



**Middle East
Research Institute**

www.meri-k.org

Policy Paper

June 18, 2020. Vol. 4, No. 40

**“We’re Real Iraqis”:
Securing Roma Rights and Integration in Post-conflict Iraq.**

Sarah Edgcumbe

Despite the ongoing persecution and displacement of the Iraqi Roma since 2003, there is little information available on this social group compared to the country’s other minorities. This lack of information is symptomatic of decades of systematic discrimination and neglect at both governmental and social levels, resulting in devastating socio-political and socio-economic marginalization. Roma communities in Iraq are often characterized by lack of adequate clean water, electricity, education and health provision alongside pervasive poverty, resulting in the Roma comprising one of ‘the most vulnerable, disfavoured and at risk of all the marginalized groups in Iraq.’

This policy brief will examine the current socio-political and socio-economic circumstances of the Iraqi Roma in order to argue that decades (if not centuries) of discrimination, marginalization and social ostracization have facilitated the appalling poverty that many Iraqi Roma experience today. This brief will urge both the Iraqi Federal and Kurdistan Regional governments to prioritise addressing the marginalization of the Roma, whilst cautioning that policies and strategies to address this entrenched marginalization must be consultative, considered, and above all, long-term in their approach.

Introduction

In comparison with other ethno-religious minority groups in Iraq, there is very little information available on the Iraqi Roma. Despite their ongoing persecution and displacement, particularly since 2003, the Roma in Iraq have received scant attention from the Iraqi government or Kurdistan Regional government (KRG), non-governmental organisations nor academics. Journalists and researchers have produced a smattering of reports highlighting the extremely precarious living conditions of the Iraqi Roma, but with no significant effect. This lack of information is symptomatic of decades of systematic discrimination at both governmental and social levels, resulting in devastating socio-political and socio-economic marginalisation for the Iraqi Roma.

In early 2019, the Iraqi government released a statement saying that all Iraqi Roma would be issued unified national identification cards, yet this promise remains unfulfilled [1]. However, despite the many years of structurally enforced neglect and marginalisation of Roma communities, there are signs that positive developments may be underway. On 9th March 2020, a group of Iraqi Roma representatives successfully met with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) along with the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights to seek support as they press the Iraqi government for improved living conditions [2]. Additionally, the recent creation of task-force responsible for planning and developing a housing project for the Roma in Baghdad is further evidence of positive change [2].

This policy brief will examine the current socio-political and socio-economic circumstances of the Iraqi Roma in order to argue that decades (if not centuries) of discrimination, marginalisation and social ostracisation have facilitated the appalling poverty that many Iraqi Roma experience today. As such, policies and strategies to address this entrenched marginalisation must be consultative, considered, and above all, long-term in their approach. In order to effectively foster integration and increased social cohesion, policy-makers must recognise that decades of marginalisation cannot be remedied without transforming majority society's perception of the Roma. Thus, integration of the Iraqi Roma into society will not be easy or quick, but the tentative first steps detailed in the preceding paragraph must be capitalised upon in order to generate the political will necessary to secure a brighter, more cohesive and conflict resilient future for Iraq as a whole.

Legislation supporting the rights and integration of the Iraqi Roma already exists in the form of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), to which Iraq is a state party. However, neither the Iraqi nor the Iraqi Kurdish governments have extended the rights enshrined within these instruments to the Roma communities. What is now required is the uniform adherence to application of these legislative instruments at the state level, in conjunction with a political commitment to achieve Iraq's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in an inclusive manner [3].

