

# I AM HERE.. BUT I AM FROM THERE

The most important aspects of the suffering of the displaced people of Afrin, the challenges they are facing, and the mechanisms of integrating them into the host community

---

RESEARCH REPORT



Summer 2024



## Content

Introduction:	4
Methodology:	6
Reasons for choosing Qamishli as a place to settle:	7
Difficulty in securing living requirements due to high prices:	8
Difficulty adapting to hot weather is one of the most important obstacles facing forcibly displaced people in the host community:	9
Ability to adapt to the host community:	10
The most important aspects of the ongoing suffering of the displaced people of Afrin	11
Psychological challenges:	11
Aspects of cooperation between the host community and the displaced community in the social field	13
The extent of the host community's response to the needs of the displaced in the economic field	14
The level of psychological and social support provided by the host community to the displaced:	15
Legal and administrative challenges faced by the displaced in the host community:	18
The most important recommendations to alleviate the suffering of the displaced and find mechanisms that would facilitate and accelerate the integration process into the host community:	20

## Research Report

# **I AM HERE.. BUT I AM FROM THERE**

The most important aspects of the suffering of the displaced people of Afrin, the challenges they are facing, and the mechanisms of integrating them into the host community

Prepared by

The «Aram» Project in the Lelun Association for Victims  
Summer 2024

## Introduction:

The Turkish war by the participating of the Syrian opposition forces affiliated with it on Afrin, began on January 20, 2018 and continued for 58 days, ending with the occupation of the Afrin city, the center of the region, on March 18, 2018. This resulted in the forced displacement of more than half of the region's original inhabitants, and the occupation process was accompanied by human rights violations that included killings, arrests, and torture of the remaining indigenous population, as well as the seizure of their property and homes by armed factions under the so-called Syrian National Army supported by Turkey, according to what was confirmed by [local](#) and [international human rights reports](#).

Most of those interviewed expressed the circumstances of forced displacement they went through after the occupation of the region, recounting precise details about how they arrived in the Shahba region and from there to the areas East of the Euphrates, and from there to Qamishli. Each stage was marked by great psychological and economic difficulties and challenges. Some of them also referred to the cases of exploitation carried out by human traffickers in the towns of Nubbul and Zahraa against the people of Afrin fleeing the hell of war, as well as the traders of crises and wars in the Al-Jazeera regions.

Most of the displacement cases and their suffering were similar among the displaced people of Afrin. Some of them left towards Iraqi Kurdistan and returned with their families because they did not get a suitable job opportunity, and some of them were forced to sell their cars or their homes in the city of Aleppo to secure transportation, food and drink expenses for their families in light of the difficult humanitarian situation that did not respond to them adequately by humanitarian, human rights and relief organizations. The local media also did not play its required role in filming their suffering and the very difficult circumstances they went through.

Some of them were able to start over and succeed in building themselves, but that group was only a small minority, but many of them are still in a state of confusion without stability, so you see them moving between the areas of Shahba, Aleppo, Al-Jazeera, Al-Furat, Raqqa and Iraqi Kurdistan in search of better conditions and job opportunities that would save them from the state of chaos and instability.

The forced displacement also led to the creation of a clear rift and dispersion among relatives and loved ones; some of them were forced to return to Afrin, keeping in mind all possibilities according to the rule that says *"If there is death, let it be in my home and on the land of my ancestors"*, while others remained in the displacement camps in the Shahba area, looking forward to what the situation will lead to in the future and the realization of their dream of a safe and dignified return, while others moved with their families via smugglers to the city of Aleppo with the aim of completing their children's education, facing the challenges of the poor economic conditions in the city of Aleppo, but perhaps their children will have a better future. Others headed to areas east of the Euphrates hoping to find better job opportunities there.

In addition to those who headed to Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan and Lebanon, while attempts to reach Europe are continuing despite the dangers they are facing on land and sea routes.



The dispersion and scattering were not limited to relatives and loved ones only, but even extended to the same family, for example: a family residing in Shahba and one of its sons residing in Qamishli for study or work, and another who returned to Afrin leaving his children and wife in Aleppo hoping to get part of his seized property despite the security risks.

Most of the displaced people of Afrin who moved to the areas east of the Euphrates settled in the areas of Kobani and Al-Jazeera, but the Turkish threats and continuous attacks led to repeated waves of displacement towards Tabqa, Raqqa, Qamishli and Hasakah in search of security and safety. The city of Qamishli was the best place for the people of Afrin for several factors, the most important of which is that it is a city that provides all the requirements for living, as well as the availability of more job opportunities than other areas, the availability of investment opportunities and the establishment of projects in it, in addition to the fact that it is the area closest to Afrin in terms of social, cultural and political composition.

The number of families of forcibly displaced people from Afrin residing in the city of Qamishli alone is estimated at about 500 families, according to inaccurate statistics from the Afrin Social Association<sup>1</sup>. There are also (182) students from Afrin attending colleges and institutes of Rojava University<sup>2</sup> in the city of Qamishli alone, according to statistics from the university administration at the beginning of 2024. While (320) families are residing in the city of Al-Hasakah, according to unofficial statistics, distributed between shelter centers and residential neighborhoods in the city.

---

1 The Afrin Social Association was established in Qamishli in late 2021. It is a civil social institution concerned with the social and service affairs of Afrin's displaced people in the Syrian Jazira regions and represents them with other parties.

