



Re-education Trips of Somali Children and Youth



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Executive Summary

This report examines the phenomenon of *dhaqan celis* — re-education trips undertaken by Somali-background children and youth from Western countries, particularly Denmark, to countries such as Somalia, Kenya, and other Muslim-majority nations. These trips, often initiated by parents, are framed as cultural rehabilitation efforts meant to restore traditional Somali and Islamic values. While some families see these trips as a way to strengthen identity, discipline children, or address behavioural and health concerns, the practice has raised increasing alarm among Western authorities due to the serious risks and rights violations involved.

Key motivations for *dhaqan celis* include fear of loss of cultural identity, concerns about crime or substance use, avoidance of child welfare interventions, dissatisfaction with Western healthcare systems, and aspirations for alternative education. Many parents feel alienated in their host countries and view these trips as a necessary corrective measure towards their children.

The report identifies patterns in age, gender, destinations, and conditions. Teenagers are most frequently targeted, but cases include individuals as young as seven and as old as 45. Somalia and Kenya are the most common destinations, with Egypt and Türkiye also noted. Decisions are usually made collectively by parents, often with the mother being the one who initiates them. However, some involve unilateral actions or deceit. Children are frequently misled about the purpose of the trips, and stays often extend for years. Girls are often sent to live with relatives, while boys are more likely to end up in rehabilitation centres.

Children and youth may not only be exposed to rehabilitation centres if sent to Somalia or Kenya. They may also be exposed to other types of institutions such as Quran schools (*dugsi*), madrasas, mental health institutions, and healing centres. These institutions differ significantly in purpose, structure, and regulation. However, they are sometimes referred to interchangeably by different sources, which can obscure the actual conditions and level of care provided. While some offer standard religious or educational instruction, others are unregulated and may subject youth to harmful practices, including corporal punishment, isolation, or coercive treatment methods.

While some youth report positive experiences, particularly when staying with relatives, there are reportedly widespread cases of abuse in rehabilitation centres in both Somalia and Kenya. Short- and long-term risks include interrupted education, social isolation, family estrangement, and exposure to female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage—particularly for girls. Challenges for Western authorities in their efforts to prevent re-education trips and to return children include underreporting, legal limitations abroad, difficulties in cooperation with parents, and a lack of early warning mechanisms in schools and municipalities.

As preventive measures, interviewed experts suggested the need for early intervention, stronger cross-sectoral collaboration, and community-led prevention efforts. They call for enhanced awareness among professionals and families alike to prevent harmful re-education trips and ensure the safety and well-being of at-risk children and youth.

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Introduction

The so-called re-education trips — known as *dhaqan celis*¹ in the Somali context — have long been a concern for Danish authorities.² Although precise data on their prevalence within the Somali community in Denmark is lacking, cases of Somali children being sent to Somalia or neighbouring countries continue to emerge.

This report examines the practice of re-education trips where children and youth of Somali background from Western countries are sent abroad — typically to Somalia and Kenya — for cultural rehabilitation.

The report explores more specifically how this practice has emerged within the Somali diaspora and it outlines patterns in age, gender, destinations, and the conditions experienced by children and youth who are placed with relatives or in so-called cultural rehabilitation centres. Furthermore, the report examines the physical, psychological, educational, and social impacts of re-education trips, including the risks of female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. It also highlights the practical and legal challenges faced by Western authorities in addressing such cases. Lastly, the report presents expert-driven proposals — grounded in practical experience and contextual understanding.

The report uses information not only from Denmark but also from several other Western countries — mainly Scandinavian (Sweden, Norway) — as the practice of re-education trips involving Somali diaspora children and youth is widespread across countries. The purpose of including information from other Western countries than Denmark is to cover the different aspects of re-education trips more comprehensively rather than to compare countries.

Methodology

This report has been drafted by the Country of Origin Information Unit (COI) of the Centre for Documentation and Counter Extremism (CDE), the Danish Immigration Service (DIS).

While developing the Terms of Reference (ToR) (see Annex 1), the project team consulted with the relevant Danish authorities, including the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration's (SIRI) Office for Honour-Related Conflicts and Negative Social Control (MÆRK) who are the prime authorities working with this issue. In addition, the Centre for Family and Visit was also consulted, as they requested specific information about the rehabilitation centres.

This report uses the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) COI Report³ Methodology as a benchmark. In order to supplement the limited information from written sources, the project group consulted a

¹ In this report, *re-education* trips and *dhaqan celis* will be used interchangeably.

² In the Danish context re-education trips are called *udlandsophold af negativ betydning* (stay abroad with negative impact) or *genopdragelsesrejser* (re-education trips) when involving individuals under the age of 18 and *ufrivillig udlandsophold* (involuntary stay abroad) when involving individuals above the age of 18. Both are illegal under Danish law. These terms for “re-education trip” are defined as a stay outside of Denmark that has a generally negative impact on the individual. This may include situations where the purpose of the trip is to send the individual back to their parents’ country of origin, or another country, with the intention of subjecting them to that country’s norms and values in a way that harms their integration into Danish society; or where the conditions during the stay abroad pose a serious threat to the individual’s health or development. Ministry of Immigration and Integration (*Et frit liv i Danmark*, Januar 2025, [url](#), p.26; Ny i Danmark, *Genopdragelsesrejse eller andet udlandsophold af negativ betydning*, [url](#))

³ EUAA, *Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2023, [url](#)

number of sources both in Denmark and in Kenya. Some interviews were conducted online or in Copenhagen, while others took place during a field mission to Nairobi, Kenya, in March 2025.

In line with the COI methodology's core principle of ensuring a comprehensive and balanced representation of the available material, the report incorporates information from a variety of sources, including those that present diverging or contradictory information or viewpoints.

Interviewed sources

DIS has interviewed various authorities and experts, who were selected based on their merits and expertise in the field. The consulted sources include more specifically the following:

- Security consultants, whose role is to advise municipalities and citizens in cases involving honour-related conflicts, are based in the Danish cities of Copenhagen, Odense, Aarhus and Aalborg.⁴ The project team initially consulted all security consultants; however, due to the limited number of cases involving Somali-background youth in Aarhus and Aalborg, interviews were conducted only with consultants based in Copenhagen and Odense. The two groups of consultants interviewed will be referred to as Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand and Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK. These practitioners were selected in their capacity as frontline professionals with first-hand operational experience with children who had undergone re-education.
- Representatives from three Western embassies, a European diplomatic source — who asked to be anonymous — and the special envoys of Norway and Sweden who work on re-education trips from Kenya as well as the Danish embassy for Somalia in Nairobi. These sources have first-hand operational experience with cases of children who have undergone re-education. However, it should be noted that embassies do not keep statistics on how many individuals have been sent on such trips or the consequences of their stays, and the information provided by these sources is merely based on the experience of the individual embassy staff in question. Cases of re-education trips typically only come to light when an affected person — or a concerned relative or friend — contacts authorities for assistance, i.e. embassy staff.
- Director General Mohamed Bashir Omar, Somalia's Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, who has provided perspective from the Somali government and its possible initiatives on these issues.
- Markus Höhne (University of Göttingen), Mohamed Ibrahim (University of British Columbia) and a journalist, Mary Harper, provide insight into the cultural aspects of re-education trips and details, and how these practices are used within the Somali diaspora.
- UNICEF Somalia, which has a mandate on child protection and is present in Somalia.
- Two young persons of Somali background with first-hand experience of staying in rehabilitation centres. The project team initially planned to interview five persons of Somali background who had been on re-education trips to Somalia. The candidates for the interviews were randomly selected with assistance from the security consultants. The aim was to supplement information gathered from other sources and obtain first-hand information, particularly about conditions in the rehabilitation centres, as detailed information was limited. However, it was only possible to conduct

⁴ Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (SIRI), *Notat om henvendelser til sikkerhedskonsulenterne i 2024*, [url](#)

interviews with two candidates. Both interviewees had been sent to Somalia and stayed in rehabilitation centres. Their identity is anonymized in this report, and they are referred to as anonymous persons 1 and 2.

It should be noted that most of the information shared by the different authorities, including the diplomatic sources and the Danish security consultants, about Somali children's re-education trips came from children's own accounts. This type of information, i.e. oral testimonies passed on through practitioners, is not always possible to verify in the same way as published materials. Although all efforts were made to assess the credibility of these accounts and to compare them across different interviews, it was not always possible to fully crosscheck the information from the authorities due to the limited availability of other sources. However, these interviews were particularly important to conduct given the limited availability of published information about re-education trips and the conditions in associated rehabilitation centres.

The project group has included reflections from the interviewed authorities and practitioners on the challenges they encounter in handling re-education trip cases. Additionally, the report presents these sources' suggestions for improving prevention efforts, based on their experiences and perspectives from working with such cases in practice. While formulating preventive measures is not the primary aim of this report, these suggestions are included to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the issue from the practitioners' point of view. It should be noted, however, that the proposed preventive measures reflect the views of the sources alone and do not represent the position of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS).

The consulted sources were briefed about the purpose of the report. Minutes were written for each interview and forwarded to the sources for approval. This gave the sources the possibility to amend, comment or correct their statements. All sources approved their statements.

The report was externally peer-reviewed by Professor Anika Liversage (VIVE) and MÆRK in May 2025. The COI Unit wish to express its gratitude to both organizations for their valuable comments and suggestions.

The report is available on the website of DIS on www.us.dk and www.stopekstremisme.dk.

