REGISTRATION PROBLEM OF NEWLY ARRIVING YAZIDIS IN TÜRKİYE
Protection Monitoring Report

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This report was prepared by the Support to Life in June 2022 to determine the problems and current needs in accessing services of Yazidi refugees living in the Midyat district of Mardin and newly arrived in Türkiye.

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1. Abstract

Some of the Yazidi community members, who fled the genocidal attacks of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in Sinjar, Iraq in 2014, have been living in Turkey for about 8 years. As Support to Life, we published a needs analysis report on the access to services of Yazidis living in Mardin and Batman in 2020. In this study, which is a continuation of the mentioned report, the problems faced by Yazidis, who fled Sinjar and seek refuge in Türkiye and settled in Mardin, Midyat, for various reasons, especially the fires in the camps since 2021, regarding access to basic services, and the identity registration problem, which has been identified as the main source of these problems, are discussed.

The main findings of this study titled "Registration Problem Faced by Newly Arrived Yazidis in Türkiye – Protection Monitoring Report" are as follows:

- Two people lost their lives and 15 women and children were injured in 450 tents affected by fires in 11 camps where Yazidis lived at Sinjar region of Iraq in 2021 and 2022.
- It has been observed that the refugee community is still experiencing the trauma of the 2014 ISIS attacks, known as the ‘73rd Decree’.
- During interviews, Yazidis stated that there are many Yazidis at refugee camps in Iraq who want to cross over to Türkiye but cannot pass the border due to recent visa regulations and high visa fees.
- Children of newly arriving Yazidi families cannot be enrolled at schools due to identity registration problem.
- Refugees with serious health problems, who were injured in camp fires or ISIS attacks in Iraq, have difficulty in accessing treatment in Türkiye due to the identity registration problem.
- Refugees who have relatives in countries such as Germany, Australia and Canada cannot be evaluated during the resettlement process due to the identity registration problem.
- People work informally, uninsured and with low wages due to the identity registration problems.
- Men and women, girls and boys aged 15-35 work over 12 hours in textile factories and restaurants while people over the age of 35 usually cannot find a job.

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2. Data on fires in the camps are based on interviews by Support to Life teams with Yazidi community leaders.
2. Introduction

500,000 people were affected from genocidal attacks by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) in 2014 to the town Sinjar that is at the west of Iraq, at the border with Syria which was predominantly inhabited by Yazidis. 5,000 Yazidi men lost their lives, 10,000 women and children were taken prisoners and over 400,000 Yazidis fled the country. According to official data from the period, 22,000 Iraqi Yazidis fleeing ISIS attacks sought refuge in Türkiye. According to field works conducted by non-governmental organizations, this number exceeded 30,000 in time.

While a significant portion of Sinjar refugees arrived in Türkiye between 2014 and 2016, an increase has been observed in the arrival of Yazidis in Türkiye since 2021, due to political turmoil in Iraq or fires in refugee camps. The beneficiaries who took refuge in Turkey before 2021 were placed in countries such as Australia, Germany and Canada through third country placement programs. Currently, according to the information shared by the Presidency of Migration Management, there are a total of 1500 Yazidis in Mardin, 1350 of whom are registered and 150 are unregistered.

This report covers obstacles faced by Yazidis that arrived in Türkiye in 2021 to access basic services starting from identity registration. The data and findings in the report are based on the observations of the Support to Life in the field studies in Mardin, especially in the last quarter of 2021. This report is a continuation of the “Access to Services of Yazidis Living in Mardin and Batman – Needs Analysis Report” prepared by Support to Life in May 2020.

The purpose of this protection monitoring report is to describe the registration problem of Yazidis who have recently arrived in Türkiye, to draw attention to the difficulties they face in issues related to basic services such as access to health and education services, and access to justice and social assistance.

The report also aims to open a space for action to solve the problems related to registration and access of Yazidi refugees to basic services, and to inform public institutions and non-governmental organizations working in the region.

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3. Methodology

The report titled ‘Registration Problem of Newly Arriving Yazidis in Türkiye’ was prepared in the light of case interviews with 22 Yazidi individuals who arrived in Türkiye in 2021, the database of Support to Life Association, observations gained during fieldwork, and the outputs of the meetings held with the Mardin Provincial Directorate of Migration Management.