2 Rojava University was established by the Autonomous Administration in 2016 and currently includes several faculties, departments and institutes. Students from the Afrin region moved to it after the closure of Afrin University as a result of the occupation of the region in March 2018 by Turkey.

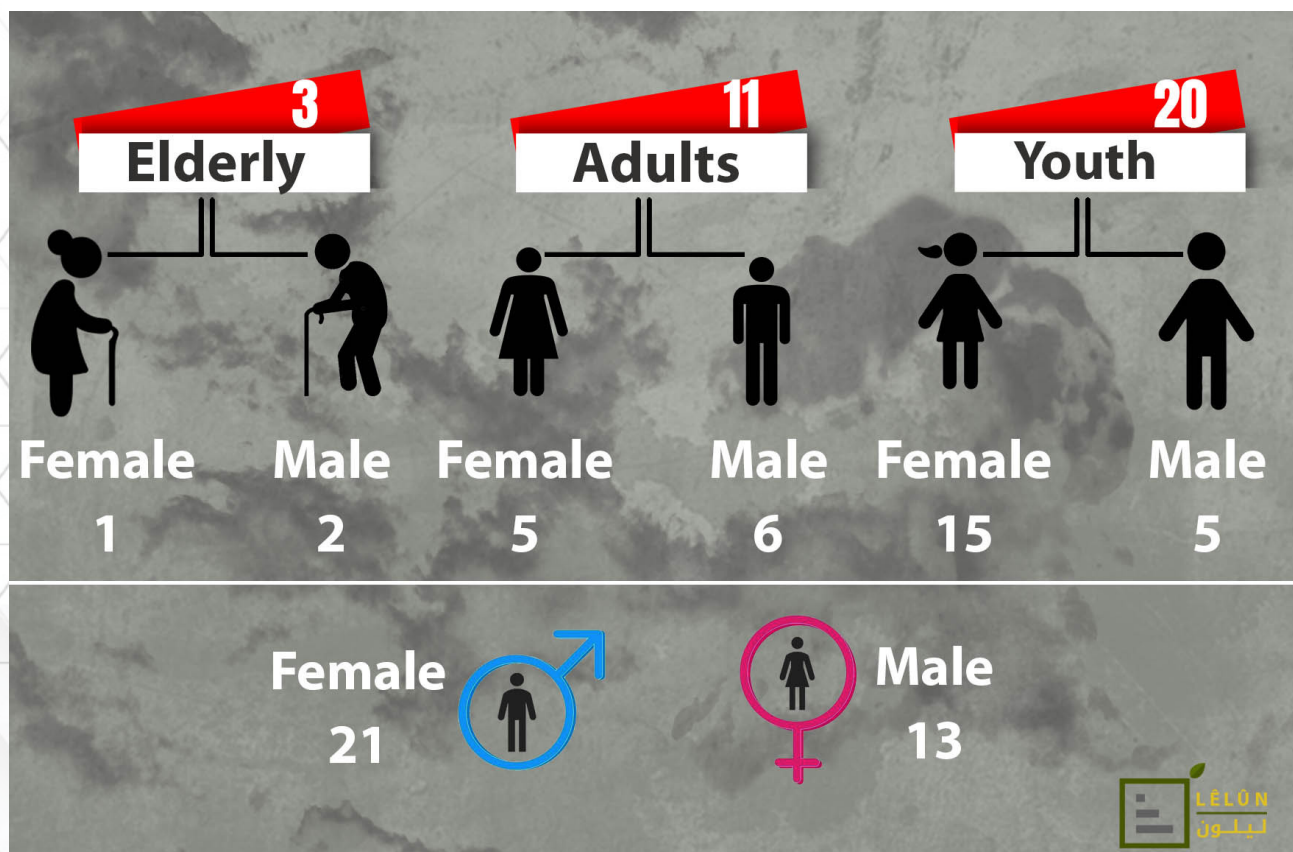
## Methodology:

Lelun In this research paper, depend on analyzing 34 physical interviews conducted with forcibly displaced persons from Afrin since 2018 residing in the cities of Qamishli and Hasakah (most of which were with residents of Qamishli). The interviews included different age groups; 13 males and 21 females, including: 20 youth, 11 adults, and 3 elderly.

The interviews were conducted by a number of data collectors from the Lelun team after receiving training on conducting interviews in a professional manner and filling out the form in clear, correct language, which was specifically designed to conduct these interviews with the aim of knowing the extent of integration of the displaced into the host community, and showing the aspects of suffering and challenges they are facing in places of forced displacement, thus the aspects that should be worked on in the integration process.

The questionnaire focused on the main aspects of the suffering of the displaced and the challenges they are facing, namely: psychological challenges, economic challenges, social challenges, as well as legal and administrative challenges, in addition to the difficulties of adaptation in the host community, and the levels of cooperation in the social, economic and psychological aspects between the two communities: the host and the displaced.

At the request of the displaced people who were interviewed, their personal information were concealed and their testimonies were presented under a pseudonym, which they chose themselves according to what is written in the interview questionnaire.