Abbreviations

COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GoS	Government of Somalia
ISF	the Institute for Social Research
NACADA	the National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ToR	Terms of Reference

1. Dhaqan Celis (re-education trips)

1.1 Background — from migration to *dhaqan celis*

After the Somali civil war in the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Somalis fled their homes — first seeking refuge in neighbouring countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen, and later in more distant places across Europe and North America. Those who arrived in Western countries often did so as asylum seekers or refugees, and over time, many of them obtained legal residency and citizenship, achieving a sense of stability after years of displacement.⁵

However, Somali families often experience stress, loneliness, and conflicts upon migrating to Western countries. This is due to the absence of their extended family networks and differences in cultural values where respect for hierarchy, obedience, and strong family ties is confronted with an individualistic, equality-driven family model.⁶

To compensate for the loss of the extended family network that used to be nearby, Somali parents often build informal networks with other Somali families and community elders in their host country to replicate the extended family structure. For example, community organizations, mosques, and social gatherings become crucial spaces where advice and childcare are exchanged among Somali neighbours and friends (functioning almost like an extended family by choice).⁷ Additionally, many diaspora parents keep daily communication with relatives in Somalia or elsewhere (via the phone and the internet) to seek advice on decisions related to how to raise their children and to ensure their children remain connected to their family lineage and heritage.⁸

However, Somali parents face major challenges in adjusting to new parenting norms due to cultural adaptation difficulties and the loss of traditional social support systems. Cultural integration gaps between parents and children arise as Somali youth quickly adopt the language and norms of the host society, sometimes leading to role reversal where children act as interpreters and cultural brokers for their parents. This shift can create family conflicts, with children seeking autonomy and parents struggling to maintain authority.⁹

Research has identified a common pattern within the Somali diaspora: after being granted citizenship in the first Western country where they initially settled, they choose to relocate to a second country. Once the initial survival needs were met, new concerns began to emerge — concerns that were less about shelter and food, and more about identity, values, and the future of their children. Many Somali parents, especially those raising children in countries like Denmark and Sweden, struggled with navigating welfare systems that they perceived as intrusive or unsympathetic to their cultural norms — particularly in areas like parenting and child protection. These concerns led some Somali families to leave the Western countries

⁵ Abdi, A.Y., *Moral geographies and their application among diasporic Somalis*, November 2023, [url](#), pp. 837-838

⁶ Osman, F., Randell, E., Mohamed, A., & Sorbring, E., *Dialectical Processes in Parent-child Relationships among Somali Families in Sweden*, 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁷ Tiilikainen, M., *Raising children of Somali descent in Toronto*, 2019, [url](#), pp. 155–156

⁸ Tiilikainen, M., *Whenever mom hands over the phone, then we talk': Transnational ties to the country of descent among Canadian Somali youth*, January 2017, [url](#), pp.66-67

⁹ Osman, F., Randell, E., Mohamed, A., & Sorbring, E., *Dialectical Processes in Parent-child Relationships among Somali Families in Sweden*, 2021, [url](#), p. 2-3; Norway and Sweden, 2025: 1

and migrate elsewhere where the Islamic culture dominates.¹⁰ Dhaqan celis — the practice of sending children for re-education/rehabilitation — is regarded as one migration pattern seen among Somali diaspora.¹¹

1.1.1 Dhaqan celis

Dhaqan celis is a Somali term made up of two words: *dhaqan*, meaning culture, and *celis*, meaning return. Together, the term can be interpreted as a return to culture.¹² The term originated within Somali communities and was initially used to describe the practice of relocating children from urban centres to rural Somalia, where they could experience and learn about traditional Somali culture, values, and way of life. However, after many Somalis fled the country due to the civil war and resettled around the world, the term evolved.¹³

Today, dhaqan celis remains a common practice among the Somali diaspora communities around the world. The term describes the practice of Somali parents sending their children — often born and raised in Western countries — back to Somalia or other regions.¹⁴

1.2 Motivations of Somali diaspora for using dhaqan celis

Somalis in Western countries may send their children abroad on *dhaqan celis* for a variety of reasons. These decisions are often rooted in a complex interplay of cultural, behavioural, legal, educational, and health-related factors:

1.2.1 Cultural and identity-related motivations

For many families, dhaqan celis is seen as a means of strengthening or preserving cultural and religious identity. Some parents make this choice in response to perceived cultural conflicts or experiences of discrimination in the host society, which they believe undermine their children's connection to their heritage. In such cases, sending a child abroad is viewed as a way to reconnect them with traditional values and community norms. A recurring reason is the desire to ensure that children grow up in an environment where their Islamic identity is respected and nurtured. For this reason, some families relocate their children

¹⁰ Abdi, A. Y., *Moral geographies and their application among diasporic Somalis*, November 2023, [url](#), p. 841; R. Haga, *Freedom has destroyed the Somali family*, 2014, [url](#)

¹¹ Bakaari, F., Escandell, X., *Ambivalent Returns: Dhaqan celis and Counter-Diasporic Migration Among Second-Generation Somalis*, 2021, [url](#), p. 52

¹² Ibrahim, M., *Dhagan Celis (Cultural Rehabilitation): Somali Canadians Transnational Approach to Youth Substance Use*, 13 June 2023, [url](#), p. 2

¹³ Osman, A. A., *The Dynamics of Return Migration within the Somali Diaspora and the Practice of 'Dhaqan Celis'. Navigating Identity and Cultural Reconnection: Exploring Motivations, Experiences, and Implications for Young Somali Returnees*, 2024, [url](#), p. 43

¹⁴ Ibrahim, M., *Dhagan Celis (Cultural Rehabilitation): Somali Canadians Transnational Approach to Youth Substance Use*, 13 June 2023, [url](#), p. 2

to Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt or Turkey, which are perceived as more culturally compatible and economically accessible than their country of residence.¹⁵

1.2.2 Behavioural and disciplinary concerns

Concerns about behavioural issues represent another key motivation for dhaqan celis. Parents may turn to dhaqan celis out of fear of losing control over their children's behaviour and values — a fear intensified by feelings of social alienation in their host countries, leading many to send their children away as the only solution.¹⁶

More specifically, parents may act out of fear that their children are becoming involved in criminal activities, substance abuse, or other high-risk behaviours. In such cases, sending the child abroad is seen as a corrective strategy aimed at rehabilitation through immersion in a culturally or religiously grounded environment.¹⁷ Publicly visible misconduct often intensifies this motivation, especially when it threatens the family's honour or standing within the community. As noted by anthropologist Markus Höhne, interventions often occur when a child's behaviour becomes impossible to conceal — for example, when a boy is seen intoxicated in public or when a girl openly expresses romantic interest in someone outside the community. In these instances, parents may act swiftly to mitigate potential shame and restore the family's reputation.¹⁸

1.2.3 Legal and child welfare considerations

In families under pressure from child welfare services, the decision to send a child abroad can also be influenced by legal concerns. Parents may see dhaqan celis as a way to avoid intervention from authorities, particularly in cases where there is a risk of the child being removed from the home. The timing of these decisions often reflects a sense of urgency, with some parents acting immediately after contact with social services. Responses vary — from impulsive actions made without fully understanding the potential consequences, to deliberate efforts to prevent the state from asserting custodial authority over the child.¹⁹

1.2.4 Health-related motivations

Health-related concerns, particularly those involving mental health, also influence decisions to send children abroad. In some cases, parents express dissatisfaction with diagnoses made in their country of residence or demonstrate a general mistrust of the local healthcare system. Others prefer alternative treatment approaches available in countries of origin. Research by Marja Tiilikainen highlights how Somali

¹⁵ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 2; Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden 2025: 7

¹⁶ The Guardian, *Tuesday briefing: How British-Somali citizens are disappearing to 'culture rehabilitation centres'*, 14 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden 2025: 10; WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; 'They Were Torturing Me'*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁸ Höhne 2025: 4 - 5

¹⁹ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 7; GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 3

families may interpret mental illness through cultural and spiritual frameworks — for example, attributing certain behaviours to possession by spirits (*jinn*s) rather than to clinical conditions. As a result, they may seek traditional healing methods or spiritual care perceived as more legitimate or effective within their cultural worldview. Building on this perspective, the researcher Mohamed Ibrahim points out that Somali families in countries such as Canada and the United States often encounter significant barriers in accessing mental health and substance abuse services. Even when families actively seek help, they may struggle to navigate complex, unfamiliar healthcare systems. These difficulties can lead them to pursue care options abroad, where treatment is often delivered in a culturally familiar setting and at a lower financial cost.²⁰

Ibrahim further argues that some parents turn to facilities abroad after failing to find effective rehabilitation options in their country of residence. A parent may, for instance, send their adult child to a treatment centre in Kenya after multiple unsuccessful attempts to manage addiction in their country of residence. Despite engaging with local services, persistent relapse can prompt families to seek out alternative centres that offer structured, culturally informed support with better perceived outcomes.²¹

1.3 Parental motivations in the Danish context

According to the security consultants from Copenhagen, Southern Denmark, and Zealand, children and young people are often sent on *dhaqan celis* to prevent authorities from intervening and potentially removing the child, especially in cases where domestic violence is suspected, or due to behavioural issues, integration challenges, or concerns about poor academic performance.²²

In addition, many children and young people are sent abroad due to involvement in crime or behaviour that the family considers problematic. This could include being part of negative social environments, displaying disruptive behaviour at school, or showing general patterns of conduct that cause family concern.²³

In some cases, families observe that their children are struggling with psychological or social issues — such as depression, anxiety, or emotional vulnerability — and believe that sending them away from Denmark will help resolve these challenges.²⁴

For some families, the decision is also rooted in cultural concerns. They fear that their children, particularly girls, are adopting Danish values and lifestyles — i.e. they are concerned the children are becoming "too Danish" — to such an extent that they risk losing their original culture and identity. In the case of girls, there may also be a desire to ensure they grow up in accordance with the family's cultural expectations and codes of honour.²⁵

²⁰ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 8 - 9; Tiilikainen, M., *Failed diaspora: experiences of 'Dhaqan Celis' and mentally ill returnees in Somaliland*, 2011, [url](#), p. 73; Ibrahim, 2025: 11