The families interviewed for the study were chosen among those had just arrived from Iraq. Thus, it was aimed that the sample represents the segment that is the subject of the report.

Interviews were held with beneficiaries who requested support during the activities carried out by the Support to Life in Mardin.

Descriptions of individuals during interviews conducted in household visits conducted for needs assessment were evaluated not just quantitatively but also qualitatively and descriptions of refugees were included in the report in their own words. The study also includes information obtained from an in-depth interview with one of the Yazidi community leaders.
4. Background

Sinjar Mountain, whose highest point reaches 1500 meters, consists of mountain ranges. On the mountain, where water resources are limited, farming was done in the past. Yazidis, who lived mostly in villages located in the mountains until 1975, were settled in certain villages collectively in 1975 with a decision taken by the then Iraqi Vice President Saddam Hussein⁶. Yazidis call these villages “micema”. Today, the total population of these villages varies between 10,000 and 40,000.

Sinjar town center is at the south side of the mountain. Sinjar Mountain is also an important religious center for Yazidis. Thus, Yazidis have never severed their relations with the mountain completely and buried their dead to their old villages on the mountain when they had the chance.

Throughout their history, Yazidis faced the attacks due to their religious and social structures and they called these attacks as ‘Decrees’. As a result of the genocidal attacks of ISIS on August 3rd, 2014 known as the ‘73rd Decree’, Yazidis crossed mountain ranges in cars, tractors or on foot and sought refuge in Türkiye.

Upon their arrival in Türkiye, 1200 Yazidi families that fled ISIS massacre were placed at three different areas, namely Nusaybin district of Mardin province, Fidanlık Camp (Temporary Accommodation Center) established by Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality, and Uğurca Village of Batman. After the appointment of a trustee to Diyarbakır Municipality, the Fidanlık Camp was closed in December 2016. The Yazidis who stayed there were placed in the Midyat Temporary Accommodation Center, which was previously inhabited by Syrian refugees. Most of the Yazidis who lived in the Midyat Temporary Accommodation Center until August 2018 preferred to live in Midyat after the camp was closed. A small group went to the surrounding cities.

Although the impact of the attacks in Iraq seems to have diminished over time, in our interviews community members expressed that the Yazidi community in Iraq was uneasy and feared disintegration due to political pressure, since the organizations affiliated with ISIS have changed their names and are still active in the country’s politics. A community leader explains this in the following words:

"We have had 73 decrees throughout our history in the lands we were born in. We were killed, we were murdered. But we were never separated from each other. Our Yazidi community has always stayed together. But these recent political repressions are tearing us apart more painfully than the 73 decrees to which Yazidis were subjected. Our culture and religion are being forgotten; we are forgetting ourselves."

Male, 47 years old

Interviewed community leaders noted that recently attacks to Yazidis have changed shape because they made an impact around the world. Accordingly, fires constantly break up at camps Yazidis stay in Iraq and many people die or get injured In these fires⁷. In the Sinjar region of Iraq, two people lost their lives and 15 women and children were injured in 450 tents affected by fires in 11 camps where Yazidis lived in 2021 and 2022⁸. Again it was mentioned that kidnapping and murder incidents towards Yazidis in Iraq took place frequently. Some of the families who cannot live this setting continue to come to Türkiye.

The Yazidi families that come to Mardin recently were settled at Sanayi, Gölcük, and Işıklar neighborhoods of central Midyat. These are the same neighborhoods where most of the Yazidi families who left Midyat Temporary Accommodation Center after its closure in August 2018 are currently living.

It is important to evaluate the registration problem of the Yazidi community who took refuge in Turkey, together with both the international and local legal framework. As will be discussed in more detail in the ‘Legal Framework of Registration Problem’ section of the report, the basic regulation on which law is based is the Law 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) that is Türkiye’s first asylum law. LFIP entered into force after getting published at the Official Gazette of the Republic of Türkiye dated 11.04.2013⁹ and covers business

6 Namık Kemal Dinç, ‘Kanatların Gölgesinde - Şengal Dile Gelirse’, Zan Vakfı Yayınları
7 For some news on the media about tent fires, see The Washington Post, The Jerusalem Post, Middle East Eye
8 Data on fires at camps are based on interviews conducted by Support to Life teams with Yazidi community leaders.
9 https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/mevzuatmetin/1.5.6458.pdf
and transactions related to foreigners, international protection to be provided at the borders, border gates or within Türkiye upon individual protection requests of foreigners and temporary protection to be provided to foreigners who cannot return to the country they were forced to leave and who come to Turkey en masse.

