

Somali Fraud: The Tip of the Iceberg
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Introduction

In late 2025, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) launched Operation Twin Shield, investigating fraud in immigration benefit applications in Minnesota. USCIS officials examined more than 1,000 cases with fraud indicators, visiting related sites and interviewing related individuals. They “found evidence of fraud, non-compliance, or public safety or national security concerns in 275 cases—44 percent of cases interviewed.”ⁱ At a press conference in October 2025, USCIS chief Joseph Edlow said the fraud “should shock all of America.”ⁱⁱ

It should, but I am not shocked, as I have served as a consular officer and manager in several high-fraud, high-corruption countries. I have interviewed tens of thousands of visa applicants, and I have been lied to countless times.

Americans who have not traveled may be unaware of the prevalence of corruption and fraud in much of the rest of the world. In my experience, the level of visa fraud in a given country tends to track the general level of corruption in that country. Somalia is one of the most corrupt countries on Earth. Not surprisingly, Somalis commit fraud at high rates when applying for U.S. visas. They continue to commit immigration fraud at high rates once in the U.S. and when seeking additional benefits, such as bringing relatives to the United States or becoming permanent residents and citizens.

To examine the particular issues presented by Somalis in visa and immigration security, one needs to look first at the U.S. visa process in general, and second, at the circumstances pertaining to Somalia and Somali nationals.

I. The U.S. Visa Process

Visas are the purview of the Department of State’s Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA). Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) in U.S. embassies and consulates are responsible for interviewing foreign applicants for non-immigrant (temporary) and immigrant (permanent) visas and issuing visas to those aliens who are qualified under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The INA contains

many ineligibilities—reasons why a given applicant is barred from receiving a U.S. visa.ⁱⁱⁱ Some, but not all, of these ineligibilities can be waived by USCIS.

Refusing Visas

Immigrant visas (IVs) can be refused for a variety of reasons. Most often, they are refused under INA section 221(g) because the applicant is not “documentarily qualified,” meaning that not all the required application documents or evidence are present and verified. The majority of IV applicants eventually overcome, or successfully apply for waivers for, all but the most serious ineligibilities. For non-immigrant visas (NIVs), most denials are made using INA section 214(b), which says that “every alien [subject to some exceptions]...shall be presumed to be an immigrant until he establishes to the satisfaction of the consular officer...that he is entitled to nonimmigrant status.”^{iv} The decision to issue or deny under 214(b) is a non-reviewable decision made by a consular officer.

Visa Fraud

Like other crime, visa fraud is endemic and will never go away. But with enough time and the right tools, it can be reduced significantly. Fraud is not exclusive to undeveloped countries, but it is far more common in poor, corrupt, or badly governed states. Somalia is all three. Every consular officer has fraud stories, and all have been fooled more than once. Even the most experienced and tough officer makes mistakes. In my consular assignments, I was lied to many times a day, about every aspect of applicants’ cases, including their age, name, identity, occupation, marital status, purpose of travel, wealth, income, relatives in the U.S., and intent to return home.

Fraud Prevention Units

Where fraud is apparent in a case that would otherwise be issuable, officers can refer the case to the post’s Fraud Prevention Unit (FPU) for further investigation. These units are small, with one part-time officer assigned in a small post and only a few even in very large posts. FPUs do not have time to look into every case, nor to look in depth at more than a few cases per day. In embassies with workloads of hundreds or even thousands of applications per day, FPUs are unable to look at more than a small sample. Consular officers rotate in and out of FPU duties, and it is never a career-long specialty for FSOs.

FPUs are supported and trained by CA’s Office of Fraud Prevention Programs in Washington, which has professional staff that is permanently dedicated to fraud prevention and coordinates with Diplomatic Security agents assigned as Assistant Regional Security Officer/Investigations (ARSO/I) within consular sections.

Asylum Claims by Overstayers

Some aliens who overstay their visas claim asylum to delay or prevent deportation. Though some claims are found to have merit, the majority fail, as the claimants seek to remain for economic or family reasons and have no basis for a valid asylum claim. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) lifecycle enforcement reports show that though “most people processed for expedited removal...will likely establish credible fear and remain in the United States for the foreseeable future...many of them will not ultimately be granted asylum.”^v But there is no annual cap on asylum claims, no fee

for the process, and applicants are able to get work authorization six months after they apply. All this encourages many aliens to submit fraudulent asylum claims because it allows them to remain in the U.S. and work for years.

