

# Exploring adolescent capabilities among the marginalised Dom community in Jordan

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# Introduction

The Dom minority community in Jordan are a highly marginalised group who face multi-layered challenges in accessing their basic human rights. The Dom community is heterogeneous, with many different sub-groups. For the purpose of this report we focus on two main sub-groups: the Bani Murra (who consider themselves descendants of pre-Islamic Arabs) and the Turkmen (who consider themselves descendants of central Asia and speak Turkish) (UNICEF, 2016) (for more information see Box 1-2 below). There are no exact figures on the size of the Dom community in Jordan, as some classify themselves as Jordanian only; estimates range from 30,000 to 130,000. However, these estimates generally do not include nomadic non-settled groups, who are likely to be the most vulnerable (Williams, 2003; Al-Fdeilat, 2013).

Dom communities have historically been nomadic, premised on a belief that all human beings commonly own land (UNICEF, 2016). Those living a nomadic lifestyle have to move around frequently due to complaints by neighbours or landowners when they squat on their land (some are reported to migrate as often as every 20 days). However, increasingly, Dom communities (particularly from the Bani Murra sub-group) are settled, although some living in urban areas attach tents to their household to maintain a traditional way of living (ibid.). Dom families who live in tented settlements generally experience poor living conditions with a lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities and electricity, waterproofing and insulation (Williams, 2003; UNICEF, 2016). They also face high rates of malnutrition, which can result in other health conditions (Kırkayak Kültür, 2020). Many residents do not have access to water, resulting in challenges in maintaining good levels of hygiene, which in turn can have implications for other aspects of life and can act as a barrier to employment and education (UNICEF, 2016). These disadvantages are often compounded by discrimination, which can limit access to employment

opportunities and uptake of basic services such as health and education (Minority Rights, n.d). As a consequence of this discrimination, many Dom people learn to hide their identity at an early age, although some have recently started to reclaim their identity and go public about it (Williams, 2003).

Adolescents from the Dom community face many challenges, and have taken on adult responsibilities from an early age. Many are frequently involved in paid work to help meet their families' economic needs, often in temporary and informal work such as street vending (UNICEF, 2016). Child marriage rates are also estimated to be high, with Bani Murra girls tending to marry around the age of 15 years, and Turkmen girls marrying even younger, aged 12–13 years (UNICEF, 2016). In one study (UNICEF, 2019) ensuring 'sutra' (protecting a girl's reputation) was considered as one of the most important drivers for child marriage in the Dom community. Reflecting high rates of child marriage, child labour and discrimination, out-of-school rates for Dom adolescents are high – in one study (UNICEF, 2016), only 10% of Dom adolescents were in school.

More broadly, however, there is a significant lack of data on the status and well-being of young people from the Dom community in Jordan. This report aims to bridge this gap, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's broader commitment to ensure that no one is left behind. We draw on findings from qualitative interviews conducted in September and October 2020 with adolescent boys and girls (aged 10–19 years), their primary caregivers, and key informants from the Bani Murra and Turkmen communities. The report presents findings on the six capability domains explored by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal research study. This report will be complemented by a policy brief presenting findings from an evaluation of the impact of UNICEF's Makani ('My Space') programme on Dom adolescents in Jordan.

### Box 1: Bani Murra

Language: Domari (mix of Turkish, Kurdish, Farsi and Hindi) but also speak Arabic.

Religion: Majority are Muslim, some are Christian. However, some religious practices are distinct from both Islam and Christianity – for example: (1) a particular name for the deity (Quiyah), although 'Allah' is often used as well; (2) a concept of sin related to ethical and moral interaction with others; (3) a temporal concept of judgement for violations; and (4) no belief in an afterlife (Williams, 2005).

History: Migrated from South Asia in the sixth century and made their way through the Middle East. There are at least five different tribes in Jordan and they are highly fragmented due to multiple waves of historical migration. The Tamarzeh tribe (Jordanian Dom) are the largest and have been in Jordan since before the Kingdom was founded. The other tribes are made up of Palestinian Dom and other smaller families, mainly from Iraq and Syria.

Living situation: Some members of the Bani Murra community have settled; other, smaller groups continue to live a nomadic lifestyle.

### Box 2: Turkmen

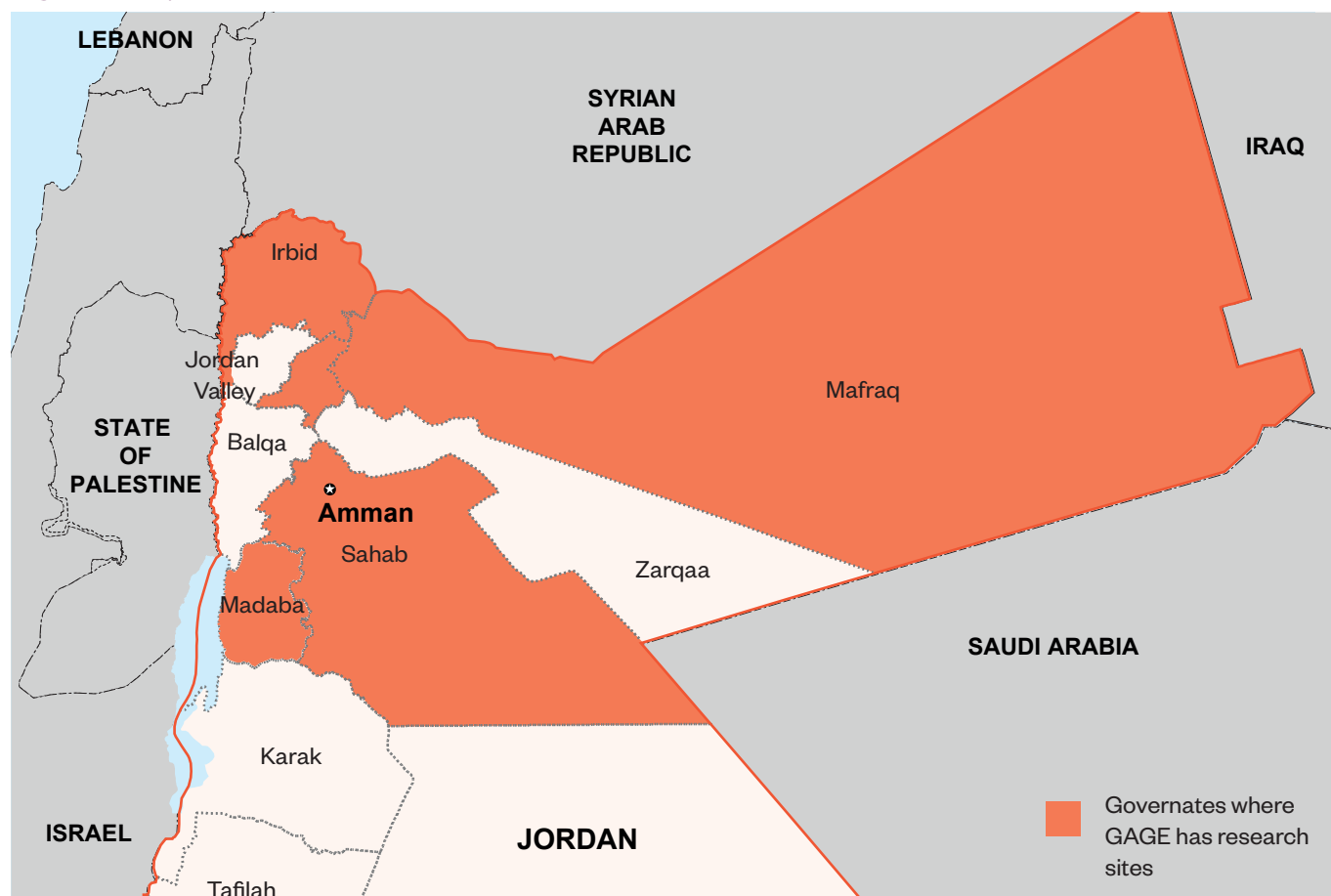
Language: Turkish.

Religion: Majority are Muslim.