According to the law, persons that are subjected to persecution at their own countries due to their race, religion, political opinion, nationality or membership at a social group or leave their countries due to such a risk, have to abandon their country due to indiscriminate violence; in addition, persons that cannot return to their countries due to risk of death penalty, torture or another degrading treatment have the right to benefit from international protection status in Türkiye. The law also regulates non-refoulement, application rules and processes in case of entry of asylum seekers to the country.

Yazidis that seek asylum in Türkiye with the migration movement that started in the last quarter of 2021 must be assessed in the scope of international protection according to LFIP numbered 6458. However, several Yazidis are faced with registration problem. Thus, there is need to make registration problem visible and conduct advocacy against this problem that obstructs access to primarily health, education, and social support mechanisms.

According to data shared by Mardin Provincial Directorate of Migration Management on April 6th, 2022, there are a total of 1500 Iraqi Yazidis living in Mardin 1350 of whom are registered and 150 unregistered. According to records kept by Yazidi community leaders, the number of unregistered Yazidis in Midyat is 450. Yazidi families earn their living with social Cohesion Assistance aids and working family members between the ages of 15-35. Refugees generally work in the textile, construction and food sectors. Their daily work is 12 hours. Almost all of the employees are unregistered. Earnings of working people vary between 1,000 TL and 3,000 TL per month. The interviewed refugees describe their working conditions as follows:

![You do whatever job you find here. Job opportunities are limited: construction, restaurants, textile. There are no other jobs. If we spoke the language and if we had permit to go to another city, we could have done the jobs we knew like apple production, beekeeping. Or maybe we would do whatever we do here but get paid better."

Female, 25 years old

![I graduated from Fine Arts Faculty in Iraq. Here now I’m working at daily jobs. I do heavy works such as carrying stones from 08.00 a.m. to 05.00 p.m. I am the only working person in my family of eight. We can barely make a living. I want to earn money with my paintings but it is very difficult to find a job like that without identity."

Male, 28 years old

Refugees generally live in low-rent houses, basements, ground floors or shared houses, as more than one family. Health expenditures constitute the most important item in the monthly expenditures of Yazidi families.

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10 See: https://www.goc.gov.tr/uluslararasi-koruma-istatistikleri. In addition, the said data was shared on April 6th, 2022 at the case management coordination meeting organized by the District Directorate of Migration Management and UNHCR.

11 The reason why the unregistered person data obtained from the Yazidi community leaders differ from the data of the District Directorate of Migration Management is that the unregistered beneficiaries that could not get appointments were not entered in the database of the Migration Administration. 150 unregistered Yazidis in the database of the District Directorate of Migration Management include people who have registration appointments.
6. Legal Framework of Registration Problem

Yazidis apply at Provincial Directorate of Migration Management for registration procedures after entering into Türkiye. International protection status determination interviews conducted with Yazidi families take about 1 to 3 days. As a result of interviews, people are given appointment dates to complete registration process. Necessary investigations are concluded within this date range as well.

With a decision taken by the Presidency of Migration Management in November 2021, applications for international protection were stopped for an indefinite time and restarted in March 2022. This one year period which registration applications were stopped caused foreigners to lose their rights and experience anxiety due to uncertainty. With the new regulation, Support to Life teams directed people who want to apply to the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management. After the interviews, it was learned that registration applications were received, but appointments for status determination interviews were made for 6 months later. The fact that appointments were given appointment dates to complete registration process. Necessary investigations are concluded within this date range as well.

According to Article 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), The High Contracting Parties shall secure to everyone within their jurisdiction the rights and freedoms. Here, the ECHR does not distinguish between foreigners or citizens by noting “everyone”. As a matter of fact, Article 14 of the ECHR titled “Prohibition of Discrimination” is as follows:

“The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.”

As it could be seen in the article above, the Convention regulates that states cannot discriminate between persons in its jurisdiction in terms of rights and obligations mentioned in the convention. Therefore, since the asylum seeker will now be within the jurisdiction of the asylum country, the responsibility for the protection of the person, the recognition of fundamental rights and freedoms and the access to public services, together with the right to asylum, belongs to the state from which the person requested asylum.

