

THE DOM

The “Other” Asylum Seekers from Syria

Discrimination, Isolation and Social Exclusion: Syrian
Dom Asylum Seekers in the Crossfire

Executive Summary

“The Rights of Dom and Other Related Minorities from Syria Seeking Asylum
in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey Project” Preliminary Report

Executive Summary

This report is prepared in the scope of the “The Rights of Dom and Other Related Minorities from Syria Seeking Asylum in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey Project” to determine the living conditions, types of being exposed to exclusion and discrimination and other problems faced by **The Dom the “Other” Asylum Seekers from Syria** who took refuge in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey.

The Dom are composed of peri-patetic communities whose roots are based in India and who are named by Middle Eastern Societies as Nawar, Gypsy, Zott, Ghajar, Bareke, Gaodari, Krismal, Qarabana, Karaçi, Abdal, Ashiret, Qurbet, Mitrip, Gewende, Dom, Abdal, Tanjirliyah, Haddadin, Hacıye, Albaniant, Halebi, Haramshe and Kaoli. In our day Dom communities live almost in all countries such as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates.

Dom community are form the peri-patetic communities living with the other publics in the Middle Eastern Geography. Peri-patetic communities are nomadic-semi nomadic communities who produce work tools for the publics they live together and most of the time they become the bearer of the oral and musical cultures. They perform traditional crafts such as dentistry, circumcision, traditional healing, animal training, ironwork, metalwork, basketry, strainer making, leatherwork and in return of serving these crafts they take food from the publics they live together. Especially during the last 50 years, together with the development of relations of production and industry since they cannot perform their traditional crafts, the communities started to a great extent to waste and refuse collection, seasonal work and daly work which are most of the time performed in the informal sector.

The environment of war, conflict and violence continuing in Middle East for many years led to the displacement of the Dom society. The recent civil war and contested period in this geography exposed the Dom living in the Middle East to violence and forced migration even though they did not take a part in the war. The contested environment experienced especially in Syria led the Dom living in this country to take shelter in neighboring countries. The Dom who took refuge in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey are discriminated and excluded in these countries. During the recent years the conflicted political and social life, civil war and the contested processes in Middle East started to make the lives of these people difficult day by day. After their spaces of migration, neighborhoods and houses were appropriated these communities who passed to settled life were forced to nomadic life once again.

The experience from the East Europe towards the end of 20th century, the disappearance of the state system in the countries of war and conflict, the spatial domination of paramilitary forces, radical groups and radical nationalist organizations, their control over the cities and districts and their comment on the government took its place in the history as the most difficult times for the ethnic and religious minorities in that country.

The political demonstrations and act started in Kosovo in 1981 continued almost 15 years and ended with the collapse of Yugoslavia. During this process the Roma/Rom society living in the borders of this country suffered from great tragedies. From the beginning of 1990s people, by Gypsies being in the first place, believed that they were emancipated. Yet, in a very short time, due to disintegration of countries and nationalism’s becoming widespread in the newly established countries Gypsies became the main target of racist attacks and xenophobia. The raising nationalist wave in the new nation states was directed firstly to the Gypsies/Roma. The Roma society living in that geography was exposed to systematic violence and massacre and a large population had to take shelter in other European countries.

During the civil wars in Central and East Europe, despite their neutrality, Gypsies once again were subjected to massacres. Especially Serbian militia appropriated the properties of gypsies, massacred them and they faced diseases and hunger in the camps. During the civil war

in countries such as Bosnia and Kosovo hundreds of thousands of Gypsies were forced to leave their homes and countries. During the war thousands of them died, tens of thousands of them were wounded and became disabled, their houses were destroyed and their lands were appropriated. In Kosovo where hundreds of thousands Gypsies lived before the civil war there were only 8 gypsy families were left.

Today Roma known as Balkan Gypsies in Europe are humiliated by the local Roma society of these countries together with other locals and the rulers as “Migrant Gypsies” and they are mostly excluded from public services and discriminated. During the 20 years following this, the lack of inclusion and harmony attempts for this society led them to the lower strata in the societal structure. This society who is not part of the social harmony programs and who cannot access and benefit from the social services provided by state and civil society such as education, employment, health, state support got rapidly criminalized and the ratio of involving in crime raised rapidly especially for younger generations.