History: Migrated from central Asia over several hundred years, beginning in the seventh century AD. Some migrated later during the Ottoman Empire.

Living situation: The Turkmen community preserves a nomadic way of life and seasonally migrates between the Jordan Valley, Zarqa, Sahab/Amman and Madaba.

Figure 1: Map of GAGE research sites



Source: Based on the UNHCR Jordan situational map of Jordan as of 2018 and modified to show GAGE research sites

# GAGE conceptual framework and methods

## Conceptual framework

GAGE's conceptual framework takes a holistic approach to adolescents' development by through paying close attention to the interconnectedness of the '3 Cs': capabilities, change strategies and contexts (which draws on Pawson and Tilley's (1997) evaluation approach). The concept of capability outcomes – first championed by Amartya Sen (1984; 2004) and later nuanced to better capture complex gender dynamics by Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Naila Kabeer (2003) – provides a framework in which to explore the kinds of assets needed for individuals to achieve valued ways of 'doing and being'. GAGE focuses on adolescent outcomes in six capability domains: education and learning; bodily integrity and freedom from violence; health, nutrition and sexual and reproductive health; psychosocial well-being; voice and agency; and economic empowerment. We also recognise that these capabilities are context dependent and that this framework is situated in adolescents' contextual constraints at the family, household, community, state and global levels. Finally, these contextual realities are dependent on a number of change strategies – such as integrated interventions for adolescents and their families, and system-level change – that can transform adolescents' lives (for more information on GAGE's conceptual framework, see GAGE consortium, 2019).

## Sample and data collection

This report draws on qualitative data collected with the Turkmen and Bani Murra minority communities across Jordan in 2020 by GAGE in partnership with UNICEF Jordan. The sample includes 60 adolescents (26 boys, 34 girls), 25 parents and 18 key informants (including service providers such as teachers and healthcare workers and UNICEF's Makani programme facilitators). The sampling process was supported by UNICEF Jordan and Makani programme staff. The research employed qualitative methods, including face-to-face individual and group interviews. Enumerators received in-depth training and, due to the covid-19 pandemic, followed strict social distancing measures to ensure the safety of researchers and participants in line with United Nations (UN) and national guidance.

Interviews were conducted by GAGE Jordan enumerators of the same sex as the interviewee, and focus group discussions were conducted in single-sex groups. Qualitative tools consisted of participatory activities such as social network hexagons, friendship circles and community mapping to encourage rich discussions (for more information on these tools, see Jones et al., 2019a; 2019b) (see also Table 2).

In accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' call to 'leave no one behind', we also included

**Table 1. Overview of adolescent study sample**

	Married, engaged or divorced	Single	In school	Out of school	Makani	No Makani	Total
Younger male (10–14)	0	14	6	8	8	6	14
Younger female (10–14)	5	11	5	11	8	8	16
Older male (15–18)	2	10	2	10	6	6	12
Older female (15–18)	10	8	5	13	10	8	18
<b>Total</b>	17	43	18	42	32	28	60

**Table 2. Overview of qualitative tools**

Tool type	Turkmen	Bani Murra	Total number of interviews
My favourite thing adolescent individual interview	14	13	27
Marriage chain adolescent individual interview	4	2	6
Mother individual interview	7	7	14
Father individual interview	6	5	11
Social network hexagon	14	13	27
Friendship circle adolescent focus group discussion (FGD)	4	5	9
Community norms adult FGD	1	2	3
Community leaders adult FGD	1	1	2
Community mapping adolescent FGD	2	2	4
Makani most significant change (MSC) adolescent FGD	8	8	16
Key informant interviews	9	9	18
Total	70	67	137

particularly marginalised adolescents such as girls who are (or had been) married. To better understand the effects of UNICEF's Makani programme on Dom adolescents' capabilities, we also included participants and non-participants in the sample (see Table 1 for overview of the sample).

Daily and site-wide debriefings were undertaken to feed into preliminary data analysis. Interviews were transcribed and translated into English and then coded thematically using the qualitative software analysis programme MAXQDA, using a codebook informed by GAGE's conceptual framework.





# Results

## 1 Education and learning

### Access to education

Adolescents and their parents place a high level of value on education, with many adolescents (both Bani Murra and Turkmen) stating that *'nothing is better than education'* (17-year-old Turkmen boy). Many parents did not want their children to follow a similar path to their own. As highlighted by the mother of a girl from the Bani Murra community, there have been intergenerational shifts in the priority attached to education: *'Now we are educating our children, not like in our time. I mean, your studies are a weapon for you. You can help yourself to advance.'* Community leaders highlighted that this shift in parents' educational aspirations for their children may be driven by a reduction in migration and an increasing number of families settling in one place.

Despite this, and due to a range of factors, many children from the Bani Murra and Turkmen communities have either not attended school at all or dropped out at an early age. In our sample, only 29% of girls and 31% of boys were attending formal schooling. Our research highlighted a number of barriers preventing children from attending school, including economic challenges and lack of transportation. A Bani Murra mother of an adolescent girl stressed a feeling of powerlessness over her children's education: *'Now I love to teach my children ... but there are things that are out of my control ... Look, my daughter also needs a bus ... She needs a bus to go [to school].'*

Turkmen parents face greater challenges in sending their children to school due to their nomadic lifestyle. Frequent migration can result in many adolescents unable to enrol in school. *'We don't have a house in order to register at school. We keep leaving, we don't settle down in one place,'* explained a 16-year-old Turkmen girl.

Furthermore, Turkmen families are generally quite isolated from the rest of Jordanian society, which can lead to some parents lacking the information they need to enrol their children in school. As a Turkmen mother whose seven children are all out of school explained: *'We've never registered. No one has told us. Where shall I register them? It's better to learn while they are young. Now, they are*

*growing up. How can they learn?'* Multiple respondents also cited the discrimination they face from teachers and other students as a barrier to enrolling their children in schools.

Once out of school, there are significant challenges in rejoining at a later age, as the head of a Makani centre described: *'When they miss the first three years of their primary education and then they start to learn from 13 or 14 years it becomes hard for them to receive education services. Even the way they hold a pen or their passion for this, it's not there.'*

### Quality of learning

Dom adolescents who are able to attend school face further challenges to receiving a quality education. Learning outcomes appear to be poor, with many adolescents reporting that they or their peers are unable to read or write (learning outcome are further impacted by the covid-19 pandemic see Box 3). As a 17-year-old Bani Murra girl participating in a focus group discussion (FGD) stated: *'I know a lot of Tawjihi [grade 12 national exam] girls that cannot write the letter S to this day!'* Another 17-year-old girl in the FGD added: *'One of my classmates, she can't write. The teacher asks her to write on the board but she cannot.'* Many respondents were unhappy with the quality of teaching provided, explaining that teachers were *'always in a rush ... to leave the class'* (17-year-old Bani Murra boy), *'only read[ing] from the book'* (11-year-old Turkmen girl) or *'writ[ing] so fast ... I've never understood him, not once'* (13-year-old Bani Murra boy). Students are moved up to the next grade without achieving adequate learning competencies, resulting in adolescents who are illiterate, even at higher levels of education. Furthermore, many Turkmen families primarily speak Turkish, and this language barrier can pose a significant challenge to children and adolescents' learning, especially as there

**Now we are educating our children, not like in our time. I mean, your studies are a weapon for you. You can help yourself to advance.**

(The mother of a girl from the Bani Murra community)

**Box 3: Implications of the covid-19 pandemic for access to education**


The covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities in education among both the Bani Murra and Turkmen communities. Due to current restrictions in Jordan, education has been delivered by the Ministry of Education's online service (Darsak.jo), with additional remote learning services delivered through two national TV channels. Dom adolescents and their parents expressed significant challenges in accessing online education, due to a lack of access to devices and poor (and, in the case of some Turkmen adolescents, non-existent) internet access. As a Bani Murra mother explained: *'Education is now through distanced learning! They could barely pass in their schools, how could they succeed through distanced learning? We can't keep buying internet credits for the phones to teach our kids. I mean I have four kids – I don't have money to buy internet credit every day to study through distance learning!'*

Many adolescents highlighted difficulties in following online education classes and missed the face-to-face support from teachers. Furthermore, due to the high illiteracy rates among the Dom community, adolescents are often unable to turn to their parents for support with schooling at home. As highlighted by a Bani Murra community leader: *'My daughters also complain about the difficulty of education, they say that teachers explain the lesson orally and tell the students to study at home. Who will teach them at home? Their mother is illiterate and can't teach them, and I am also illiterate.'*

are no mother-tongue classes at primary school level for them. In addition, frequent migration may impact Turkmen adolescents' learning outcomes.

