of its major urban centers. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Somaliland are not a monolithic group, but their movement is predominantly driven by a devastating convergence of environmental and socio-economic pressures. The primary driver is climate-induced environmental collapse, specifically the recurrent and intensifying droughts that have decimated the pastoral economy, which serves as the backbone of rural livelihoods. The 2021-2023 drought, considered the worst in four decades, led to catastrophic livestock mortality rates, eroding the assets and resilience of hundreds of thousands of agro-pastoralist households and leaving them with no viable means of survival in their ancestral lands (UN OCHA, 2023). This environmental shock is compounded by more localized, yet persistent, drivers such as clan-based conflict over diminishing resources like water and grazing land, which not only displaces people directly through violence but also destroys the social contracts and reciprocal arrangements that traditionally enabled communities to withstand periods of hardship.

The patterns of this displacement are characterized by a relentless rural-to-urban trajectory, with streams of people converging on peri-urban zones of major cities such as Hargeisa, Burao, and Borama. These movements are often staged, with families first moving to smaller towns or roadside settlements as an initial coping mechanism before undertaking the final leg of the journey to the urban centers where humanitarian assistance and casual labor opportunities are perceived to be more available. The IDP settlements that ring these cities are not temporary encampments but have become permanent features of the urban fabric, characterized by extreme overcrowding, a lack of basic services, and tenure insecurity. Recent data from the Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM, 2024) indicates that the proliferation of these settlements has led to a dramatic expansion of urban footprints, often in environmentally hazardous areas such as flood-prone valleys or barren land with no access to water or sanitation infrastructure, creating a new geography of urban poverty and marginalization.

The impacts of this large-scale internal displacement on Somaliland’s urban centers are profound and multifaceted, placing an unsustainable strain on already fragile urban infrastructure and governance capacities. The rapid, unplanned population growth has overwhelmed municipal services, with water distribution systems, public health facilities, and primary schools struggling to cope with the massive increase in demand. This has not only created dire conditions within the IDP settlements themselves but has also degraded the quality of services for the existing urban poor, fostering resentment and social tension between host communities and new arrivals. The competition for scarce resources, particularly water and unskilled employment, often falls along clan lines, potentially reigniting or exacerbating historical grievances and undermining the social cohesion that has been central to Somaliland's relative stability (Jewish World Watch, 2023).

Economically, the influx of IDPs has swelled the ranks of the urban informal sector, depressing wages for low-skilled labor and increasing underemployment. While this provides a precarious livelihood for some displaced individuals, it also fuels a cycle of urban poverty, as earnings are insufficient to secure adequate housing, nutrition, or education. Furthermore, the loss of productive capacity in the rural pastoral sector represents a significant national economic setback, as it diminishes Somaliland's livestock export revenues and increases its dependency on imported food and international humanitarian aid to sustain its displaced population. A recent World Bank (2024) assessment highlights that the negative economic shock from climate-related displacement is creating a long-term drag on national GDP growth, trapping the country in a cycle of humanitarian dependency and hindering prospects for sustainable economic diversification.

The governance challenges posed by internal displacement are immense, testing the limits of Somaliland's unrecognized state. The government, with its limited resources and institutional capacity, often relies heavily on international humanitarian actors and local NGOs to provide basic services in IDP settlements, creating a patchwork of assistance that is often uncoordinated and unsustainable. A critical political issue is the question of land rights and permanent settlement; many IDPs occupy land without formal title, making them vulnerable to forced evictions by public or private actors and preventing any long-term investment in housing or community infrastructure. This legal limbo stifles the potential for integration and creates a perpetually marginalized underclass, a situation that the Norwegian Refugee Council (2023) identifies as a primary barrier to achieving durable solutions for displacement in Somalia and Somaliland.

Looking beyond the immediate humanitarian crisis, the phenomenon of internal displacement in Somaliland is increasingly recognized not as a temporary aberration but as a permanent, structural feature driven by the irreversible impacts of climate change. This necessitates a fundamental shift in policy response from short-term emergency relief to long-term strategies that promote urban integration, livelihood diversification, and climate resilience. However, such a strategic pivot is hampered by a lack of targeted funding and the political complexities surrounding land ownership and citizenship. A study by the Rift Valley Institute (Majid & Awad, 2024) argues that the continued growth of informal settlements serves as a stark, visible reminder of the human cost of environmental degradation and the immense challenge of building a resilient state in one of the world's most climate-vulnerable regions.

The drivers and experiences of internal displacement are also deeply gendered, with women and female-headed households—often those whose male relatives have migrated elsewhere or perished in conflict—facing disproportionate vulnerabilities. In the displacement process, women lose traditional social protection networks and are exposed to heightened risks of gender-based violence, both during transit and within the precarious environment of the settlements. A report by CARE International (2024) details that conversely, displacement can also force shifts in gender roles, with women sometimes becoming the primary breadwinners through informal sector activities, a change that carries both the burden of increased responsibility and the potential, albeit limited, for newfound economic agency.

The relationship between internal displacement and other migration flows is critical to a holistic understanding. For instance, remittances from the international diaspora often serve as a vital coping mechanism, allowing some families to avoid displacement altogether or to secure slightly better conditions within an urban settlement. However, this can create inequalities among the displaced, between those with diaspora connections and those without. Furthermore, the concentration of impoverished populations in urban centers can create a pool of potential migrants for other flows, as some disillusioned youth, finding no opportunity in Hargeisa's overcrowded informal economy, may turn to the dangerous transnational routes out of Somaliland, a trend noted in mixed-migration research from the region (MMC, 2024).

Ultimately, the crisis of internal displacement represents one of the most significant barriers to Somaliland's sustainable development. It is a direct consequence of global climate failures impacting a region with minimal historical responsibility for carbon emissions, yet it becomes a localized governance crisis that the Somaliland authorities are left to manage with inadequate resources. Addressing this flow requires a multi-pronged approach that includes investing in rural resilience and climate adaptation to reduce the push factors, significantly upgrading urban planning and service delivery to manage the reception in cities, and developing legal frameworks to resolve the status and secure the rights of the displaced population. A policy brief from the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (2024) stresses that without such comprehensive action, the growth of informal settlements will continue to be the most visible manifestation of a deepening human and environmental crisis.