As Lora Ries, the director of the Border Security and Immigration Center, and I argued in a Heritage *Special Report* in March 2025, the U.S. refugee and asylum process no longer serves the national interest and must be redesigned to preserve a credible refugee system while removing the possibility of gaming it to immigrate for purely economic purposes.^{vi}

II. What Is Visa Vetting?

“Vetting” in consular visa operations means checking an applicant’s background to determine whether he has past criminal, terrorist, or other records that indicate that he is a national security risk or show an ineligibility to enter the United States. It requires U.S. agencies to gather and rely on biographic information (name, date of birth, place of birth, and so on) and biometric information (photo, fingerprints, and DNA). This can then be compared to all data held in U.S. official military, intelligence, and law enforcement databases. “Hits”—matches with derogatory information—must be cleared as not applicable, waived, or addressed by administrative measures or law enforcement.

The personal consular interview is the first line of vetting for foreign visa applicants. Twenty-five years ago on the visa line in New Delhi, I interviewed at least 150 visa applicants a day using a paper form and then entered my decision into a computerized non-immigrant visa (NIV) system. With reference to the INA, my job was to decide whether each applicant qualified for a visa. After September 11, 2001, the State Department told adjudicating officers that “every visa decision is a national security decision.” If an applicant did not qualify under the law, we did not issue a visa. The most common reason for denial was under INA section 214(b), which in brief requires every alien to prove to the consular officer that he is going to the U.S. for the purpose stated, and that he has a home outside the U.S. to which he intends to return. There are many reasons a person might be ineligible for a visa under the INA, mostly under section 212, including criminal offenses, public health concerns, and previous immigration violations.

The second line of vetting is through automatic checks of U.S. databases containing holdings from across government agencies. Names, dates of birth, and other facts are run through the Consular Lookout and Support System (CLASS) maintained by the Bureau of Consular Affairs. This system pulls data from federal agencies that in turn have data from state and local law enforcement, such that if a foreigner has a criminal or other adverse history in the United States, he is likely to be flagged for further review before a visa is issued. Visa applicants must also provide photographs and all 10 fingerprints (if available). These are confirmed by embassy or consular staff and the interviewing consular officer, and are then run through facial recognition and fingerprint databases to see if there are any matches. Adverse results are addressed by the interviewing or adjudicating consular officers before they make a decision.

It is quite common to find applicants with false names and dates of birth, even with legitimately issued foreign passports, because their other identities can be compared to bio-data databases. Fingerprints do not change, and facial recognition is continuously improving. Although NIV applicants do not have to supply criminal records clearances from their national police agency, which is a requirement for immigrant visas, they are required to attest on a signed form that they

have no criminal record and no other ineligibility. Embassies and consulates have local and American staff trained in anti-fraud measures. Consular staff know local languages, accents, customs, news, and other country-specific factors that can help to prevent applicants from lying successfully in their visa applications. Larger embassies host various federal agencies, including elements of DHS and other federal law enforcement, who have local contacts with their counterparts through whom they can investigate cases of concern.

Although vetting of foreign visa applicants is by no means foolproof, it is multilayered and frequently results in visa refusals based on adverse information that would not have been discovered had the person simply arrived without identity documents at the U.S. border.

The NINO Rule

However, the greatest weakness of vetting is what I call the NINO rule: nothing in, nothing out. Let's assume a hypothetical foreign visa applicant has committed a serious crime, such as robbery, rape, or murder in his remote home village, in a country with little law enforcement and no centralized records. If his own country is ignorant of, incapable of recording, or unwilling to share his criminal record with the United States, then U.S. authorities will have no way of knowing the truth unless the individual self-reports on the application form. In my experience, many applicants with adverse histories that would result in visa ineligibilities do not volunteer this information. If this hypothetical applicant has never been to the U.S. or encountered American agencies overseas in any way, he will have no record in any U.S. database searched during vetting. Therefore, it is easy, and common, for foreign applicants for asylum, visas, refugee status, and other immigration benefits to lie and get away with it. The less developed the country, the more common this is. Somalia is as undeveloped as countries get.