## Reasons for choosing Qamishli as a place to settle:

The report explains, through interviews conducted with Afrin displaced people residing in the Syrian city of Qamishli, the goals and reasons why most of the displaced people chose this city as a place to reside after their forced displacement from the Afrin region in March 2018. The reasons varied as follows, as the results showed that:

6 people out of 34 chose Qamishli because it is a relatively safe place, 11 because of the availability of job opportunities, 16 to complete their studies after obtaining their high school diploma in Afrin and later in their displacement area in Shahba because there is no university there, while 1 said that he/she came for medical treatment reasons.

“Gulstan/a pseudonym” is a teacher who was displaced on March 15, 2018 from Afrin to the Shahba area and from there to the city of Qamishli. She is the mother of two young men who were studying at the University of Afrin and left their studies due to displacement. A physical interview was conducted with her on June 25, 2024: *“On March 15, 2024, I was displaced with my children, my husband, and my sisters on foot from the center of Afrin. After that, we went with the convoys heading to Al-Jazeera to the city of Qamishli, where we stayed with some acquaintances until they provided us a house where we lived with my brothers and sisters’ families. Later, we got job opportunities and rented a house of our own.”*

Regarding the reason for her coming here and choosing Qamishli as a place to settle, she says: *“She moved in searching of a safe place, and she faced great difficulties at the beginning of her settlement, as she lived with her sisters’ families in one rented house, and they were unemployed.”* In this regard,

“Rolan /a pseudonym” who was interviewed on July 7, 2024, who was a student at the Faculty of Medicine at Afrin University, says: *“At that time, the decision was my father’s and a job opportunity was available for him at the university. I was a student at the Faculty of Medicine in Afrin, but I could not complete my studies because my department was not available here, so I had to work to help my family with expenses.”*

While Mrs. “Neroz/pseudonym”, a Kurdish language teacher who was interviewed in a physical session on July 6, 2024, said about the reason for choosing the city of Qamishli: *“By chance! We did not intend to settle in Qamishli. After my husband went to Iraqi Kurdistan, we would join him later. He did not like the situation there, and asked us to come to Qamishli. He came back here and we rented a house, then he arranged his work affairs here, we are still living here.”*

Regarding the housing and accommodation situation for the displaced people who were interviewed, 22 people confirmed that they live in rented houses, 11 male and female students live in student housing, while only 1 said that he lives in a house he owns, which he bought .after the forced displacement

After the displaced people lost their livelihoods and work in their villages and regions, and sought refuge in different displacement areas, some of them were able to find suitable job opportunities, and some of them were even able to develop private projects, but most of them

are continuing to suffer from instability in their sources of income as a result of their inability to manage their properties in Afrin after the armed factions seized them.

27 of those interviewed reported that their main sources of income were their daily work, 13 said that it was internal aid in the form of monthly aid provided by Rojava University to students from the occupied areas, and 3 people said that they had a private project that they were able to implement and develop later, while 2 people said that they sometimes depend on external sources from their relatives in the countries of immigration.

### **Difficulty in securing living requirements due to high prices:**

Most of the targeted interviewees confirmed that they are unable to secure all the requirements of their families due to high prices and house rents, and the low level of income as a result of low salaries that are often less than \$100 per month. Some of them even said that they can only buy meat rarely, and their focus is only on life necessities.

This indicates the continuation of their economic suffering, as only 2 people confirmed that they were able to secure all the requirements of the family, while 28 confirmed that they are unable to secure all the requirements for their families, while only 4 said that they are trying to secure what they need to some extent.

While the students residing in the university housing confirmed that the aid providing to them is not enough to meet their needs, especially since most of their families are residing in displacement camps and do not receive monthly salaries, after they had lost their property, livelihoods, seasons and means of living in Afrin, and they have no other source left, as the student “Berivan Khalil/pseudonym” who was interviewed in a physical interview on July 4, 2024 says in this regard: ***“I cannot meet all my needs, as the financial aid provided to us is not enough, especially with the significant increase in the prices of materials, the amount of money provided to us is not enough. There is no one who provides me any help, so I am forced to borrow.”***

While the student “Marbel Hassan/pseudonym” from Rojava University who lives in the student housing and was interviewed on July 4, 2024, says: ***“I cannot provide for all my needs as a university student, and my family’s situation is not good because we are displaced, I do not have a job, and I have to pay for my studies (printing lectures and university courses), which are basic requirements for us, this is difficult for me on many occasions.”***

“Khabat/pseudonym” says in the interview conducted on June 29, 2024, who works in one of the institutions of the Autonomous Administration is a father of two children and lives in a rented house: ***“We are facing difficulty in providing for all our needs due to the high prices of materials and rents. One time when my daughter got sick, I had to take her to the hospital and I was not able to pay the full amount, so I had to borrow amount to cover the hospital costs, and I have not paid this debt yet.”***

Mr. “Sipan Muhammad/pseudonym” said in an interview conducted on July 3, 2024 about his inability to secure his family’s needs: ***“No, of course, I cannot, because of the difficult living***



*conditions and the high prices of essential goods. My mother lives with me, she is elderly and needs medical care because she suffers from several diseases. We can hardly secure her medical costs in many cases, which forced me to borrow from my acquaintances and relatives, in addition to the operating costs of amperes and gas, the price of which exceeds 150 thousand Syrian pounds, which often requires me to use a kerosene stove.”*