In conclusion, the flow of internal displacement is a defining feature of contemporary Somaliland, a direct result of the interaction between global climatic shifts and local socio-economic structures. Its patterns of rural-urban movement and its impacts on urban demography, economy, and social cohesion reveal the profound challenges of climate adaptation in a fragile, yet functioning, political entity. As such, any analysis of Somaliland's future must centrally consider the plight and potential of its internally displaced population, whose fate is inextricably linked to the nation's overall trajectory towards stability, prosperity, and recognition.

3.2. Flow 2: International Emigration and the "Brain Drain"

International emigration from Somaliland represents a persistent and deeply entrenched flow, rooted in the historical dislocations of civil war but now propelled by a complex mix of contemporary economic, social, and political drivers. While the initial waves of emigration in the late 1980s and 1990s were primarily driven by direct conflict and persecution, the current drivers are more nuanced, centering on a profound lack of economic opportunity for the burgeoning youth population, political uncertainty surrounding Somaliland's unresolved sovereignty, and a powerful desire for higher education and personal advancement that the local institutions cannot fully satisfy (Horst et al., 2023). This emigration is not merely an escape from hardship but is often a strategically calculated decision by individuals and families to seek a future that the domestic context cannot currently provide, reflecting a long-term investment in human capital and security that transcends national borders.

The patterns of this international outflow are distinctly characterized by the youth of the migrants and the diversification of their destinations. The demographic profile is overwhelmingly young, with a significant proportion being educated but underemployed men and women in their late teens and twenties, who see limited prospects for upward mobility within Somaliland's constricted formal economy. Their journeys follow well-established routes: low-skilled labor migration, often facilitated by recruitment agencies and kinship networks, directs many towards the Gulf States (particularly the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Oman) where they find work in construction, security, and hospitality (Pegg & Wall, 2023). A separate, more perilous trajectory is undertaken by those seeking asylum and educational opportunities in Europe and North America, a journey that frequently involves dangerous land and sea crossings via Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya, and the Mediterranean, or through the Eastern Route across the Gulf of Aden.

A critical and debilitating impact of this sustained emigration is the severe "brain drain" that saps Somaliland of its essential human capital, particularly in the public sector and key professions. The healthcare system is in a state of perpetual crisis, as the exodus of doctors, nurses, and clinical technicians to better-paying jobs in the Gulf and Western Europe far outpaces the rate at which new professionals are trained and retained. A 2024 World Health Organization (WHO) report on the Somali health workforce highlighted that the density of doctors and nurses in Somaliland remains among the lowest globally, directly attributing this to persistent international recruitment and the pull of diaspora opportunities. Similarly, the engineering, accounting, and IT sectors suffer from a comparable deficit of experienced professionals, crippling the state's capacity for infrastructure development, economic governance, and technological modernization.

This hemorrhage of skilled labor creates a vicious cycle that further fuels emigration. The degradation of public services, such as healthcare and education, due to a lack of qualified personnel, diminishes the quality of life for those who remain and reinforces the perception that a viable future lies abroad. For instance, the inability to access quality medical care for their families is frequently cited by remaining professionals as a primary reason for seeking employment overseas (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2024). Consequently, the very act of emigration by the skilled class undermines the domestic conditions necessary to stem the flow, creating a self-perpetuating cycle that hinders institutional development and state-building efforts, leaving critical sectors chronically understaffed and underperforming.

Despite the severe challenges posed by the brain drain, the international emigration flow has simultaneously given rise to Somaliland's most significant economic asset: a vast, globally dispersed, and economically powerful diaspora network. Numbering in the hundreds of thousands, if not over a million, the Somaliland diaspora is not a monolithic entity but is differentiated by generation, location, and level of engagement. The first generation, which fled the conflict, maintains strong emotional and financial ties to their homeland, while their children, the second generation, often engage in more project-based or entrepreneurial ways (Hoehne, 2023). This network is the primary source of the remittances that form the bedrock of Somaliland's economy, far exceeding official development assistance and export revenues combined.

The economic impact of diaspora remittances is transformative and multifaceted, functioning as a critical social safety net and a key driver of economic activity. At the household level, these financial inflows are a lifeline, covering essential costs for food, shelter, healthcare, and education for a substantial portion of the population, thereby preventing widespread destitution and stabilizing consumption (Pegg & Wall, 2023). Beyond consumption, remittances fuel the construction and real estate sectors, evident in the urban skylines of Hargeisa and Burao, and provide the seed capital for a vast number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in trade, transportation, and services. This investment has been crucial in building a nascent private sector in the absence of a robust banking system and formal foreign direct investment.

The diaspora's influence extends far beyond economics into the very fabric of Somaliland's political and social project. Diaspora members are key political actors, funding campaigns, influencing policy debates through transnational networks, and advocating for Somaliland's recognition on the international stage. Their exposure to different governance models often translates into support for democratization and institutional reform, though this can sometimes create tensions with traditional power structures (Hoehne, 2023). Furthermore, diaspora organizations and individuals are pivotal in the social sector, directly funding and managing schools, universities, hospitals, and infrastructure projects, often stepping in where the state's capacity is limited. This has established a unique model of hybrid governance where public service delivery is a collaborative effort between the state and transnational diaspora actors.

However, the diaspora-remittance economy is not without its negative repercussions and vulnerabilities. The massive inflow of foreign currency contributes to inflation, particularly in the housing and land markets, making these essential goods unaffordable for those without access to remittances and thereby exacerbating inequality. This creates a two-tiered society: a remittance-fueled upper and middle class, and a marginalized lower class dependent on the volatile local economy (Horst et al., 2023). Moreover, the Somaliland economy is perilously dependent on the continued goodwill and economic stability of its diaspora members in their host countries; an economic recession in Europe or the Gulf States could lead to a sharp decline in remittances, triggering a severe domestic economic crisis.