Iraqi Roma: an increasingly marginalised and persecuted component of Iraqi society

Roma have lived in Iraq for many centuries; as a result, they have both influenced, and been influenced by, Iraqi culture. The Roma of Iraq practice Islam and speak Arabic, whilst in turn, their music and songs have become rooted within Iraqi musical tradition, influencing musicians and singers across generations [4]. Originating from tenth century Northern India⁴, the Iraqi Roma have historically been excluded from population census' conducted by the Iraqi state on the premise that they are foreigners. The ability to trace one's ancestry back to the Iraqi government's 1957 census is a key criterion for being able to receive national identification documents [5]. This is often a prohibitive factor for members of the Roma community, whose families have been present in Iraq for many generations but excluded from official recognition. Thus, many Iraqi Roma have technically been stateless since the formation of the Iraqi State in the 1920s. This statelessness combined with continuing marginalisation has resulted in the contemporary Iraqi government being unaware of how many Roma individuals reside in the country. Estimates vary from 50,000 to 200,000, though in 2017, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues referenced the figure as 'up to 200,000' [6,7].

The ingrained nature of popular social contempt for the Roma is evident in the fact that they are often referred to as 'Kawliyah': an 'abusive, discriminatory term' which carries derogatory connotations of social ostracism [8]. Indeed, while most journalists refer to the community as 'Roma' or 'Gypsy', there are instances of journalists also adopting popular derogatory vernacular and referring to them as 'kawliyah', in publications [9]. Such examples indicate the entrenched nature of the discrimination the Iraqi Roma face.

Deep-rooted discrimination is manifested in the abysmal conditions that characterise Roma communities in contemporary Iraq. Many Roma live as IDPs on squatted land in squalid conditions 'without access to clean water, electricity, adequate shelter, healthcare, adequate food, education and other basic services' [10]. However, those remaining in ancestral communities often fare no better. Eyewitness accounts provided by journalists, academics and activists who have visited Roma communities in Iraq remain consistent with the complaints of the Iraqi Roma themselves. Their communities have suffered from extreme neglect, and their people abandoned by the state to 'live in grinding poverty as squatters in segregated slums where they are at constant threat of eviction' [5]. These communities often have no access to running water or clean drinking water; in cases where clean water is delivered it is usually an inadequate amount [11]. Additionally, Roma communities and villages often lack schools or healthcare facilities, which dramatically reduces employment prospects, and shortens life expectancy considerably. A Roma leader of Fawar village in Diwaniyah province laments. 'We suffer badly from the heat in [our] modest houses where we lack electricity. Some of the children throw themselves in sewage water to cool off. Our only access to water is that coming from the contaminated, not-for-human consumption city sewage' [12].

This bleak picture which comprises reality for the Iraqi Roma helps to explain the prevalence of Iraqi Roma beggars; begging is often the only means of income generation available to members of this community. Exclusion from the national campaign against illiteracy in the 1970s meant that at the time, around 95% of Roma remained illiterate [4]. Given the government neglect of Iraqi Roma communities in terms of provision of schools or other forms of education, the illiteracy rate among the Iraqi Roma population will likely remain extremely high, presenting an enormous barrier to both employment and the political representation required to drive positive change in state policy towards them. Social discrimination also plays a significant role in preventing Iraqi Roma from being able to access stable employment and other life opportunities. 'They are refused work because of social stigmatisation. Socially they are despised and [non-Roma] refuse to socialise with them. They are cornered socially, tribally, religiously and governmentally, and they are not allowed to run their own businesses' [12].

The stigmatisation that the Iraqi Roma face is not only an obstruction in terms of gaining access to employment, which has dire consequences for the health and welfare of Roma families; it also manifests as physical violence against them. This is increasingly the case since the regime change in 2003. Targeted violence has caused many Iraqi Roma to leave their communities in order to move into cities, and attempt to assimilate: thereby abandoning their unique culture and hiding their identity in an attempt to escape the risk of physical harm and, simultaneously, securing employment [8].

Whilst the Roma of Iraq have long been pushed to the margins of society, under Saddam Hussein their communities received a measure of protection and even a form of veneration, as they

performed a well-defined, unique role within society, drawing tourists from the Gulf, and later, during the Iran-Iraq war, Iraqi soldiers on leave to their communities, which were effectively used as 'pleasure towns' [4]. 'They worked as dancers, singers or musicians, entertaining people at parties and gatherings. They sold alcohol, created handicrafts and were fortune tellers. And behind closed doors they worked as prostitutes for the elite and ordinary citizens alike [5]. For the Iraqi Roma living under the regime of Saddam Hussein, 'Iraqi nationality was dependent on fulfilling these needed yet shunned professions', but despite this, nationality remained an unfulfilled promise for many [5]. Though the Ba'ath Regime did issue national ID cards to some Roma, the cards contained their ethnicity, thus rendering the Roma vulnerable to social discrimination [1].