6.1. Protection in International Law Mechanism

Individuals have the right to seek protection from the state of which they are citizens. Protection is a right for the individuals and a positive obligation for the state of which they are citizens. When the state fails to fulfill this obligation of protection or is reluctant to protect its citizens, or when it wants to eliminate the legal security of its citizens, a legal mechanism substituted by international law comes into play instead of this protection obligation. The legal mechanism replaced by the international law is known as ‘refugee law’ and it provides the right to international protection.

Refugee law also determines the legal distinction that states make between their nationals and stateless or foreign persons. This distinction exists in law as a status, not as a negative situation, and is mostly regulated in order to secure the rights of refugees.

According to this law, people that had to leave their countries due to threat of war or persecution and who are in danger of persecution in case they return to their countries have the right to apply for asylum. This legal protection is based on the 1951 Convention Related to the Status of Refugees (Geneva Convention) and 1967 Protocol on Legal Status of Refugees.

6.2. Protection in Türkiye In the Scope of Law Numbered 6458

Since both the Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol are contracts signed by Türkiye, these contracts are considered a domestic legal norm in accordance with Article 90 of the Constitution. However, by making reservations about ‘geographical restriction’ in both conventions, Turkey agreed to grant refugee status only to people who took refuge in the country due to events in European countries. Thus, in Turkish legislation there are different protection types for persons that seek asylum in Türkiye due to events that take place outside of Europe. These different international protection types are described and regulated separately in Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) Numbered 6458 that is considered as the main legislation in refugee law. According to this separation, Iraqi Yazidis in Midyat are considered in international protection under ‘conditional refugee’ status. Conditional refugee status is described in LFIP article 62 as:

“A person who as a result of events occurring outside European countries and owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is
outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it, shall be granted conditional refugee status upon completion of the refugee status determination process. Conditional refugees shall be allowed to reside in Turkey temporarily until they are resettled to a third country."

Along with the legal right to stay, the asylum seeker’s access to other public rights and services is possible with the positive result of the application.

Access to public rights and benefiting from services is a matter of human rights, and the obligation of states to protect human rights is for everyone living within the limits of their jurisdiction.

On the other hand, it should be noted that in cases where foreigners’ applications for international protection are rejected, a deportation decision is made, another action is taken against them by the administration or due to their relations with private individuals, the right to seek their rights is guaranteed and protected. The right to seek rights is secured in 1951 Geneva Convention, in the Constitution, and in LFIP. Again, based on ECHR article 6, everyone has the right to fair trial and according to ECHR article 13, applying at an effective domestic remedy.

7. Problems Deepening with Lack of Registration

7.1. Access to Health Services

The biggest obstacle to accessing health services is the lack of international protection status for Yazidi beneficiaries. Unregistered families can only access health services and medicines required for their treatment for a fee. Families who cannot afford these expenses economically try to be treated at home with traditional methods and do not go to the hospital until their illness worsens. In field studies, many different health problems were identified, such as heart disease, cancer, orthopedic disorders, chronic blood pressure, psychological problems, chronic diabetes, growth retardation in children, lack of newborn vaccinations and inability to perform emergency surgeries.

My father’s coronary vein had to be replaced. He had no identity. He got surgery at a public hospital. He stayed at the hospital for 2 weeks. When he was leaving, we were told we had to pay 130,000 TL. They said, “That is what you have to pay. We cannot do anything unless you have an identity.”

Male, 22 years old

I’m four months pregnant, but I can’t go to the hospital for a checkup because I don’t have my ID. I could go only once and then I had to spend a lot for examination, medicine and such. The doctor said I should come for regular checkups. I will when I will have my identity. While fleeing the massacre in Shengal in 2014, my daughter, who is 8 years old today, was just a baby; she was not fed enough at that time and has growth retardation. I can’t take her to the doctor regularly.

Female, 34 years old

We have been married for four years but we can’t have children. We want to see a doctor and get treatment but we can’t because my husband has no identity.

Female, 28 years old

12 [https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2013/04/20130411-2.htm]
I fell and hit my head the other day. We went to a public hospital. There was a 400 TL expense. We had to pay because we had no identity.”

