

Estimating Somaliland's Population - Technical paper

An accurate number for a country's population is an essential component of any country's official statistics production system, as the total population number allows statisticians to convert representative sample estimates to national statistics. The latest available population estimates for Somaliland are from the *Population Estimation Survey 2014*, with a population number of **3,508,180¹**.

Using this snapshot of the country's demography, we can estimate the current population number by projecting from 2014 if we know the **population growth rate**, which is the rate at which a population is changing in a given year expressed as a percentage of the population. This rate can be calculated as the sum of two components, as shown in the formula below.

$$\text{population growth rate} = \text{rate of natural increase} + \text{net migration rate}$$

The net migration rate represents the net effect of emigration and immigration (which in Somaliland corresponds to citizens formerly living abroad that have returned, often called "returnees") on the country's population in a given year, following the formula:

$$\text{net migration rate} = \frac{\text{number of immigrants} - \text{number of emigrants}}{\text{total population}}$$

Since a substantial proportion of emigration is done illegally and thus not recorded, it is difficult to accurately measure the true value of this statistic. The above-mentioned *Population Estimation Survey 2014* did provide an estimate of this rate for the year 2013, resulting in a positive net migration rate of 0.3%, meaning that the number of immigrants was higher (in fact twice as high) than that of emigrants.

This positive net migration rate contradicts popular wisdom and mainstream narratives around migration in Somaliland. This could be explained by under-reporting of emigration by survey respondents, which would mean that the net migration rate measured is inaccurate.

However, it could also be a consequence of factors affecting both Somaliland and former emigration countries for that specific year, for instance major political turmoil in the MENA following the Arab Spring.

On balance, there remains a high degree of uncertainty around the accuracy of this estimate of 0.3% positive net migration. Furthermore, this is only one data point whereas the net migration rate is likely to vary significantly through time, which should reinforce our skepticism.

Consequently, and until more information on net migration becomes available, we will **assume the net migration rate to be zero**, meaning that the number of immigrants was roughly equal to the number of emigrants over the relevant period.

¹ (UNFPA, 2014)

This leaves the rate of natural increase to be determined, which corresponds to the evolution of the population from the difference between the number of deaths and births in a given year, expressed as a percentage of the population. This rate is commonly calculated from the birth rate and the death rate, also known as crude birth rate and crude death rate, as shown in the following formula²:

$$\text{rate of natural increase} = \frac{\text{birth rate} - \text{death rate}}{10}$$

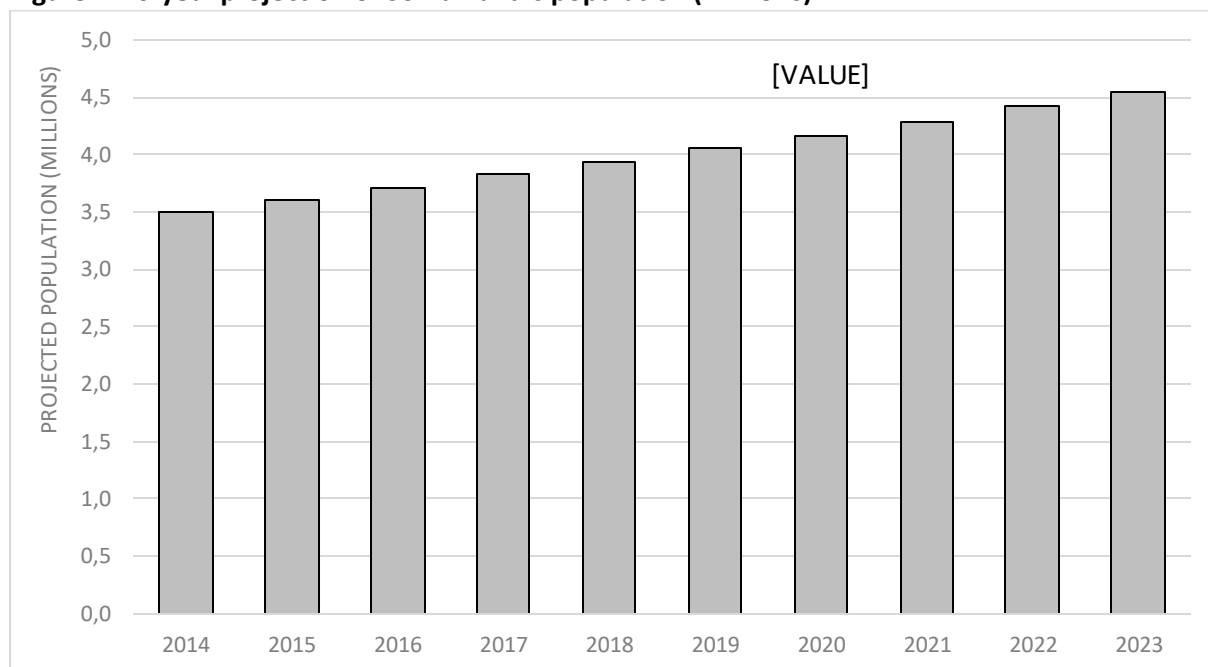
New data collected recently as part of the *Somaliland Health and Demographic Survey* provided us with previously unavailable estimates for both the birth rate and the death rate, with 37.4 births and 8.1 deaths per 1,000 population respectively³.

Using the formula in the previous page, we can now calculate the rate of natural increase, which also corresponds to the rate of population growth as net migration is assumed to be zero. The result is a **rate of population growth of 2.93%**, which means that the Somaliland population would roughly double every 24 years if the rate remains constant.

We can now project the evolution of Somaliland's total population from 2014 onwards, which results in a **population figure of 4,171,898 for the year 2020**, as shown in the table and figure below:

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
3,508,180	3,610,970	3,716,771	3,825,672	3,937,765	4,053,141	4,171,898

Figure 1. 10-year projection of Somaliland's population (millions)



² The difference between birth and death rate is divided by 10 in order to obtain a percentage, as both rates in the numerator are usually expressed per 1,000 population.

³ (Somaliland Central Statistics Department, Forthcoming)

References

Somaliland Central Statistics Department. (Forthcoming). *Somaliland Health and Demographic Survey*.

UNFPA. (2014). *Population Estimation Survey 2014 for the 18 pre-war regions of Somalia*. Somalia Country Office, Nairobi, Kenya.