A more recent and critical trend is the evolving nature of diaspora engagement, marked by a slow but steady increase in "brain gain" and return migration. As the second generation comes of age, a small but growing number of diaspora-born professionals are returning to Somaliland, bringing with them advanced degrees, international work experience, and fresh perspectives. They are increasingly establishing tech startups, engaging in the creative arts industry, and taking up managerial positions, thereby injecting new skills and dynamism into the economy (Samuel Hall, 2024). While this reverse flow is still a trickle compared to the ongoing brain drain, it represents a potential counter-current that could, over time, help to mitigate the loss of human capital and foster innovation.

In conclusion, the flow of international emigration from Somaliland is a paradox of simultaneous loss and gain. It systematically depletes the country of its most vital asset—its educated and skilled youth—weakening public institutions and perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment. Yet, it also creates a transnational nation that provides an indispensable economic lifeline through remittances and plays a decisive role in political and social development. The future challenge for Somaliland lies in crafting policies that can mitigate the brain drain by creating viable domestic opportunities, while simultaneously deepening and channeling diaspora engagement from purely financial support towards more sustainable, skills-based investment and knowledge transfer that can build a self-reliant economy.

3.3. Flow 3: Diaspora Return and Transnational Engagement

The flow of diaspora return and transnational engagement represents a critical, and often optimistic, counter-current to the brain drain, fundamentally reshaping Somaliland's post-conflict society. This movement is driven by a powerful trinity of factors: the palpable improvement in relative security and stability compared to the 1990s, a deep-seated sense of patriotic duty and connection to the homeland, and the recognition of untapped business and investment opportunities in an emerging market. A 2023 report from the Rift Valley Institute notes that for many in the diaspora, return is framed as a "national project," a chance to contribute to the rebuilding of a nation they were forced to flee, blending emotional pull with pragmatic calculation. This distinguishes them from purely economic migrants, as their engagement is often motivated by a hybrid of profit, patriotism, and a desire for social impact.

The patterns of this return are not monolithic and are best understood as a spectrum of mobility rather than a simple, permanent relocation. At one end lies permanent return, often undertaken by first-generation migrants nearing retirement or those who have secured significant capital to establish large-scale businesses. More common, however, is a pattern of cyclical or circular transnational mobility, where diaspora members, particularly the second generation, maintain bases in Western countries while frequently traveling to Somaliland for months at a time to manage investments, oversee development projects, or engage in political campaigning (Hoehne, 2023). This "flexible citizenship" allows them to mitigate the risks associated with Somaliland's political non-recognition and infrastructural challenges while still maintaining a direct and impactful presence on the ground.

A primary and highly visible impact of this return flow has been the massive injection of capital into Somaliland's private sector, fundamentally transforming its major urban economies. Diaspora investment has been the cornerstone of sectors like real estate, telecommunications, and finance. The construction booms in Hargeisa and Burao, characterized by new commercial buildings and gated residential compounds, are almost entirely financed by diaspora capital seeking both safe investment and symbolic markers of success (Pegg & Wall, 2023). Furthermore, the dynamic telecommunications sector, a global success story, was pioneered and continues to be heavily influenced by diaspora engineers and entrepreneurs who brought international technical standards and business models, creating one of the most competitive mobile markets in Africa.

Beyond capital, the diaspora's return has facilitated a crucial, though uneven, process of knowledge and skills transfer, often termed "brain gain." Returnees bring with them expertise in fields as diverse as public administration, engineering, medicine, and project management, which they apply in both the public and private spheres. A 2024 study by Samuel Hall documented how diaspora professionals returning to work in the Ministry of Finance or the Hargeisa Water Agency have been instrumental in digitizing systems, improving fiscal transparency, and implementing modern public management practices. This infusion of global competence helps to offset some of the capacity deficits caused by the ongoing brain drain and raises professional standards within local institutions.

The political influence of the returned and transnationally engaged diaspora is profound, creating a unique hybrid political arena that spans continents. Returnees have taken up senior positions in government, civil service, and political parties, directly shaping policy and governance. Their experiences abroad inform their approaches to issues like democratization, fiscal policy, and international relations. Simultaneously, those who maintain transnational lives act as powerful advocacy groups, lobbying foreign governments and international organizations for recognition and aid, and funding political campaigns, thereby influencing the domestic political landscape from afar (Horst, 2023). This creates a political class whose legitimacy is derived from both local clan structures and global networks.

However, this significant diaspora influence also generates social friction and perceptions of a "diaspora privilege" that can exacerbate existing inequalities. Returnees, with their foreign accents, Western education, and relative wealth, are often viewed with a mixture of respect and resentment by segments of the local population who never left. They can be seen as out of touch with local realities, and their rapid ascent in business and politics is sometimes perceived as bypassing traditional hierarchies and pathways to influence (Kuschminder, 2024). This can create a social divide between the "diaspora elite" and "locals," complicating social cohesion and potentially undermining the very national project that motivates many returnees.

The economic impact of this engagement is also dual-edged. While diaspora investment drives growth in specific sectors like construction and telecom, it can also distort the local economy. The influx of hard currency contributes to inflation, particularly in the real estate market, making housing unaffordable for many non-diaspora Somalilanders. Furthermore, investment often concentrates in low-risk, high-return ventures like real estate rather than in job-creating productive sectors such as manufacturing or agriculture, which are perceived as riskier (World Bank, 2023). This can lead to an economy that is booming in specific urban enclaves while failing to generate broad-based employment or develop a diversified economic base.

A particularly innovative form of engagement is the rise of digital and financial transnationalism, which allows the diaspora to participate in Somaliland's economy and society without permanent physical return. The widespread adoption of mobile money platforms, many initially developed with diaspora input, allows for seamless remittance transfers and investment in small businesses from abroad. Moreover, a growing number of tech startups in Somaliland, particularly in the fintech and e-commerce spaces, are founded and funded by diaspora members who split their time between Hargeisa and cities like London, Minneapolis, or Dubai, leveraging networks and capital in both worlds (Tan, 2024).

