

REPORT

AWARENESS-RAISING AND ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN SESSION ON PROMOTION OF MIGRANTS' RIGHTS AND SAFE MIGRATION PRACTICES IN PUNTLAND, SOMALIA



Organized By:

Bareedo Platform Somalia & Refugees Affairs Department (RAD)

Venue:

Reception Center One, Bosaso, Puntland, Somalia

Date:

May 5, 2019

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Bosaso, as Puntland's largest urban, coastal, and commercial hub, hosts over 30,000 migrants—primarily from Ethiopia—making it a focal point for mixed migration flows in Somalia. Many of these migrants experience harsh living conditions, rights violations, legal marginalization, and limited access to services. In response, Bareedo Platform organized an awareness-raising session aimed at promoting migrants' rights, introducing available support services, and enhancing collaboration among key stakeholders involved in migration governance. The session brought together representatives and committee members from the migrant communities in Bosaso, alongside officials from the Government's Refugee and Migrants Authority—including the Refugees Affairs Department (RAD) and the Migration Response Center (MRC)—as well as local authorities from Bosaso municipality. The event was held at Reception Center One in Bosaso, Puntland, a central hub for migrant reception and support services.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CAMPAIGN SESSION

- Raise awareness among migrant communities about their rights and the services available through Refugees Affairs Department (RAD) and the Migration Response Center (MRC).
- Promote safe migration practices.
- Strengthen linkages between migrant communities and service providers.
- Advocate for inclusion of migrants in services, decision-making platforms, and protection mechanisms.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM PRESENTATIONS

Remarks from Mr. Burhan Huruse Hashi (Director, Refugees Affairs Department – RAD)

Mr. Burhan Huruse Hashi, the Director of the Refugees Affairs Department (RAD), provided a comprehensive overview of the definitions and categories of people on the move—namely migrants, immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. He emphasized that each group requires tailored forms of support and services, particularly within the context of Puntland, Somalia.

Focusing on asylum seekers and refugees, Mr. Burhan explained that the RAD provides immediate reception services upon arrival. This includes registration and the facilitation of Refugee Status Determination (RSD) interviews, which are essential for recognizing and granting refugee status. Through a strong partnership with UNHCR, RAD offers a range of basic services to all asylum seekers and refugees. These services include access to healthcare, education, livelihoods opportunities, legal assistance, and psychosocial support. Puntland has several reception facilities, with the largest Refugee Reception Center located in Bosaso. Additionally, mobile reception units operate at major entry points across the region to ensure broader coverage and accessibility.

Turning to the situation of migrants, Mr. Burhan noted that RAD manages registration at various key entry locations such as Tukaraq, Alxamdulilah, Goldogob, Bosaso port, and airports throughout Puntland. He highlighted the presence of the Migration Response Center (MRC) in Bosaso, which provides specialized services tailored to the needs of migrants, including legal aid and referrals. Mr. Burhan added that the majority of migrants currently served—around 60%—are from Ethiopia, reflecting the regional dynamics of cross-border migration into Puntland.

Remarks from Mr. Barkhad Hamud (MRC – Bosaso)

Mr. Barkhad Hamud, representing the Migration Response Center (MRC) in Bosaso, provided an overview of the key services offered to migrants passing through or residing in the region. He explained that the MRC serves as a frontline support facility, offering a range of critical interventions. These include the registration of migrants upon arrival, access to legal services, and targeted assistance for vulnerable individuals—particularly survivors of gender-based violence, victims of exploitation, and those affected by human trafficking.

In addition to direct support, Mr. Barkhad highlighted the MRC's strong referral system. Migrants who require more specialized or long-term assistance are connected to appropriate service providers through established partnerships with organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), among others operating in Bosaso. These collaborative efforts ensure that migrants receive holistic and dignified care across various areas of need.

Remarks from Mr. Abdikareem Guled (Bareedo Platform)

Mr. Abdikareem Guled, representing Bareedo Platform, spoke about the organization's pivotal role in promoting the rights and wellbeing of migrants in Puntland. He emphasized Bareedo Platform's commitment to advocating for migrants' rights, advancing safe migration practices, and ensuring the meaningful inclusion of migrant communities in both service delivery and decision-making platforms at the local level.