III. Somalia: A Low-Trust, High-Fraud Country

According to a 2012 State Department inspection of its Somalia Unit, based in Kenya, Somalia's "chronic instability has made it a haven for transnational terrorism, piracy, and a threat to stability in the region," and "Somalia has lacked an effective central government for more than 2 decades."^{vii} Things have not improved much since. In 2025, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) ranked Somalia 192nd of 193 countries on its Human Development Index, meaning it was the second-least developed country in the world after South Sudan.^{viii}

The 2024 country report on human rights for Somalia from the State Department summarizes thusly:

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious abuses in a conflict; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict by the government and nonstate groups; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; and significant presence of any of the worst forms of child labor.^{ix}

Transparency International maintains a Corruption Perceptions Index, which "measures how corrupt each country's public sector is perceived to be, according to experts and business people."^x

According to that index, in 2025 Somalia ranked 179th of 180 countries, meaning it was the second-most corrupt country after South Sudan.^{xi}

I have conducted thousands of visa interviews in Fiji (50th-least corrupt), Ghana (80th), and India (96th). In all these countries, I encountered fraud in visa and citizen-services applications every working day. While many applicants in these countries were truthful, a substantial number lied about their identity, family relationships, educational qualifications, business affairs, their purpose in traveling to the United States, and every other aspect pertinent to visa processing and American Citizen Services. In my experience, the prevalence of fraud in visa applications tracks the general rate of corruption and fraud in each country.

At the U.S. embassy in Nairobi from 2020 to 2022, I supervised all consular operations for both Kenya and Somalia, as the U.S. has no permanent consular presence in Somalia. The level of fraud in applications for visas and American Citizen Services that I observed was consistent with Somalia's bottom ranking in the Human Development Index, the Corruption Perceptions Index, and State Department's human rights report.

Endemic Corruption in Somalia

In spite of the known corruption in Somalia, the U.S. has poured hundreds of millions of dollars in aid into the country every year for decades. A State Department inspection of the U.S. Mission to Somalia in 2018 found "Internal Controls Lacking in High-Risk Environment," noting that senior staff had paid insufficient attention to protocols designed to combat fraud in U.S. military and civilian assistance grants and programs. In addition, the Office of the Inspector General "found that neither Mission Somalia nor the Department had fully assessed the risk that U.S. funding could benefit terrorists or their supporters..."^{xii}

Just one example of the risk posed by lack of internal controls and due diligence in aid awards is the case of Nour International Relief Aid. In 2009, Islamic Relief USA reportedly fired "an independent contractor who ran a donated-drug program," one Diana Sufian, for inflating the value of donated goods.^{xiii} According to *Forbes*, her firm "Nour International Relief Aid...was mentioned in [a] leaked 2009 cable posted on Wikileaks, but hasn't filed a federal tax return since 2006. Even then, it listed no revenue." *Forbes* reported that "in 2009, according to Islamic Relief's latest-available tax return, Sufian was paid \$669,000."

Despite this history, Nour International Relief Aid apparently later got a U.S. government grant "to supply the people of Somalia with pharmaceuticals and medical supplies in support of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)." Over several years, the U.S. government awarded Nour almost \$6 million dollars. A State Department report in 2015 found that Nour "did not adhere to Federal procurement laws and regulations and the Department's standard grant terms and conditions," including by using sole-source vendors, failing to ensure prices were reasonable, letting vendors overcharge the U.S. government, buying pharmaceuticals and medical supplies that were not on the list of approved products, and improperly withdrawing funds and thus exceeding its monthly budgets.^{xiv} *The Washington Times* reported that Nour's malfeasance caused the State Department to be overcharged by \$1.6 million.^{xv}

In response, Nour’s chief executive said she “was not aware of pertinent Federal laws and regulations,” yet she was given millions in U.S. aid to distribute—after taking a profit. Diana Sufian was “charged by Criminal Indictment filed on September 29, 2020, in the United States District Court for the District of Nevada, with two Counts of Major Fraud against the United States, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1031. ECF No. 1.” She agreed to a “pre-trial diversion” program in 2020.^{xvi}