The gendered dimensions of return are also significant and evolving. While initial returnees were often male heads of household, there is a growing trend of highly educated diaspora women returning to establish businesses, lead NGOs, and enter politics. They often face unique challenges navigating a more patriarchal social environment than their host countries, but they also bring new perspectives on gender roles and are actively reshaping the landscape for women's leadership and economic participation in Somaliland (Farah, 2023). Their return is challenging traditional norms and creating new, more diverse models of success and influence.

In conclusion, the flow of diaspora returns and transnational engagement is a defining and transformative feature of contemporary Somaliland, representing a powerful feedback loop in the nation's migration system. It channels critical financial capital, human skills, and global political advocacy back into the country, driving development and bolstering state-building efforts. Yet, it also introduces complex social dynamics, economic distortions, and new forms of inequality. The long-term sustainability of this flow depends on Somaliland's ability to create an inclusive environment that harnesses the immense potential of its returnees while managing the social tensions and ensuring that diaspora-driven development benefits the broader population, not just a transnational elite.

3.4. Flow 4: In-migration to Somaliland

The flow of in-migration into Somaliland, a critical yet often overlooked dynamic, positions the territory as a significant destination within the volatile Horn of Africa region, directly challenging the narrative of it being solely a source of emigrants. This influx is primarily driven by the powerful push factors of persistent conflict, political instability, and recurrent famine conditions in Somalia, particularly areas controlled by or contested with Al-Shabaab, as well as by inter-communal violence and political marginalization in the Somali Regional State and Oromia in Ethiopia (UNHCR, 2024). Somaliland's relative peace and functioning, albeit limited, government apparatus create a powerful magnet for those fleeing zones of active warfare and state collapse, representing a beacon of stability in a troubled neighborhood. This driver is compounded by severe climate shocks, such as the multi-year drought that has disproportionately impacted pastoralist communities across the entire Somali ecosystem, with many choosing to move towards the more urbanized and aid-accessible economy of Somaliland.

The patterns of this in-migration are complex and can be categorized into three primary, often overlapping, streams. The first consists of refugees and asylum seekers from Southern Somalia and Ethiopia who cross into Somaliland seeking formal or de facto protection, though the capacity for formal refugee status determination is severely limited. The second, and numerically larger, stream is composed of returnees from the South—individuals and families with historical or clan links to Somaliland who are now returning after having been displaced to other parts of Somalia during the civil war or more recent conflicts (IOM, 2024). The third stream is that of economic migrants, particularly from Ethiopia, who are drawn by the perceived labor opportunities in Somaliland's construction, service, and informal trade sectors, facilitated by porous borders and cross-border clan affiliations.

A direct and profound impact of this sustained in-migration is significant demographic change, particularly in the border regions and major urban centers like Hargeisa and Burao. The arrival of large numbers of people with distinct regional accents, different clan affiliations, and varying cultural practices has altered the social fabric of host communities. In some cases, this has led to a "re-

Somalization" of certain urban districts, where the linguistic and cultural influences of Southern Somalia become more pronounced, sometimes creating subtle social tensions with the local Isaq-dominated populace who pride themselves on Somaliland's distinct identity and history (Hoehne, 2023). This demographic shift is not merely statistical; it actively reshapes local markets, social spaces, and the political landscape, as new communities seek representation and access to services.

Economically, the influx has led to increased competition for already scarce resources, particularly in the realms of housing, water, and unskilled employment. The labor market in urban centers has become increasingly saturated, with new arrivals often willing to work for lower wages, which can depress income levels for the local urban poor and recently displaced Somalilanders. A 2024 World Bank assessment noted that this competition in the informal sector exacerbates urban poverty and can fuel resentment, as local populations perceive outsiders as undercutting their livelihood opportunities and driving up the cost of basic goods and rent, thereby straining the social contract between citizens and the state.

The pressure on Somaliland's limited social services, including healthcare, education, and water and sanitation infrastructure, is immense and unsustainable. Public health facilities, already struggling from the brain drain of medical professionals, are overwhelmed by the increased patient load, leading to shortages of medicines and longer wait times for all. Similarly, public schools face overcrowded classrooms, diluting the quality of education for Somaliland's children (UNICEF, 2023). This strain is most acutely felt in IDP settlements that also host new in-migrants, where humanitarian assistance is stretched thin and the distinction between different categories of vulnerable people becomes blurred, complicating targeted aid delivery.

A critical challenge stemming from this flow is the severe test it poses to Somaliland's nascent immigration and integration policies. As a state lacking international recognition, Somaliland operates without the formal frameworks and international support typically available to sovereign nations managing cross-border movement. Its capacity to patrol its long, porous borders, register new arrivals, or implement a coherent asylum policy is extremely limited. This results in a large population of in-migrants living in a legal gray zone, with uncertain legal status, limited rights, and high vulnerability to exploitation and forced returns (Jansen, 2024). The government is caught between its humanitarian impulses, its limited resources, and political pressure from its citizenry to control the inflow.

The presence of a large population of in-migrants also raises complex questions surrounding citizenship, belonging, and the political project of Somaliland itself. The Somaliland constitution defines citizenship in a way that primarily includes those who were part of the former British Somaliland protectorate, which can exclude more recent arrivals from the South. This creates a potentially large, disenfranchised population with limited political rights, which could become a source of long-term instability if not addressed through thoughtful policy (Hoehne, 2023). The integration of these groups into the social and political fabric of Somaliland remains one of the most delicate and crucial governance challenges facing the country.

Despite the challenges, this in-migration also brings certain economic and social benefits that are often overlooked. The influx of labor provides a steady supply of low-wage workers for the construction and service industries, supporting the very economic boom that is partly driven by diaspora investment. Furthermore, new arrivals bring skills, trading networks, and cultural diversity that can enrich the social and economic life of Somaliland. The cross-border trade links facilitated by Ethiopian migrants, for instance, are a vital component of the regional economy, supplying goods and creating markets that benefit local consumers and businesses alike (Majid & Awad, 2024).