²¹ Ibrahim, 2025: 17

²² Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 2; Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 4- 5

²³ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 2; Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 6

²⁴ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 2

²⁵ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 2; Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 4- 5

2. Patterns and characteristics of re-education trips

2.1 Prevalence

The phenomenon of Somali families sending children back home for upbringing has been observed for several decades across the Somali diaspora. It began to emerge as a pattern in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as the children of Somalis who had fled the civil war reached adolescence.²⁶ Western governments and media began to take notice in the early 2000s of Somali parents sending teenagers abroad for extended periods, as cases were reported in Norway, Denmark, the UK, the Netherlands, and some countries in North America.²⁷

In recent years, however, *dhaqan celis* has become a growing concern, drawing increased attention from Western authorities and organizations seeking to address the issue.²⁸

2.1.1 Scope

In general, a large number of re-education trips of persons from different backgrounds are never reported and therefore do not appear in official statistics — an issue that authorities openly acknowledge.²⁹ One reason for this underreporting is the difficulty in defining the phenomenon, especially when it overlaps with parents' right to make decisions about their children's upbringing.³⁰ In addition, many cases are often highly complex and can take several years to resolve.³¹

To gain insight into the scope of the issue, the report includes data on the number of re-education trips in Denmark, Sweden and Norway from both written and oral sources. Oral sources include Swedish and Norwegian special envoys, as well as security consultants from the Capital Region, South Denmark, and Zealand (as a result, some of the data is region-specific in the Danish context). Data from the written sources, for example, covers all of Denmark and was collected by several organisations, including RED Center against honour-related conflicts (which provides counselling and other services, including safehouses, to ethnic minority youths, their families and professionals and promotes knowledge about honour-related conflicts nationwide).³² In the Danish context each authority — RED Center, SIRI, and the

²⁶ The Guardian, *Somali 'rehab': re-education camps where children are locked up, beaten and abused*, March 2023, [url](#); Höhne, 2025: 1

²⁷ Tilikainen, M., *Failed Diaspora: Experiences of Dhaqan Celis and Mentally Ill Returnees in Somaliland*, 2011, [url](#), p. 71, 79-80, 82-83; Johnsdotter, S., *European Somali Children Dumped? On families, parents, and children in a transnational context*, 2015, [url](#), pp. 85-86; HRS, *Den store politiske skammen: Ekstremvold på koranskoler*, November 2017, [url](#)

²⁸ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 2, 4-5; Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 1; The Guardian, *UK Somali teenagers taken 'on holiday' and forced into marriage*, 2018, [url](#); HRS, *Den store politiske skammen: Ekstremvold på koranskoler*, November 2017, [url](#); Denmark, Regeringen, *Myndighederne vil gribe ind for genopdragelsesrejser*, September 2017, [url](#); SVT Nyheter, *Pojkar skickas på "uppfostringsresor" – mot sin vilja*, 26 June 2019, [url](#)

²⁹ To gain insight into the scope of the problem, the report includes data on the number of re-education trips in Denmark, Sweden and Norway from both written and oral sources. Oral sources include Swedish and Norwegian special envoys, as well as security consultants from the Capital Region, South Denmark, and Zealand (as a result, some of the data is region-specific in the Danish context). Data from the written sources, for example, covers all of Denmark and is collected by several organizations, including RED.

³⁰ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, 2024, [url](#), pp. 30; Ankestyrelsen, *Længerevarende udlandsophold blandt børn og unge med ikke-vestlig baggrund*, January 2018, [url](#), p.4; Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 1

³¹ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 3

³² RED Centre, [url](#)

regional security consultants — uses its own registration system in which individuals who contact them are recorded. Since these registrations are anonymous and data is not shared between authorities, duplicate registrations may occur across those authorities.³³

With regard to the total number of re-education trips in Denmark, the team of regional security consultants in Denmark reported 64 new cases concerning re-education trips or involuntary stays abroad in 2023 — an increase of 13 % compared to 2022 — and 52 new cases in 2024.³⁴ In 2021, the team of security consultants in Denmark was involved in 46 cases where individuals had already been sent abroad against their will, while an additional 53 individuals expressed fear of being sent abroad.³⁵

RED Safehouse in Denmark handled 96 inquiries about re-education trips in 2022. Among these, 16 inquiries came directly from children and young people seeking assistance to return to Denmark from abroad.³⁶

2.1.1.1 Number of reported cases involving children and young people of Somali background

The following section presents figures on children and young people of Somali background who were sent on re-education trips, as reported by the security consultants in the Capital Region, Region Zealand, and the Region of Southern Denmark in 2023 and 2024. In addition, data from Sweden and Norway, reported by the Special Envoys in Kenya, are also included.

Cases in Denmark

In 2024, security consultants in the Capital Region registered a total of 29 new cases of re-education trips, of which 8 cases involved children and young people with a Somali background. In two of these cases, individuals were threatened with re-education trips but were not actually sent abroad, while in three cases, the individuals managed to return to Denmark.³⁷

In 2023, 29 new cases were also registered in the Capital Region regarding re-education trips, of which 10 cases involved children and young people with a Somali background. Several of these cases concerned larger sibling groups. In three of these cases, authorities had already expressed concerns prior to the trips that individuals would be sent abroad. In five cases, the individuals eventually returned to Denmark.³⁸

In 2023, the Region of Southern Denmark registered only concerns about potential re-education trips, totaling 20, of which one case involved Somalia. The figures for 2024 cover both the Region of Southern Denmark and the Region of Zealand. There were 27 cases of concern about potential re-education trips and 16 cases of individuals already staying abroad on alleged re-education trips. Of these, three cases involved Somali children and young people.³⁹

³³ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 0

³⁴ Denmark, Ministry of Immigration and Integration, *Et frit liv i Danmark*, January 2025, [url](#), p. 8

³⁵ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, 2024, [url](#), pp. 161–162

³⁶ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, 2024, [url](#), pp. 161–162

³⁷ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 2

³⁸ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 3

³⁹ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 1

Cases in Norway and Sweden

In contrast to Denmark, Norway registered 100 cases in 2024 concerning Somalis staying abroad against their will. The same year, the Swedish authorities' recorded 74 cases of family-related coercion involving 134 individuals. Among these, it has been confirmed that in 37 cases, the affected persons were returned to Sweden.⁴⁰ According to the Norwegian Special Envoy in Nairobi, the number of cases involving re-education trips appears to be decreasing. The Special Envoy further stated that this is largely due to increased awareness efforts. Particularly preventive initiatives, such as awareness campaigns launched before the summer holidays, have been implemented to reduce the risk of re-education trips (for more information see section [4.1](#)).⁴¹

2.2. Age and gender

While some stays are relatively short, lasting only a few months, others can extend over many years — up to more than a decade in some cases.⁴² A source stated that the stays often last for two to four years.⁴³

It is mainly Somali teenagers who are sent on re-education trips, as this is the stage of their life when their behaviour tends to stray furthest from parental expectations. Many families choose to intervene if they notice worrying signs.⁴⁴

However, it is not only teenagers who are subjected to re-education trips; children and adults are also affected. According to Danish regional data, in 2024, the departure age ranged from seven to 45 years. In some cases involving larger sibling groups, the age range was between one and 31 years.⁴⁵ In Norway and Sweden, data shows that children and young people are typically sent abroad between the ages of 12 and 28.⁴⁶

Diplomatic sources reported that the age range typically spans from teenagers to adults, and in some cases, individuals around 40 years old have been sent on re-education trips.⁴⁷ In general, there is no strict age limit for individuals sent on this kind of trip.⁴⁸

Both genders are subjected to dhaqan celis, though the form of re-education may generally differ by gender (for more information about types of re-education, see section [3](#)). Teenage boys are disproportionately often sent to rehabilitation centres compared to girls. The main reasons cited include problematic behaviours such as drug use, criminal activities, involvement in negative social circles and

⁴⁰ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 3

⁴¹ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 32

⁴² Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, 2024, [url](#), p. 15; Security Consultants Region Capital, 2025: 2

⁴³ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Transnasjonal Oppvekst*, 2014, [url](#), p. 75

⁴⁴ Johnsdotter, S., *European Somali Children Dumped? On families, parents, and children in a transnational context*, 2015, [url](#), p. 81-82; The Guardian, *Somali 'rehab': re-education camps where children are locked up, beaten and and abused*, 12 March 2023, [url](#); Johnsdotter, S., *European Somali Children Dumped? On families, parents, and children in a transnational context*, 2015, [url](#), p.11, The Guardian, *UK Somali teenagers taken 'on holiday' and forced into marriage*, 26 August 2018, [url](#); The Wall Street Journal, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; 'They Were Torturing Me'*, 16 August 2022, [url](#); European diplomatic source, 2025: 5-6

⁴⁵ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 2

⁴⁶ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 21

⁴⁷ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 2

⁴⁸ European Diplomatic source, 2025: 5

generally unacceptable behaviour.⁴⁹ These centres are staffed predominantly by men (approximately 90%), reflecting a heavily gendered environment in which boys are considered manageable in institutional settings.⁵⁰

In contrast to boys, girls are more commonly sent to live with relatives or placed in homestay arrangements rather than rehabilitation centres.⁵¹ This practice is notably prevalent in cases involving children from Sweden and other European countries.⁵²

The reasons for sending girls abroad are primarily centred on cultural concerns, perceived inappropriate lifestyles, and protection of family honour. Families often worry about girls becoming too westernized or engaging in behaviours considered inappropriate — particularly dating outside the Somali community.⁵³ Girls aged over 15 are frequently sent abroad due to anxieties about their sexuality, relationships, and marriage prospects; families fear that girls exhibiting behaviours perceived as too "Western" or "Danish" will struggle to find spouses from within the Somali community.⁵⁴ Moreover, even younger girls (under 15) might be sent away due to concerns about their overall behaviour, academic performance, or to ensure adherence to cultural and honour codes within the family.⁵⁵