Contemporary violent persecution and amplified vulnerability of the Iraqi Roma

After 2003, national ID cards issued to Iraqi Roma were stamped with the word 'exception', therefore denying the Iraqi Roma recognition of their ethnicity whilst simultaneously preventing them from accessing state-provided services or government-sponsored jobs [13]. Moreover, the 'exception' stamp seemingly signified governmental tolerance of violence against them [4]. Almost immediately after the US-led coalition invasion, Shiite militias (notably those led by Muqtada al-Sadr) launched a campaign of brutal persecution against the Iraqi Roma due to their perceived immorality. Thousands of Iraqi Roma have died as a direct result of this violence, leading the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) to recognise them as 'among the most vulnerable, disfavoured and at-risk of all the marginalised groups in Iraq' [10, 12].

To provide some concrete examples of such persecution, in 2004, Shiite militias launched an attack on the Roma village of Azzohour and razed it to the ground. Roma witnesses state that the militias 'used bombs, mortars and machine guns, and looted their homes' [8]. These witness accounts are corroborated by the Commission on Human Rights in the province of Diwaniyah, a member of which describes how 'the attack on the village destroyed it almost completely, turning it to rubble...the number of families who lived in the village dropped from 450 to 120, and the ones who remained are the poorest' [8]. Throughout 2008, Shiite militias launched multiple attacks in the Roma village of Fawar, wreaking bloody devastation. A Roma eyewitness describes how 'fanatic Shia militias launched hundreds of attacks...and burned our houses. They brutally slaughtered our women and children with their swords and decapitated them...these Shiite militias excelled at killing and torturing us [12]. Many Iraqi Roma women have been raped and murdered on the external roads surrounding Fawar, contributing to levels of fear which have driven many to flee their communities in order to seek safety in cities [12]. Sadly, the above examples are not in any way exceptions or anomalies. A 2004 report in the *Economist* describes how Shiite militias formed "raiding parties [armed with] pickaxes, [and] routed gypsy families by the hundreds, steal[ing] their cars and cash savings...and reduc[ing] their homes to rubble."

Iraq-based journalist Tawfiq al-Tamimi has expressed grave concern for the Iraqi Roma in the recent past, stating that: "The situation of Iraqi gypsies is at its worst today: they are constantly threatened by conservatives under the pretext of maintaining honour and chastity. Their living conditions are deplorable and they are practically deprived of basic human rights" [14]. Aside from the combination of institutional and social discrimination, stigmatisation and marginalisation that have

been explored above, there has also been a pattern since 2003 of preventing the Iraqi Roma's freedom of movement, which constitutes a contravention of their human rights as well as a significant obstacle to integration and social cohesion. This close monitoring and control of movement in and around Roma communities is a consequence of the increasing Islamisation of social norms and local governance in the Iraqi provinces in which the Roma predominantly reside. This is primarily due to the rise of extremist militias who perceive both Roma culture and their common means of generating an income as immoral [6].

The village of Fawar in Diwaniyah province is one of many that has been subjected to increased police presence and movement restrictions. As one Roma resident of Fawar explains 'The police treat us in a very arbitrary way...sometimes they allow us to enter the village and other times they don't. In some cases they won't even let our relatives enter the village to visit us [13]. The villagers are acutely aware that until recently, neighbouring villages were uncomfortable living in close proximity to a Roma community, and explain that Fawar was (and possibly still is) 'monitored by security and tribal entities for parties, dancing and music gatherings [14]. Similarly, a journalist who visited Iraqi Roma communities in Basra reports that all of the Roma she spoke to complained that they face discrimination ranging from beatings to persecution by authorities [15]. Despite the continued harassment and persecution of the Roma by militias, authorities and other groups, provincial authorities contend that securitisation measures are necessary, not for the protection of the Roma, but in order to protect majority society from Roma immorality [13]. Such state-sanctioned discrimination indicates that there are significant elements of governance, state-building and social development which urgently need to be addressed.