Mr. Haji Muhammad/pseudonym, who was conducted in a physical interview on July 6, 2024, gives an example of the suffering: *“In a painful situation that happened to me that I will never forget; when I was living in the town of Tal Tamer, after I lost all my money, my car broke down, and I was forced to repair it due to the unstable security situation there. I had to borrow from two people, and although they were helping me, I wished I hadn’t had to ask them, when one of them asked to return the money with an increase of 100,000 Syrian pounds, while my car was still in the workshop and had not been repaired yet. In that moment of distress, I wondered why I was in these difficult situations, as my financial situation was good in Afrin, and I did not need financial assistance from anyone.”*

### **Difficulty adapting to hot weather is one of the most important obstacles facing forcibly displaced people in the host community:**

All interviewees agreed that the first challenge they faced was the extreme rise in temperatures in the summer compared to the weather in their region, and the difficulty of adapting to the desert plains of the region and the hot desert climate that hinders human activity and forces them to stay at home in many cases in light of the frequent power outages and the lack of means of cooling. This difference in geographical nature seemed to increase their attachment, longing and insistence on returning to their region, which enjoys a moderate climate, and where they were not accustomed to using air conditioners for cooling, nor even fans in most mountain villages. The lack of vegetation in the region, the scarcity of trees, forests and farms, and the scarcity of places for summer and recreation increased the difficulty of adapting to this environment.

In the interview conducted with her on June 30, 2024, Mrs. “Zanareen/pseudonym” says in this regard: *“There is a difference in terms of the natural environment, as Afrin has a temperate nature while the nature here is dry and very hot, until now I cannot adapt to this atmosphere, because our lifestyle has changed. Life here stops from one o’clock in the afternoon until four o’clock due to the extreme heat, and the atmosphere here lacks summer nights and evenings, and the region lacks parks and summer resorts.”*

The difference in the natural environment and climate has negatively affected the psychological state of the displaced people of Afrin, who used to resort to nature whenever they were at a loss and faced psychological difficulties, where the fresh air, the charming atmosphere and the beautiful nature are, as “Zakaria Afrin/pseudonym” clearly expressed in the interview conducted with him on July 1, 2024, saying: *“The environment of Afrin is moderate, there is no machine in Afrin called (the fan) because we did not need it, its atmosphere is pleasant. Afrin is a tourist area par excellence with its diverse terrain of trees, mountains, valleys*

*and rivers. I remember my house in Afrin and its charming view, no matter how stressed I was, as soon as I sat on my balcony and drank a cup of coffee, my mood would improve.”*

High temperatures are one of the first challenges that displaced people are facing in the host community. Student Maryam Abdo/pseudonym added in an interview conducted on June 30, 2024: *“One of the biggest challenges I am facing is the difference in temperatures. The summer in our region was moderate with humidity in the air, while here you find extreme, dry temperatures that resemble the desert without trees or water and no suitable sites for trips“.*

### **Ability to adapt to the host community:**

Most of those interviewed confirmed that they did not find great difficulties in terms of social aspects in adapting to the host community, as it has a Kurdish majority, most of its residents speak Kurdish, and their tendencies are similar in addition to the similarity of most of the common customs and traditions. They were able to form many friendships in a short period of time and quickly integrate into society, overcoming climatic and geographical obstacles and challenges.

In this regard, “Bave Jihan/pseudonym” said in the interview conducted on June 13, 2024: *“I did not find any difficulty in terms of dialect, as I am a student in the Kurdish language department, and even the customs and traditions are somewhat similar“.*

»Amina Muhammad” said in the interview conducted on June 29, 2024: *“I did not find any difficulty in terms of dialect due to previous mutual visits with some of our acquaintances from Qamishli, but our customs are not similar in terms of types of food“.*

While others reported that they faced difficulties in the beginning in terms of dialect, as the members of the host community did not understand them quickly, there are differences in some customs and traditions, and the influence of tribal customs is still somewhat overwhelming, especially with regard to the role of women in society, in addition to some religious influences on some aspects of life.

Rolan/pseudonym says in the interview conducted with him on July 7, 2024 in this regard: *“Of course, at first, the difference in dialect was an obstacle. The people of the region did not understand our dialect. I adapted to the environment with reservations about some terms that I still find difficult. As for customs and traditions, they are different from our region, where adherence to the Islamic religion is stronger, which puts pressure on us as a Yazidi religious minority. Here, we find some discrimination. However, in Afrin, this discrimination did not exist. For example, women’s councils during death cases differ from men’s councils.”*

Simav Ali/pseudonym, a displaced person who married into the host community, who was interviewed on June 28, 2024, spoke about the similar customs and traditions between the Afrin community and the host community, saying: *“Regarding customs and traditions, I did not face a big problem because the Kurds are generally similar, but we faced a strange situation*



*when my husband and I went to a wedding, where we had to sit separately because men and women did not accept sitting together.”*

University student Sizar Ali/pseudonym added in the interview conducted on July 5, 2024 that his lack of understanding of his professors' dialect was the reason for his failure at university in the first year, saying: *“I faced difficulties when I first arrived here. When I was at university and attending lectures, I could not understand the professor's dialect, which led to my failure in some subjects, and my lack of understanding of the dialect hindered me from achieving success in those subjects“.*

## **The most important aspects of the ongoing suffering of the displaced people of Afrin**

Interviews with the forcibly displaced people in the city of Qamishli and Al-Hasakah

revealed many aspects of the suffering and challenges that they still face despite the passage of more than six years since the forced displacement from Afrin. These obstacles and challenges become a reason for the difficulty of integrating into the host community, and living in isolation and distance even from their displaced community, despite achieving a good percentage of the integration process, especially since the Qamishli region is considered one of the regions and social environments closest to the environment of Afrin, in terms of the similarity of many customs and traditions, and the presence of an educated elite of writers, poets and politicians who have previous knowledge of the society of Afrin, as well as the presence of a kind of social openness, and attempts to get rid of the prevailing tribal customs that have only been formal.