Crime and the Terrorist Threat in Somalia

Many senior Somali leaders, including elected officials, business owners, clan elders, and criminal chiefs are dual nationals of Somalia and the United States or other Western countries. Wealthy Somalis in the diaspora have settled in Canada, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Despite most having achieved their second nationality by claiming asylum due to a fear of returning to Somalia, many retain business and family ties there and return regularly. Somalis based in the U.S. have engaged in transnational crime as well as financing^{xvii} or supporting terrorist activity in Somalia^{xviii} or recruiting others to return to Somalia to fight for Islamic terror group Al-Shabaab.^{xix} The Directorate of National Intelligence explains that:

Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin—commonly known as al-Shabaab—was the militant wing of the Somali Council of Islamic Courts that took over most of southern Somalia in the second half of 2006. Despite the group’s defeat by Somali and Ethiopian forces in 2007, al-Shabaab—a clan-based insurgent and terrorist group—has continued its violent insurgency in southern and central Somalia.^{xx}

Partly to prevent diaspora Somalis from returning to fight in its interminable civil wars and terrorism, Somalia recently created an electronic visa system. In November 2025, the U.S. embassy in Somalia reported on “credible allegations that unidentified hackers penetrated Somalia’s e-visa system potentially exposing the personal data of at least 35,000 people, including possibly thousands of U.S. citizens.”^{xxi} In December 2025, Al Jazeera reported that Somalia’s “electronic visa website lacks proper security, allowing anyone to download sensitive data,” including visa applicants’ passport details, names, and dates of birth.^{xxii} Al Jazeera was able to download e-visas containing sensitive information from dozens of people” including United States citizens.

Diaspora Somalis have raised money in the United States for Al-Shabaab. Money lending and transfer firms, such as Al Barakaat in Minneapolis, facilitated the movement of money from the U.S. to Somalia. Their owners and leadership were mostly dual nationals with U.S. as well as Somali passports. According to reporting from the *City Journal*, some of the money garnered through welfare fraud in Minnesota ended up in the hands of Al-Shabaab, as it reportedly takes a percentage of money transfers into Somalia from abroad.^{xxiii} Al Barakaat was eventually closed by the U.S. government, but other companies remained open and operated in countries where known terrorist financing takes place, such as Afghanistan, Dubai, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Sudan. Store-front money transfer shops are common in American cities.

U.S. Diplomatic Presence in Somalia

Somalia’s central government collapsed in 1991, after the death of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre, who had ruled since 1969. On September 8, 2015, the State Department formally established the

U.S. Mission to Somalia, which was a remote mission based at Embassy Nairobi in Kenya. (The State Department has established “remote missions,” meaning U.S. embassies to a country not located in that country, when diplomatic relations still exist between the U.S. and that country but American staff have been evacuated due to a “natural disaster, political instability, or other security threats.”) ^{xxiv} In December 2018, the Department moved the U.S. Ambassador and a few diplomatic staff to a small facility within the protected confines of the Mogadishu International Airport. Once resident at the Mogadishu airport, the U.S. Ambassador was the subject of “constant death threats and targeting” according to State Department sources. Administrative and other support staff remain at Embassy Nairobi. According to a State Department report in 2018, the U.S. Mission to Somalia had no locally employed staff in Somalia. ^{xxv}

Visa Processing for Somalis—Handled in Nairobi

The State Department’s Inspector General (OIG) reported on the U.S. embassy in Nairobi in 2018. This report covered the consular section, which, as noted, handles all applications for visas and other consular services from Somali nationals as there is no U.S. consular section operating in Somalia. ^{xxvi} The challenges of consular work at Embassy Nairobi are considerable, as the OIG report noted:

The embassy provided consular services to five other countries in addition to Kenya. Embassy Nairobi processed immigrant visas for Burundi, Uganda, Eritrea, and South Sudan; nonimmigrant visas for South Sudan; and all consular services for Somalia. The diverse workload meant that Nairobi regularly conducted interviews in multiple regional languages and relied on interpreters, which required greater time for interviews. Nearly all the countries served by Embassy Nairobi lacked reliable civil documents, which necessitated greater scrutiny and made casework more labor intensive. Additionally, many of the visa applicants from these countries were displaced from their home countries and resettled as refugees. The result was a visa workload of great complexity that required consular officers to be familiar with local customs, migration patterns, educational norms, and family habits of a wide range of cultures. Presidential Proclamation 964522 also required enhanced vetting of visa applicants and necessitated additional processes for approximately 20 percent of Nairobi’s immigrant visa workload. These efforts were in addition to the security review that the Department of Homeland Security Visa Security Unit at Embassy Nairobi conducted on all visas issued. ^{xxvii}