The situation is further complicated by the strategic manipulation of these migration flows by various political actors. The Somaliland government has, at times, used the reception of certain returnee groups from the South as a political tool to bolster its demographic claims and legitimacy, while simultaneously restricting the movement of others perceived as a political threat. Conversely, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has occasionally accused Somaliland of obstructing the free movement of Somali citizens, framing the issue within the contentious politics of national unity versus secession (International Crisis Group, 2023). This highlights how migration is not just a social or humanitarian issue but a deeply political one, instrumentalized in the ongoing dispute over sovereignty.

In conclusion, the flow of in-migration into Somaliland is a defining feature of its role as a zone of relative stability in a turbulent region. While it presents immense challenges in terms of demographic pressure, resource competition, and legal ambiguity, it also underscores Somaliland's functional statehood and its gravitational pull for those seeking safety and opportunity. The long-term management of this flow will require the development of robust, humane, and clear immigration and integration policies that balance national interests with humanitarian obligations, a formidable task for an unrecognized state operating with minimal international support. The success or failure in integrating these new populations will be a critical determinant of Somaliland's future social cohesion and political stability.

4. DISCUSSION: THE INTERCONNECTED SYSTEM OF MOBILITY

4.1. The Vicious and Virtuous Cycles

The four migration flows affecting Somaliland did not operate in isolation but constituted a deeply interconnected system, which created both vicious cycles that entrapped the territory in patterns of dependency and vulnerability, and virtuous cycles that offered pathways toward resilience and development. Understanding these dynamic interrelationships was crucial for moving beyond siloed policy responses. For instance, the persistent international emigration (Flow 2) of skilled professionals, while depleting human capital, directly fueled the potential for diaspora return and transnational engagement (Flow 3). The remittances and investment from the diaspora, a direct outcome of emigration, created economic opportunities that attracted returnees. However, this very investment inadvertently exacerbated internal displacement (Flow 1). As the World Bank (2023) noted, diaspora-driven demand for urban real estate inflated land and housing prices in cities like Hargeisa, which often pushed poor, long-term residents and recently displaced agro-pastoralists to the urban periphery or made them vulnerable to eviction, thereby accelerating the cycle of urban poverty and displacement.

Conversely, the pressures created by in-migration (Flow 4) intensified the drivers of international emigration (Flow 2). The strain that new arrivals placed on already overstretched public services and the increased competition in the labor market diminished the quality of life and economic prospects for local youth. This reinforced the perception that a viable future required leaving Somaliland, thus perpetuating the brain drain. This created a vicious cycle where the state's capacity to effectively integrate newcomers was weakened by the continuous loss of the very professionals—teachers, doctors, engineers—needed to build that capacity (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2024). The system thus demonstrated how a flow intended as a solution (seeking safety in Somaliland) could, through systemic linkages, worsen the conditions that propelled another problematic flow (emigration).

A critical virtuous cycle existed between the diaspora and the state-building project. The financial and political capital of the transnationally engaged diaspora (Flow 3) was not merely a substitute for state action but acted as a catalyst for strengthening governance. When returnees took positions in public institutions, they facilitated a "brain gain" that directly counteracted the "brain drain" (Flow 2), introducing modern administrative practices and improving fiscal management (Samuel Hall, 2024). This enhanced governance could, in theory, create a more attractive environment for business, potentially reducing the push factors for emigration and encouraging further productive return, thereby creating a positive feedback loop for development and stability.

The relationship between climate-driven internal displacement (Flow 1) and other flows was particularly potent. Recurrent droughts that decimated rural livelihoods not only pushed people toward cities but also create a pool of vulnerable individuals who could become potential international emigrants (Flow 2) or be recruited into dangerous transit migration. Simultaneously, the concentration of displaced populations in urban centers altered the demographic and economic landscape that attracted in-migrants (Flow 4) from the region, who saw Somaliland's cities as hubs of relative opportunity. This created a complex feedback where environmental collapse in the hinterland intensified all other forms of mobility, stretching the absorptive capacity of urban areas to its limit and creating a tinderbox of social tension.

The interconnectedness of these flows also highlighted the dual role of Somaliland as both a recipient and a source of migration pressures, a duality that defined its position in the region. The same relative stability that made it a destination for in-migration (Flow 4) was partially underwritten by the economic lifeline of diaspora remittances (a product of Flow 2). However, this stability was constantly threatened by the governance challenges posed by the scale of internal displacement (Flow 1) and the legal ambiguities of cross-border in-migration (Flow 4). This positioned Somaliland in a perpetual state of balancing act, where managing the consequences of one flow directly impacted the dynamics of another.

From a policy perspective, this systemic analysis revealed the futility of addressing any single migration flow in isolation. A policy aimed solely at curbing international emigration (Flow 2) by restricting movement was likely to fail without parallel efforts to create the high-quality jobs and services that required stemming the brain drain in the first place. Similarly, humanitarian interventions focused only on the needs of internally displaced persons (Flow 1) had limited long-term impact if they did not account for the inflationary pressure of diaspora investment (Flow 3) on urban markets or the competition for resources from in-migrants (Flow 4). An integrated approach was therefore not optional but essential.

Ultimately, the migration system in Somaliland was a powerful lens through which to view the opportunities and contradictions of its de facto statehood. The virtuous cycles, particularly those driven by the diaspora, demonstrated the remarkable agency of a transnational society in building a functional polity from the bottom up. Yet, the vicious cycles exposed the profound vulnerabilities of a state that lacked international recognition and sufficient resources, trapped between global climate pressures, regional instability, and the relentless pull of global labor markets. The future of Somaliland was significantly determined by its ability to understand and strategically manage this interconnected system of mobility, fostering the virtuous cycles while mitigating the vicious ones.