Given the degree of persecution that Roma have faced in Iraq, it is no surprise that increasing numbers have migrated north to Kurdistan Region of Iraqi (KRI). A census conducted in the KRI by Aluka Cultural Centre for Gypsies in Dohuk found that in recent years the number of Roma in the KRI has risen from 25,000 to 31,000 [4, 16]. In some areas of the KRI the Kurdish government has provided purpose-built housing complexes for the Roma (for example, the Rizgari complex in Dohuk which houses 515 families), whereas in other areas, they remain neglected. Overall, marginalisation continues to prevail. The housing complexes in the KRI remain removed from cities and towns, while resultant isolation exacerbates the problems caused by too few schools and few available job opportunities. Much like in Iraq, stigmatisation and neglect has resulted in begging being the only viable survival option for many Roma families in the KRI. Furthermore, the isolated nature of Roma housing in the KRI has continued to prevent meaningful daily interaction between the Roma and majority society which would likely result in reduced prejudices and increased integration.

Since 2012, the Roma in KRI have been advocating for their right to secure political representation on the provincial councils and in the Iraqi Kurdistan's Parliament [17]. The objective of political representation is no doubt echoed by Roma across Iraq, but until they are granted full Iraqi citizenship, political representation is prohibited by the integral requirement of citizenship as a means through which to access relevant rights under the Iraqi Constitution. By way of recognising the right of Iraqi Roma to full citizenship, in 2015, The Committee for Human Rights at the Kurdistan Parliament requested that the Ministry of Interior allow the Roma community to have their own passport, as they were registered in the 1957 census in Iraq [18]. Importantly, Article 18 of the Iraqi Constitution stipulates that 'Iraqi citizenship is a right for every Iraqi. It is therefore the duty of the

state to provide full citizenship to the Iraqi Roma, which will then enable them to enjoy their constitutional right to 'vote, elect and run for office [19].

National and civil society responses to Iraqi Roma deprivation

As has been demonstrated above, extraordinarily little effort has been made by the Iraqi state to address the entrenched marginalisation of the Roma. Until very recently it seemed that the Iraqi authorities were willing to tolerate violence against the Roma which subsequently led to their displacement and increased vulnerability. The securitisation measures adopted in Diwaniyah province indicate that local authorities view persecution of the Roma as justified based on their perception of the group as immoral. Such securitisation measures have a significant impact upon Roma quality of life and ability to generate an income. Their communities are policed, with friends and relatives often being denied entry to villages, while the freedom of movement of Roma individuals is sometimes being severely curtailed [12-15]. The broad framework of provisions and initiatives required in order to effectively address the precarious socioeconomic and political standing of the Iraqi Roma has neither been formulated nor applied in any measure, leaving the Iraqi government (as well as the KRG) negligent in their responsibilities under both the 2005 Iraqi Constitution and the International Convention on all Forms of Racial Discrimination, which the Iraqi state ratified in 1970 [20].

The first glimmer of hope for the Iraqi Roma came in April 2019, when Iraqi authorities announced that all Roma would be issued national identification cards which no longer carried the word 'exception' or referenced to their ethnicity in a deliberate bid to address the discrimination they face [1]. However, these identification cards have yet to be rolled out in a uniform fashion, leaving Iraqi Roma vulnerable to persecution and without access to services or employment.