Discrimination by teachers against students from the Bani Murra and Turkmen communities also appears common. Although Dom students often require additional support from teachers, many do not receive this, and describe instances of being ignored or neglected by their teachers. A 13-year-old Bani Murra girl described her frustration: *'She keeps writing, while we keep begging ... We keep begging the teacher and raise our hands ... "Let us participate, teacher!"'* This was also highlighted by the (Bani Murra) mother of an adolescent girl: *'When they are normal children, they teach them, but gypsies they do not teach them.'*

When struggling to keep up with lessons, several interviewees reported being met with anger or violence from teachers, who often appear to have little patience or understanding of the reasons why they are struggling to learn. A 10-year-old Bani Murra boy explained his experience: *'I told him that I can't write in English! Then he beats me, he wants me to write by force, but I tell him that I can't! Then I say to him, I am going to leave this school.'*

 I dropped out. We dropped out. Boys argued with us. They want to beat us because I'm a Turkmen.

(A 16-year-old Turkmen boy)

**School dropout**

School dropout is extremely common among both communities. Violence and bullying from their peers is a significant contributor to the high rates of early school-leaving. Adolescent boys and girls described being relentlessly bullied, physically and verbally, by their peers. Turkmen adolescents in particular faced significant discrimination from their peers. *'I dropped out. We dropped out. Boys argued with us. They want to beat us because I'm a Turkmen'*, explained a 16-year-old Turkmen boy. Corporal punishment – which is widespread in boys' schools in Jordan (Jones et al., 2019c) – is another key reason why boys drop out of school. A 17-year-old Bani Murra boy added: *'I dropped out of school because teachers hit the students.'*

Reasons for dropout are highly gendered. While boys are expected to leave school for paid work to support the household, girls are often expected to leave to undertake unpaid care work, such as looking after younger siblings. A 13-year-old Bani Murra girl described her experience: *'I used to know how to read and write, but when my mother had the baby boy, she made me leave school to take care of him.'* All married adolescents in our sample were out of school, either because they had never attended at all or because they dropped out for various reasons (such as looking after younger siblings, experiencing sexual harassment outside school, or bullying in school). Key informants highlighted that early marriage was a key reason why girls left school early, particularly among the Turkmen, who tend to marry at an earlier age than their

**My daughter got first place in the university [and] wants to obtain a Master's degree in law. She went to the university professors, but they mocked her because she is a gypsy, they broke her morale. ... Isn't she a human being and has the right to speak?**

(A Bani Murra community leader)

Bani Murra counterparts. As girls get older, social norms that dictate mobility restrictions can make it difficult to stay in school, so they are often pulled out of school once they reach mid-adolescence. As highlighted by a Makani centre key informant: *'The parents stop bringing them to school when they reach 13 years old or maybe before, they don't reach 8th grade, his father stops bringing her to school, he'll tell you "my daughter has grown up" or "she's a big girl now".'* This is also influenced by high levels of sexual harassment of girls on the way to school and outside the school gates. A 15-year-old Bani Murra girl described how this led to her parents removing her from school: *'When my mother saw guys coming to the school and that the school is not controlled, she said: "There is no need to go to school as you can read and write. That's enough." Every day the police restricted the bad boys. Every day, there were cars. So, my parents didn't like this situation.'*

Gender dynamics in the household also influence decision-making over school dropout. Whereas girls are generally pulled out of school by their parents, boys tend to decide to drop out of their own accord, and often against their parents' wishes. A Bani Murra mother who pulled her daughter out of school due to safety concerns describes taking the opposite approach when it comes to her son's education: *'The boy no longer wants to go [to school] by himself. [He hated it because] they [boys] were beating him. I tell him "you have to go" and I send him and he goes, and on the second day he sits and does not enter class at all, the teacher told me about him ... He plays around the school, but outside, far from the school.'* Truancy among boys appears common; they pretend to go to school but hang out with friends outside the school gates instead.

In our study sample, there was a clear absence of Bani Murra and Turkmen adolescents reaching tertiary education. The only mention of a Bani Murra adolescent attending university underscores the discrimination faced by members of the Dom community even at higher levels

of education. A Bani Murra community leader explained his daughter's experience: *'My daughter got first place in the university [and] wants to obtain a Master's degree in law. She went to the university professors, but they mocked her because she is a gypsy, they broke her morale. She studied by heart, but the professors at the university do not allow her to debate and talk. Isn't she a human being and has the right to speak?'*

## 2 Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

### Corporal punishment by caregivers and teachers

Adolescents in our sample reported experiencing significant levels of violence in many aspects of their lives. Violence perpetrated by teachers in school is severe and, as highlighted in section 3.1, is a key driver of school dropout. Adolescents describe being hit with sticks or belts and being slapped by teachers, often for reasons outside of their control. Violence is not only used as a method of punishment for misbehaviour but also for things such as not understanding lessons, failing exams or turning up late. A 14-year-old Bani Murra girl described her brother's experience: *'We had a funeral in the family, so he [brother] did not attend the lesson. He [teacher] hit him, he pulled his ears and lifted him from his ears until they bled and he hit him with a stick on his hands.'*

The majority of school violence is directed towards boys; girls are much less likely to be beaten by teachers. Some age differences are also apparent, and adolescents noted the reduction in corporal punishment at higher levels of education: *'In 9th and 10th grades, there is less, because the youth became quieter, but before these grades, there is a lot of beating,'* explained a 16-year-old Bani Murra boy. Although violence seems to be aimed towards both Dom students and Jordanian students, with teachers being *'unjust to all students'* (17-year-old Bani Murra boy), some adolescents (mostly Turkmen) described being verbally abused by teachers because of their ethnic minority status. As an 18-year-old Turkmen girl described: *'They [teachers] were laughing at us because we are Turkish, [they were] mocking us.'*

Some adolescents also reported experiencing corporal punishment from caregivers, although most respondents from the Turkmen community said they do not get beaten

▶ If a girl runs away, it becomes a scandal and a shame for the family, so they either kill her or burn her. They don't do anything to the male. They don't beat the boy. A boy is never disgraced!

(A 12-year-old Bani Murra girl)

by their parents. Violence from caregivers among the Bani Murra community, on the other hand, seems more widespread, and in some cases consists of more extreme forms of violence such as *'burn[ing] ... by a spoon'* (11-year-old Bani Murra boy) or beating with *'gas rubber pipe, sticks, kicks and slaps'* (12-year-old Bani Murra boy). Again, such violence appears more prevalent among younger children, with corporal punishment seeming to stop at older ages. Adolescent boys are usually punished for disobeying their parents or being involved in negative behaviours such as smoking and swearing. In some cases, older brothers take on the household head roles and punish their siblings for misbehaving.