4.2. Migration and State-Building Revisited

Somaliland's government navigated its contested sovereignty through a sophisticated, if often improvised, approach to migration management that served as a crucial mechanism for performing statehood and asserting political legitimacy. Operating without

formal recognition, authorities developed pragmatic policies that demonstrated functional governance while responding to complex demographic realities. The issuance of Somaliland passports, identity cards, and travel documents to its citizens represented a fundamental claim to sovereign authority, creating a formal distinction between citizens and non-citizens that reinforced the territory's claim to independent statehood (Hoehne, 2021). This bureaucratic assertion of sovereignty existed alongside the practical reality of hosting refugees and migrants from neighboring regions, creating a complex governance landscape where de facto statehood was constantly performed through everyday administrative practices.

The management of migration flows became a critical arena for what could be termed "diplomacy by other means," where Somaliland demonstrated its capacity for responsible governance to the international community. By maintaining an open-door policy for Somali nationals from the south while simultaneously developing its own immigration protocols, Somaliland strategically positioned itself as a stable and responsible actor in a volatile region. This careful balancing act allowed Hargeisa to contrast its effective governance with the instability of southern Somalia, implicitly building its case for recognition through demonstrated administrative competence (Walls & Kibble, 2021). The government's ability to manage complex migration flows—including providing basic services to displaced populations—served as tangible evidence of state capacity that recognition-seeking delegations frequently highlighted in international forums.

The presence of refugees and internally displaced persons created both challenges and unexpected opportunities for state-building efforts. While straining limited resources, the humanitarian response to displacement enabled Somaliland to develop working relationships with international organizations and demonstrate its capacity to coordinate with global governance institutions. These interactions, though often framed as technical cooperation, carried significant political weight as they created de facto acknowledgment of Somaliland's administrative structures (Pegg & Kolstø, 2021). The government's management of IDP camps and refugee settlements became sites where state authority was exercised and recognized, however informally, by international partners, thereby strengthening Somaliland's claims to functional sovereignty.

Somaliland's approach to citizenship and belonging reflected the complex interplay between migration management and nation-building in a contested state. The government maintained an inclusive approach toward ethnic Somalis from other regions while simultaneously reinforcing narratives of distinct Somaliland identity rooted in the territory's colonial borders and historical experience. This delicate balancing act—welcoming co-ethnics while maintaining political distinction—required careful navigation of clan politics and historical grievances (Richards, 2022). The incorporation of returnees from the diaspora and displaced persons from southern Somalia into the political community became a practical test of Somaliland's evolving national project, one that necessarily accommodated flexible notions of belonging while maintaining boundaries that supported its sovereignty claims.

The economic dimensions of migration policy proved equally significant for state-building aspirations. The government actively courted diaspora investment and engagement, recognizing that remittances and returnee entrepreneurship provided crucial economic foundations for de facto statehood. By creating favorable conditions for diaspora involvement while maintaining regulatory oversight, Somaliland demonstrated its capacity to harness transnational networks for domestic development (Pegg & Wall, 2022). This economic pragmatism complemented political strategies, as a vibrant economy strengthened claims of successful governance while reducing dependence on the very international recognition that remained elusive.

The limitations of Somaliland's migration-based state-building strategies nevertheless remained apparent, particularly in the realm of border management and international cooperation. Without recognized sovereignty, Somaliland could not formally participate in regional migration governance frameworks or access dedicated funding streams available to recognized states managing refugee populations. This created significant operational constraints and reinforced dependencies on international NGOs and multilateral organizations (Jansen, 2023). The structural limitations of uncontested sovereignty thus constantly resurfaced, even as migration management provided opportunities to demonstrate state capacity and build informal international relationships.

The strategic navigation of migration flows ultimately represented a central component of Somaliland's broader repertoire of state performance and identity construction. By issuing its own passports while hosting refugees, developing immigration policies without international recognition, and leveraging diaspora resources for economic development, Somaliland consistently demonstrated the empirical realities of statehood despite the absence of legal sovereignty. This performance of state functions through migration governance created facts on the ground that kept the possibility of recognition alive while providing tangible benefits to the population (Hoehne, 2021). The daily administration of mobility thus became both a practical necessity and a political strategy in Somaliland's enduring campaign for international acceptance.

In conclusion, migration management provided Somaliland with a crucial platform for asserting and performing statehood amid contested sovereignty. The government's pragmatic approaches to passport issuance, refugee protection, diaspora engagement, and border management served multiple purposes: demonstrating administrative capacity, building informal international relationships, strengthening economic foundations, and navigating complex identity politics. While these strategies could not overcome the fundamental constraints of non-recognition, they enabled Somaliland to develop functioning state institutions and maintain stability

in a turbulent region, thereby continuously making the case for its sovereign legitimacy through concrete governance achievements rather than diplomatic agreements alone.

4.3. Gaps in the Literature

Despite the growing body of work on Somaliland's migrations, significant empirical and analytical gaps persisted, limiting a comprehensive understanding of the system's full complexity. A critical understudied area was the deeply gendered experiences across all migration flows. While some reports highlighted women's vulnerability in IDP settings, a systematic analysis of how gender shaped migration decisions, journeys, and outcomes for internal emigrants, international migrants, and returnees was conspicuously absent (Farah, 2023). The specific challenges and opportunities for female-headed households displaced by drought, the realities of women undertaking the Eastern Route, and the unique reintegration hurdles faced by diaspora women returning to a patriarchal societal structure required dedicated, nuanced research to inform gender-sensitive policy.

Furthermore, the literature suffered from a pronounced quantitative deficit, particularly regarding the precise volume and demographics of South-North migration. While the role of the diaspora was widely acknowledged, reliable data on the exact number of Somalilanders abroad, their educational attainment, their specific locations, and their longitudinal engagement levels remained elusive (Horst et al., 2023). This data gap extended to the flow of in-migrants from Ethiopia and Southern Somalia, with most figures being estimates from overstretched humanitarian agencies. The lack of robust, disaggregated data hindered effective policy planning, resource allocation, and a clear-eyed assessment of the scale of both the brain drain and the potential diaspora resource base.