According to the minority policies implemented by the countries, the problems of Gypsies include not only demands occurred solely because of culture and history but also non-humanitarian elements such as poverty, prejudice, discrimination and violence.

Before it is too late, action is needed for Syrian Dom to prevent the reoccurrence of this experience lived during the last thirty years by Balkan Rom in Europe. National and international organizations, civil society organizations working on migration/asylum seeking, Roma/Gypsy institutions and all the countries where Syrian refugees reside by the three countries where this research was implemented (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan) being naturally in the first place should develop a strategy related with this situation.

Dom society is composed of peri-patetic communities living with the other people in the Middle Eastern geography. Peri-patetic communities are nomadic-semi nomadic communities who produce work tools for the publics they live together and most of the time they become the bearer of the oral and musical cultures. They perform traditional crafts such as dentistry, circumcision, traditional healing, animal training, ironwork, metalwork, basketry, strainer making, leatherwork and in return of serving these crafts they take food from the publics they live together Especially during the last 50 years, together with the development of relations of production and industry since they cannot perform their traditional crafts, the communities started to a great extent to waste and refuse collection, seasonal work and daly work which are most of the time performed in the informal sector.

Dom community started to settle in Middle East during the last 50 years. They built humble houses in the margins of the cities they reside for centuries where they started to perform their craft and became semi-nomadic. Especially for the last 20 years, after the invasion of Iraq by USA, the process of conflict that the Middle East entered started to force these communities to nomadic life once again.

The fieldwork of the report dealing with the impact of civil war and contested processes over in Syria over the Dom communities were made by Kırkayak Kültür – Dom Research Workshop. The report is written by Kemal Vural Tarlan, an expert on Dom Studies and Hacer Foggo, an expert on Roma studies.

The researches aimed to determine the profile of Dom society in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, their basic needs and to make situation analysis including a regional mapping composed of the locations they settle in these countries. During the fieldwork, the location where Dom groups settle in these countries were determined basing on the previous studies.

Syrian Dom Asylum Seekers Current Situation in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey

The civil war and processes of conflict in Syria entered its 6th year during which almost 12 million Syrians had to leave their home. According to the UNHCR data 5.165.502 people took refuge in nearby countries. The number of registered Syrian refugees is 3.168.757 and 1.001.051 in Lebanon. As for Jordan, according to the data of UNHCR 660.582 Syrian refugees were registered. The Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan has turned into a city where approximately 80 thousand refugees reside. UNHCR suspended temporarily the new registration procedures as of 6 May 2015 in accordance with the instructions of Lebanon. Accordingly, the number of people in the waiting list of registration is not counted in this particular number. According to some observers this number exceeds 1.5 million people by the arrivals after the mentioned date.

All ethnic groups and religious minorities living in Syria are having “hard times” during the civil war. In Syria people who were subjected to the deadly violence of the regime and the jihadist groups had to take refuge in other countries with the hope of saving their lives. Even though they did not take a part in the conflict the Dom communities living in this country were especially exposed to violence and exclusion. While radical jihadist groups appropriated their houses and goods and posed threats and from time to time implemented violence at the level of massacre claiming that “they are not Muslims enough”, the previous Baath regime ignored and excluded by and a great part of them were not given identity cards. Therefore during the difficult conditions of the civil war they were sacrificed to avoid sharing the limited sources with an ethnic group who has never been considered as an essential part of the country. The regime bombarded heavily many areas where this community settles on the grounds that the opponents take shelter there. For example places like Haydariye, a district in Aleppo where Gypsies historically live for centuries, were evacuated completely.

In the last 6 years the Syrian Dom managed to take shelter in neighboring countries passing the radical militia and Syrian army. According to the leaders of Syrian Dom society and experts working on this subject and experts doing this research 150 thousand Syrian Dom were spread to Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and European countries.

The field was made through interviews in Turkey, in the provinces and districts of Gaziantep, Nurdağı, İslâhiye, Nizip, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Birecik, İstanbul, Balat, Cibali, Tarlabası, Sultançiftliği, İzmir, Kadifekale, Basmahane, Adana, Ceyhan, Tufanbeyli, Mersin; in Lebanon in the settlements in Beqaa Valley and in Deir Zanon and Al Marj as the camp areas of Dom groups and in the Sabra-Hay el Gharbeh neighborhood; in Jordan in settlements such as Al-Qweismeh, Amman - Al Kweismeh, Mustanada, Dleel, Al Taliah, Irbid, Jarash, Mustanada, Mafraq, Al Zaqra, Dleel (Adduleyl). Throughout the field research approximately 700 women, girls, children and men from Dom society were interviewed individually and through 35 group interviews.