He highlighted the organization's collaboration with key government bodies, particularly the Refugees Affairs Department (RAD), in monitoring mixed migration flows across Puntland. This includes tracking both entry and departure movements to strengthen data-informed responses and protection mechanisms. Mr. Abdikareem also noted that Bareedo provides targeted capacity-building support for government authorities and other stakeholders involved in migration management. These trainings aim to enhance institutional knowledge, coordination, and service delivery for migrant populations.

Furthermore, Bareedo Platform regularly organizes awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns to educate communities, elevate migrant voices, and foster inclusive policies. Through these efforts, the organization seeks to build a more just, responsive, and rights-based migration governance system across Puntland.

Testimony from Ms. Yasmin Salah (Representative of Migrant Community)

Ms. Yasmin Salah, a representative from the migrant community in Bosaso, shared a powerful account of the challenges facing migrants living in Puntland. She began by highlighting that the migrant population in Bosaso alone exceeds 30,000 individuals, the majority of whom are enduring extremely poor living conditions, persistent legal uncertainties, and widespread violations of their basic rights.

One of the major concerns she raised was the lack of legal documentation, which leaves many migrants without official status or protection, making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. She emphasized that most migrants are unaware of their rights and have limited access to information or avenues to engage with relevant organizations or authorities that provide support. This disconnect is further compounded by language and cultural barriers, as many migrants do not speak Somali and struggle to communicate with local communities and service providers.

Ms. Yasmin also spoke about the challenges migrants face in the job market. Often employed in informal and low-paying jobs, many are subjected to unfair labor practices, including the denial of wages. These abuses are particularly prevalent among migrants working on farms in remote rural areas, far from urban oversight and legal protections.

She expressed deep concern about the treatment of migrants by law enforcement agencies. Arbitrary arrests, harassment, and mistreatment by police have become common, with migrants frequently detained for minor infractions—or without clear cause. She noted that hundreds of migrants are currently being held in detention centers across Puntland, with the majority concentrated in police detention facilities in Bosaso.

Ms. Yasmin concluded by calling for greater protection, legal recognition, and support for the migrant community, urging stakeholders to address these systemic challenges through inclusive, rights-based responses.

KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

- 1. Lack of Legal Documentation and Awareness Among Migrants:** A significant number of migrants in Bosaso lack formal identification or residency documents, placing them in a state of legal limbo. Without proper documentation, they are unable to access essential services such as healthcare, education, or formal employment. Moreover, most migrants are not fully aware of their rights under Somali law or international protection

frameworks. This lack of awareness leaves them highly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and arbitrary detention, as they are unable to advocate for themselves or seek assistance from relevant authorities.

- 2. Poor Enforcement of Labor Rights and Protection from Exploitation:** Migrant workers, especially those employed in informal sectors such as farming, construction, and domestic labor, face routine violations of their labor rights. Many are paid below market rates, forced to work under unsafe conditions, or denied wages entirely. There are no effective enforcement mechanisms in place to hold exploitative employers accountable, and most migrants lack access to legal remedies or support services when abuses occur.
- 3. Gaps in Communication Between Migrants and Authorities:** There exists a considerable disconnect between migrant communities and government institutions. Migrants often do not know which authorities to approach for help or how to report grievances. On the other hand, government agencies and service providers lack structured engagement channels with migrant communities, resulting in mistrust and missed opportunities for collaboration, protection, and outreach.
- 4. Limited Access to Legal Services and Redress Mechanisms:** Although some organizations offer legal aid, coverage is limited and not well-coordinated. Migrants—particularly those in detention or remote rural areas—have minimal access to legal assistance. As a result, many are unable to resolve disputes, contest unlawful detention, or seek redress for labor violations, violence, or exploitation.
- 5. Inadequate Support for Vulnerable Groups (e.g., GBV Survivors, Trafficked Persons):** Specialized support services for highly vulnerable individuals—such as survivors of gender-based violence, unaccompanied minors, and victims of human trafficking—remain insufficient. Referral systems are underdeveloped, and frontline service providers are often under-resourced or untrained to handle these complex cases with the required sensitivity and confidentiality.
- 6. Overcrowded Detention Centers With High Numbers of Detained Migrants:** Reports indicate that hundreds of migrants are being held in detention centers across Puntland, many for extended periods without formal charges or legal representation. Bosaso's police detention facilities are particularly overcrowded. Conditions in these centers often fall short of minimum humanitarian standards, lacking adequate space, hygiene, or healthcare provisions. Arbitrary arrests and prolonged detentions have also been reported, further violating migrants' rights.
- 7. Language Barriers Limiting Migrant Participation and Service Access:** Most migrants—especially those from Ethiopia—face significant language and cultural barriers that hinder their ability to navigate local systems, access services, or integrate into the host