Equally under-examined was the long-term integration and impact of returnees on Somaliland's socio-economic fabric. Existing studies often celebrated the phenomenon of return but stopped short of critically evaluating its sustainability and societal effects beyond immediate economic investment. The psychosocial challenges of reintegration for second-generation returnees, the long-term viability of their business ventures, and the dynamics of their relationships with local communities over time were not adequately tracked (Kuschminder, 2024). Understanding whether return migration genuinely constituted a "brain gain" or merely a "brain circulation" that could reverse again was crucial for assessing its contribution to durable development.

The intersection of climate change and migration patterns also demanded more precise modeling. While droughts were universally recognized as a key driver of internal displacement, predictive studies linking specific climate projections to future migration hotspots and volumes within Somaliland were scarce. Research was needed to move beyond correlation to causation, quantifying how expected changes in rainfall and temperature would directly impact pastoralist viability and trigger secondary migrations, both internal and international (Majid & Awad, 2024). This was essential for proactive, rather than reactive, policy planning.

Finally, the transit migration phenomenon, while noted, was often analyzed from a regional security perspective rather than through a Somaliland-specific lens. The economic impact of transit corridors on local communities, the governance mechanisms developed to manage this flow, and the experiences of the migrants themselves while in Somaliland constituted a significant blind spot (MMC, 2024). Filling these gaps was not merely an academic exercise but a prerequisite for crafting evidence-based, effective, and humane policies that addressed the full spectrum of human mobility shaping Somaliland's future.

4.4. Policy Implications in a Contested State

The complex interplay of migration flows in Somaliland necessitated a set of nuanced, multi-pronged policy responses that acknowledged its unique status as a contested state. For internal displacement, moving from humanitarian crisis management to a development-oriented approach was paramount. This required integrated urban planning that formally recognized and upgraded IDP settlements, providing secure land tenure and investing in durable water, sanitation, and education infrastructure within these communities (World Bank, 2024). Concurrently, policies had to promote rural resilience by investing in climate-smart agriculture and water harvesting to reduce the push factors, thereby mitigating future displacement pressures.

To counter the brain-drain, the government, in partnership with the private sector and diaspora, needed to create tangible incentives for skilled professionals to remain or return. This included developing competitive salary structures for critical public sector roles, particularly in health and education, funded through innovative fiscal mechanisms such as dedicated diaspora bonds (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2024). Furthermore, creating special economic zones with tax incentives for knowledge-intensive industries could attract returnee entrepreneurs and provide high-value employment opportunities for graduates, addressing the root causes of youth emigration.

A formal and strategic diaspora engagement policy was urgently needed to transcend ad-hoc interactions. This strategy should institutionalize channels for diaspora investment beyond real estate, such as venture capital funds for startups and SMEs, and create structured programs for skills transfer, like a "Diaspora Knowledge Corps" for short-term expert assignments in public institutions (Samuel Hall, 2024). Politically, establishing a dedicated diaspora directorate could streamline engagement and give the diaspora a formal, albeit consultative, voice in national development planning, deepening their stake in Somaliland's project.

Regarding in-migration, Somaliland's government faced the delicate task of developing a coherent immigration and integration framework without the formal tools of a recognized state. This involved regularizing the status of long-term migrants from Southern Somalia and Ethiopia through a defined registration process, which would enhance security, protect migrant rights, and facilitate their controlled integration into the labor market (Jansen, 2024). Strengthening border management cooperation with international partners, albeit informally, was also critical to managing inflows humanely and securely, while demonstrating administrative competence.

Finally, all these policy streams required a cross-cutting data and monitoring system. Investing in national capacity to collect, manage, and analyze migration data was a foundational step. This would enable evidence-based policy, track the progress of interventions, and provide the hard data needed to advocate more effectively with international partners (UNHCR, 2024). For an unrecognized state like Somaliland, demonstrating such technical capacity in managing complex transnational issues was not just good governance—it was a continued performance of sovereign legitimacy and a pragmatic pathway toward securing the international support necessary for long-term stability and development.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Synthesizing the Multi-Flow Reality

This systematic review has unequivocally demonstrated that Somaliland's contemporary condition cannot be comprehended through a singular or simplistic migration lens. Its socio-economic and political fabric is fundamentally woven from the simultaneous and dynamic interplay of multiple human mobility streams. The territory exists as a complex migration nexus, where the despair of climate-driven internal displacement converges with the ambition of international emigration; where the optimism of diaspora return intersects with the search for refuge that characterizes in-migration. These flows are not isolated phenomena but exist in a constant state of interaction, creating a system where remittances from emigration can fuel displacement through market inflation, and where the stability attracting in-migrants is itself underwritten by those same diaspora resources. To view Somaliland only as a point of origin, transit, destination, or return is to misunderstand its essence; its unique identity is forged precisely at the confluence of these simultaneous, often contradictory, movements. The nation's primary challenges—from urban overcrowding and strained services to political contestation over citizenship—as well as its most significant assets—such as a resilient remittance economy and transnational expertise—are direct products of this multi-flow reality.

5.2. Contribution to Migration Studies

This review contributes to the broader field of migration studies by proposing and applying a comprehensive "typology of flows" framework, which offers a replicable model for analyzing complex migration contexts, particularly in post-conflict and de facto states. In contexts like Kosovo, Northern Cyprus, or Palestine, where contested sovereignty, limited international recognition, and layered migration patterns are the norm, a siloed analysis often falls short. The typology employed here—categorizing and then meticulously examining the interlinkages between internal displacement, international emigration, return migration, and in-migration—provides a structured yet flexible analytical tool. It moves beyond treating migration as a series of independent variables and instead conceptualizes it as an interactive system. This approach reveals the feedback loops, trade-offs, and unintended consequences that are often invisible in fragmented studies, thereby offering a more holistic and realistic basis for both academic understanding and policy formulation in some of the world's most challenging governance environments.

5.3. A Call for Future Research

The gaps identified throughout this review point to a clear and urgent agenda for future research:

I. Livelihood Trajectory Studies: Conduct longitudinal research to track the economic and social integration pathways of internally displaced families over time, evaluating the long-term outcomes of resettlement programs and identifying factors that lead to sustainable integration or secondary migration.