The report concluded that “Embassy Nairobi’s consular personnel addressed these varied needs effectively and efficiently.” ^{xxviii} However, the report found that “consular managers responsible for reviewing visa and passport decisions of their subordinate officers did not always examine the minimum number of cases” required, which “increases the risk that inappropriate decisions might pass unnoticed or uncorrected.” In addition, the “OIG found that Nairobi used 25 different physicians to conduct the required medical exams for immigrant visa applicants, which is “approximately 10 times more than [Department guidance] recommends for posts with Nairobi’s level of immigrant visa workload.” ^{xxix}

Consular staff began quarterly visits to Mogadishu in 2018, to provide routine services to U.S. citizens, such as accepting applications for consular reports of birth abroad and passports. The 2018 OIG report noted that the consular section had cleared lengthy backlogs of passport and report-of-birth applications. These are often held up due to concerns about family relationships. Given

Somalia's non-existent or unreliable documents, DNA testing is often the only way to be sure of biological relationships. As of 2022, there was a significant backlog of DNA testing at Embassy Nairobi due to COVID-19-era restrictions, staff shortages, and logistical difficulties.^{xxx}

IV. Exporting Somali Norms to the West

In the wake of the welfare scandal in Minnesota, Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute (which argues for virtually no immigration restrictions) claimed that Somalis are incarcerated at lower rates than native-born Americans. The *City Journal* found statistical bias and flawed methodology in the claim and that it was not an “apples-to-apples comparison.” The *City Journal*'s own analysis found that “young men born in Somalia have roughly twice the incarceration rate of those born in the United States,” and four times higher than “non-Hispanic white natives.”^{xxxix}

This seems more likely, as data from Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom all show higher rates of criminal convictions from Somali immigrants (among many other countries) than from natives.^{xxxix} Unlike those European countries, the U.S. does not collect data on crime rates by immigration status or country of birth.

Like crime, corruption rates seem to follow foreign populations into host countries at least into the first generation. A study on parking tickets by United Nations diplomats from 2007 found “a strong effect of corruption norms: diplomats from high-corruption countries...accumulated significantly more unpaid parking violations.”^{xxxix} The study showed that “officials from more corrupt countries behaved far more corruptly, even under identical enforcement conditions, and these differences persisted over time.”^{xxxix}

V. Examples of Visa Fraud by Somali Nationals

In my time in Embassy Nairobi, visa applications were at a small percentage of routine levels due to COVID restrictions. Concerning Somalis, the consular section received non-immigrant visa applications mostly for official travel of elected officials or government employees who lived in Somalia, or from private individuals resident in Kenya or other countries outside Somalia. We also processed immigrant visas and applications for family members to join asylum claimants or refugees already in the U.S.

Here are a few of the routine visa fraud types I saw at Embassy Nairobi:

- Fraudulent claims about marriages and other family relationships for immigrant visas and refugee family “follow-to-join” cases.
- Fraudulent or unauthorized letters of support, fraudulent official “diplomatic notes” from the Somali government, or diplomatic notes obtained by bribery.
- Fraudulent employment letters, educational qualifications, or civil documents.
- Letters of invitation from Somalis in America known to sponsor multiple individuals who had overstayed visas and claimed asylum.
- Fraudulent recommendation or employment letters from Somali elected or government officials, or legitimate companies, for individuals who were intending immigrants or had criminal records.

- Fraudulent letters of invitation from businesses, conferences, festivals, and events in the U.S. for applicants to present with their visa application.

Aliens who obtain visitor or student visas by fraud often claim asylum once in the United States. So do aliens who cross the border illegally, to prevent their removal. Often, the fraud consists of falsely claiming persecution in their home country, so they can game U.S. asylum laws. Sometimes, it is to conceal material facts that would render them ineligible from receiving asylum, let alone a visa.