In addition, some girls reported facing the threat of violence from their parents if they are perceived to be in danger of ruining their reputation. For example, a 15-year-old Bani Murra girl reported being *'hit many times'* when her boyfriend came to her family's house. As a 12-year-old Bani Murra girl explained the different consequences for boys and girls of transgressing norms around family honour: *'If a girl runs away, it becomes a scandal and a shame for the family, so they either kill her or burn her. They don't do anything to the male. They don't beat the boy. A boy is never disgraced!'*

Some parents, however, do not want to repeat their own childhood experiences and are trying to use alternative forms of discipline. The father of a Bani Murra adolescent boy explained: *'If I beat the boy, he will become more adamant. This thing was present in me and I am still living my childhood. If anyone would prevent me from smoking, I will go to smoke. So, I try to be political. I like this political style, to talk to the boy and make him understand that it is forbidden, more than the attitude when I used to beat. It has a much greater effect.'*

## Peer violence, bullying and community violence

Bullying from peers was reported to be extreme and often relentless. Boys and girls, Turkmen and Bani Murra, explained that they face frequent verbal bullying and name-calling, and physical violence such as stone-throwing. Adolescents, particularly younger boys and girls, described being bullied for being *'dirty'*, *'poor'* or having *'darker skin'*. A 12-year-old Bani Murra girl recounted her experience: *'She told me, "You're dirty." All of my friends held a group breakfast. I sat alone, my stuff was with them and I didn't eat. Then, she started to tell me, "Stay away, stay away. You're poor." I go to the bathroom and cry.'*

Although most of this bullying is verbal, there were some reports of severe physical violence, mainly between boys. The mother of an adolescent described her son's experience: *'When they beat him in his face, he became resistant to go to school. A boy in his class when he was at the 5th grade [hit him] with a ceramic shard, it made a scar on his face, so he was psychologically traumatised by it.'*

As well as being subject to violence from people outside the Dom community, adolescents in our sample described experiencing violence from each other (Bani Murra perpetrating violence against Turkmen, and vice versa) and, in some cases, perpetrating violence against teachers and other adults. Adolescent boys described using violence as a way to defend themselves: *'If a person hits me strongly, I will hit him back. Why will I not get my right by my own hand?'* asked a 13-year-old Bani Murra boy. Violence has become normalised within many parts of the community, with reports of youth violence perpetrated by gangs who *'carry knives to show off'* (12-year-old Bani Murra boy) or have *'hidden the razor in her teeth'* (14-year-old Bani Murra girl). Furthermore, even within each minority community, significant violence occurs between neighbours (for Turkmen families this is often prompted by land disputes). In these cases, whole families may get involved when fights occur. As a 17-year-old Turkmen boy stated: *'Turkmen will clash ... I swear, when two kids fight, the older ones will come and fight too.'*

▶ She told me, "You're dirty." ... Then, she started to tell me, "Stay away, stay away. You're poor." I go to the bathroom and cry.

(A 12-year-old Bani Murra girl)



There was a young boy who was 12 years old and had a lot of problems. So we referred him to the social counsellor and we realised that he was being sexually harassed by the owner of the store next to them. We referred him but nothing really happened after that.

(A key informant)

Fear of kidnapping among the Dom community is also widespread, and some adolescents report first-hand experiences of being approached by strangers: *'He told me to come and take something, I understood, I opened the car door and ran away'* (12-year-old Bani Murra boy).

### Sexual and gender-based violence

The literature shows that sexual harassment of girls in Jordan is widespread (USAID, 2015; Jones et al., 2019c). Echoing this, our qualitative research found that a number of girls had experienced sexual harassment (either verbal harassment or inappropriate touching) in the street. A 16-year-old Bani Murra girl explained: *'Sometimes the young man who works in this shop says to girls, "you have gained weight" or "give me a kiss" or "you have hips". This seller suddenly attacks girls. One time he hugged me, I screamed and ran away from the shop.'* This can have further implications for adolescent girls' restricted mobility, as they *'feel afraid to go anywhere because of the boys in the street'* (11-year-old Turkmen girl).

We found few examples of boys experiencing sexual violence. However, the one example reported by a key informant highlighted the likely underreporting of male sexual assault and the difficulties boys face in seeking support: *'There was a young boy who was 12 years old and had a lot of problems. So we referred him to the social counsellor and we realised that he was being sexually harassed by the owner of the store next to them. We referred him but nothing really happened after that. The boy changed what he said after he realised that things had become serious. He said that nobody did anything. He was afraid.'*

### Child marriage

Child marriage is common among the Dom community – as already mentioned, girls often marry in early adolescence, boys generally marry older, at age 18 or

above. Adolescents face significant social pressure from within their community to marry early, even *'considering [a girl] as an old maid ... if [she] became 15 years old without getting married'* (FGD with Bani Murra mothers). However, within the Bani Murra community, norms surrounding marriage appear to be shifting, with most adolescents saying they will get married as adults and most parents agreeing that marriage is occurring at older ages. By comparison, Turkmen girls are still getting married relatively young, usually between 12 and 15 years. A key informant explained: *'By the time she is 12 she can be living with her husband. Maximum 15 years old, it would be really hard to find a girl among the Turkmen who is 15 years old and not married.'*

Marriages among both the Bani Murra and Turkmen communities are between relatives (paternal cousins), and are often arranged from childhood. Adolescents have very little say over who and when they marry. As a 13-year-old Turkmen girl explained: *'Falling in love is useless, you don't get to marry the one you love. Parents reject him. Love isn't nice, then.'* As marriages are usually arranged between relatives, it is expected that adolescents will agree as *'no one dares to harm the other or to break his heart'* (Turkmen father). Consanguineous marriages are usually favoured by parents as they are more likely to trust members of their own family to treat their daughters well. In general, boys have more say over marriage decisions than girls and are given more freedom to refuse a proposed marriage. Some Turkmen adolescent boys may also kidnap their future bride if they are refused by her parents.

Marriages are often not formalised among the Turkmen until the spouses are older, and so rates of child marriage may be underreported. A 14-year-old married Turkmen girl explained: *'We do not make such documents until we grow older. We applied for one previously but they [Jordanian authorities] did not approve it due to our young ages. They said after five months, they will create the marriage contract. We cannot make a passport for the baby without a marriage contract. We can register the baby on behalf of my mom, the baby will be like my sister.'*

Falling in love is useless, you don't get to marry the one you love. Parents reject him. Love isn't nice, then.

(A 13-year-old Turkmen girl)



### Access to justice/interactions with law enforcement

When seeking support and justice for experiences of violence, members of the Dom community face many challenges. In school, Turkmen adolescents described facing discrimination from teachers who did not believe them when they reported violence, as an 11-year-old Turkmen girl noted: *'At school, girls beat and insult us...The school headteacher does not believe me when I speak and she says that I am a liar, while she says the other girls are good girls.'*

Many Dom adolescents (mainly Turkmen) are engaged in informal work, begging or selling at traffic lights, so frequently encounter trouble with the police. Key informants believe that these negative interactions are having implications for reporting of violence: *'They are really afraid of the police because of the beggar work they do. I told you the example of the girl who suffered sexual harassment from her brothers, but we never went all the way in this referral, because once things become serious, they withdraw, the families have no problem in taking all their stuff and tent and going away.'* Adding to this, experiences of police brutality are common and are likely to result in greater distrust in the police: *'They take us to the police station. They put us in an empty room and beat*

*us'*, explained a 12-year-old Turkmen boy. Key informants noted that community members are more likely to go to the local community leader (*mukhtar*) rather than the police to solve problems, as *mukhtars* have traditionally acted as mediators, particularly in disputes over marriage kidnapping.

## 3 Health, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health

### General health

Access to healthcare can be a challenge for Bani Murra families. Quite a few of those in our sample did not have health insurance and were unable to pay (or had to borrow money) for medical treatment. In one instance this led to a father removing his own daughter's teeth because he was unable to take her to the dentist: *'My molar was broken and my father didn't have enough money to fix it. [He] removed it by pliers. He does everything to us. He doesn't*

▶▶ My molar was broken and my father didn't have enough money to fix it. [He] removed it by pliers.

(A 17-year-old Bani Murra girl)

*let us need anything. If he doesn't have money...*' (17-year-old Bani Murra girl).

Access to healthcare does not appear to be such a significant problem for Turkmen families. The reasons for this are unclear, although a healthcare worker put this down to Turkmen having more (expendable) income from begging and selling on the streets: *'Bani Murra in general rarely would pay money. Turkmen usually pay, as they do some begging so they can find money, but Bani Murra [in the seven years I have been here] were not able to complete their medical services.'* In contrast, Turkmen appear to attend healthcare services more frequently, so much so that *'Doctors at the hospitals do not like Turkmen residents because they go to hospitals a lot'* (17-year-old Turkmen girl). However, some key informants highlighted that some Turkmen preferred to go to the pharmacy directly for treatment to reduce the cost of healthcare.