Female, 52 years old

On the other hand, it is frequently observed in field studies that the wounds of this massacre are still fresh in the Yazidi community, which is trying to escape a great massacre and start a new life. In the households interviewed, some family members stated that they regularly use psychiatric drugs. Some beneficiaries that were supported by Support to Life psychologists were referred to psychiatry service. However, they cannot receive treatment due to registration problem.

Neither myself, nor my daughter-in-law are well psychologically. we are using medicine. because we do not have identities we buy unprescribed drugs from the pharmacy.”

Female, 45 years old

During meeting Support to Life teams conducted with Mardin Provincial Directorate of Migration Management, authorities noted that beneficiaries in sensitive situations could be registered in case they could document their conditions. However, beneficiaries are required to check-in to hospitals for a fee in order to document these conditions.

An amendment made in 2019 in the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFID) has increased the sensitivity of people who have applied for international protection or who have this status to access health services. Article 89 of the Law titled “Access to Assistance and Services”, subparagraph (a) of paragraph 3 was amended by the Law published in the Official Gazette dated 24/12/2019 and numbered 30988. The provision introduced according to this amendment reads: “General health insurance of international protection applicants and status holders who do not have any health insurance and do not have the ability to pay will be covered by the general directorate for a period of 1 year from the registration of the international protection application.” With this amendment, the general health insurance of international protection applicants and status holders over the age of 18 who completed one year in Türkiye from the date of registration was terminated. There were ‘have special needs’ could not receive documents proving their special needs due to paid hospital admission. Thus it was observed that they could not benefit from health services. Unregistered beneficiaries cannot benefit from health services in family health centers and immigrant health centers, just like in hospitals.

Considering that the Yazidi community, which is very vulnerable socio-economically, cannot afford to pay for treatment and medicine by their own means, limiting health insurance and the fact that Yazidis that do not yet have international protection record cannot access free treatment leads us to conclude that there are major problems with accessing health services.

Between December 2021 and April 2022, 39 Yazidi beneficiaries applied to our case management teams noting that they could not access health services due to registration problems. Among these beneficiaries, there were pregnant women, those with chronic diseases, and those who could not meet their treatment needs as a result of an accident. Four beneficiaries were faced with high treatment expenses following the surgery they had at the hospital they checked in as emergency.
7.2. Access to Health Services

Lack of international protection registration causes problems especially for children to access education. Children whose education life is interrupted or who never attended school before, cannot enroll to school following their arrival in Türkiye due to problems and delays in registration process. With the ‘guest student’ application implemented in previous years, it was possible to attend the classes with their peers by going to the nearest school to ensure that children who had registration problems or were waiting for an appointment for registration would not be excluded from education. However, with the termination of the guest student implementation by the Ministry of National Education as of September 2021, it is no longer legally possible for children who have not yet been registered to go to school. This has led to the emergence of another barrier in accessing education services.

We came to Turkey 5 months ago. My children were going to school in Iraq, we brought their diplomas with us. But here they can’t go to school because we don’t have identity cards yet. They cannot leave the house. My 12-year-old son is withdrawn; not in good condition psychologically."

Female, 34 years old

Child’s lack of access education in this process brings along different child protection problems. Among these problems, child labor with its domestic and outdoor forms comes to the front. In the Yazidi community, which is already in a very fragile economic situation, children who do not have access to education, as in other refugee communities, may be forced to work. It was observed that children who cannot be enrolled in school are employed as child labor in industries such as textile and agriculture. Being employed in these jobs causes health problems in children and reveals risk of various accidents.

7.3. Access to Social Support Programs

It has been observed that Yazidis who have come to Turkey since 2021 cannot benefit from the social support they can apply for because they do not have identity records.

We did not receive social assistance. We applied, but we did not receive support because we did not have an identity card."

Female, 34 years old

One of the most common social supports that foreigners under international and temporary protection in Turkey can benefit from is the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN). In order to receive ESSN support, persons under protection must fulfil certain criteria. Support is provided to the following people:

- Persons who have a foreign identity number starting with 99,
- Women between the ages of 18-59 who are alone,
- Older people aged 60 and over who are alone,
- Single parents under the age of 18 with at least one child,
- Families with one or more persons with a disability of 40% or more14,
- Families with more than four children,
- Families with many dependents (children, elderly, disabled)15.