The few previous attempts made by the Iraqi government to address the poverty and marginalisation which blights the lives of the Roma were isolated, and either myopic in their approach or fraught with underlying prejudice. In the 1950s, for example, authorities established a school for Fawar village without commensurate consideration of how to address the structural causes or effects of poverty and social discrimination, leaving many Roma struggling to secure an income through prostitution or begging [13]. More recent initiatives in Diwaniyah province have involved the provision of sewing and weaving facilities, workshops and a waste recycling project. However, these programmes have been underpinned by the perceived deliberate strategy of keeping the Roma isolated from majority society on the premise that this will 'prevent them from having to endure social harassment [12]. What such programmes actually do is enforce a form of ghettoisation which renders integration and social cohesion much harder to achieve, whilst restricting the life opportunities of the Roma involved to a handful of roles that the state deems suitable for them.

A much more effective approach has been demonstrated through a civil society campaign established by Manar al-Zybaidi, called 'Gypsies are Humans'. Ms al-Zybaidi aimed to address the fact that Fawar village had been without a school for fourteen years. In doing so she employed a two-pronged approach: on the one hand she sought the human and financial resources to establish a school, while on the other, she used the 'Gypsies are Humans' campaign to challenge society's

attitudes towards the Roma via social media. Initially, the provincial authorities were unwilling to offer any support to Ms al-Zybaidi or the village. However, under pressure from civil rights activists and human rights advocates, the authorities did eventually agree to commit themselves to improving the living conditions in Fawar. As volunteers came forward to teach and children began attending regularly, Fawar became a good news story, with positive outcomes being disseminated over social media being used as a tool through which to disseminate this positive outcome. Interestingly, after the demonstrable success of the school, the perceptions of the Roma held by the communities surrounding Fawar began to change, becoming more positive. As evidence of this, the headteacher of the school states in a media report 'in 2003 there were demands to expel the residents of Fawar, but the demands are now to integrate the villagers into society [21].

The contrast between the approaches employed by the state and civil society in the examples provided above is telling. The 'Gypsies are Humans' campaign recognised that majority society plays a crucial role in the acceptance and integration of Roma. Acceptance will result in support for government spending to improve Roma communities, while integration will provide increased educational and livelihood opportunities, and concurrently reduce their risk of future relapse into abject poverty and marginalisation. The 'Gypsies are Humans' campaign provides a basic blueprint which the government should build upon when developing a framework to provide human rights and secure integration for, the Iraqi Roma.

International recognition of the persecution and marginalisation of Iraqi Roma

Before examining international recognition of the precarious conditions experienced by the Iraqi Roma, it is unfortunate but necessary to point out that their ethnicity is unfortunately likely to significantly diminish political interest in their plight. The Roma represent Europe's largest trans-national minority, but they remain its most persecuted ethnic group [22]. Europe's Roma experience social stigmatisation and structural marginalisation that is similar to that of their counterparts in Iraq. There is also little shared knowledge of the fact that Roma populations exist outside of Europe. This combination of factors works against the Iraqi Roma; they are often completely overlooked. However, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have both raised grave concerns over the plight of the Iraqi Roma very recently.

In 2017, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues highlighted several concerns regarding the Roma and other marginalised minority groups in Iraq [7]. Referencing the Roma specifically, she wrote that 'They...reportedly face widespread discrimination and ostracism and suffer extreme poverty [7]. On marginalised minorities in general, she raised concerns regarding national reconciliation and political, economic and social participation before going on to make several recommendations [7]. These recommendations advocate for the following: formulation of a legal and political framework for the protection of minority rights which should be passed into law and overseen by a dedicated body; ensured political representation of underrepresented minorities, including minority women; employment of proactive measures to re-establish trust among marginalised minority groups and to develop a social ethos based upon equality; and finally, intensified efforts to include minority groups in the promotion of national reconciliation. These

measures all seem relatively common sense, but it seems that there has to date been no political will to secure these objectives to date.

In early 2019, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination published its concluding observations on three periodic reports submitted by Iraq [23]. Observations twenty-five and twenty-six express concern regarding the 'limited representation of ethnic and ethno-religious minorities in the elective bodies at all levels and in public office and urge both the Iraqi government and the KRG to remedy this by 'taking all necessary measures, including amending its electoral laws and ensuring the representation of minorities that do not benefit from the quota system [23]. This would include the Roma, as they do not benefit from the current system and have been completely omitted from electoral and quota processes.