Substance abuse among the Dom community is rife. Many adolescents in our sample knew the whereabouts of drug dealers and could easily explain how to obtain drugs, as a 15-year-old Bani Murra girl noted: *'They sell and buy in front of us. It's normal. In front of people. They sell to people.'* Smoking is also extremely common among adolescents, especially boys, as highlighted by a 12-year-old Turkmen boy: *'Children smoke, there are those who are [smoking] at the age of 13, 12 or 11. There are those who are 9 years old who smoke.'* It is less common for women and girls to smoke; however, some were reported to smoke 'shisha'. Unlike most of the Jordanian population (due to religious prohibition), some Turkmen adolescents drink alcohol, commonly the alcoholic drink Arak.<sup>1</sup>

## Water, sanitation and hygiene

Access to water, sanitation and hygiene is a major challenge for Dom adolescents, particularly for the Turkmen community who often live together in one tent, with many family members sharing only one bathroom. Some families do not have access to bathrooms and so resort to using their neighbours' facilities or even defecating in the streets. Turkmen families also tend to buy water as the water from the tap tastes 'salty', which brings an additional economic expense. Access to water can also be a challenge for the Bani Murra community who at times are unable to afford water: *'One time, we were out of water for a month and we couldn't ... We didn't pay. We were out of water ... My father didn't have money'* (12-year-

▶▶ We only eat hummus and falafel, we don't eat meat, chicken and fruits, we don't have money.

(A 16-year-old Turkmen boy)

old Bani Murra girl). Key informants also highlighted issues of cleanliness among Turkmen families – adolescents are prone to infections and head lice and often do not follow hygienic practices such as washing or cutting their nails. Dental hygiene is also poor and quite a few adolescents highlighted problems with their teeth.

## Nutrition and food security

Bani Murra adolescents appear to have good knowledge (from their parents) on what constitutes a healthy, balanced diet and are conscious of the need to eat healthy foods. Turkmen adolescents, on the other hand, are more likely to have a poor diet (often consisting of falafel and other fried foods), which is likely due to food insecurity and a lack of refrigerators in some Turkmen tents, making it difficult to store food safely. As a 16-year-old Turkmen boy highlighted: *'Yes, we only eat hummus and falafel, we don't eat meat, chicken and fruits, we don't have money.'* Due to high levels of poverty, some families experience significant food insecurity, with adolescents describing missing meals or asking for food from neighbours during times of financial struggle (pressures that have been exacerbated during the covid-19 pandemic). A 17-year-old Turkmen boy explained: *'If there is no food, we don't have lunch. If there is food, we have lunch.'* A Turkmen mother added: *'We can't secure much [food]. All of us may only eat tea and bread. We are poor and can't afford to eat much. Turkmen people can hardly afford to eat meat or fish. We eat it occasionally.'*

## Knowledge and experiences of puberty

Dom adolescents lack knowledge about puberty due to sensitivities of discussing topics such as menstruation. Mothers highlighted that they provide information and support for their daughters once they have started menstruating, but that it is taboo to discuss menstruation with younger adolescents. This is particularly true for Turkmen mothers, who tend to be more embarrassed to talk to their children about menstruation: *'We do not discuss this with them when they are young. When they get this, they get scared so they run to tell their mothers*

1 A translucent, white, anise-flavoured alcoholic drink.

🔴 I got my period in Turkey, I was 10 or 11 years old. I swear to God, I went crazy. ... I thought that something entered inside me like a snake or a scorpion.

(A 13-year-old Turkmen girl)

*and they teach them what to do' (Turkmen father). In addition, mothers' own knowledge about menstrual health management is not always strong, as a 12-year-old Bani Murra girl explained: 'My mother told me to have a shower when the period stops [and that I] don't need to have a shower during the period.'*

This can result in significant fear when adolescents reach menarche, as highlighted by a 13-year-old Turkmen girl who ran away for 10 days when she first got her period: *'I got my period in Turkey, I was 10 or 11 years old. I swear to God, I went crazy. My mother told me to wear underwear and a pad. I didn't go to my house for 10 days, I didn't eat or drink. I thought that something entered inside me like a snake or a scorpion. My mother told me that I got my period, and I asked her what a period is.'*

Additionally, for Turkmen adolescents who often live in tents in large families, their living conditions and limited access to water present challenges for menstrual hygiene management and privacy. As a key informant described: *'They don't have privacy at all, especially regarding using the bathroom and taking showers. Sometimes I walk in the street and I find a mother showering her kids in the street! They basically don't have water, they get water one day a week, so when they get the water they gather all their children together to shower them.'*

Adolescents also reported challenges in affording menstruation products, often using cloths or towels instead. *'If there isn't, it's ok. Whether tissues or a bath towel. Sometimes, we use our clothes that we don't use anymore. We rip them off and keep them.'* Some girls also reported challenges in obtaining menstrual products in school due to embarrassment in asking their teacher. A 12-year-old Bani Murra girl explained: *'Girls have to go to the health teacher in school to ask for menstruation products, but some girls are shy to ask. There should be a spot near the bathroom where these things will be available.'*

## Sexual and reproductive health

Married adolescents appear to have fairly good knowledge about different types of contraception available such as the intrauterine device (IUD), contraceptive pills and monthly injections. In particular, Turkmen married adolescents seem to receive fairly good knowledge about contraception from their mothers. Some younger married adolescents, however, lacked information about pregnancy and methods of contraception, as a 15-year-old married Bani Murra girl explained: *'I knew that I was pregnant after a period of time. I sat with her [sister-in-law]. I told her that I didn't want to be pregnant immediately. I didn't know these issues. She said to me: "You don't want to be pregnant after that. Is this true?" I said to her: "Yeah." Then, she told me about these things [contraception].'* Fear of side effects associated with contraception is common and a key reason why some adolescents discontinue using contraception. However, due to economic challenges, it seems that married adolescent girls and their husbands are more open to using contraception in order to have a smaller family. An 18-year-old married Turkmen girl explained: *'I take an injection. He [husband] told me not to get pregnant. He does not want it anymore because this would increase the expenses, right? We do not have enough money.'* In contrast, we did not come across any unmarried adolescents in our sample openly reporting using contraception, and knowledge of contraception among unmarried adolescents is also low.

However, adolescent married girls are under considerable pressure to conceive in order to demonstrate fertility, and so contraception is only deemed appropriate once married couples have had their first child. This pressure can result in married adolescents taking other measures to fall pregnant – for example, a 19-year-old girl who was married at age 14 had spent 5,000 Jordanian dinars (JOD) on multiple rounds of assisted conception (in vitro fertilisation (IVF)) after experiencing three miscarriages. Additionally, a healthcare worker reported that some married Turkmen girls are seeking hormone treatment if they do not get pregnant quickly: *'As it is a*

🔴 I take an injection. He [husband] told me not to get pregnant. He does not want it anymore because this would increase the expenses, right?

(An 18-year-old married Turkmen girl)



*shame that she married and did not deliver, she will be patient for about 9 months then she will start seeking treatments with medical help. You would find 13- or 14-year-old girls that would go to the specialist and sometimes they accelerate the process of having babies using hormones and chemicals.'*

## 4 Psychosocial well-being

### Resilience and emotional efficacy

We found high levels of anxiety, stress and worry among the Dom adolescents in our sample, and particularly among Turkmen boys. While some adolescents expressed a range of worries over things such as the covid-19 pandemic and their families' health, by far the most significant contributor to these high levels of negative feelings is the discrimination and violence that adolescents face in all aspects of their lives. As a key informant highlighted: *'It is very rare that you find someone who is dealing with them [Dom adolescents] as humans and with kindness or respect. They are always marginalised.'* Adolescents described the significant toll that violence, bullying and general discrimination is taking on their mental health. As the mother of an adolescent described: *'I used to take them to school and they came back crying. "We don't want to go; they are torturing us!"*


There is another group [of Dom] who are marginalised and they feel imperfect, and that they're a burden on society. That's why they're aggressive, they curse, beat and do anything to prove their existence.