Newly arrived Yazidi families cannot benefit from the ESSN, provided they meet at least one of the above criteria, as they do not have an international protection identity card. According to the data provided by the ESSN Task Force Teams and the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SYDV), as of May 31, 2022, the number of refugee families under international protection benefiting from the ESSN program in Midyat is 76, and the total number of people is 533. Households with disabled people at home are given a disability pension of 800 TL within the scope of the ESSN program. According to the information received from the Midyat Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation, there are no Iraqi refugees receiving disability pension.

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13 https://www.unicef.org/turkey/%C3%A7ocuk-i%C5%9F%C3%A7ili%C4%9F
14 Disability status must be documented with a disability report to be obtained from the authorized state hospital.
15 This criterion is determined as 1.5 or more dependents per healthy adult aged 18-59 in the family.
7.4. Other Problems Related to Lack of Registration

The registration problems experienced by Yazidi families, who came to Turkey in 2021 to escape the political pressure in Iraq and the fires in the camps and who live in Mardin, Midyat today, result in inability to access basic rights and services, especially health, education and social assistance. In addition, in connection with the registration problem, refugees also face housing and employment problems. Difficulties in accessing basic food, heating and finding housing have left many newly arrived refugee families in a very difficult situation.

Due to economic problems, some Yazidi families live in basement floor apartments or shops they share. Especially the first arrivals in 2021 coincided with the harshest winter months which led to an increase in health problems and serious sensitivities due to heating and accommodation problems. The fact that legal procedures such as rental contracts, electricity, water and energy subscriptions, which are necessary for the continuation of daily life, cannot be carried out on their behalf, is also related to the registration problem of the Yazidis. In addition, Yazidis who wanted to settle with their relatives living in neighborhoods that were included in the closed neighborhood by the Mardin Provincial Directorate of Migration Management had to move to more distant neighborhoods within the scope of this ban. This situation causes the vulnerability of the already vulnerable population to increase and causes difficulties in meeting their basic needs.

On the other hand, Yazidis who are not registered for international protection work for more than 12 hours without insurance, for low wages, because they do not have work permits. Occupational accidents that occur with long shifts are also recorded in hospital records in different ways due to the lack of a work permit, leading to loss of rights.

Since the livelihoods in Midyat district are based on tourism and agriculture, they are very limited and seasonal. Yazidis, who generally work in the food and textile sector, cannot work in different districts or provinces due to registration and language barriers.

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In Iraq my husband was working as a laboratory assistant in a hospital. We have been living in Turkey for five months, where he started to work in construction and daily jobs for a daily wage. But he has a problem in his back, he can't work now because he has also stomach inflammation."

Female, 31 years old

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My father and I look after our family of 5 financially. My father got sick, now only I can work. I work in constructions if I find a job. I can't go to work regularly because I take my father to the doctor's for checkups."

Male, 22 years old

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Considering the density of refugees in various regions of Turkey, a total of 781 neighborhoods in certain provinces were closed to temporary protection registration, international protection registration, residence permit, temporary protection or change of residence for refugees within the scope of international protection and residence permit, except for newborn and nuclear family reunification.
8. Conclusion

As can be concluded from the field findings included in this report, the major obstacle in front of Yazidis who migrated to Turkey and continue to migrate to access basic rights and services is the problem of international protection registration. Although the registration problem of individuals with high sensitivity has been resolved through advocacy activities for public institutions, the problem of other beneficiaries is not solved yet. The termination of health insurance of people who are registered after a long-awaited appointment, leads to a resurgence of protection sensitivities and prevents free access to health services, which is the most basic right.

The presence of hundreds of Yazidis waiting to cross from Sinjar region to Türkiye shows that new arrivals and thus the registration problem will continue. It is important that non-governmental organizations, especially the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, carry out advocacy activities with the premise that the reasons for the newly arrived Yazidis to seek asylum in Türkiye are to flee from political pressures and cruel acts. On the other hand, in order to speed up the registration process of refugees, beneficiaries with high sensitivity should be reported to the relevant public institutions and individual advocacy activities should be carried out. In order to document their sensitivities, during first application of Yazidis action must be taken based on declaration and refugees should be provided with access to health services, even if temporarily. In particular, since the trauma and psychological sensitivities of people who have been subjected to the persecution of ISIS themselves or their relatives cannot be easily documented, a declaration should be taken as a basis in accessing such health services.