The above-mentioned factors have contributed to creating a kind of psychological and social stability among the displaced and increased their level of integration and effectiveness in the host community. However, there are still many aspects of suffering that the displaced are facing, which must be worked on between the displaced and host communities in order to mitigate their effects and impact, thus increase the pace of their integration, which will contribute to increase community effectiveness and play a more positive role in developing the local community from various aspects. These aspects are manifested in:

### **Psychological challenges:**

These challenges generally appear in longing and yearning for their villages, homes and beautiful nature, feelings of alienation and instability, and the displacement complex and fear of displacement again.

Rolan expresses about these challenges clearly and deeply, saying: *“Since 2018 until now, we have been stuck in a time loop, which is returning home, and time causes me psychological suffering because the years pass and take away from our lives. The shock of displacement and instability, the fear of the future, the person residing on his land cannot translate the*

*extent of the pain we feel even if he sympathizes with us. I personally cannot plan for my future due to the impact of the shock from Afrin, as the war ended all our dreams, and we still live within the complex of displacement.”*

While the young man “Azad/pseudonym” who completed his studies at Rojava University in Qamishli and who lives in Al-Hasakah, was interviewed in Qamishli on July 22, 2024, recounts his painful memories of the war on Afrin, saying: *“We are constantly haunted by a lack of self-confidence, weak faith in solutions, and longing for our homeland. The most overwhelming feeling is the painful memories I went through; I was working during the war with the Kurdish Red Crescent, providing first aid to the wounded and injured... Very painful memories! I remember one time when we were providing first aid to the wounded, there was a young man among the paramedics whose features I did not recognize, I heard him calling my name, he was our neighbor’s son whose features were hidden by blood!”*

While the student “Avin Al-Ahmad” confirms that she was exposed to disturbing situations for her, which is that some members of the host community do not know the reasons for her coming here, and this affected her psychological state, regarding the reason for her forced displacement, as she says: *“I am far from my family, I miss them a lot, and I was exposed to bullying from some people when they said to me: Why did you leave your land and your home to come here? Don’t you have a university in your city? This hurt me greatly, because they do not yet realize that Afrin is occupied, and that we left our region against our will.”*

Perhaps the lack of knowledge of some members from the host community about the conditions of the forcibly displaced and the reasons for their forced displacement weakens their sympathy toward them, and thus becomes a cause of creating psychological crises and a negative reaction in the displaced person. Maryam Abdo expresses this very clearly, saying: *“One of the most difficult psychological challenges I faced when I arrived here to complete my studies, was dealing with the questions of the girls in the university housing. They would ask: Why don’t you study in your home city? Or why don’t you spend your holidays in your homes? Their questions made us feel surprised, as they had not yet realized that Afrin was occupied and did not know the details of the fear and suffering we had endured in order to get here.”*

Zilan Muhammad says in this regard: *“I am facing a continuous internal challenge, as I constantly tell myself: I shouldn’t be here, so what am I doing here? Every day that passes becomes much more difficult.”*

Student Marbel Hassan adds other aspects of the psychological pressures that Afrin students are exposed to and their suffering in their place of residence, especially during holidays, occasions and holidays. She says: *“One of the most important challenges I am facing here is being far from my city and my family. That is, we as Afrin students, visit our families once a year, only once! We cannot spend the holidays and holidays with our relatives and loved ones because of studying and the difficulty of the road, unlike our friends from the region who go to their homes on occasions and weekends, while we remain alone in the residence, and this makes me sad and depressed.”*



Student Joudy Hassan/pseudonym who was interviewed in physics on July 7, 2024, points out other aspects of psychological challenges that no one has mentioned before, as she finds herself a stranger and alone in the host community, and no one asks about her, she has no relatives or acquaintances here, so she says: ***“No one took the initiative to ask about my situation even though I am a stranger, and no one supported me, this made me feel sad, lonely and alienated, in turn this matter greatly affected my psychology and my studies.”***

### **Aspects of cooperation between the host community and the displaced community in the social field**

*The experience of forced displacement is undoubtedly very harsh for those who have experienced it, and its effects remain for many years and perhaps decades for those who have tasted it, but the extent of that impact depends on several factors, the most important of which is the role of the host community towards the forcibly displaced, whether they are sympathetic to his/her cause, or are dissatisfied with his/her presence among them.*

Lelun has closely monitored this situation through direct dialogue sessions between the displaced and host communities, through direct interviews with a sample of different social segments of Afrin's displaced people residing in the city of Qamishli in the far northeast of Syria, which is thousands of miles away from their region. The responses were somewhat positive, which made this city in particular and the Al-Jazeera region in general a destination for most of Afrin's displaced people who headed to the areas east of the Euphrates for several factors, perhaps the most important of which are; It is a city with a Kurdish majority and an open environment that is somewhat similar to the Afrin community in terms of civilization, openness and acceptance of others, in addition to similar ideas, the availability of job opportunities, and its relative stability, and the provision of most of the necessities of life, and that it is a suitable environment for establishing and developing vital economic projects.