(A Makani facilitator)

*... I went to talk to the teachers, and they sent notices to the kids' parents, but nothing has changed.'* As well as acts of violence and bullying, negative perceptions of the Dom among the wider community can also affect adolescents' own self-worth. An 18-year-old Turkmen girl explained: *'The shops don't sell us anything. They tell us that we're thieves, liars ... I think, what have we done to you? What have we done? We're also humans who talk, we're humans like you.'*

As highlighted by other key informants, this level of marginalisation can sometimes manifest in negative behaviours such as aggression and violence: *'There is another group [of Dom] who are marginalised and they feel imperfect, and that they're a burden on society. That's why they're aggressive, they curse, beat and do anything to prove their existence'* (Makani facilitator). This was also echoed by a Turkmen father who described how his son is regularly bullied and, in response, *'beat his uncle'* and *'throws stones'* when he becomes upset.



 All of them are like my brothers. I help them and they help me. He tells me not to lose myself and be good to my father and mother. He advises me and calms me down.

(17-year-old Turkmen boy)

In general, it appears more common for boys (particularly from Turkmen families) to resort to negative coping strategies such as alcohol and drugs to deal with feelings of lack of agency. As a 17-year-old Turkmen boy who was unable to marry his girlfriend due to her parents' refusal explained: *'I go to any place and drink, that's all. If I am upset, I go and drink. I take things ... pills and marijuana. Because my heart is burning, because she is my dearest one ... They rejected me and I started drinking.'*

A lack of decision-making over future partners was also reported as a source of significant mental ill-health among some Dom adolescents. An 18-year-old Bani Murra girl gave the example of her sister: *'She brought the laundry detergent and wanted to commit suicide! She actually was in love with my cousin, but my family was opposing it, and up until now she didn't marry him! She was going to commit suicide, but I stopped her and I told her that everything has a solution. Honestly, I was very upset! I mean, how would they get her engaged without letting her know?'*

High levels of perceived violence and kidnapping in their surrounding areas constitutes another source of fear and worries for adolescents. Several respondents highlighted the general anxiety they feel when moving around their neighbourhood because of limited social cohesion. A 13-year-old Bani Murra boy explained: *'I had a panic attack. I was afraid ... I was afraid of going to the grocery. I was afraid of going out.'* These fears are partly projected onto children by their parents. Turkmen adolescents are very isolated from the rest of society, and some *'only like interacting with people from our community'* (Turkmen mother). This social isolation – as well as experiences of violence and discrimination described earlier – may be contributing to the significant fear some adolescents feel when interacting with other members of the community. This was reflected in interviews with teachers: *'When they brought them to school, they would stop at the school fence, and you felt that they were afraid. They feel hurt from the outside community, perhaps due to the nature of their profession or the situation in which they are living.'*

*Last year there was a boy and his sister. We decided to separate them from each other [into different classes] so that the personality of each of them is formed separately. The girl accepted it, but the boy refused. He remained attached to his sister and was afraid.'*

## Support from adults

Adolescents' relationships with their parents differ: whereas some adolescents believe there are *'some problems you cannot tell your family about, especially when they are private things about yourself'* (17-year-old Turkmen boy), others reported that they have close relationships with their parents, whom they rely on for support and advice.

Parents, particularly from the Bani Murra community – concerned by the levels of violence and bullying their children are experiencing – try to help, including by talking to teachers and offering their children advice on how to handle situations. As the Bani Murra mother of a young boy explained: *'Even his friend once told him, "Are you a Nuri?"<sup>2</sup> I told him that he should say, yes, as there is nothing wrong with it.'*

However, some adolescents recognised the significant strain their parents are under and reported feeling reluctant to burden them with any more problems. A 17-year-old Bani Murra married girl explained: *'My mother has children and suffers a lot of problems with them, I do not want to share my problems with her because I do not want to increase her worries. I want my mom to feel comfortable, I do not want to upset her.'*

In some cases, adults who have taken up roles that are supposed to be supportive of adolescents – such as teachers – are reportedly perpetuating discrimination towards members of the Dom community. Several adolescents described being called *'liars'* and *'failures'* by their teachers, which may negatively impact their sense of self-worth.

## Support from peers

Our findings also highlighted the myriad ways that younger adolescents support each other in the face of deprivation. This is particularly the case for adolescent girls from the Bani Murra community. One such example was a group of friends who saved up their money together and split it equally to buy things they needed. As highlighted by one of the girls: *'The good things in the friendship are that this one*

<sup>2</sup> A local derogatory word often used in Jordan to describe members of the Dom community.



**DD** I'm imprisoned. My father doesn't allow me to go out. I'm just allowed to go out with my mother. They worry about us because our neighbourhood is terrible, it's full of guys.

(10-year-old Bani Murra girl)

*gives money to that one when she doesn't have'* (friendship circle with 12-year-old Bani Murra girls).

Boys reported that they generally support each other by steering peers away from negative behaviour such as smoking and by giving advice. Turkmen boys in particular appear to rely on their friends for social and emotional support. A 17-year-old Turkmen boy explained: *'All of them are like my brothers. I help them and they help me. He tells me not to lose myself and be good to my father and mother. He advises me and calms me down.'*

Strict curbs on mobility for adolescent girls mean that they often face restrictions in socialising with friends. Married girls in particular have a much smaller social network; many are unable to (or no longer want to) see friends once they are married. As a 15-year-old married Turkmen girl noted: *'There are many [friends]. I met them every day. Now, I don't see them, because all of us got married and were gone.'* Girls also have fewer places within the neighbourhood where they can go to socialise with friends. When a community mapping exercise discussed the availability of activities and facilities for adolescents, one 16-year-old Bani Murra girl pointed out the dearth of girl-friendly spaces: *'There are a lot of sports centres ... they are only for the young men. There is also a billiards hall, where young men play billiards ... There is also a PlayStation for young men ... There is a bar here in this area, where young men can drink alcohol.'*

## 5 Voice and agency

### Mobility and access to safe spaces

Bani Murra and Turkmen adolescents face significant restrictions on their mobility. This is particularly the case for adolescent girls due to the threat of violence and kidnapping, alongside conservative gender norms that dictate that *'girls should stay home, and guys should go out'* (17-year-old Bani Murra girl). We found a number of extreme examples of girls who are prevented from leaving the house at all. For example, a 10-year-old girl noted: *'I'm*

*imprisoned. My father doesn't allow me to go out. I'm just allowed to go out with my mother. They worry about us because our neighbourhood is terrible, it's full of guys.'*

Boys, on the other hand, are afforded significantly more freedom, although some younger Turkmen boys face restrictions in terms of where they can go and how late they can stay out. The mother of a young Turkmen adolescent boy explained: *'I have two boys and I don't let them go out a lot, I keep guard. If they go to the neighbour's house, I will follow behind him till he reaches the house. Not the girls, the girls never go out.'*

To combat the high levels of sexual harassment in the community, some parents have – instead of restricting girls' mobility – sought to teach them to defend themselves. One 12-year-old Bani Murra girl described her approach to sexual harassment, as advised by her mother: *'I'd scream and gather people, and I'd say what he's doing to humiliate him. My mom [told me to do that] ... My friends and I were walking, and a boy was holding a speaker and he played songs, then he started saying bad things, so I got angry and I started telling him to get lost, and I threw rocks at him. My friends and I kept throwing rocks at him, a lot of similar situations happen.'* However, this kind of advice tends to be the exception and most parents instead try to protect their children by keeping them at home. Married girls are particularly restricted and are often not allowed to go outside their homes without their husbands. This was highlighted by an 18-year-old Turkmen girl who explained: *'If I want to hang out with friends, my husband would get angry with me. My husband would say, "How do you want people to describe us? Do not leave alone, I must be with you".'* Due to these restrictions, married girls are often unable to go out and buy the things they need for their households. Some reported that they only visit the market once annually during Eid, and that they are often too shy to ask their husbands to go out.