Although less common, some females do end up in rehabilitation centres only for females.⁵⁶ The two young persons whom the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) spoke with were both girls who had been to rehabilitation centres.⁵⁷

2.4 Destinations

The primary destination for Somali-origin children and young people sent on re-education trips is Somalia, specifically its major cities such as Mogadishu, Hargeisa, Bosaso, Galkayo, Garowe, and Burco. These cities host various types of facilities, including rehabilitation centers, designed for cultural reorientation.⁵⁸ In addition to Somalia, Somaliland is frequently mentioned as a destination for re-education stays.⁵⁹

Kenya is another common destination, especially in Somali-majority areas such as Nairobi's Eastleigh district,⁶⁰ where rehabilitation centers and Quran schools are established. It is noted that in some cases, the

⁴⁹ Security Consultants, Region Capita of DK, 2025: 6; GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 9; Security Consultants, Region South DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 2-3; Höhne, 2025: 2; Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 22

⁵⁰ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 9

⁵¹ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 23; European Diplomatic source, 2025 2025: 1; GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 9

⁵² Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 23; European Diplomatic source, 2025 2025: 1

⁵³ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand,, 2025: 2-3; Höhne, 2025: 2

⁵⁴ Security Consultants Region Capital, 2025: 7; Anonymous source 2, 2025: 1

⁵⁵ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 5

⁵⁶ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 9; The Guardian, *Somali 'rehab': re-education camps where children are locked up, beaten and and abused*, 12 March 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁷ Anonymous source 1, 2025; Anonymous source 2; 2025

⁵⁸ Höhne, 2025: 3 Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 9; GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development 2025:2

⁵⁹ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 1

⁶⁰ Eastleigh is home to more than 300,000 Somalis and is known as little Mogadishu, Landinfo, *Temanotat Kenya: Kvinnelig kjønnslemlestelse blant kenyansk-somaliere*, 6 February 2024, [url](#), p. 6

families running the Quran school also host the child at home, combining residential stays with schooling for profit.⁶¹

Somali government officials note that some families may also choose other Muslim-majority countries, where the cost of living is lower and cultural values are more aligned.⁶² According to the Norwegian envoy, the relocation of children heavily depends on the locations of extended family.⁶³

Egypt and Türkiye are two destinations that families often select as a potential alternative because of their Muslim-majority population and lower cost of living compared to Western countries.⁶⁴ Morocco and Iraq appear occasionally as a destination, but it is far less common compared to Somalia, Kenya, or Egypt.⁶⁵

Additionally, the United Kingdom is a frequent destination for Somali-background children involved in relocation — especially because many have extended family in this country.⁶⁶

2.5 Decision-making

Both parents typically make decisions regarding sending Somali-background children on re-education trips.⁶⁷ In these cases, the decision is portrayed as a collective one, where parents commonly agree on sending the child abroad, and the child is expected to follow their guidance.⁶⁸

Some sources confirm that mothers increasingly take the lead in decisions related to re-education trips. Mothers are sometimes even more proactive than fathers or husbands in initiating re-education trips.⁶⁹ Other sources highlight that decisions can be made without full parental agreement. Occasionally, one parent — typically the father — makes the decision alone, sometimes without informing the mother. For example, the Capital Region of Denmark reported two cases from 2023 and 2024 where the father and his family members organized re-education trips without the mother's involvement.⁷⁰ Similarly, in cases where one parent disagrees with the decision, they may attempt to alert authorities to prevent the child from being sent abroad.⁷¹

Finally, the role of the extended family can also vary. In situations where the child is placed in home-based care with relatives, extended family members are usually involved or at least informed. However, if the child is sent to a re-education center, parents often conceal this from the wider family, fearing that a relative might intervene or oppose the decision. However, if the parents are not present, for example, if

⁶¹ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 9; Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden 2025: 11; The Guardian, *Somali 'rehab': re-education camps where children are locked up, beaten and abused*, 12 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶² GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 2

⁶³ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 11

⁶⁴ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 2; Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 11; Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 9

⁶⁵ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 9; Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025, 2025: 1

⁶⁶ Norway, Helse- og omsorgsdepartementet, *Rapport fra ekspertgruppe om unge som etterlates i utlandet mot sin vilje*, 2020, [url](#), p. 52, Osman A. A., *In Search of Green Pastures: The onward immigration of Somali-Swedes to Britain*. *Journal of Migration Research*, 2012, [url](#) pp. 134 -136.

⁶⁷ European Diplomatic source, 2025: 16; Ibrahim, 2025: 7

⁶⁸ Ibrahim, 2025: 7

⁶⁹ Höhne, 2025: 20; Ibrahim, 2025: 8

⁷⁰ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 21

⁷¹ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 9

they are deceased, the responsibility for such decisions often falls to other family members, such as uncles.⁷²

2.6 Parental strategies towards the children

Most cases indicate that Somali-background children and young people are misled about the purpose of trips abroad, which later turn out to be re-education stays. Although some of the affected children are aware that such practices exist, they often do not believe they could become victims themselves, which may make them more willing to travel.⁷³

Families commonly conceal the real intent behind the trip. It is often described to the child as a vacation or a visit to ill family members.⁷⁴ The stated reasons for travel often do not reflect the underlying intentions, which may include long-term stays abroad, participation in structured re-education programs, or even facing forced marriage or other intentions that aim to control the children's behaviour.⁷⁵

A pattern observed by the Security Consultants in the Capital Region of Denmark shows that parents may send children either individually or in groups. In some cases, an older sibling is sent ahead and their experience is subsequently used as a point of reference within the family. Families may, for instance, use the older sibling's negative experience as a warning that younger children could also be sent away if they do not adhere to expected behaviour.⁷⁶

In some cases, children are sent on multiple re-education trips if the family believes that the first stay did not result in the desired behavioural change. This can significantly increase the child's trauma and make reintegration into their home society (e.g. Denmark) even more difficult upon return.⁷⁷

Children and youths are typically accompanied by family members, such as a parent, siblings, or other relatives, to the destination country. It is common for siblings to travel together or for a parent to escort one or more children.⁷⁸

⁷² Höhne, 2025: 22

⁷³ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 2

⁷⁴ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 6; European diplomatic source, 2025, 2025: 5; Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 2; Anonymous source 1, 2025: 1; Anonymous source 2, 2015: 1

⁷⁵ European Diplomatic source, 2025, 2025: 5; Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 6

⁷⁶ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 18

⁷⁷ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 10

⁷⁸ Aftonbladet, *They are stuck in Somalia: "Prison for children"*, 1 August 2024, [url](#); Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025:

3. Types of stay

There are two primary forms of dhaqan celis of Somali children and youth: family-based placements and rehabilitation centres.⁷⁹

In some cases, the two forms of dhaqan celis may overlap. For example, children and young people initially placed with relatives may later be moved to rehabilitation facilities if the family struggles to care for them, and sometimes the process occurs in reverse. In one case from Sweden, for example, a 14-year-old boy was initially enrolled in a rehabilitation centre, but after reports of physical abuse emerged, his parents withdrew him and instead placed him in the care of relatives. In another case also from Sweden, a boy was initially placed with his aunt and uncle for a year; however, when he resisted attending the local school, he was moved to a rehabilitation facility against his will.⁸⁰ In two recent cases from Denmark, children were initially placed in homestays but were later transferred to rehabilitation centres.⁸¹

3.1 Homestays with relatives

Somali society emphasizes collectivism in family life, which is, among other things, reflected in responsibilities towards the children shared across the extended family. It is common for other relatives or even community members to discipline or guide a child, reflecting a belief that child-rearing is a communal duty rather than solely the parents' task.⁸² Thus, all adult relatives share accountability for raising children, and many Somali families foster the children of relatives as their own, whether temporarily or permanently. Sending a child to live with extended family is, according to researcher Johnsdotter, viewed by Somali parents as protective parenting.⁸³ These homestays are generally intended to expose the young person to traditional Somali culture and daily life.⁸⁴ However, from the youth's perspective, home stays are not always voluntary; some children report being deceived or pressured into travelling, without being fully informed about the duration or conditions of their stay.⁸⁵

It is due to this collective responsibility towards the children that diaspora youth are sent to live with extended family members—typically grandparents, uncles, aunts, or other relatives—in Somalia or other countries. In some cases one of the parents stays with their children.⁸⁶ The length of these stays can vary significantly, from a few months to several years.⁸⁷ An example is that of a young girl from Sweden who was

⁷⁹ Höhne, 2025: 6

⁸⁰ Aftonbladet, *They are stuck in Somalia: "Prison for children"*, 1 August 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹ Anonymous source 1, 2025: 2, 6, 11; Anonymous source 2, 2025: 4

⁸² Johnsdotter, S., *European Somali Children Dumped? On families, parents, and children in a transnational context*, 2015, [url](#), pp. 88-89; Evason, N. *Cultural Atlas*, Somali Culture — Family, 2019, [url](#)

⁸³ Johnsdotter, S., *European Somali Children Dumped? On families, parents, and children in a transnational context*, 2015, [url](#), pp. 86-88

⁸⁴ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Transnasjonal Oppvekst*, 2014, [url](#), p. 78; Johnsdotter, S., *European Somali Children Dumped? On families, parents, and children in a transnational context*, 2015, [url](#), p. 90

⁸⁵ Zetland, *Flere mindreårige danskere opholder sig lige nu i Somalia mod deres vilje. Jeg satte mig for at finde ud af hvorfor*, 19 April 2018, [url](#)

⁸⁶ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, 2024, [url](#), pp. 55-56

⁸⁷ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, 2024, [url](#), p. 15

sent to Laascaanood, Somalia, at the age of 13 or 14, staying for nine months to adopt more culturally acceptable behavior.⁸⁸

