

A [new report](#) published by the Danish Institute for International Studies in partnership with the Rift Valley Institute and XCEPT, analyses the checkpoints on Somali roads that are operated or under the control of both government actors, al-Shabaab armed groups, and other militia in Somalia, focusing in particular on two main trade routes: 1) the Baidoa corridor, a road linking Mogadishu with Kenya and Ethiopia and; 2) the Garissa corridor, a road that connects the port city of Kismayo with the grazing lands of Afmadow (in the southern Somalia, north-west of Kismayo) and north-eastern Kenya.

The research, conducted in the period between October 2022 and March 2023, shows that such checkpoints have increased over time, identifying a total of 204 checkpoints, 44 (or 23 per cent) of which operated by al-Shabaab. Here, checkpoint operators demand to road users the payment of fees called 'birqaad' (checkpoint opening fee) or sometimes 'xadhig fur' (rope lifting fee), in most cases without issuing any receipts. These checkpoints are also frequently complemented by additional customs points for each administrative region that collect additional fees, but this time, by issuing a receipt. Most routes have a checkpoint roughly every 15–20 kilometres, translating to an average of around 5 checkpoints per 100 km travelled. An [interactive map](#) on the Danish Institute for International Studies website shows the distribution of checkpoints. The study, in particular, analyses the impact of such checkpoints on trade, society and political projects.

The consequence is that such checkpoints increase transport costs and therefore constitute trade barriers because of the fees that passing truck drivers are asked to pay to move their goods across local and international boundaries. The report also argues that, with the exception of the Garissa corridor, along most routes, taxes levied at checkpoints in government-controlled areas are superior to those levied by al-Shabaab forces in areas under the control of the latter.

Checkpoints have also differential impacts on domestic and cross-border trade, and affect the balance between them. In port cities, for instance, products such foodstuff that are imported from abroad are cheaper than the locally produced equivalent because they are subject only to customs duties, while if they are moved at the interior of the country, their cost raises because of the incidence of checkpoint taxes along local roads. The longer is the distance a truck must cover for transporting goods, the higher is the price that final consumers will pay. Checkpoint taxes also discriminate against farming produce and other low-value bulk cargo, with checkpoint taxes along agricultural feeder roads three times higher per tonne than checkpoint taxes for imported manufactured goods and commodities destined for exports. In other words, they play a role of transfer of wealth from marginal and vulnerable populations in farming areas towards well-connected traders and checkpoint operators.