Observation 29 is worth quoting in full due to its exclusive focus upon Iraqi Roma: 'The Committee is concerned about the continued discrimination and marginalisation of the Roma in [Iraq]. In particular, the Committee is concerned that Roma are disproportionately affected by poverty and that they face difficulties in accessing employment, healthcare, housing and education. The Committee is further concerned about reports that most Roma citizens do not hold unified national identity documents, which reportedly exposes them to discrimination, including in cases of employment [23]. The Committee goes on to recommend that Iraq 'adopt concrete measures to effectively fight discrimination against, and stigmatisation of, Roma. The Committee also recommends that [Iraq] adopt special measures to improve integration of Roma into society, including by firmly tackling their poverty and ensuring their access to healthcare, employment, education and housing. The Committee further recommends that all members of the Roma community are granted unified official identity documents, without discrimination [23].

Both the 2005 Iraqi Constitution and the ICERD contain instrumentalised rights which would provide the Iraqi Roma with much greater protection if their respective articles therein were applied universally and equitably to all Iraqi citizens. Indeed, it is the responsibility of both the Iraqi government and the KRG to ensure that the rights contained within the aforementioned legal instruments are extended to all citizens without discrimination. The case of the Iraqi Roma illustrates the myriad ways in which both governments are failing in this responsibility with consequential harmful and far-reaching repercussions for a vulnerable ethnic group.

The Sustainable Development Goals

Aside from its obligations to guiding legal instruments, the Iraqi government should be reminded that as part of the international community and a member state of the UN, it is also a party to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 [3]. These goals seek to erase poverty and discrimination while fostering prosperity and peace at a global level, with successful transformation taking place before 2030. In addition to the SDGs themselves, 193 UN member states, including Iraq, pledged to 'Leave No-one Behind' in pursuit of these goals. The objective of this pledge is to ensure that on a global level, states 'endeavour to reach the furthest behind first...in practice, this means taking explicit action to end extreme poverty, curb inequalities, confront discrimination and fast-track progress for the furthest behind [24]. The current situation of the Iraqi Roma clearly positions them as a priority recipient of the affirmative action and attention the 'Leave No-one Behind' pledge

entails. The framework outlined within the ‘Leave No-one Behind’ pledge provides a strong foundation upon which to formulate strategies for securing the inclusion of Iraq’s Roma communities in the satisfaction of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Conclusion

The Iraqi Roma, despite having been present in Iraq for hundreds of years have long been stigmatised and marginalised. However, since the US-led coalition invasion in 2003, they have been actively persecuted, which has exacerbated their poverty and rendered them one of the most vulnerable minority groups in contemporary Iraq.

The Iraqi government has consistently employed a *de facto* policy of neglect, securitisation, and even tacit support for violence against the Iraqi Roma in the past, but there are small glimmers of hope emerging. Both the Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish governments should build upon this tentative momentum by extending all rights enshrined within the Iraqi Constitution as well as other ratified human rights instruments to the Iraqi Roma as a matter of urgency. Necessary initiatives and actions to achieve this objective should be employed alongside a pragmatic but determined framework for achieving the SDGs. Of utmost importance is the necessity of reaching out to majority society, alongside the Roma through strategies for social integration and increased community cohesion.

Recommendations

Education

- Both the Iraqi government and KRG should work to remove barriers to Roma children accessing education by providing primary schools for Roma communities and providing free transport for older Roma children to attend their nearest high school.
- In recognition of the grinding poverty experienced by Roma families which can contribute towards Roma children being removed from school in order to beg, Roma families should receive a financial stipend while their children attend school in order to encourage attendance.
- University scholarships should be made available for Roma students; and especially for those who wish to enter healthcare or teaching professions, as they can directly contribute to community development upon graduation.
- Both the Iraqi government and KRG should consider the development and implementation of citizenship classes as part of the school curriculum. These classes should highlight the positive contributions and historical presence of all ethnic groups within Iraq, including Roma, while also teaching students the value of diversity.
- A public awareness campaign similar to ‘Gypsies are Humans’ should be strategically planned and implemented in order to gain public support for the integration of Roma children integrating into schools and universities. Such a campaign should also aim to foster support for broader integration, as well as public recognition of the requirement for affirmative action policies.