GENERAL PROBLEMS OF DOM REFUGEES

Discrimination

The findings of the interviews display that;

- Dom community members express that they live under harsh living conditions, they are called beggar, Gypsy and they are exposed to prejudice and hate speech when they leave their house.
- They state that they face discrimination and exclusion at their work place and their works while women do daily work and men work at constructions and paper gathering.
- During the interviews made with the employees of civil society organizations from three countries it is seen that the employees of NGO's lack basic information on Dom society, their culture, language, sociological structure and they describe Dom with adjectives such as Gypsy, Nawar, beggar, aggressive and thief. The prejudices of the employees of institution who support refugees are one of the reasons in the lack of widespread services to Dom.
- In the areas where Dom communities reside the community centers and education centers offering services to the children of other Syrian refugees are not welcoming Dom children. Especially Arab, Kurd and Turkmen refugee families express frequently that they do not want "Gypsy children" in the schools where their children study.

EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT

- During the research it is seen that in all three countries the majority of Dom interviewees in the rural areas do seasonal agricultural work, portage, field and garden cleaning and proning while the ones in the cities work as paper gatherers, water sellers, construction workers and some work in textile workshops with very low wages and even though they deal with a specific wage finally they take "whatever given" by the boss gives. It is seen especially in Jordan and Lebanon that women do domestic works and cleaning taking a lower wage that other workers doing the same job. They state that employers frequently dismiss them without paying their wage and therefore they change their place very often.
- The community members express that they work in temporary works in cities and towns such as construction, portage, garden cleaning and agricultural work and they are exposed to discrimination in wages where they are paid more than half of the regular wage.
- In all the three countries musician Dom groups practicing their job in entertainment sector started to play orchestra instruments and percussion and rhythm instruments in addition to the traditional instruments as well and they continued to display their skills in weddings, night clubs and pubs. They add in the interviews that discrimination in terms of wages is high in this line of work.

PROBLEM OF ACCOMODATION

In the countries where Syrian Dom communities reside we confronted people;

- Living in the tents as nomads
- Living in the suburbs of the city,
- Living in the rent or in tents in Roma or Dom neighborhoods in the cities,
- Living in the unregistered camp areas settled by them,
- Living in the abandoned or almost ruined houses in the areas of urban transformation.

The community members express that in the countries they took shelter they cannot afford the rents of houses and camp settlements, electricity and water bills, people do not want them to rent their houses, even if they rent they are sent out after a while by their landlords due to the complaints of neighbors saying that they are gypsies. In the neighborhoods they reside mukhtars and other public institutions do not register them and therefore they cannot take identification cards given to them, they cannot benefit from social assistance to a great extent and cannot register their children to school.

Community members state that their reason to return back to nomadic life is because of this discrimination they suffer from. They express that they do not want to live in the refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan since the camps are controlled by security forces and they are subjected to great discrimination by the other communities living in these camps and especially women and children suffer from discrimination and exclusion taking a physical, psychological and violence dimension.

HEALTH

During the interviews it is seen that the community members have great difficulties to access health services. It is found out that when there is no great necessity, except urgent cases, they do not go to doctor and they experience great problems in monitoring of pregnant women, vaccination of infants and medicine and medical support for chronic diseases. The community's frequent change of location in Turkey results with difficulties in accessing benefiting from health services since the foreigner identification cards given to Syrians under temporary protection are valid only in the city they are distributed. They state that they have difficulties in accessing the health services provided by international organization in Lebanon and Jordan.

In the domain of health it is seen that;

- Women, children and infants have problems in accessing protective health services,
- The hospitals demand fee in secondary health services,
- Infant vaccination remains as a problem,
- Children suffer from excessive lack of nutrition,
- They suffer from important health problems but since they do not have id cards it is impossible to get free services from hospitals and therefore a lot patients cannot be treated,
- Regular health monitoring and medical care for pregnant women, infants and children fail,
- Due to the conditions of accommodation community members are under the risk of epidemic diseases,

- The members of the interviewee families diseases such as typhoid, respiratory disorder, asthma, bronchitis and Koah are common,
- Recently contagious diseases such as tuberculosis and leishmaniasis became widespread in the community.

ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER AND HYGIENE

- Syrian Dom communities who take refuge in neighboring countries have great difficulty in access to clean water in where they reside.
- In the neighborhoods they live in Turkey the houses they took shelter are so old and ruined that they generally do not involve healthy public water system.
- They cannot access to water because public water is a paid-service and they cannot afford to pay the bills.
- For groups living in tents and living a nomadic life access to water becomes even more difficult. Mobile groups stop over the urban periphery, nearby villages, in their historical “spaces of migration”. In these places they meet their need for water in unhealthy water resources such as streams and rivers.
- These resources close to agricultural areas, industrial facilities and sewerage systems due to recent widespread use of agricultural pesticide involve chemical waste. Community members who meet their drinking and cleaning water needs face with contagious diseases and health problems.
- As for Jordan and Lebanon the lack of enough drinking water and the high prices of water create a difficult situation for community members. People having economic difficulties lead to cheap water from unknown resources. Finding clean water for cleaning and bath is extremely difficult.

Dom Children and Education

According to the UNHCR data 38.1% of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon (approximately 380 thousand) are composed of children between the ages 5-17. This number is 35.6% (approximately 235 thousand) for Jordan and it is 31% (approximately 960 thousand) for Turkey, therefore this number approaches 2 million with the unregistered children in three countries in total.

In the countries where Syrian refugees reside the education of children keeps its valid situation as a basic problem for over 6 years.

Basic problems of Dom children;

- Absence in school and lack of participation to the education life,
- Right to play, (a very basic right of any child)
- Malnutrition,
- Child labor,

- Early marriage,
- Access to clean water.

Especially children are affected negatively from the conditions of the countries they settle and they cannot benefit from basic human rights such as education, health and nutrition. Today nearly all of the Dom children living in the neighboring countries of Syria, being Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, cannot take education from the formal education institutions. Children who register to schools from education do not follow the courses after a while because of exclusion and discrimination.

Child Labor

During the field research conducted in three countries it was mentioned and observed that the children of Dom families between the ages of 15-17 work in various sectors. The prominent jobs are observed as refuse collection, donation gathering and working summers as cheap laborers in the fields, industry and various service sectors. In the three countries where the project is carried out the high level of the child labor problem and the lack of enough number of programs resulted with important and serious problems such as different abuses children were exposed to in the work spaces, long working hours, adverse effects of these jobs on children's physical and mental development and lack of participation to education life.

Additionally Dom families stated that due to the ethnic identity of their children they are facing discrimination and sometimes violence.

Child Abuse

According to the World Health Organization "knowingly or unknowingly performed acts of an adult, society or country which affect the health, physical development of a child" are accepted as child abuse. That children are to be protected from "all forms of physical and psychological violence" when they are under the care of their parents or a third party is written in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

During the fieldwork carried on in three countries it was observed that Dom children were subjected to abuse at different levels. Especially the insecure condition of the accommodation places and environment, the child laborers' working until late and children's working with their parents to collect donations were seen among the reasons for children's being victims of child abuse..

MIGRATION AND WOMEN

The studies made display that the times of mass migration are the periods in which women are most unprotected.

The prejudiced approach of local society towards women is reflected on the daily lives of women. Refugee women experience abuse both on the street and in their daily life. The interviews made show that the perception of the society on Syrian refugee women becomes more biased when it comes to Dom women due to their ethnic roots, identities and gender. Women who gather donations in the streets become vulnerable towards any kind of abuse, sexual violence and harassment.

Dom Groups and Women's Health

It was observed during the face to face interviews made in three countries with women that women do not have enough knowledge on contraception and their rights regarding health and information gap remains as a lack. Besides, women stated that due to economic reasons they cannot access to hygiene material.

Dom Groups and Elderliness

During the fieldwork few elderly Dom individuals have been confronted. It was mentioned in the interviews that elderly people have health problems and due to the legal status they cannot benefit from health services.

Physical, psychological and social changes brought by old age and the refugee psychology have important impact on old Syrians.