During these stays, the extended family takes over responsibility for the youth's upbringing, guiding and disciplining them. Physical discipline, including minor beatings, is often seen as a normal part of upbringing within Somali culture. However, according to anthropologist Höhne, extreme forms of abuse such as sexual violence or severe trauma are generally not expected within family settings.⁸⁹

Children live with relatives and attend religious schools during the day.⁹⁰ Some take regular private school or university courses while staying with relatives.⁹¹ In both Somalia and Kenya — common destinations for children sent to stay with relatives — upbringing within the school environment is often characterized by strict discipline, which can pose challenges, especially when government oversight is limited.⁹²

In Somalia, the majority of the education system is privately run, leading to significant variations in quality and content due to the lack of state regulation.⁹³ In severe cases where children are seriously harmed, parents often have limited legal options for addressing the situation. This is largely due to deeply rooted cultural attitudes that discourage reporting or openly acknowledging such issues, making it difficult to seek justice or protection through formal legal channels.⁹⁴

In Kenya, disciplinary methods vary depending on the type of school, but they generally differ from what children and young people in Western countries are accustomed to. While some schools and educational centres offer a high standard of education, others are marked by harsh discipline and control.⁹⁵ Even international schools, which otherwise enjoy a good reputation, may employ strict and harsh teaching methods with students.⁹⁶

3.2 Cultural rehabilitation centres

As mentioned above, there are two main forms of dhaqan celis. This section will focus on the so-called cultural rehabilitation centres.

Cultural rehabilitation centres primarily serve Somalis who were born or raised in Western countries. According to an article from the Guardian, these centres claim to provide them with a rigorous education on Somali culture and religion. Although these centres are reported to have expanded over the past decade, there is a lack of data to determine exactly their actual prevalence.⁹⁷

Rehabilitation centres have evolved into a significant commercial enterprise in Somalia and neighbouring countries. They are actively promoted through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, as

⁸⁸ Höhne, 2025: 7

⁸⁹ Höhne, 2025: 7-8

⁹⁰ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 9

⁹¹ Tilikainen, M., *Failed Diaspora: Experiences of Dhaqan Celis and Mentally Ill Returnees in Somaliland*, 2011, [url](#), p. 80

⁹² Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 3

⁹³ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 4

⁹⁴ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 5; Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 3-4

⁹⁵ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 5

⁹⁶ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 9

⁹⁷ The Guardian, *Tuesday briefing: How British-Somali citizens are disappearing to 'culture rehabilitation centres'*, 14 March 2023, [url](#)

well as Somali television channels like Somali Universal TV,⁹⁸ in an effort to attract clients.⁹⁹ The marketing often targets diaspora communities, presenting these centres as professional treatment facilities for young people who are drug users, alcoholics, mentally ill, gay, disobedient, irreligious, or simply perceived as too westernized.¹⁰⁰

Monthly fees usually range from USD 140 to 600, depending on the facility type, available services, and location.¹⁰¹

Since children and young people of Somali background are frequently sent to rehabilitation centres and other facilities in countries like Kenya and Somalia,¹⁰² the following sections will focus on these two locations. It will also outline the various types of institutions found in each country and explain how they differ from one another. The information presented is primarily based on interviews with sources in Kenya and Somalia who identified different types of institutions where Somali diaspora children and young people are placed for rehabilitation.

3.2.1 Centres and facilities in Somalia

3.2.1.1 Rehabilitation centres

In Somalia, rehabilitation centres are often referred to as *guuri dhaqan celis*,¹⁰³ and typically accommodate children and young people — often from Western countries — who are perceived as displaying so-called deviant behaviour. Families use these facilities as a way to reintroduce them to Somali cultural and religious values. In some cases, they are also used to remove so-called deviant youth from the family environment and subject them to disciplinary measures.¹⁰⁴

These centres serve not only diaspora children and young people but also members of the local community. One source highlighted the case of a gay man now residing in Germany, who was placed in such a centre while still living in Somalia. This was intended as a means of correcting what was seen as deviant behaviour, reflecting the deep-rooted taboo surrounding homosexuality in Somali society.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Universal TV is considered one of the most important television station for the Somali diaspora and is viewed as neutral. The TV station was established in 2025, and operates from several countries. Gaas, M.H., Hansen, S.J., Berry, D., *Mapping the Somali Media*, n.d., [url](#), pp. 26 -27

⁹⁹ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 24; Institutt for samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold: Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, February 2024, [url](#), p. 51; Ibrahim, M., *Dhaqan Celis (Cultural Rehabilitation): Somali Canadians Transnational Approach to Youth Substance Use*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁰⁰ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025 : 24, 25; The Guardian, *Tuesday briefing: How British-Somali citizens are disappearing to 'culture rehabilitation centres'*, 14 March 2023, [url](#); Höhne, 2025: 13; Director General, Mohamed Bashir Omar, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development: 10; WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; 'They Were Torturing Me'*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden: 24, 25; The Guardian, *Tuesday briefing: How British-Somali citizens are disappearing to 'culture rehabilitation centres'*, 14 March 2023, [url](#); Höhne, 2025: 13; Director General, Mohamed Bashir Omar, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development: 10; WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; 'They Were Torturing Me'*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰² Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 11; Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 9; WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; 'They Were Torturing Me'*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁰³ *Guuri dhaqan celis* is a Somalia term, which translates directly to *house of cultural rehabilitation* (Höhne, 2025: 10)

¹⁰⁴ Höhne, 2025: 10; Ibrahim, 2025: 17

¹⁰⁵ Höhne, 2025: 11

UNICEF stated that there is limited information on rehabilitation centres in Somalia. Reports concerning diaspora children have not been reported by civil society, government institutions, or local actors. Instead, most cases have been brought to UNICEF's attention by European embassies.¹⁰⁶

According to UNICEF, rehabilitation centres are not widely viewed as a problem or a child protection issue among Somalis in Somalia, which is why they are often overlooked in related discussions. The practice has become somewhat normalized, with both local and diaspora children frequently sent to these schools for educational purposes. For many — particularly within the diaspora — some of these centres are regarded as part of Somalia's broader education system.¹⁰⁷

Determining the exact number of these facilities in Somalia is challenging, but they are believed to be widespread, especially in cities like Mogadishu, Hargeisa, and Bosasa, which are key hubs for the diaspora communities.¹⁰⁸ These centres are predominantly operated by the private sector, which holds significant influence in Somalia, and there is currently no formal regulatory framework governing their operation.¹⁰⁹

3.2.1.2 Quran school (dugsi)

According to the Norwegian Special Envoys in Nairobi, the terms Quran school and rehabilitation centre are sometimes used interchangeably or misunderstood, even though they refer to distinctly different types of institutions.¹¹⁰ This statement is echoed in a Norwegian report from 2024, which notes that the term 'Koranic schools' was previously used to describe conditions in so-called rehabilitation centres.¹¹¹

Somalia is home to a range of educational institutions, including Quran schools, where children as young as five and young people focus solely on religious studies. These are typically day schools, as boarding schools are less common in the country. Quran schools cater to both local students and those returning from the diaspora.¹¹²

Although these schools are primarily intended for educational purposes, corporal punishment remains widespread, reflecting prevailing cultural norms. In severe cases where a child is seriously harmed, parents often face significant challenges in seeking justice, as cultural attitudes can limit legal recourse and accountability.¹¹³

3.2.1.3 Healing centres

Healing centres began to expand significantly in Somalia after the outbreak of the civil war in the early '90s, as the demand for trauma treatment grew. Although largely absent before the conflict, they became more widespread following the rise of the Islamic courts. These centres offer faith-based approaches to trauma

¹⁰⁶ UNICEF Somalia, 2025: 1, 6

¹⁰⁷ UNICEF Somalia, 2025: 8-9

¹⁰⁸ Ibrahim, 2025: 25; Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 26; Höhne, 2025: 3

¹⁰⁹ Ibrahim, 2025: 25; Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 26; Three Western Embassies, 2025: 6

¹¹⁰ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 14

¹¹¹ Institutt for samfunnsforskning, *Transnasjonal oppvekst: Om lengre utenlandsopphold blant barn og unge med innvandrerbakgrunn*, 14 February 2014, [url](#), p. 51

¹¹² GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 4

¹¹³ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 5

and psychological distress, addressing issues such as psychosocial suffering, spiritual conditions like jinn possession, and other perceived forms of evil.¹¹⁴

According to researcher Mohamed Ibrahim, attendance at the healing centres is generally voluntary, with individuals free to come and go at their discretion.¹¹⁵

3.2.1.4 Mental health facilities

According to journalist Mary Harper, mental hospitals in Somalia are primarily intended for individuals with severe mental illness. However, at times, these facilities also accommodate young people from the diaspora who are struggling with drug addiction, especially when their families are unable to manage their behaviour. In such cases, these hospitals effectively function as rehabilitation centres.¹¹⁶

3.2.2 Centres and facilities in Kenya

3.2.2.1 Rehabilitation centres

In Kenya, there are many so-called rehabilitation centres, particularly in Eastleigh, Nairobi.¹¹⁷ The rehabilitation centres are legally required to be licensed and staffed with qualified professionals, including psychologists, nurses, and doctors. The National Authority for the Campaign against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) is the primary government body responsible for inspecting and regulating these certified facilities.¹¹⁸

Rehabilitation centres in Kenya differ significantly in their structure and approach. In practice, some are fully accredited and offer a mix of religious teachings alongside professional treatment for mental health and addiction. Others, while still accredited, focus purely on clinical methods without any religious component. In contrast, there are also unaccredited centres that rely entirely on faith-based practices, with no integration of formal psychological or medical care.¹¹⁹