Health

- Provision of adequate clean water to all Roma communities should be prioritised.
- Provision of health clinics for Roma communities should be prioritised. Where Roma communities are small in population mobile clinics could be utilised.
- Specialist antenatal and early childhood outreach workers should be provided for Roma communities.
- Reproductive healthcare for both men and women should be made available to Roma communities.

Housing

- Where possible, Roma communities on squatted land should have their residences legally regularised provided the land being squatted on is not environmentally hazardous.
- Arbitrary evictions should be ceased with immediate effect. Those who arbitrarily evict Roma households or communities should be subject to criminal proceedings and punished according to the law without discrimination and regardless of background or position.
- Where physically possible, Roma communities should be provided with access to clean water and electricity, as well as safe, purpose-built structures in which to live. Houses should include provision of adequate sanitation, including a purpose-built toilet.
- In situations where Roma communities are residing in environmentally hazardous areas, the community should be consulted as to their desired outcome regarding relocation. Relocation should then take the form of a participatory process until the desired outcome has been achieved.
- Provision of housing should be prioritised for those Roma households or communities living in the most unsafe conditions.
- All Roma families and communities should be provided with paperwork for their places of residence, whether deeds of ownership or tenancy agreements, thus reducing the risk of arbitrary eviction and displacement.
- Restrictions on the movement of Roma, including movement in and out of Roma communities should be lifted immediately. State actors such as police, militias or other armed forces who continue to engage in restrictive behaviour should be disciplined, or, if necessary, face criminal proceedings.

Employment

- Adult literacy classes should be made available to Roma communities and families.
- Vocational training programmes should be made available to Roma communities. Such vocational training should be delivered after accurate, region-specific market-research to ensure the marketability of skills, and should be provided after community consultation, thus enabling the Roma to take the lead in choosing their means of income generation.
- Both the Iraqi government and KRG should consider the development of an apprenticeship scheme which would pay employers to take on Roma apprentices in craft and trade-based jobs, thereby paying the apprentice a stipend until he has attained a sufficient level of skill to work independently. Such a scheme would not only contribute to poverty reduction among the Roma, but would also facilitate social integration.

Political / Social

- Both the Iraqi government and the KRG should conduct a nationwide needs assessment of Roma communities as a matter of urgency. This needs assessment should be in the form of an open consultation, thereby enabling Roma participants to give contextual input.
- National identification documents which make no reference to ethnicity and which do not carry the word 'exception' should be issued as a matter of priority.
- Both the Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional governments should seek to liaise with governments of other states containing a Roma population that have already developed strategies on how to integrate Roma communities. The Kosovan government is a prime example.
- Both the Iraqi government and the KRG should encourage Roma political representation at provincial council and parliamentary levels by including a number of Roma seats in parliamentary and relevant council quotas.
- Both the Iraqi government and the KRG should reach out to UNDP for liaison and support in employing the 'Leave No-one Behind' framework for attainment of the SDGs.

References

1. The New Arab, (3rd April 2019), '*Iraq's Persecuted "Gypsy" Community Granted National ID Cards*', <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2019/4/3/iraqs-persecuted-gypsy-community-granted-national-id-cards>.
2. United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), (11th March 2020), "*We want to live like other Iraqis*" – Roma representatives meet with UNAMI Human Rights Office and IHCHR", [http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=11976:"we-want-to-live-like-other-iraqis"-roma-representatives-meet-with-unami-human-rights-office-and-ihchr&Itemid=606&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=11976:).
3. See United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Iraq website: <https://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>.
4. Zeidel R, (2014), '*Gypsies and Society in Iraq: Between Marginality, Folklore and Romanticism*', Middle Eastern Studies, 50 (1), p75-80.
5. Nowhere People, <http://www.nowherepeople.org/iraq> - website accessed 24th April 2020.
6. Belayachi D, (3rd April 2015), '*The Iraqi Gypsies Living on the Fringes of Society*', The Observers (France 24), <https://observers.france24.com/en/20150304-iraq-gypsies-villages-minorities-diwaniya>.
7. UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues on her Mission to Iraq, (9th January 2017), (A/HRC/34/53/Add.1), <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/report-special-rapporteur-minority-issues-her-mission-iraq-ahrc3453add1-enar>.
8. Tamimi I, (19th September 2011), '*Iraq's Roma women: from dancing, prostitution in pre-Iraq invasion to harassment, begging*', Middle East Online, <https://middle-east->