Yazidi children who cannot access education, could be admitted to schools based on initiative of school administrations and Provincial Directorates of National Education at the first stage; or Social Service Centers can take educational measures for children and open the way for children to go back to school. Non-governmental organizations can advocate for access to education and involving out-of-school children in psychosocial support activities, they can provide some support for these children fleeing war and persecution to overcome their trauma.

Finally, in this period when resettlement processes to a third country have slowed down considerably compared to previous years, the registration problem needs to be resolved in order for the refugees to start the resettlement process. Even if Yazidis want to go to a third country after coming to Turkey, they not only need but also have the right to access basic rights and services during their stay in Türkiye.
Interview

HOPE FOR A NEW LIFE IN LIMBO

Ömer Smoky is one of the thousands of Yazidis who left their roots in Sinjar and took refuge in Turkey. This community leader, who takes it as his duty to convey the problems of the Yazidis to the authorities, is also the unofficial memory of this community. Ape Ömer’s own story is like a summary of the discriminatory practices Yazidis have faced in different aspects for centuries over the last 50 years. Ömer Smoky conveyed both his experiences and the problems of the Yazidis, of which he is the spokesperson.

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Ape Ömer (Uncle Omer) is a member of Yazidi communities, numbering more than 30 thousand who came to Turkey after fleeing the genocidal attacks of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) against Yazidis living in Sinjar in 2014. One of the community leaders, Ape Ömer, both records civil data of Yazidis that sought refuge in Türkiye who live in Mardin, Midyat and acts as an intermediary between the institutions and the community in order to identify the needs and support requests of the community members and to provide this support.

The ISIS massacre that reached a peak on August 3rd 2014, caused thousands of Yazidis to go over the Sinjar Mountain to run to neighboring countries. Yazidis who reached Turkey were placed in the Fidanlık camp in Diyarbakır. When this camp was closed in 2016, some of the refugees settled in the surrounding villages and some of them settled in the Temporary Accommodation Center in Mardin, Midyat. This center was also closed in 2018. Today, Yazidis living in Mardin live in rental houses in the center of Midyat, but mostly in contact with each other.

The Support to Life Mardin team has been conducting fieldwork for a long time so that the Yazidi community living in the region can access rights and services. The fact that some of the Yazidis left the camps in Sinjar and entered Turkey as of 2021 is what we learned and followed through this close contact. We met with Ape Ömer to hear firsthand the reasons for the arrival of these newly arrived refugees, their current situation here, their needs and problems. But first, we will hear Ape Omar’s own story and the how the massacre Yazidis call ‘73rd Decree’ took place. We sit on the floor cushions in the airy hall of the house where the family lives in Midyat and press the record button.

65-year-old Ape Ömer has two wives and eight children. Today, members of this family live in different countries, just like most Yazidi families, who have to be spread to many countries of the world like ‘rosary beads’. One wife is in Germany, 3 children are in the Çem Mişko camp in Zaho, Iraq, and the remaining 5 children are in Midyat...


18 It is possible to use the expression “rosary beads”, which the Armenian writer Migirdic Marposyan from Diyarbakır used to describe the Armenians as the title of his book, inspired by his own story, for the current situation of the Yazidis.
Ape Ömer has been both the victim and direct witness of systematic state violence against Yazidis almost since his birth. He mentions that in 1975, when he was at school age, Yazidis were collected by the state in the village of Sinjar where they lived. His brother was lost, his brother was drafted. The entire burden of the crowded house fell on Ape Ömer’s shoulders. After getting married at the age of 20, he continued to study and graduated from the industrial technical college in 1989. He summarizes this period coincided with the 1991 Gulf War by saying “Like every Yazidi family, we experienced difficulties in general and financial difficulties.” The story goes on with all kinds of details, Ape Ömer narrates the events that stick in his memory year after year. The critical threshold is 2014.