For instance, in July 2025, Sowda Ahmed Mohamud, a Somali citizen, pled guilty to asylum fraud and false statements in her testimony before an immigration judge.^{xxxv} Along with hundreds of thousands of others Mohamud crossed the U.S. border illegally during the Biden Administration. In March 2024, she surrendered to the Border Patrol and then claimed asylum. As previously noted, most people like her have no U.S. records—NINO. But Mohamud did, and the FBI’s San Diego office of the Joint Terrorism Task Force (FBI-JTTF) investigated. They found that Mohamud had already attempted to apply for “lawful status” in the U.S. along with Brazil and the United Kingdom, but she lied on her asylum application by claiming she had not. She also “fraudulently and intentionally withheld that she had a biological sister, who was residing in the U.S. pending a determination of her own immigration petition.”^{xxxvi}

Furthermore, Mohamud purposely did not disclose in her asylum application that her brother Mohamed Ahmed Qahiye was “a high-ranking member of the foreign terrorist organization ISIS-Somalia,” who had reportedly once “met with Iranian nationals who paid more than \$10,000 to ISIS-Somalia leadership.”^{xxxvii} For that asylum fraud, which took an expensive U.S. investigation to reveal, Mohamud was simply sentenced to time served already (15 months in immigration detention) and to removal from the United States. Such a light sentence hardly seems a deterrent to others.

Aliens who obtain refugee status through fraud can later petition for relatives to follow them to the United States. Aliens who obtain U.S. visas by fraud will usually go on to achieve permanent residency and then citizenship, all on the foundation of the original fraud. Once citizens, they can petition for relatives to come as legal immigrants.

Here is one example: In 2017, the United States filed civil complaints in the District of Minnesota against four individuals who allegedly fraudulently obtained their naturalized U.S. citizenship.^{xxxviii} In 2000, Ahmed Mohamed Warsame and Fosia Abdi Adan (not their real names) claimed to be husband and wife and won the green card lottery, formally the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program. Their visas were processed and issued at the U.S. embassy in Yemen. The couple claimed three children, who were not their biological or adopted children. The putative family of five came to the United States in 2001 and became citizens some years later. In this case, the Minnesota District Court ordered the de-naturalization of the purported couple and the three individuals whom they brought with them fraudulently as children. However, having processed thousands of immigrant visas in several high-fraud countries, I believe this is a rare discovery amid many fraudulent cases that are never discovered.

In addition to routine fraud in visa applications, officials and government workers who received visas for U.S.-sponsored training and visitor programs often remained in the U.S. illegally. The Youth Empowerment Somalia^{xxxix} program for high school students was ended by the U.S. because, according to one senior American official, “none ever returned to Somalia.”^{xl}

VI. Examples of Immigration Fraud by Somalis in the U.S.

As noted in the summary, in October 2025, USCIS Director Edlow mentioned some fraud cases that may shock Americans, but that are familiar to any U.S. consular or DHS officer who has handled visa or immigration benefit applications.^{xli} Here are just three concerning cases USCIS found:

- One alien had overstayed his non-immigrant visa and “was the son of a known or suspected terrorist on the no-fly list,” according to Edlow.
- Another alien bought a fake death certificate in Kenya for \$100 for his still-living wife, so that he could fraudulently marry another woman. He has five children with this second, bigamous, wife in Minneapolis, and three children by his first wife who lives in Sweden.
- A third alien entered the U.S. illegally in 2023 and was released by the Border Patrol into removal (deportation) proceedings. As so often happens, he married a U.S. citizen to avoid removal. The Minneapolis-Saint Paul USCIS field office did not find him and his putative wife to be credible when they attested (under oath) to their marriage. After a site visit by investigators, the American-citizen spouse confessed that the marriage was “fraudulent and entered into solely for immigration purposes.”^{xlii}

These three cases represent types of fraud that were commonplace in several countries where I did consular work. Visa overstays are common, even in countries with low approval rates. In India, Fiji, and Ghana, three countries where I did consular assignments, fake documents of all types were available from vendors with offices or stores around the consulate. Fake marriages for immigration purposes were extremely common. Claiming non-relatives as biological or legal children was also common. I would imagine that if USCIS had followed up on every refugee document or visa issued in high-fraud consular posts, it would find similar rates of fraud in the U.S. Unfortunately, USCIS has the resources to investigate only a small percentage of suspect cases. In addition, political leadership, under Presidents Obama and Biden in particular, has been reluctant to devote resources to fraud investigations, electing instead to concentrate on mass processing and speed.