In interviews conducted in March 2025, three Western embassies in Nairobi identified two main types of centres in Kenya where children and young people from the diaspora are placed under the label of rehabilitation centres: healthcare or mental health facilities, and madrasas (further information about madrasas can be found below). Although these institutions serve different purposes and have distinct structures, the boundaries between them are often blurred.¹²⁰

3.2.2.2 Healthcare facilities

The above mentioned is echoed in a recent Canadian study conducted in Kenya on health care facilities and their programmes. The rehabilitation centres investigated in the study stated that they promote their

¹¹⁴ Ibrahim, 2025: 13-14

¹¹⁵ Ibrahim, 2025: 13

¹¹⁶ Mary Harper 2025: 5

¹¹⁷ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 13, 15; Three Western Embassies, 2025 : 7

¹¹⁸ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 10; Ibrahim, 2025: 21

¹¹⁹ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 7, 12; Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden: 13, 15

¹²⁰ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 4, 5

programs as holistic care solutions for youth facing behavioural challenges and substance use, grounded in a biopsychosocial spiritual approach.¹²¹

The study further stated that in East Africa — especially in Kenya — numerous rehabilitation programmes have been established in response to the growing issue of substance abuse among diaspora youth. Believing that drug use is a deviant and immoral form of behaviour that goes against their culture and faith, Somali parents often view cultural and spiritual rehabilitation as the most effective way to address the issue. One father interviewed in the study shared that he took his son to Kenya for both spiritual and herbal treatment.¹²²

Admissions to centres typically took place over the phone, without any prior clinical assessment. Some clients did not have substance abuse issues, but were instead placed at the centre for behavioural problems at school and at home.¹²³

An estimated 60 – 80% of the residents in the rehabilitation centres in Kenya are from Western countries such as the UK, Norway, Canada, and other European nations.¹²⁴

3.2.2.3 Madrasas

Many Somali families who return to East Africa to provide their children with both Islamic and general education, typically enrol them in institutions like madrasas. The academic demands at these schools can be intense, and in some cases, students are subjected to physical punishment. Although corporal punishment is illegal in Kenya, it continues to occur in certain schools.¹²⁵

Madrasas, which provide a combination of Islamic and general education, generally fall into two categories: day schools and boarding schools. These institutions primarily serve minors.¹²⁶ Some children report poor food quality and strict regulations in madrasas, but instances of severe physical mistreatment appear to be less commonly reported than in healthcare or mental health rehabilitation centres.¹²⁷

3.2.3 Conditions in rehabilitation centres in Kenya and Somalia

The following section only covers the conditions in rehabilitation centres in Kenya and Somalia. Generally, there is limited detailed information about the conditions inside the rehabilitation centres. However, the available information comes from the accounts of children and young people who have returned from these facilities.¹²⁸

¹²¹ Ibrahim, M., *Dhagan Celis (Cultural Rehabilitation): Somali Canadians Transnational Approach to Youth Substance Use*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), pp. 6-7

¹²² Ibrahim, M., *Dhagan Celis (Cultural Rehabilitation): Somali Canadians Transnational Approach to Youth Substance Use*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 6

¹²³ Ibrahim, M., *Dhagan Celis (Cultural Rehabilitation): Somali Canadians Transnational Approach to Youth Substance Use*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹²⁴ Ibrahim, M., *Dhagan Celis (Cultural Rehabilitation): Somali Canadians Transnational Approach to Youth Substance Use*, 13 October 2023, [url](#), p. 7; Ibrahim, 2025: 17

¹²⁵ Ibrahim, 2025: 15

¹²⁶ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 12; Three Western Embassies, 2025: 15

¹²⁷ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 16

¹²⁸ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 5; Three Western Embassies, 2025: 6

Across East Africa, many so-called rehabilitation centres operate in secret, often lacking signs or identifiable addresses, resembling health facilities. These centres are frequently surrounded by high walls topped with barbed wire and guarded gates. In Kenya, some of these facilities are military-like schools, marked by harsh discipline, overcrowded sleeping quarters with bunk beds, physical restraints, and periods of food scarcity.¹²⁹ The rooms are generally narrow; some open onto a concrete patio and are secured with steel bars and heavy padlocks, while others have only a single barred window.¹³⁰

According to researcher Mohamed Ibrahim's fieldwork in Kenya during 2016, 2017, 2018, 2022, and 2023, most centres primarily accommodate young men. However, he observed that one facility had a small section designated for women, with only six beds allocated, indicating a significantly lower female presence.¹³¹

Testimonies of two former residents of rehabilitation centres interviewed by DIS in April 2025 indicate that these centres are segregated by gender in Somalia. The former residents reported that they had been placed in a women-only facility. They described how female residents in the centres were confined to overcrowded, windowless rooms and wore nightdress-like garments. As many as 40 individuals happened to be crammed into a single space, with some reportedly chained to the walls. Most of the staff were women, but male guards stationed outside would intervene whenever someone needed to be disciplined.¹³²

According to testimony given by a former resident of a rehabilitation centre in Mogadishu to *The Wall Street Journal* in 2022, movement within the facility was tightly controlled. The minimum stay was three months, and contact with the outside world was severely restricted — phone calls, for example, were only allowed after three weeks. Furthermore, surveillance was constant; cameras sent footage to a central office, where administrators monitored the compound.¹³³

In these centres, the food provided is often insufficient.¹³⁴ For instance, one former resident described meals as consisting mostly of rice, macaroni, and beans for both lunch and dinner, while another mentioned that the food “looked like green glue.” Many also suffered from health issues due to poor hygiene and unsanitary conditions, including diarrhoea, and other illnesses linked to lack of sanitation.¹³⁵

Two recent residents from rehabilitation centres in Somalia described their daily lives as being woken up every morning by loudspeakers calling for prayers. If they did not get up, they were beaten, and speaking any language other than Somali could also lead to punishment.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 11; WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; ‘They Were Torturing Me*, 16 August 2022, [url](#); The Guardian, *Tuesday briefing: How British-Somali citizens are disappearing to ‘culture rehabilitation centres’*, 14 March 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁰ NRK, *Ny koranskole avslørt: Norske elever beskriver tortur i Mogadishu*, 19 February 2018, [url](#); Anonymous source 1: 8

¹³¹ Ibrahim: 20

¹³² Anonymous source 1: 8; Anonymous source 2: 4 -5

¹³³ WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; ‘They Were Torturing Me*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁴ KBH: 14; WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; ‘They Were Torturing Me*, 16 August 2022, [url](#); Hönhe, 2025: 12; Anonymous source 1: 6

¹³⁵ WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; ‘They Were Torturing Me*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁶ Anonymous source 1: 10; Anonymous source 2: 5

3.2.3.1 Treatment

There is extensive documentation of abuse and ill-treatment within these rehabilitation centres. Both boys and girls have been reported to be subjected to physical and sexual abuse.¹³⁷

Individuals with drug problems do not receive any formal treatment; instead, they are abruptly cut off from drugs and placed in isolation.¹³⁸ A 2018 BBC report highlighted a Somali neighbourhood in Nairobi where a rehabilitation centre for drug users routinely subjected patients to abuse. Victims were beaten and forced to drink a toxic liquid called “harmala”.¹³⁹ Similarly, Norway’s NRK reported in 2018 on former students of a so-called rehabilitation centre who described extreme abuse. Students alleged that guards chained their feet, lifted them, and took turns beating the soles of their feet with strips of car tires or garden hoses — sometimes delivering up to 500 hits. A former student from another Western country showed scars on his ankles from the chains. Survivors even drew diagrams of the school and the torture chamber where the abuse took place.¹⁴⁰

It has been reported by several sources that punishment at these centres can be severe. To mention a few: An article by Wall Street Journal from 2022 mentioned some centres that locked individuals, who violated centre rules, in isolated rooms surrounded by electrified wire and razor coils — some residents spent days and nights chained in a facility. As an example, the article mentions a former resident being punched in the face until he bled and being doused with urine and cold water for minor violations, such as failing to memorize Quranic verses.¹⁴¹ In addition, interviews conducted by The Guardian in 2023 with young people who had been confined in these centres also revealed accounts of beatings, solitary confinement, and psychological abuse. One interviewee described being beaten into submission, while another reported that sexual abuse, including of minors under 16, was common.¹⁴²

3.2.4 Parental awareness

Parents are often unaware of the mistreatment their children endure in rehabilitation centres. In some cases, however, they are aware but still condone or support these practices, believing them necessary to address, for instance, their children's drug use or prevent future criminal behaviour.¹⁴³

According to anthropologist Höhne, while parents usually have a general idea of where they are sending their children, they are often not fully informed about the conditions or potential abuse within these centres.¹⁴⁴ The following factors may contribute to this lack of understanding:

¹³⁷ Höhne, 2025: 12

¹³⁸ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 11

¹³⁹ BBC, *Rehab Nightmare: the dark side of Somali healing centres in Kenya*, 3 September 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴⁰ NRK, *Ny koranskole avslørt: Norske elever beskriver tortur i Mogadishu*, 19 February 2018, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; 'They Were Torturing Me'*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴² The Guardian, *Tuesday briefing: How British-Somali citizens are disappearing to 'culture rehabilitation centres'*, 14 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴³ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 12; Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 29

¹⁴⁴ Höhne, 2025: 15

First, the credibility of the children themselves is often undermined: Labelled as problematic or untrustworthy, their reports of mistreatment are frequently dismissed.¹⁴⁵ This is illustrated in a 2022 Wall Street Journal article, where the mother of a young man detained in a Somali rehabilitation centre stated that she did not believe her son's reports of abuse.¹⁴⁶

Secondly, the authority of those running these centres also plays a significant role. These facilities are often led by religious figures or sheikhs who hold considerable influence within their communities, making it difficult to question their authority. Furthermore, cultural taboos—especially those related to sexual abuse—create a climate of silence, discouraging victims from speaking out and preventing parents from accepting that such abuse could be taking place.¹⁴⁷

