

Youth, Employment and Migration in Puntland and Somaliland

Nassim Majidi and Hervé Nicolle discuss some of the employment challenges facing young people in Somaliland and Puntland.

Since 2011 and most recently again in 2015, headlines have covered the ‘youth exodus’ from Somaliland and Puntland to Europe. In 2016, the European Union launched a **seven million euros education program in Puntland**, including a component on youth and vocational skills training.

The assumption is that the lack of employment is driving migration, more so than insecurity or conflict. In the safer regions of Somaliland and Puntland, this assumption was confirmed. Out of 780 youth interviewed for this study, 70% wanted to migrate to find better job opportunities. A root cause is the inability to find jobs locally. It is not that young people want to leave, but they expressed not having any other choice: according to our study, only 27 per cent of youth/employer combinations are a match, dropping to 19 per cent in Somaliland. This means that there is a strong disconnect between what youth expect of the labour market, and what the labour market demands of the youth.

The story of Amal, 24, living in Burao, Somaliland

“I see my role as that of a young female who sets a good example to other young girls to emulate. I have been blessed to go school and complete university and now I am working, I am sure this will inspire a lot of other young girls to complete school. I also see my role as that of a contributor to the development of my community, through my work I believe I contribute to my community positively.” The problem facing Amal now is this: she is over-qualified for her job. She is a secretary yet has a degree in nutrition from Hargeisa University. She has realised – unexpectedly – that her diploma is not worth that much. She is not satisfied with her job, it only serves to pay the bills, her dream is to work in the health sector. She tried to go through job adverts in local papers and on websites. She applied for job postings on online platforms. “I have not been able to find a job that matches my education background. The main reason why I do not have a job that is suitable is because I do not have people placed in positions of influence who can help me. Rarely are one’s qualifications considered. Jobs are given out to family members by those in positions of influence. The educated young people do not get employed often due to the lack of work experience. Every job you apply for asks for a minimum of 5 years experience. On top of that, women are less likely to find employment”.



Graduating from university is no guarantee of being able to find a job in Somaliland Photo Credit: University of Hargeisa (<http://bit.ly/1Nzs1dG>)

Our analysis reveals that the mismatch is happening at three levels: profiles, skills requirements and perceptions of the labour market. These confirm Amal's analysis and add some more nuances.

- **The Requirement nexus:** Amal is right in saying that employers want youth with work experience. In addition, language requirements typically fall short in our survey: more than a quarter of all employers require basic spoken and written Arabic, which less than five per cent of youths have, and nearly half require various levels of speaking and writing in English, which just over half of youths possess.
- **The Perceptions nexus** reveals that youths in Somaliland underestimate the importance of factors such as qualifications and work experience to employers, more so for the public sector. Youths in Puntland on the other hand overestimate the importance of qualifications, along with contacts to the employers, while work experience is underestimated.

Altogether, our compatibility index shows the missed opportunities of youth employability. The research concludes on the need to address key obstacles that are structural in Puntland and Somaliland to help address the profile, requirements and perceptions gaps:

First, addressing an outdated vocational training system: with an unemployment rate of 46 per cent among vocational training graduates in Hargeysa, Vocational Training (VT) programmes are limited in their impact on employment. This results in clear contradictions in the labour market: technical and higher education actors do not provide youth with marketable skills, most unskilled Somali youth are reluctant to accept jobs perceived as degrading, and most students focus on a few niches (IT, business) while other directly marketable skills are ignored.

Second, addressing the limits of higher education institutions (HEIs) across these areas. In 2013, there were over 50,000 students enrolled at HEIs across Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland, with an average of 2,500 lecturers, making the overall student-lecturer ration an average of 21:1 with substantial variations between universities. While large numbers of youth move to Somaliland's urban centres to pursue a higher education, several youth in Hargeysa and Burao wanted to study abroad because of the low quality of education in Somaliland.

Third, the lack of an efficient financial system means that employers are constrained. In the ILO 2011 *Puntland Enterprise Survey*, half of micro-, small and medium sized enterprises said that the priority measure to improve their business should be access to credit and financial services. The lack of a functioning banking sector was a hindrance to foreign direct investment and economic growth, and employment in Somaliland and Puntland.

Our study for IOM concludes on 24 key recommendations for stakeholders to aim for long-term employment schemes, focusing on present and future labour market realities. **A full set of recommendations is included in our final report.**

Nassim Majidi and **Hervé Nicolle** are the founders and co-directors of *Samuel Hall*, an independent think tank based in Nairobi and Mogadishu. This research was commissioned by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2014 and published in 2015. Follow Nassim on Twitter [@nassimmajidi](#) and Hervé [@herve_nicolle](#).

The views expressed in this post are those of the author and in no way reflect those of the Africa at LSE blog or the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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