community. The absence of translation or interpretation services at reception centers, hospitals, legal clinics, and government offices prevents migrants from understanding critical information or asserting their needs, deepening their marginalization and vulnerability.

RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTION POINTS

- 1. Enhance Legal Identity and Protection:** Launch mobile documentation clinics and conduct legal awareness sessions to assist undocumented migrants in obtaining legal status. This should be implemented by RAD in partnership with IOM, UNHCR, and local authorities within the next three months.
- 2. Address Labor Exploitation and Wage Denial:** Establish clear complaint and redress mechanisms to protect migrants from exploitation, especially in informal sectors like farming. MoLSA, employers, and civil society organizations should collaborate to ensure labor rights are respected and enforced.
- 3. Promote Rights-Based Law Enforcement:** Organize training programs for police and law enforcement agencies on humane, rights-based treatment of migrants. In addition, regular monitoring visits to detention centers should be instituted by the Ministry of Internal Security, OHCHR, and civil society actors such as Bareedo Platform to ensure compliance and accountability.
- 4. Overcome Language and Communication Barriers:** Develop and disseminate multilingual information materials in migrants' native languages (e.g., Amharic, Oromo) to help them understand their rights and available services. This should be spearheaded by the MRC and community-based organizations.
- 5. Strengthen Support for Vulnerable Migrants:** Enhance referral systems and specialized support for GBV survivors, trafficked persons, and other vulnerable migrants through stronger coordination among MRC, IOM, DRC, and UNFPA.
- 6. Establish Migrant Advisory Committees:** Form representative committees from the migrant communities to serve as liaison platforms for dialogue with local authorities and service providers. Bareedo Platform and MRC should lead this effort to foster inclusive engagement and advocacy.
- 7. Build Capacity of Duty-Bearers and Stakeholders:** Conduct regular capacity building and awareness training for government officials, civil society actors, and migrant focal points on migration governance, protection, and inclusive service delivery. These should be delivered quarterly by Bareedo Platform and relevant ministries.

- 8. Improve Data Collection and Monitoring:** Strengthen systems for tracking mixed migration flows, detention cases, and returns through coordinated data collection efforts led by RAD, IOM, and Bareedo Platform to inform evidence-based responses.

CONCLUSION

The awareness-raising and advocacy campaign session organized by Bareedo Platform in Bosaso shed light on the pressing challenges facing migrant communities in Puntland, particularly in the urban hub of Bosaso. With over 30,000 migrants—many undocumented and vulnerable—the need for rights-based, inclusive, and coordinated responses has never been more urgent.

The engagement of key actors, including the Refugees Affairs Department (RAD), the Migration Response Center (MRC), and representatives from the migrant community, provided a valuable platform for dialogue, information-sharing, and mutual understanding. The discussions revealed critical protection gaps: lack of legal documentation, exploitation in the labor market, poor access to justice and services, overcrowded detention centers, and systemic barriers due to language and cultural differences.

Moving forward, it is essential that stakeholders translate the recommendations into concrete, sustained actions. Strengthening legal pathways, enhancing coordination between service providers, building trust with migrant communities, and improving access to essential services will be vital steps toward ensuring the dignity, safety, and rights of all migrants in Puntland. Bareedo Platform remains committed to supporting this collective effort through continued advocacy, community engagement, and partnership-building with local and international actors.

END