*Although the community in Qamishli is a civil society, the simple rural and hospitable tribal character in relations still prevails, and the Kurdish national spirit is also considered a factor in the sympathy of the host community members to a good extent with the issue of the displaced people of Afrin.*

As Rancy/pseudonym was interviewed physically on June 28, 2024, and who held her wedding in the city of Qamishli, was attended by a number of the people of the host community, including her husband's friends, her friends and acquaintances, says: ***“There is cooperation in the social field, as there was a large percentage of the people of Qamishli who attended our wedding from our acquaintances and friends, there are also mutual visits.”***

Community participation between the host and displaced communities occurs in various social events within the circle of acquaintances and friends, participation in recreational trips, inviting them to the village, to attend a celebration or wedding party, to a cultural or political symposium, or perhaps sometimes mutual visits to each other's homes, until this community participation manifested itself to the level of marriage between the two communities.

»Bave Jihan” expresses this fact by saying: *“There is cooperation and strong relations that connect me with the host community, since my wife is from here, as my friends from the displaced and host communities participated in making arrangements for my wedding and provided me with assistance».*

»Simav Ali”, who married from the host community despite some opposition from the family, adds: *“I got married from the host community despite the opposition of my family, but it was not strong opposition due to concerns about the difference in customs and traditions. During my marriage, my friends organized a small henna party because it was not possible to hold a wedding due to the Corona pandemic.”*

For her part, the student “Berivan Khalil” added that: *“My friend and I attended the wedding of my cousin who married someone from the host community, and we spent a beautiful day, we learned about their customs at weddings. There is an exchange of visits on occasions with my friends from the host community.”*

“Salwa Muhammad/pseudonym”, who was interviewed physically on July 2, 2024, added: *“I exchange visits with the neighbors, and our relationship is good. We exchange conversations about our culture, customs, and types of food, so I feel happy with her presence.”*

“Soz Rashid/pseudonym”, who was interviewed physically on July 7, 2024, confirmed that: She was invited by one of her friends to visit her house, perhaps this would alleviate some of her feelings of loneliness.

However, a few of the female students who recently came to Qamishli from the Shahba region had a somewhat negative view, that they had not yet participated in any social activities with the host community. Zara Mohammed/pseudonym, who was interviewed physically on July 7, 2024, said: *“I was never invited by the host community to visit their homes, but I participated in some events without an invitation from anyone, but on my own”.*

### **The extent of the host community’s response to the needs of the displaced in the economic field**

Although Qamishli is a city in its urban and population nature, a pattern of village and tribal customs and traditions still prevails to this day, especially honoring and receiving guests and sympathizing with humanitarian issues. This is what happened to some extent with the displaced people of Afrin who came from the far northwest of Syria to the far northeast of it, but this was not ideal, for several reasons, including: the weak financial situation of a large segment of the city’s original residents who were state employees, and the other category was merchants and exploiters whose only concern was financial gain. Qamishli and the regions of northeastern Syria in general have become a destination for a large segment of internally displaced persons to provide relative security and stability, and provide various job opportunities, and the basic necessities of life such as fuel and electricity compared to the rest of the other Syrian regions, which led to it becoming a fertile environment for commercial investment.



“Gulistan” confirms the good reception of the host community for her and her family, as they provided all the economic assistance they could, especially since she received a free house for a whole year, after which she was able to get a job opportunity for her, her husband and her children later, then they rented an apartment.

“Rancy” also confirms the help of the host community in reducing the rent, saying: ***“Yes, part of the house rent was deducted for us because we are from Afrin, and the Afrin Social Association also put forward the names of some doctors who provide services to the people of Afrin with various discounts.”***

“Bave Jihan” also refers to this cooperation from the host community, adding: ***“Yes, there is cooperation from the host community. I speak from my point of view, the owner of the house I currently live in used to charge me a small fee (\$5) until 2021, but I did not accept that in light of the high prices, so we agreed on a monthly rent of only \$50.”***

“Khabat” added that he was able to benefit only once from a special discount allocated to Afrin’s displaced people in a clothing store. There are some initiatives from some workshop owners and from some merchants from the Afrin region as well as from the host community, this is done through the Afrin Social Association.

However, these initiatives remain individual and have not risen to the level of collective actions, the beneficiary segment is very small, so there must be other initiatives that are more effective and target larger numbers and broader segments of the displaced community.

Sipan Mohammed says that he did not receive any assistance, the discounts were limited to medical examinations by some doctors.

While Zenareen, who owns a clothing store, which she was able to open with her husband after forced displacement, expresses her dissatisfaction with the lack of cooperation from the host community, saying: ***“I have not received any assistance yet, but we are facing some difficulties in the high wages of the store, shipping costs, getting the goods, road challenges, workers’ wages, and other operating wages, since the store is in an upscale neighborhood and the costs are high.”***

Amina, who lost her son in the war in Afrin, also adds that she lives a very tragic life in light of her husband’s illness. She is forced to work two shifts and live in a bad house to get a living for her family and her husband’s medications, she confirms that: ***“There is no party that provides us with any assistance, but the Martyrs’ Families Foundation contributed to bearing the costs of my husband’s treatment and medications.”***

### **The level of psychological and social support provided by the host community to the displaced:**

The host community in Al-Jazeera region in general, and in Qamishli in particular, welcomed the displaced people from Afrin with satisfaction, and sympathized with their cause to a large extent due to their national and social ties with the Afrin community, to the point that some of

them had come to Afrin during the war to provide moral support.