In December 2025, following up on Operation Twin Shield, DHS launched Operation PARRIS (Post-Admission Refugee Reverification and Integrity Strengthening), in Minnesota, “a sweeping initiative re-examining thousands of refugee cases through new background checks and intensive verification of refugee claims.”^{xliii} The operation targeted 5,600 refugees in Minnesota who were admitted to the U.S. as refugees and have applied for but not yet received lawful permanent resident status (green card). At USCIS’s “newly established vetting center” adjudicators will, according to DHS, conduct “thorough background checks, reinterviews, and merit reviews of refugee claims.”^{xliv} Cases where fraud is found will be forwarded to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for action, including denial of benefits and ultimately deportation.

VII. Welfare Fraud by Somalis

Most legal immigrants are barred by law from receiving many core federal welfare benefits for five years. Refugees, however, are able to receive a wide range of benefits immediately on arrival in the U.S.^{xlv} Therefore, Somali refugees can be eligible with no waiting period for federal public benefits

including Medicaid, Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance, Refugee Social Services, Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Federal Student Aid.

American citizens and immigrants of all backgrounds, and in all states, have been known to commit fraud in obtaining federal, state, and local taxpayer-funded benefits. But the concentration and scale of the benefit fraud committed by Somali immigrants and U.S. citizens of Somali descent in Minnesota stands out. In an ever-widening scandal first reported by *County Highway* and then *City Journal* and other outlets, nearly 100 individuals, the majority of them Somali immigrants or naturalized citizens, have been charged in a web of scams that stole from federal welfare programs.^{xlvi} Somalis in Minnesota created shell companies and falsely claimed \$250 million in federal child nutrition reimbursements under the Feeding Our Future program. Others set up daycare programs that vastly inflated the number of children served, if any. Still others scammed Minnesota state programs like Early Intensive Developmental and Behavioral Intervention, Housing Stabilization Services, and Integrated Community Services that tapped into federal Medicaid money.^{xlvii}

The “total losses [from welfare fraud largely committed by Somalis] across 14 state welfare programs may exceed \$9 billion,” although estimates vary and the investigations are still ongoing.^{xlviii} Fraud is of concern from any quarter, but the Somali population in the United States is already on average a net fiscal drain. According to a report by the Center for Immigration Studies, 89 percent of Somali-immigrant households with children receive some form of welfare, compared to only 21 percent of native households.^{xlix} “Over 73% of Somali households have at least one member on Medicaid, 54% receive food stamps, and 27% receive direct cash transfers. This compares to 18, 7, and 6% for native-born households, respectively.”¹

Conclusion

Visa and immigration fraud by Somalis is common in countries that receive Somali asylum seekers, immigrants, refugees, and visitors.^{li} Becoming legal permanent residents and even U.S. citizens does not magically end this tendency, as seen in Minnesota and other states. Because of the known associations of U.S.-resident Somalis with Al-Shabaab, the unusually high level at which Somalis in America claim federal welfare benefits, and the growing scope of benefits fraud associated with this relatively small population, careful monitoring and verification of Somali nationals as they progress through immigration statuses to citizenship is warranted. However, the U.S. has admitted tens of thousands of refugees, including from Somalia, over decades and then failed to follow up with oversight and, if necessary, investigation into cases of marriage, relationship, and other categories of fraud which could render individuals inadmissible and deportable.

In addition, visa issuance rates should be tied to overstay and fraud rates. Visa vetting and later immigration benefits applications should be enhanced using AI and any other available technological tools. All countries where the U.S. issues visas should be required, over time, to provide a mechanism for the U.S. to automatically verify that their nationals do not have criminal records before they are issued visas. This is already applied to some of the Visa Waiver Program countries^{lii} and should be extended gradually to all other countries. Countries like Somalia that are unable to properly record, document, and verify the true identities of their nationals, and who cannot reliably inform U.S. authorities whether they have criminal records, should receive extremely limited access to U.S. visas

and immigration benefits.

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