In a 2022 interview with the Wall Street Journal, Larry André, the U.S. ambassador to Somalia, stated that in many cases, the parents of the victims were unaware of the conditions and were shocked to discover the physical, mental, and sexual abuse their children had suffered.¹⁴⁸

3.3 Consequences of dhaqan celis

As stated in the National Appeals Board's 2018 report, not all types of long-term stays are considered problematic. The report identifies three categories of stays: Overtly Problematic Stays, Grey Zone Stays, and Extended Holiday Stays. The latter category does not immediately cause Danish municipalities concern regarding the well-being of the child or young person.¹⁴⁹

The regional security consultants from Region Southern DK and Region Zealand stated in an interview with the COI unit of DIS in March 2025 that some children or young people had positive experiences during stays with relatives. For example, one young man reported that he benefited from staying with his aunt and grandmother.¹⁵⁰

According to an embassy consulted by DIS, feedback regarding stays in madrasas and some rehabilitation centres in Kenya has not been overwhelmingly negative either.¹⁵¹

According to researcher Mohamed Ibrahim, in many cases, Somali children and young people who travel to East Africa do so not because they need rehabilitation but to reconnect with their communities and better understand their cultural heritage. Some return after spending a summer holiday abroad, while others stay for longer periods or even attend local schools. The nature of these stays and the experiences gained vary widely depending on each child's and each family's situation.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ Höhne, 2025: 16

¹⁴⁶ WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; 'They Were Torturing Me*, 16 August 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ Höhne, 2025: 17- 19

¹⁴⁸ WSJ, *Hundreds of Somali-American Youths Held Captive in Rehab Centers; 'They Were Torturing Me*, 16 August 2022 [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ Ankestyrelsen, *Længerevarende udlandsophold blandt børn og unge med ikke-vestlig baggrund*, February 2018, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁵⁰ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 6

¹⁵¹ Three Western Embassies, 2015: 21

¹⁵² Ibrahim 2025: 6

Research further shows that although a re-education trip is often perceived as forced, it does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes. Some young people report that such experiences have been important for their cultural and identity development.¹⁵³

Although some positive experiences have been reported, it is primarily the negative ones that come to light and attract the most attention from authorities and the public—highlighting why this issue remains a matter of concern.¹⁵⁴

The following section outlines the negative consequences of dhaqan celis for children and young people of Somali background.

3.3.1 Psychological and physical trauma

Children and youth returning from re-education trips often suffer from serious physical and psychological problems that can persist for years — especially those who have been to rehabilitation centres.¹⁵⁵ There are cases of people who suffer long-term physical injuries, such as difficulties walking due to having been beaten on their feet or having worn leg chains for extended periods of time.¹⁵⁶

A report stated that young adults who remained in Somalia past the age of 18 often suffer from deep psychological trauma, a lack of family contact, and may survive through criminal networks.¹⁵⁷ A source noted that some individuals, rescued from rehabilitation centres, it is difficult for them to reintegrate in the country of residence because of the deep and lasting psychological scars of the experience.¹⁵⁸

3.3.2 Education

Re-education trips frequently disrupt a young person's schooling for extended periods of time. Upon their return, many struggle to reintegrate into the Danish school system due to educational gaps and lost academic years.¹⁵⁹ The Norwegian experience shows that teenagers sent away for months or years often suffer from interrupted schooling, leading to significant setbacks and difficulties catching up.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ Bakaari, F., Escandell, X., *Ambivalent Returns: Dhaqan celis and Counter-Diasporic Migration Among Second-Generation Somalis*, 2021, [url](#), p. 51

¹⁵⁴ Bakaari, F., Escandell, X., *Ambivalent Returns: Dhaqan celis and Counter-Diasporic Migration Among Second-Generation Somalis*, 2021, [url](#), pp. 51-52

¹⁵⁵ The Guardian, *Somali 'rehab': re-education camps where children are locked up, beaten and and abused*, 12 March 2023, [url](#); Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, 2024, [url](#), pp. 31, 52; Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 17

¹⁵⁶ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 17

¹⁵⁷ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, February 2024, [url](#), p. 52

¹⁵⁸ Three Western Embassies, 2025; 20

¹⁵⁹ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 16; Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, February 2024, [url](#), p. 90

¹⁶⁰ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, February 2024, [url](#), p. 90

Additionally, the stay abroad has negatively affected the child's or the young person's language skills in their European or Western country of residence, and/or their overall well-being.¹⁶¹

3.3.3 Social life

Many young people returning to Denmark after re-education trips experience profound social disconnection. During their stay abroad, they often lose contact with friends, family, and support networks in Denmark, leading to major difficulties in rebuilding their social lives upon return. Some go into hiding to protect themselves from their families, cutting off vital support structures.¹⁶² Cases from the Norwegian context similarly show that returnees often experience a sense of alienation and difficulty re-establishing connections with friends and social networks.¹⁶³

3.3.4 Relationship with parents

The experience of being forcibly sent abroad for cultural rehabilitation often causes permanent damage to the parent-child relationship. In many cases, the emotional impact of forced separation during re-education trips creates lasting challenges in rebuilding trust between young people and their parents.¹⁶⁴ Within the Somali diaspora, there is growing awareness of these consequences, as more cases of long-term family breakdown become visible within the community.¹⁶⁵

3.3.5 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and forced marriages

Re-education trips can expose Somali-background girls to significant risks, including forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).

Somalia has one of the highest rates of FGM in the world, with a prevalence of 99.2% according to 2022 data. FGM is often considered a religious tradition (Sunna) and is typically based on parental consent.¹⁶⁶ Somali girls sent on re-education trips to Somalia and placed in the homes of relatives are at risk of facing FGM.¹⁶⁷ Whilst Somali authorities state that FGM is not practiced within rehabilitation centres, girls living with relatives during re-education trips remain at high risk.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶¹ Ankestyrelsen, *Længerevarende udlandsophold blandt børn og unge med ikke-vestlig baggrund*, February 2018, [url](#), p. 47; Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, February 2024, [url](#), p. 90

¹⁶² Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 16

¹⁶³ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, February 2024, [url](#), p. 90

¹⁶⁴ Höhne, 2025: 14; Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, February 2024, [url](#), p. 50

¹⁶⁵ Höhne, 2015: 14

¹⁶⁶ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development 2025: 14

¹⁶⁷ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, February 2024, [url](#), pp. 55-56; GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 14; European Diplomatic source, 2025: 1, 9

¹⁶⁸ GoS, Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, 2025: 14

According to a European diplomatic source, sometimes parents actively arrange FGM procedures; in other cases, one or both parents are unaware that the girl has undergone FGM or may not openly admit that they knew that the girl would undergo FGM.¹⁶⁹ A report from The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) published in 2020 noted that if a girl has not yet undergone FGM when she returns to Somalia, the risk remains high — even if she is staying only with her grandmother and without her parents.¹⁷⁰

Moreover, the lack of effective enforcement of FGM bans in Somalia further exacerbates the risk. Even local leaders who disapprove of FGM often fail to enforce laws against it, reflecting the practice's deep social acceptance.¹⁷¹

In the United Kingdom, the Home Office's Forced Marriage Unit recorded 91 Somalia-related forced marriage cases in 2017 — a 100% increase from the previous year. These cases often involved parents sending teenagers back to Somalia for re-education in rehabilitation centres, and being told by the parents that the only way they could escape was to get married.¹⁷²

A 2024 report from the Institute for Social Research (ISF) in Norway also confirms that Somali girls remain at risk of forced marriage during re-education stays. The report highlights several cases of Somali girls being held back in their parents' home countries, often exposing them to forced marriage.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ European diplomatic source, 2025: 10

¹⁷⁰ DRC, *Thematic Report Somalia*, December 2020, [url](#), pp. 9–10

¹⁷¹ European diplomatic source, 2025: 13

¹⁷² The Guardian, *UK Somali teenagers taken 'on holiday' and forced into marriage*, 26 August 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷³ Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, *Trøblete utenlandsopphold Barn og unge voksne tilbakeholdt i utlandet: fenomenforståelse og oppfølging*, February 2024, [url](#), pp. 55-56

4. Challenges regarding prevention of re-education and suggested measures

4.1. Challenges faced by Western authorities involved in cases of re-education trips

The interviewed sources identified a number of challenges regarding re-education, which are summarized in the following sections:

4.1.1. Challenges in identifying and responding to re-education trips

In the Danish context, some schools and municipalities often lack the necessary knowledge and communication frameworks to respond adequately to concerns about children at risk of being sent on re-education trips. Even when warning signs arise—such as previously reported family conflicts, sudden relocations, or prolonged school absenteeism— some institutions fail to act effectively.¹⁷⁴

Sometimes it is difficult for authorities to detect an impending re-education trip, especially in cases where families inform schools in advance of travel plans.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, distinguishing between legitimate travel and re-education trips remains challenging, as parents have the legal right to travel with their children.¹⁷⁶

From a broader European perspective, authorities occasionally initiate investigations when children, particularly those of Somali descent, fail to return after a holiday. However, once a child is abroad, intervention by the authorities becomes extremely difficult due to their limited jurisdiction and legal authority in other countries, limited resources, and the need for careful case-by-case investigation.¹⁷⁷

There are cases where children and young people who initially report a risk of being sent on a re-education trip later withdraw their statements due to family pressure and fear of serious legal consequences for their parents. In such situations, it becomes especially difficult for the authorities to prevent the travel.¹⁷⁸

4.1.2. Cooperation and challenges with parents and local authorities

Parents often play a dual role, both facilitating and hindering the resolution of cases. Authorities typically involve parents only with the child's consent. When involved, parents usually cooperate to avoid legal consequences.¹⁷⁹ Danish authorities proactively inform parents about the legal consequences of sending their children on re-education trips, applying pressure to secure their cooperation.¹⁸⁰ However, parents can also actively obstruct repatriation efforts. They may withhold critical travel documents, such as passports,