[online.com/en/iraq/s-roma-women-dancing-prostitution-pre-iraq-invasion-harassment-begging](https://www.bbc.com/en/iraq/s-roma-women-dancing-prostitution-pre-iraq-invasion-harassment-begging).

9. Majeed H, (17th April 2018), '*Children of Iraq's Kawliyah return to school after 14-year break*', Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-gypsies/children-of-irags-kawliya-return-to-school-after-14-year-break-idUSKBN1HO23K>.

10. European Asylum Support Office, (March 2019), '*EASO Country Information Report – Iraq: Targeting of Individuals*', p152.

11. Balayachi D, (3rd April 2015), The Observers (France 24).

12. Latif N, (23rd January 2013), '*The Gypsies of Iraq – meetings with a people in isolation*', Your Middle East, <https://yourmiddleeast.com/2013/01/23/the-gypsies-of-iraq-ae-meetings-with-a-people-in-isolation/>.

13. al-Zubaidi M, '*Iraq's Gypsies Blockaded by Police, Harassed by Authorities*', Niqash, <https://www.niqash.org/en/articles/society/5119/>.

14. Bassem W, (27th April 2015), '*Iraq's Gypsy Communities Face Discrimination*', Al-Monitor, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2015/04/iraq-gypsies-dance-parties-prostitution-discrimination.html>.

15. Taleb M, '*Basra's Gypsy Community Despised – and Expanding*', Niqash, <https://www.niqash.org/en/articles/society/3247/>.

16. Dosky A K, (8th June 2012) '*Iraqi Kurdistan's Gypsies want to vote: no more singing and dancing*', EKurd Daily, <https://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/6/state6271.htm>.

17. Rudaw, (20th September 2018), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bl56N8v23U>; and Dosky AK, (8th June 2012), '*Iraqi Kurdistan's Gypsies want to vote: No more singing and dancing*', EKurd Daily, <https://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/6/state6271.htm>.

18. Rudaw, (18th March 2015), <https://www.rudaw.net/sorani/kurdistan/1803201526>.

19. National Constitution of Iraq (2005), Article 20.

20. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>.

21. Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), (11th December 2017), '*Village of Hope*', IWPR, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/village-hope>.

22. Global Minorities, (2015), <http://www.globalminorities.co.uk/gma-reports/the-most-persecuted-minority-in-europe-an-assessment-of-roma-rights-in-europe>.

23. UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – Concluding Observations on the Combined Twenty-second to Twenty-fifth Periodic Reports on Iraq, (11th January 2019), (CERD/C/IRQ/CO/22-25).

24. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (July 2018), '*What Does it Mean to Leave Noone Behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation*', <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/what-does-it-mean-to-leave-no-one-behind-.html>.

Sarah Edgcumbe is a PhD candidate with the School of International Relations at the University of St Andrews. She holds an MA in conflict studies and human rights from Utrecht University and an MA in refugee protection and forced migration studies from the University of London's School of Advanced Studies. Her research interests are the interrelationship between conflict, gender and minorities and the role of grassroots activism and resistance in society within a conflict or post-conflict context.

Article Citation: Louise, S. (2020) "We're Real Iraqis": Securing Roma Rights and Integration in Post-conflict Iraq., MERI Policy Paper. vol. 4, no. 40.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of MERI.