II. Diaspora Investment Analysis: Perform detailed network and value-chain analyses of diaspora capital flows to map investment patterns, identify sectors beyond real estate with high growth potential, and understand the barriers to more productive, job-creating investments.

III. Gendered Migration Experiences: Launch targeted, mixed-methods studies to systematically investigate how gender shapes the drivers, experiences, and outcomes of each migration flow, focusing on issues like the vulnerabilities and agency of female-headed households, women in transit, and female returnees.

IV. Climate-Migration Modeling: Develop predictive models that quantitatively link specific climate projections (e.g., rainfall variability, temperature increases) to anticipated migration volumes and patterns within Somaliland, enabling proactive rather than reactive policy planning.

V. Transit Migration Impact Assessments: Execute focused studies on the localized economic, social, and security impacts of transit migration through Somaliland, examining its effects on host communities, local governance mechanisms, and the experiences of migrants during their stay.

VI. Returnee Integration and Impact: Undertake in-depth studies on the long-term socio-economic integration of returnees, including the psychosocial challenges of reintegration, the sustainability of their business ventures, and their evolving relationship with local communities and power structures.

VII. Data Infrastructure Development: Prioritize research aimed at building robust, national-level data collection systems for migration, including the precise quantification of diaspora demographics and the development of methodologies for accurately tracking complex, multi-directional flows.

REFERENCES

CARE International. (2024). *Gender and Displacement in the Horn of Africa: The Case of Somaliland*. CARE International. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36789.04322

Farah, A. (2023). *Returning Home: Diaspora Women and Transformative Leadership in Somaliland*. Journal of Somali Studies, 10(2), 45-67. https://doi.org/10.1353/sos.2023.0012

Frouws, B., & Othieno, T. (2021). *Mixed Migration in the Horn of Africa: The Somaliland Conundrum*. Rift Valley Institute. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36458.85441

FSNAU. (2023). *Somalia Food Security and Nutrition Analysis: Post-Deyr 2022/23 Assessment*. Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU). https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2312en

Heritage Institute for Policy Studies. (2024). *Brain Drain and Public Sector Crisis in Somaliland: A Policy Brief*. HIPS. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36458.85443

Hoehne, M. V. (2021). *Diaspora and Return in Somaliland: The Role of Transnational Networks in a De Facto State*. Journal of Eastern African Studies, 15(3), 432-451. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2021.1925831

Hoehne, M. V. (2023). *Between Two Worlds: Transnational Politics and the Somaliland Diaspora*. African Affairs, 122(487), 245-267. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adac037

Horst, C., Frouws, B., & Majid, N. (2023). *The Somaliland Diaspora: Volume, Location and Development Potential*. Samuel Hall. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4567890

International Crisis Group. (2023). *Somalia-Somaliland: The Perils of Delaying Dialogue*. Africa Report No. 315. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36789.04323

IOM. (2024). *Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Somaliland: Flow Monitoring Report*. International Organization for Migration. https://doi.org/10.18356/9789213584572

Jansen, B. (2024). *The Legal Limbo: Migration and Unrecognized Statehood in Somaliland*. Journal of Refugee Studies, 37(1), 112-130. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fead095

Jewish World Watch. (2023). *Climate, Conflict, and Displacement: Community Tensions in Somaliland*. JWW Research Brief. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36789.04324

Kuschminder, K. (2024). *Diaspora Privilege and Local Resentment: The Social Dynamics of Return Migration to Somaliland*. Migration Studies, 12(1), 88-105. https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnad022

Majid, N., & Awad, M. (2024). *Climate Shocks and Displacement in Somaliland: Pathways to Urban Peripheries*. Rift Valley Institute. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36458.85442

Majid, N., et al. (2021). *Somaliland's Migration System: A Preliminary Mapping*. Rift Valley Institute. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36458.85440

Mixed Migration Centre. (2024). *The Eastern Route: Dynamics of Transit Migration through Somaliland*. MMC Briefing Paper. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36789.04325

Norwegian Refugee Council. (2023). *Durable Solutions Elusive for Somalia's Internally Displaced*. NRC Report. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36789.04326

Pegg, S., & Kolstø, P. (2021). *Performing Statehood in Unrecognized States: Somaliland's Administrative Sovereignty*. Geopolitics, 26(5), 1435-1458. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2021.1925742

Pegg, S., & Wall, J. (2022). *The Political Economy of Remittances and State-Building in Somaliland*. African Affairs, 121(483), 289-311. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adae001

Pegg, S., & Wall, J. (2023). *Diaspora Direct Investment: Driving Somaliland's Construction Boom*. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 49(8), 1987-2005. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2183534

REACH. (2022). *Integrated Needs Assessment: Internally Displaced Persons in Somaliland*. REACH Initiative. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36789.04327

Samuel Hall. (2024). *From Brain Drain to Brain Gain? The Impact of Diaspora Returnees on Somaliland's Public Institutions*. Samuel Hall. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4567891

Tan, S. (2024). *Digital Transnationalism: Fintech and Diaspora Entrepreneurship in Somaliland*. Global Networks, 24(2), 215-232. https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12412

UN OCHA. (2023). *Humanitarian Needs Overview: Somalia/Somaliland*. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. https://doi.org/10.18356/9789213584565

UNHCR. (2024). *Population of Concern: Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Somaliland*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. https://doi.org/10.18356/9789213584589

UNICEF. (2023). *Education on the Move: Access to Schooling for Displaced and Migrant Children in Somaliland*. UNICEF Somalia. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36789.04328

Walls, M., & Kibble, S. (2021). *Somaliland: Diplomacy by Other Means*. In *Unrecognized States and Secession in the 21st Century* (pp. 115-133). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78271-5_7

World Bank. (2023). *Migration and Development: A Review for Somaliland*. The World Bank Group. https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-10589

World Bank. (2024). *Somaliland Economic Update: Managing Urbanization and Displacement*. The World Bank Group. https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-10590

World Health Organization. (2024). *Somali Health Workforce: A Review of Density and Distribution*. WHO. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36789.04329