¹⁷⁴ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 23

¹⁷⁵ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 9

¹⁷⁶ European diplomatic source, 2025: 20; Zetland, *Flere mindreårige danskere opholder sig lige nu i Somalia mod deres vilje. Jeg satte mig for at finde ud af hvorfor*, 19 April 2018, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ European diplomatic source, 2025: 17

¹⁷⁸ European diplomatic source, 2025: 18

¹⁷⁹ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 19; Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 16

¹⁸⁰ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 16

making it difficult for children to leave.¹⁸¹ In Somalia, obtaining necessary documents often requires parental consent, and children under 18 cannot leave without it, as they are stopped and questioned by immigration officers at airports.¹⁸²

A concrete case related to Denmark illustrates these difficulties: a young woman who found her hidden Somali passport and attempted to escape with embassy assistance was stopped at the airport due to a travel ban imposed by her father. She had to return to a safe house and wait two more weeks for another escape attempt.¹⁸³

Handling these cases is highly complex and unpredictable. Success often depends on the cooperation of local actors, including Somali immigration officials and supportive individuals in European embassies.¹⁸⁴ In regions like Kenya, where freedom of movement is greater, NGOs and local authorities may assist children directly at airports to ensure they can leave safely, preventing last-minute family interventions.¹⁸⁵

However, both children and municipal employees in Denmark often underestimate how limited Danish authorities' powers are abroad. Danish embassies cannot override local laws, which severely restricts their ability to forcibly repatriate children.¹⁸⁶

4.1.3. Difficulties in case assessment and protection abroad

Many cases involving Somali-background children sent abroad for re-education are extremely time-consuming, often difficult to resolve quickly, and can take several years to conclude.¹⁸⁷ Handling such cases demands significant time and resources, particularly due to the close social networks within Somali communities, where information spreads quickly, making it challenging for embassies and NGOs to work discreetly.¹⁸⁸

Facilities in which children are placed in Somalia are typically private and lack government regulation, which makes detecting and addressing abuse more difficult.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, Somali community structures and local authority networks often resist cooperation with European embassies.¹⁹⁰

Assessing the credibility of children's claims remains a challenge for some embassies. They often face difficulties when children provide conflicting accounts, making it unclear whether mistreatment actually occurred. In some cases, children genuinely suffer mistreatment; in others, the child's report of mistreatment may be false or exaggerated, simply due to their dislike of parental decisions. Such cases may be classified by the involved authorities as family disputes rather than abuse.¹⁹¹

¹⁸¹ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 15

¹⁸² Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 19-20

¹⁸³ Anonymous source 2, 2025: 10

¹⁸⁴ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 12

¹⁸⁵ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 17

¹⁸⁶ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 17

¹⁸⁷ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden: 3; Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 14

¹⁸⁸ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 14

¹⁸⁹ Danish Embassy for Somalia, 2025: 6

¹⁹⁰ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden, 2025: 18

¹⁹¹ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 22- 23

This challenge is particularly evident when children ask for help to leave religious boarding schools (madrasas). Although these facilities may offer basic living conditions that contrast with Western standards, they are not necessarily abusive. In the absence of proven mistreatment, some Western authorities typically do not intervene.¹⁹²

4.2. Preventive measures and the need for awareness

During interviews with various sources, suggestions for preventive measures were gathered, and the most significant recommendations are summarized below.

4.2.1 *The need for stronger awareness and early intervention*

The consulted Danish security consultants emphasized the urgent need for greater awareness among authorities, schools, and institutions regarding the risks of re-education trips and related abuses. They stressed that a systematic approach is necessary to detect and respond to warning signs—such as children suddenly dropping out of school or relocating unexpectedly. Schools and municipal authorities must take all notifications seriously and act swiftly. Improved communication, active follow-up, and timely intervention from teachers, professionals, and municipal employees are essential to prevent children from being subjected to harmful experiences like re-education trips, which can have severe and lasting consequences for their well-being, development, and health.¹⁹³

In addition, there is a call for stronger collaboration between authorities, schools, and other relevant actors to protect children and young people who may be at risk.¹⁹⁴ A more proactive and structured effort, including early preventive measures, is needed to tackle the problem effectively.¹⁹⁵ According to the European diplomatic source, authorities could strengthen efforts at school and community levels by raising awareness of the consequences families face when they send children abroad for practices such as FGM, forced marriage, and re-education trips.¹⁹⁶

4.2.2 *Approaches informed by cultural awareness and family engagement*

One reason why some Somali families living in Western countries choose to send their children back to East Africa is dissatisfaction with the healthcare services available in the West, which they often perceive as inadequate or culturally inappropriate. They may feel that these services do not respect or understand their cultural values, beliefs, or traditional ways of explaining and treating illness. Families and individuals want to feel heard and understood, particularly when it comes to perceptions of mental health. In particular, trust and mutual understanding are essential when it comes to perceptions of mental health. To enhance communication and build trust with these families, researcher Mohamed Ibrahim has argued that

¹⁹² Three Western Embassies, 2025: 24

¹⁹³ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 26

¹⁹⁴ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 27

¹⁹⁵ Security Consultants, Region Southern DK and Region Zealand, 2025: 12

¹⁹⁶ European diplomatic source, 2025: 24

healthcare systems should ensure that staff are equipped with knowledge of relevant cultural backgrounds to enable professionals to engage more effectively and meaningfully with diverse communities.¹⁹⁷

According to Security Consultants Region South Denmark, it is important that professionals are culturally aware when offering support to families from different backgrounds — particularly in cases involving youth challenges such as criminal behaviour, substance use, or mental health concerns. Support strategies that are informed by an awareness of the families' cultural contexts, combined with educational outreach, closer dialogue, and improved support systems, can contribute to preventing risky re-education trips.¹⁹⁸

4.2.3 Improving prevention through cooperation and community involvement

Real preventative impact can only be achieved through strong cooperation between governments, NGOs, and other agencies. Therefore, Norway and Sweden noted that better information sharing and coordinated strategies—such as refusing to recognize forced marriages performed under duress abroad—could significantly reduce the frequency of harmful re-education trips.¹⁹⁹

Preventative strategies should also include community-led information campaigns. According to a Western embassy, these campaigns should educate families, children, and young adults about the potential risks and negative impacts associated with certain facilities abroad. To be effective and culturally sensitive, campaigns must ideally be designed and led by individuals within the affected communities themselves, minimizing the risk of unintended backlash and ensuring the messages resonate meaningfully.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Ibrahim, 2025: 26-27

¹⁹⁸ Security Consultants, Capital Region of DK, 2025: 13

¹⁹⁹ Special Envoys for Integration issues of Norway and Sweden 2025: 34

²⁰⁰ Three Western Embassies, 2025: 25

You can call the Danish Immigration Service's hotline at **70 26 28 18** on weekdays between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. if you are a child or young person and are afraid of being sent on a re-education trip abroad.

The purpose of the hotline is to prevent children and young people from being sent on re-education trips or being forced into marriage.

[Read more about re-education trip \(nyidanmark.dk\)](#)

Contacting other authorities

- **Nationalt Center mod Æresrelaterede Konflikter (MÆRK) under SIRI**

'Sikkerhedskonsulenterne' under MÆRK provides free support and guidance to professionals and citizens on honour-related conflicts, negative social control and re-education trips.

[Read more about Sikkerhedskonsulenterne \(nc-maerk.dk\)](#)

- **The Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

The Coordination Unit for Child Abductions (Koordinationsenheden for Børnebortførelser) offers advice and guidance if, for example, a child stays abroad without the consent of one parent, or if one parent illegally detains the child abroad.

[Read more about The Coordination Unit for Child Abductions \(um.dk\)](#)

Du kan ringe til Udlændingestyrelsens hotline på telefonnummer **70 26 28 18** alle hverdage mellem kl. 10 og 14, hvis du som barn eller ung er bange for at blive sendt på en genopdragelsesrejse i udlandet.

Formålet med hotlinen er at forhindre, at børn og unge sendes på genopdragelsesrejser eller risikerer at blive tvangsgift.

[Læs mere om genopdragelsesrejser \(nyidanmark.dk\)](#)

Kontakt til andre myndigheder

- **Nationalt Center mod Æresrelaterede Konflikter (MÆRK) under SIRI**

Sikkerhedskonsulenterne under MÆRK tilbyder gratis støtte og rådgivning til både fagpersoner og borgere om æresrelaterede konflikter, negativ social kontrol og genopdragelsesrejser.

[Læs mere om sikkerhedskonsulenterne \(nc-maerk\)](#)

- **Udenrigsministeriet**

Koordinationsenheden for Børnebortførelser tilbyder råd og vejledning, hvis et barn fx opholder sig i udlandet uden den ene forældres samtykke, eller hvis den ene forælder ulovligt tilbageholder barnet i udlandet.

[Læs mere om Koordinationsenheden for Børnebortførelser \(um.dk\)](#)

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Annex 1: Terms of Reference

1. Dhaqan Celis (re-education trips)

- 1.1. Dhaqan Celis: Cultural reintegration
- 1.2. Motivations of Somali diaspora for using dhaqan celis

2. Patterns and characteristics of re-education trips

- 2.1 Prevalence
- 2.2. Age and gender
- 2.4 Destinations
- 2.5 Decision making
- 2.6 Parental strategies towards the children

3. Types of stay

- 3.1. Home stays
- 3.2 Cultural rehabilitation centres
- 3.3 Consequences of dhaqan celis

4. Challenges regarding prevention of re-education and suggested measures

- 4.1. Challenges faced by Western authorities involved in cases of re-education trips
- 4.2. Preventive measures and the need for awareness