This sympathy was evident through several initiatives that they carried out, even if they were individual, by the host community, such as receiving them in their homes for a period of time, providing them with houses without rent, providing some material assistance, and providing them with job opportunities in organizations, workshops and various departments, in addition to inviting the people of Afrin to visit their homes or villages or attend social and cultural activities as a form of psychological support to alleviate the impact of forced displacement on them, and to make them feel that they are in their own country and city, not guests or displaced persons.

In addition to the participation of the host community in supporting the Afrin cause through various activities, and trying to find common ground between the two communities, trying to provide what they can provide a safe social environment, which led to an increase in social ties and integration that led to the marriage of some young men and women between the displaced and host communities, as this phenomenon and relationship prevailed and developed significantly, indicating the development of the extent of the integration of the displaced community into the host community.

Those who were interviewed expressed all these facts transparently, and they also pointed out some weaknesses and shortcomings in the level of sympathy and solidarity with the issue of the displaced people of Afrin, as “Zakaria Afrin” confirmed this fact by saying: ***“Yes, there is support and sympathy for my cause. The cultural institution that I belong to commemorates the occupation of Afrin every year and revives cultural activities and festivals related to Afrin. In terms of psychological support, my wife’s family and some friends invite us every so often to visit them in the village among nature.”***

For her part, Rancy referred to the great sympathy and moral support she received from some acquaintances who invited her to the village to change her psychological state and feel that there are those who feel her situation and suffering, saying: ***“Yes, there was sympathy for my cause from my friends at university and work. I remember that my friend invited me once to visit her in Darbasiyah, I stayed with them for a day, and we spent time in nature. After the marriage, my friend invited me to her farm in Hatimiyah with my fellow teachers.”***

Azad also refers to the extent of the psychological support he received from his friends at university, and their sympathy for his cause and considering it their cause, saying: ***“The young men I met during my studies at university sympathized with me a lot. I have friends who hosted me in their homes and villages to relieve me and provided me with moral support.”***

In the physics interview conducted with her on July 7, 2024, Rojin Muhammad/pseudonym, confirms the positive role played by her university friends when they learned that she was displaced from the Afrin region. She says in this regard: ***“Some of my friends showed great sympathy towards me when they knew that I was from Afrin, and when I explained our suffering during the war and the details of our journey, it greatly affected their feelings.”***

Avin Al-Ahmad explains the level of support and sympathy she received from her professors at the university, and their appreciation of her psychological and social situation in this way:



***“Yes, I received psychological support from the university professors, as they understood our challenges when we were unable to reach the university to attend lectures due to road closures, or when the electricity was cut off. They would invite us to come to the university during exam periods to ensure that electricity was available so that we could study, or they would open the doors of their homes to us at any time. If we faced any problem, they would provide us with support and assistance without hesitation.”***

*Yara Mohammed/pseudonym, who was interviewed physically on July 3, 2024, confirms the support she receives from her professors at the university and the extent of their sympathy with her cause as a result of their understanding of her situation as a forced displaced, as they try to a large extent to provide a safe social and psychological environment so that she does not find herself a stranger, but rather she sees herself among her family.*

The student Salah Agha/pseudonym, who was interviewed physically on July 4, 2024, adds that he was able to feel comfortable and safe, as if he were among his family as a result of the sympathy and psychological support he received from his friends and professors, as he says: ***“Yes, I received some psychological support from some friends when they told me: ‘We are here, what do you need? Tell us and we will help you. Our home is your home, whenever you want, come to us.’ I felt that they were like my brothers and wanted to help me.”***

Amal Ali/pseudonym, who was interviewed physically on July 3, 2024, also expressed the extent of the psychological and moral support and sympathy she receives from her neighbor, who always stands by her and consoles her in her ordeal. She says: ***“Here are some of the people I feel comfortable with, including my neighbor in the neighborhood, who is my friend in the city. She supports me morally and always plants hope in me to return to my region. She also participates with me in many of the activities that take place for Afrin.”***

For her part, Zara Muhammad says that: ***“There is cooperation in this field from the host community, but it is very little and not at the required level, although some of my friends and professors at the university support my cause and sympathize with me”.***

“Media Hussein/pseudonym” stated in the physical interview conducted with her on July 6, 2024 that when she first came to Qamishli, she felt sympathy from her colleagues at work for her cause, as she says: ***“In this field, I received moral support from my colleagues at the center where I work, and support for the Afrin cause, and they used to say that a day must come when we return to our homes».***

From the above, it is clear that there is a good level of social integration by the displaced in the host community, as it has been shown that marriage rates have increased among the youth of both communities, as well as the participation of the host community in establishing economic projects, and the clear social impact of the displaced community on the host community and vice versa.

However, this is not enough, as the integration rate must be increased even more, so that the displaced community becomes more giving, productive and effective in all aspects. This requires joint efforts and cooperation between the host community and the displaced community, in addition to decision-makers from local authorities, the media and civil society activists side by side.

## Legal and administrative challenges faced by the displaced in the host community:

Interviews conducted with the displaced showed that there are legal and administrative challenges that some still face, which are limited to not bringing and possessing personal documents (personal identify card, family book), and thus their inability to register in the commune<sup>3</sup> and thus being deprived of several services such as fuel, domestic gas and subsidized bread..