DARKEST NIGHT

2014 is a completely different turning point for the Yazidis, the ostracized and attacked community of all times. As Ape Ömer said, life was never easy, but in 2014, when ISIS entered Iraq, this community, which had been subjected to 72 massacres and exiles in the past, was subjected to a genocide. On August 3rd, 2014, which is known today as the Yazidi Genocide Day by some countries, approximately 5 thousand people were killed and 400,000 people were displaced. Whereabouts of over 2,800 Yazidi women and children is still unknown. The night of that August 3rd, Ape Ömer’s family was among the tens of thousands of people who fled to Sinjar Mountain, some by tractors and some on foot. During the difficult journey, they first came to Syria and then to Turkey. After sending his family ahead, Ape Ömer stayed in Iraq and tried to find his missing family members. When he failed, he entered Turkey:

We were taken to camp in Diyarbakır. We lived in that camp until 2017. When that camp was closed, we went to Midyat camp. We had a lot of difficulties when we moved to the Midyat camp. Midyat camp was also closed 4 years ago. So we moved to rental houses in the city.”

Ape Ömer, who has been living in Turkey for 7 years, has an international protection record; but especially the financial difficulties they experience cause them to turn their eyes abroad:

We are refugees and barely make a living here, we have no income. We are having trouble paying our rent. The fact that the social assistance provided is under certain conditions is putting a drain on us. About 60 Yazidis with children under the age of 18 were able to use these benefits, but we could not benefit from them because the conditions were not met.”

“WE WORTH NOTHING FOR THEM”

According to Ape Ömer, who stated that the number of Yazidis coming from Sinjar to Türkiye has increased since August 2021 and that approximately 150 families have crossed the border, the main reasons for the increase in crossings are the fires in refugee camps one after another and the turbulent political environment in Iraq:

The Yazidi community worth nothing for the Iraqi government. First-degree relatives of those who support ISIS are currently active in politics. They go on with their lives as if nothing happened. Moreover, pressure from politicians is a factor. Every incoming party pressures us to choose them. If I lived in the country now, I could not continue my own business, farming, because of these political pressures.”

Although there are rumors like sabotage and the outdated electrical system in the camp being the cause of the fires, the reality is that the refugees in the camp are uneasy and are looking for escape routes. Pointing out that fires occur in all seasons, three fires broke out in one camp and 20-30 tents were burned each time, Ape Ömer states that they received news of fires from 9 camps in Sinjar.
“IDENTITY IS THE FIRST PROBLEM”

According to Ape Ömer, who closely follows the problems of the Yazidi community, the first problem faced by newly arrived refugees in Türkiye is access to health services in connection with the lack of identity. On the other hand, the fact that the general health insurance of people with international protection registration is limited to one year causes another problem. Because, with this new regulation, there are serious risks regarding the access of Yazidis who have been living in Türkiye for years to health services:

Provincial Directorate of Migration Management requests a report documenting health problems in order for health insurance to become active. When he goes to the hospital to document illnesses, the doctor does not report immediately; A fee is charged when you want to issue a report. This fee also puts pressure on us.”

Ape Ömer states that especially those who want to be treated without an identity card have difficulties.

The registration problem, which also caused us to write this report, is obviously the main problem that makes the Yazidis the other of the other in the refugee community. Yazidis, who anxiously await the completion of the application process without benefiting from basic rights and services, seem to be in a limbo. While many community members like Ape Ömer hope to transition to the 3rd country, they live here without dreaming or making plans for the future.

FUTURE WITHOUT A DREAM

At the end of our conversation, Ape Ömer’s son and daughter-in-law join us. Faruk, 26, and Basi, 24, have been married for five years. When I ask about their life in Turkey, the first thing the young couple talked about is financial difficulties. Both of them say that they work in whatever job they can find and that their job opportunities in Midyat are very limited. After working hard in a textile workshop for 8 months, Faruk got a job as a dishwasher in a restaurant. Basi has been working at that restaurant for 3 years. When it comes to their future plans and children, both Basi and Faruk are afraid of having a child because of their financial difficulties. He talks about the fact that they could not complete their education and that they could not dream without a diploma.

Thus, we conclude an intense conversation. Despite all their financial difficulties, Ape Ömer’s wife offers treats to us, whom she saw as guests. After the conversation is over, he takes us to the garden behind the house. This tiny place has been turned into a vegetable garden, fruit trees, peppers, tomatoes… Obviously, the family is trying to make their home as long as they can, with their farming knowledge from their past. The mother of the family, plucked the roses she had grown in the garden and gives them as gifts to us, women of Support to Life. Such a love of life blooms in a life tested with such pain… We leave with the stories in our ears, the colorful roses of the garden in our hands.

Gözde Kazaz
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