Holistic works should be developed especially by taking health, poverty, accommodation, loneliness, fear from death and war trauma into consideration.

Dom Groups and Disability

In the face to face interviews it was stated that there are disabled people inside the Dom groups who had to move to neighboring countries after the war in Syria. These people are disabled either because of the war or by birth. It is also observed that there are people whose disability became permanent after migrating to neighboring countries and disabled children who were born in these places.

Additionally, in the fieldwork the research group also met physically and mentally disabled children and adults. The interviewees stated that the disabled Dom community members cannot benefit from health and rehabilitation services and programs in the places where they live and civil society organizations do not visit them.

Data and Monitoring Mechanism

There are no data on the population of Syrian Dom groups taking refuge in neighboring countries (Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon) who are both settled and continuously mobile. Tangible and realistic indicators which are to be updated according to the needs are required on the socio-economic profile of these groups, their access to public services and basic rights, their expectations and needs. Via the studies to be done basing on the data and through indicators these groups can be continuously monitored even though they are mobile.

Even though the majority of the Dom communities in three countries live in historical Dom neighborhoods in cities and towns, there are groups mobile for certain reasons who lack any kind of basic needs. To ease the access of these groups to these basic services namely access to education, accommodation, employment, health and social support a monitoring mechanism should be constructed. For this mechanism to function healthily public institutions and non-governmental organizations should work in coordination and cooperation.

Findings and Suggestions

- There is an urgent need for basic services such as accommodation, food, education and health,
- The employees of public institutions should spread the perception that they give support services rather than posing “threat” to Dom groups,
- Possibilities should be develop to allow public institutions to work in collaboration with national and international non-governmental organizations on the subject of Dom,
- Urgent action is necessary in terms of health and medicine such as health screenings etc.,
- Dom families should be registered by promising that they would not be taken in the camps they do not want to settle and international protection should be granted to them,
- Dom people should not be sent to camps unless voluntary,
- Local authorities are suggested to distribute warm meals by opening food bank in neighborhoods,
- Access to basic services should be granted immediately such as identification cards and health screenings,
- In the literature the relation between age and being a refugee does not take place. Local and international non-governmental organization should give priority to projects on this subject,
- For nomadic Dom societies a monitoring mechanism should be developed. A network should be created that would embody the education of children, women’s health, elderly people and disabled people,

- The impact of physical and social changes brought by old age and that of the refugee psychology on elderly people should be eased through rehabilitation support,
- To prevent early marriages training activities on gender should be implemented, programs on education and professional education and employment of young women should be formed,
- Education activities should be implemented for women's gathering information on contraception and rights on health,
- For women to access hygiene material joint studies between non-governmental organizations and health institutions should be made,
- Measures to be taken to prevent community members from epidemic diseases and health screenings' frequency should be increased.
- New employment policies should be developed for Dom communities regarding their life style and cultural differences,
- Considering that Dom work especially in temporary works such as agriculture and construction their working as cheap labor should be prevented by offering vocational education to the group,
- Dom children who are subjected to discrimination due to their lifestyle and ethnic identities have a low schooling rate. That is why education methods should be implemented specifically. For schooling of children who live a nomadic life different education models, syllabi, language programs should be developed by professionals.
- Child protection mechanisms should be strengthened and measures to be taken to add children to the child protection mechanisms of each three countries,
- Non-governmental organizations should be allowed to develop areas for children's education and children should be directed to formal trainings in these centers,
- Children in need of special education should be involved in education,
- Counseling services of schools should be supported from which Dom children should be benefited,
- School social services should be established in each of the three countries and monitoring the cases such as absence and abuse and the visits to refugee and Dom families should be more active in the triad of child-school-family to establish the integration between child and school.
- Mapping activities should be developed for Dom and refugees to benefit from services regarding disabled individuals,
- For disabled Dom individuals to benefit fully from disability services monitoring activities should be developed and thrust building activities with Dom groups should be made for them to receive services,
- Rehabilitation services should be free for disabled refugees,
- Local authorities should play a role in the access to rehabilitation services,
- Mobile system should be established and local authorities should work more active to provide services for the urgent needs of disabled people,

- National and international institutions should play more role in rehabilitation centers' becoming accessible for people who are in need of special education and rehabilitation services.