Some also indicated that they cannot obtain identification documents for security reasons, and others noted that when they first came to Al-Jazeera, they were asking them for a sponsor as a condition for residency, but later a decision was issued by the Asayish forces<sup>4</sup> to consider the residents of the Afrin region as the rest of the residents of the regions of north and east Syria that are subject to the Autonomous Administration.

However, the most important administrative problem that Afrin's displaced people suffered from was their deprivation of moving freely in the various Syrian regions, especially between the areas east of the Euphrates and Aleppo Governorate. They were forced to go by plane from Qamishli Airport to Damascus and from there by bus to the city of Aleppo - where the majority of Afrin's people live, because the land checkpoints did not allow them to cross directly via the land roads to the city of Aleppo, where the Syrian state checkpoints forced them to return to the Shahba camps<sup>5</sup>.

“Simav Ali” says about the most important legal and administrative difficulties in the Al-Jazeera region that she faced as a displaced person from Afrin: ***“When I got married in 2020, and started the marriage procedures, I faced great difficulty in obtaining a civil status extract because my civil status was on Afrin. It took a long time and a large sum of money until I was able to obtain it here. Among the major challenges I faced when trying to obtain a passport, I faced security questions because of my civil status, as I had to obtain the passport from Al-Hasakah instead of Aleppo.”***

Rolan, the only young man, who suffered greatly from the procedures for obtaining a single person's ID card, which the neighborhood commune did not appreciate and did not provide him with heating fuel, so he spent all winters in the cold without a heater, is saying: ***“I do not have a personal ID card and the single person's procedure was not completed, because of the difficult procedures, I could not even register in the commune and spend the winter without a heater.”***

While “Gulistan” explains the legal challenges she faced by not bringing personal and family

3 Commune: It is the smallest social service institution affiliated with the self-administration. It is found in every neighborhood and village, and provides various services, such as domestic gas, heating fuel, bread, and sometimes relief supplies for the displaced and the displaced.

4 Asayish: Internal security forces affiliated with the Internal Authority of the Autonomous Administration.

5 Recently, in late 2023, the «Tayha» crossing between Manbij and Aleppo was opened, and the people of Afrin were allowed to pass through it.



documents, saying: *“Not bringing official documents with us, such as the family book and the ID card of my eldest son, prevented us from registering in the commune, and it also limited my son’s movement within the area for fear of arrest by the various security forces.”*

Knowing and analyzing the challenges faced by forcibly displaced people in general and the displaced people of Afrin in particular by the host community, decision-makers, activists and influential social figures imposes duties and tasks on them that they must perform to put an end to these challenges or at least mitigate their impact, which helps and contributes in one way or another to increase the social integration of the members of the displaced community in its various categories, and increasing the effectiveness of their role in community participation in several fields.

**The most important recommendations to alleviate the suffering of the displaced and find mechanisms that would facilitate and accelerate the integration process into the host community:**

- Supporting the livelihoods of forcibly displaced persons in cities in particular by local authorities and local and international civil society organizations.
- Supporting forcibly displaced students in particular who are studying at universities and institutes in host communities in order to complete their higher education.
- Promoting social and cultural activities between the host and displaced communities to exchange knowledge about social and cultural customs and traditions.
- Local authorities should work to take into account the legal status of the displaced persons and provide them with facilities to benefit from various services.
- Civil society organizations should provide various types of psychological, social, relief and legal support to forcibly displaced persons from Afrin in host communities.
- Civil society organizations should cover the expenses and costs of accommodation by providing in-kind amounts in line with accommodation fees on a regular basis for those unable to obtain adequate housing.
- Carrying out social initiatives that would increase the rate of integration of the displaced into the host community, such as cultural and social festivals, recreational trips.
- The host community should take into account the psychological state of the displaced community and try to provide all kinds of support to facilitate the integration process.
- Local authorities and owners of industrial and commercial establishments should give priority in work and employment to the displaced.
- Civil society organizations should determine a percentage of employment for the displaced as material and moral support for them.
- Supporting and assisting the establishment and formation of organizations and associations for the displaced in the host communities.
- Conveying the voice of the forcibly displaced to the relevant international and local human rights bodies.
- Highlighting the issues of the displaced by the local media.
- Opening the way for the displaced community and encouraging it to participate effectively in developing the social, cultural and economic foundations of the host



## ► About LELUN:

We are a group of daughters and sons of Afrin, who love its soil, are devoted to its olives, and we believe in the history of the fathers and grandfathers, and in fulfillment of their efforts and struggle in preserving the human being, the land and the trees, and in order for the trees to return to their splendor, and for the families and loved ones to return to their mountains, plains and homes, it was necessary to launch The ground is being prepared for the return of rights to their owners and the pursuit of justice.

The goal of justice for the victims was the main stimulus that generated us; Young men and women of Afrin who are jealous of its people, people and land, regardless of their nationality, sect, background or political affiliation, to establish an association for the victims of violations in this Afrin under the name "Lilon", to extend a helping hand to the affected women on an equal footing, by defending them.

"Lilon" will work to contribute to the prosecution efforts by providing evidence related to the violations committed against the residents and people of the Afrin region by all parties to the conflict, and to contribute to compensating the affected victims.