### Voice and decision-making in the family and community

Our findings also reveal strong gender differences around decision-making. Adolescent girls have very little say in decisions that will have significant repercussions for their future, such as leaving school and getting married. One 14-year-old Bani Murra married girl who was hoping to return to school explained that she *'tried to talk, but no one*

**DD** [I] tried to talk, but no one listened.

(A 14-year-old married Bani Murra girl)



*listened', while another was resigned to the fact that 'I'm in school until my father decides' (10-year-old Bani Murra girl). Boys, on the other hand, have a lot more input into these key decisions, as a 17-year-old Bani Murra boy described: 'Then I said to my mother, "I want to get back to school", and she registered me in the informal education system.'*

As already mentioned, adolescents also have very little say over whom they marry and when. Even when adolescents are given an apparent choice, they face strong social pressure to meet their parents' wishes to marry early. This was highlighted by a 14-year-old Bani Murra married girl, who said: *'My brother came and he said to me: "My sister, I can't force you to do something that you don't want. Tell me now, if you agree or not". I felt a little bit afraid and I felt hesitant, but when I saw my family was happy and pleased, I said: "My happiness depends on my family's happiness".'*

### Access to age-appropriate information and technology

Access to technology – particularly smartphones and the internet – is relatively low among the Dom community. Turkmen families often do not have access to the internet at home due to a lack of electricity in their tents and rely on buying internet credit for their mobile phones at shops.

**I don't want to be like anyone, I want to be like myself.**

(A 14-year-old Turkmen girl)

Girls are even less likely to have access to technology. Parents remain highly suspicious of girls' use of technology and often ban daughters from using mobile phones as they are afraid that *'a girl's thinking and behaviors may be changed if she watches something wrong on mobiles'* (Turkmen mother). However, younger boys also face some restrictions in accessing technology, and can be prevented from doing so until they are older, as a Turkmen mother explained: *'When my son turns 15 years old, he will be a youth. He can have it [mobile] then so that I can contact him.'*

Among Turkmen families, key informants noted that information spreads quickly through community leaders (*mukhtar*) who are key contact points and responsible for solving problems in the community. As the head of a Makani centre explained: *'The mukhtar has a phone and he has WhatsApp and everybody came when we used to offer lessons during corona[virus]. We would send it to the mukhtar and he would give it to them and then they solve it and send it back to us. The Turkmen are much easier. When I tell them that there is an initiative, education for all,*



▶▶ ‘They don’t take me for work. If you have work, I will come and work for you. But what do people say? They say that they should not hire Turkmen as they say we are dirty.’

(A 17-year-old Turkmen girl)

*the news would spread quickly and in one hour everybody would come to me.’*

### Role models

Dom adolescents have limited role models outside of their immediate families. Most of those in our sample stated that family members such as parents, aunts or uncles were their role models. Even when asked directly about role models outside their family, one 14-year-old Turkmen girl did could not name any, adding that: *‘I don’t want to be like anyone, I want to be like myself.’* Outside of family members, teachers and Makani facilitators were the most common role models cited.

The lack of adults from the Dom community in leadership roles is a likely reason for the lack of role models for adolescents, outside of their immediate environment. Although Dom people have risen to occupy professional positions such as university professors, lawyers and doctors, most hide their Dom heritage. Community members also highlight a lack of representation within government, which can have implications for adolescents’ own role models and aspirations. However, to combat these challenges, The Bani Murra Association – an organisation devoted to challenging stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding the Dom community – is encouraging people to ‘come out’ as members of the Dom community (Williams, 2005).

## 6 Economic empowerment

### Economic aspirations

In general, Dom adolescents appear to have high work aspirations. Younger adolescents aspire to have medical or civil service careers and surprisingly – considering their often negative interactions with law enforcement – one of the most common aspirations among younger adolescents is to work as a police officer. This may be in response to the high levels of violence in the community, as a 12-year-old Bani Murra girl explained, it would mean you could: *‘defend*

*people and you can defend yourself when you become a police officer.’*

Bani Murra girls have quite high aspirations compared to boys, with some aspiring to be astronauts or paediatricians. In some cases, however, these aspirations are quite unrealistic and are at odds with what is likely to be achievable – for example, some girls who are out of school aspire to be doctors, with little knowledge and no plans on how to achieve this. In addition, some older girls’ aspirations are shaped by external factors; one 12-year-old girl wanted to be a dentist to *‘achieve my mother’s dream’* while another was unable to enrol in her preferred choice of major due to the lack of other girls in the programme: *‘I aspire for something, but my major is completely different from my ambition. There is a hotel service specialty in Jordan, but there are not many girls in it, I do not want to be the only girl studying this major’* (16-year-old Bani Murra girl).

Boys tended to report more modest aspirations (albeit a few aspired to be footballers), perhaps because many are already doing paid work and see a career path already laid out for them. Many working boys aspire to more practical and vocational roles such as working in a factory, carrying on with the type of work they are already doing or following in the footsteps of their fathers. According to key informants, Turkmen boys have particularly low aspirations, as they are only focused on immediate economic needs: *‘When I asked the Turkmen boys and girls about their dreams and passions and goals, all of them kept silent! And just think about the meaning of ‘dream’ and ‘goal’! I mean they only just think about the next day!’* (Makani facilitator).

### Access to decent and age-appropriate employment

Our findings indicate that there are high levels of child work in the Dom community. In most cases, Turkmen make money by petty trading on the streets and at traffic lights. Such activities are mainly undertaken by men and boys. Due to increasing restrictions on begging, many are finding it difficult to make a living this way, and risk arrest while selling at traffic lights (many Turkmen adolescents

▶▶ Some fathers force their children to work. This problem exists a lot – that parents pressure their children to work

(A Makani facilitator)

are unaware of the laws and restrictions on petty trade). As such, a high number of Turkmen boys described being arrested by the police. As an 18-year-old Turkmen boy explained: *'My younger brother was imprisoned twice, three times ....'*

Turkmen are often prevented from entering other professions in Jordan, largely due to language barriers (as the majority speak Turkish) or employers refusing to hire members of the Turkmen community, as a 17-year-old Turkmen girl described: *'They don't take me for work. If you have work, I will come and work for you. But what do people say? They say that they should not hire Turkmen as they say we are dirty.'*

As well as working as street vendors at traffic lights, adolescents (including girls) also work on farms. We found reports of adolescents as young as 10 years working on farms, often for very long hours and little pay. Workers can also face abuse from their employers due to their ethnicity. A 17-year-old Turkmen boy described his experience: *'We are awake at 4 a.m. to go and work in the farms, the daily payment is 8 JOD. No, he told me go inside and work, I asked him from where I have to start, he said to me "the son of dog, work properly". He then dropped me to the ground and hit me. There are Syrians, Egyptians and Turkmen who are working. He is only furious with the Turkmen.'*

Unemployment rates among the Bani Murra are also very high, meaning that many families are living in poverty. As a result, many Bani Murra resort to begging at traffic lights, whereas Turkmen tend to sell items. Bani Murra households also rely on paid child work to cover their family expenses, with children doing jobs such as factory

workers, barbers and cleaners – again, often poorly paid and short-term work with little job security, as a Makani facilitator explained: *'Some fathers force their children to work. This problem exists a lot – that parents pressure their children to work.'* In some cases, working adolescents have very little control over the money they earn. One 17-year-old Bani Murra adolescent who has been working for three years described his anguish at having to give all the money he earned to his father: *'When I worked in the salon, the boss was paying me 150 JOD, my father was saying to me, "take 30 JOD for your transportation, and give me the rest of the money!" ... I feel like this, I've been working for three years, and I didn't save any money.'*

Turkmen frequently migrate back and forth from Jordan to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region such as Egypt due to the better economic opportunities there, given less regulation by police and greater success in selling. As a 12-year-old Turkmen girl explained: *'They buy more [in Egypt]. And there is no police. They don't catch you.'* Key informants also reported that Bani Murra girls as young as 12 or 13 are migrating to the Gulf states to work as dancers; however, reports of migration from the Bani Murra participants were generally low.

Due to highly traditional gender roles and restrictions on mobility, women and girls are expected to take care of the household and not do paid work, as a Bani Murra mother highlighted: *'The boy is not like the girls. He must work to form a family, a future for him. For the girl, her home is the basis for her. The woman has to marry, take care of her husband, home, and children.'* However, among some

#### Box 4. Impact of covid-19 on economic empowerment

The Dom community face significant challenges due to the covid-19 pandemic. As many are already living below the poverty line, covid-related restrictions have meant that many families are struggling financially and having to borrow money or sell possessions to meet their daily needs. A 17-year-old Bani Murra girl explained: *'His [her father] work stopped when there was curfew, he didn't work for the first one or two months. He had hidden some money and we used to spend from that, but we had to borrow money from people for a period, so that we can spend.'*

Most members of the Dom community work in low-paid, irregular jobs, which meant they were further disadvantaged when restrictions came into force. For those whose livelihood depended on selling or begging at traffic lights, covid-related restrictions meant they could no longer do so (although some fathers reported still going out to sell and risking arrest).

Some humanitarian agencies provided food parcels during this time, though these were not sufficient to cover family needs, as a 17-year-old Turkmen girl described: *'When corona[virus] started, we were hungry. They got us food packets. I told him that I have seven sisters and a brother, he gave me two packages. I said, what will I do with two packages? He can see for himself the number of persons. He told me that if I like take it or just throw it away. He came just once.'*

families living in poverty (mainly Turkmen), women and girls are required to work, mainly on farms, out of necessity to meet their families' economic needs. Girls are also often involved in making jewellery or clothes. One Bani Murra mother had encouraged her 15-year-old daughter to start selling handmade bracelets in school, as the girl explained: *'I made bracelets. We are working to make bracelets, I learned how. So, when I did it, I felt shocked. We make bracelets and we sell them here at the school. She [mother] brought all the things we need and we made it.'*

### Access to age- and gender-responsive social protection

Jordan's National Aid Fund (NAF) – a monthly conditional cash transfer programme targeting people living below the poverty line – is the most common form of social protection for the Dom community in Jordan. Since 2019, the programme has been scaled up and aims to reach around 185,000 households by 2022 (Government of Jordan, 2020). However, among our sample, we found limited access to social protection, and many respondents did not have access to social protection even though

they were struggling financially. A 14-year-old Bani Murra married girl explained: *'[We get] no support. This would be useful for us because sometimes we feel upset because we don't have money to buy food; we need this many times. We searched for things like this as a source of income. So, unfortunately, we didn't find.'* The NAF includes a number of eligibility criteria that may prevent Dom households from accessing it, such as ensuring that children attend school and that family members are not engaged in begging. Key informants also highlighted that during cold weather, some Turkmen families have rejected free temporary accommodation provided by the Civil Defense Directorate, as they preferred to stay in their tents.

Among interviewees who did report receiving social assistance, the amount they receive is often not sufficient to bring them above the poverty line, particularly as many live in large families, as one Bani Murra father explained: *'They said to me that I receive the national assistance, about 200 JOD, and they are sufficient for you. Oh my God, I have five children, my wife and I ... So, we are seven. Also, I pay the electricity and the water bills. How shall that [the assistance] be sufficient for me?'*



# Conclusions and policy recommendations

Our findings on the well-being of Bani Murra and Turkmen adolescents in Jordan have a number of implications for policy-makers and programming. We present these according to the six GAGE capability domains.



## Education and learning

- Remove the barriers that prevent Dom adolescents attending school by providing affordable and safe transportation to schools and facilitating school enrolment.
- Reduce violence in schools by strengthening teacher knowledge of and training in non-violent disciplinary approaches.
- Work with local communities and police to improve security around schools to reduce harassment (particularly of girls) outside school premises and en route to schools.
- Build on and strengthen anti-bullying policies and campaigns in schools, including initiatives to encourage interaction and social cohesion between Dom and other students.
- Invest in Arabic classes for students for whom it is not their mother tongue so as to support social integration, particularly among Turkmen children and adolescents.
- Work closely with Dom families to provide practical guidance on how parents can support their children to attend school (including steps needed to enrol their children). Provide awareness-raising sessions that challenge gendered norms favouring marriage and caregiving activities over schooling for girls, and paid work for boys.
- Encourage a supportive teaching environment that encourages participation, including extra tutorials for students who are falling behind or are regularly absent.



## Bodily integrity and freedom from violence

- Target programming that fosters positive masculinities and provide awareness-raising sessions on non-violent defence strategies for boys, and empowerment and self-defence classes for girls.
- Introduce safe and anonymous reporting mechanisms for adolescents experiencing violence at home, at school or in the community – including acts of police brutality – and develop culturally appropriate mechanisms to report incidence of sexual harassment and assault against males.
- Scale up parental awareness sessions on the harms of child marriage, particularly targeting fathers (who often have the final say on marital decisions) and community and religious leaders, including in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development and development partners such as UNICEF.
- Increase linkages between Dom community *mukhtars* and law enforcement agencies to improve relationships between the Dom and the police.



## Health, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health

- Tackle food insecurity by providing food parcels or vouchers to the most vulnerable households.
- Provide programming (mainly targeting boys) aimed at tackling substance abuse and smoking, addressing and treating both the health and psychosocial aspects of negative coping strategies.
- Scale up puberty education in schools, including Makani centres, and support parents with knowledge on puberty and advice on how to talk to their children about sensitive topics such as menstruation.
- Provide free menstruation products for girls in schools and community centres, in easily accessible places such as toilets.



- Provide sexual and reproductive health education for younger couples before and during marriage to ensure they have accurate and up-to-date information, including on the importance of birth spacing, targeting common misinformation about contraception and challenging social pressures to conceive straight after marriage.
- Increase access to safe and clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services (such as safe and private community latrine and washing facilities) for Dom families living in tents, and scale up initiatives that encourage good hygiene and dental practices.



## Psychosocial well-being

- Encourage community initiatives that mix Dom families with other families to encourage social cohesion, including through cultural exchange programmes, and challenge any misconceptions about the Dom community.
- Provide safe recreational spaces that are designed for adolescent girls to socialise with their friends and tackle social norms that prevent girls (particularly married girls) from socialising with their peers.
- Expand psychosocial support services, working with Dom community leaders (*mukhtars*) to provide outreach to isolated communities and link them with local services.
- Create initiatives in which adolescent boys are encouraged to hold their friends accountable and steer them away from negative coping strategies and behaviour such as substance abuse and violence.
- Provide parenting programming that supports caregivers to talk to their children about any problems they may be having, and raises awareness of key warning signs to look out for (such as substance abuse by adolescents).



## Voice and agency

- Support Dom adolescents' aspirations by providing sessions that increase knowledge of successful Dom community members (potential role models), inviting

them to schools and other community spaces to provide talks and mentorship.

- Scale up parenting classes that challenge gendered norms that dictate restrictions on adolescent girls' mobility and discourage adolescents' voice in household decision-making.
- Provide adolescents with opportunities to access the internet through internet cafes, as well as guidance on how to stay safe online.
- Increase opportunities for adolescent girls and boys to participate in clubs such as Makani centres that encourage them to develop confidence and take up volunteer opportunities and leadership roles – for example, getting involved in hygiene and cleanliness initiatives in the community.
- Provide adolescents with awareness-raising sessions on their rights and how to report violations, through life skills classes, such as those offered by Makani centres.



## Economic empowerment

- Help adolescents understand the steps needed to achieve their aspirations, through providing them with early stage career advice and routes to employment.
- Expand training, apprenticeships and skills-based programming (such as Arabic lessons for Turkmen adolescents) to ensure that young people have the skills needed to enter the labour market, as well as providing access to credit and marketing skills to establish micro-enterprises in line with community skills such as tailoring and jewellery making.
- Introduce policies that prevent employers from discriminating against members of the Dom community, providing a confidential platform where people can report incidents of discrimination.
- Tackle high rates of child labour by providing labelled cash transfers that encourage school attendance, such as UNICEF's Hajati cash-plus programme.
- Scale up social protection (including the NAF) so that it targets the most vulnerable Dom families and is adequate to bring them above the poverty line, and support access to basic services through outreach initiatives and training of service providers in inclusive approaches.

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## About GAGE

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a nine-year longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit [www.gage.odi.org.uk](http://www.gage.odi.org.uk) for more information.

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