Change by Design
Antakya

Living Heritage of Antakya's Dom

Advocating for Adequate Housing in Reconstruction

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Editors
Francesco Pasta, ule Can, Beatrice De Carli

Contributors
Text: Tuba Akin, Mehmet Kuyumcu, Lucia Maffei, Francesco Pasta, Serra Utkum kiz
Illustrations: Lucia Maffei

Production
Copy Editing: Francesco Pasta
Design: Ottavia Pasta

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UCL The Bartlett Development Planning Unit

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Contents

A story about the Dom origins and way of life

“Allah, emmetınker rızkesse farıkk keyşi hırkerr meleykette cıvellırre. Hee meleyket eee emmetınker rızkesse elli kette işş hırende ötenınttı mıkırrde tallıntı, oventtı, dengzınmı. Bess emmetekıt eyre vındırde. Hee emmet tenekkıt işnörre allatül terr nevendee. Meleyket rızkıs kevv kever kebder nıcenre.

Eee meselles Alhıssa cıb keyşıı hırker peççi pırre:
Yaa Rabb çıvre eee emmetınker rızkesse sıı farıkk kıröm. Bess emmete eşte ebedd tenekkıt nıvındırrışte. Allatül pandıt hışında rızkesse kevv keverd kepdem nıçenıştöm, fitte.

Allhınşşı meleykettıt fıtte:
“Henörrin Dominne. Töö orınkii rızkesse elli nengendee pandesattı tışlekker. Henörinn pey nasibiss le rızkıss dekende fıtte.”

“God appoints a helper angel to distribute sustenance to all peoples and tribes. This angel leaves each community’s provision in the regions where they live — on the mountains, in the valleys, along the coasts. But when the angel reaches one particular people, they hesitate. For this people is not settled; they are constantly on the move, living a nomadic life. The angel does not know where to leave their sustenance.

They return to consult God about the matter.
“O Lord,” they say, “I have distributed the sustenance of all peoples. But there is one people with neither a homeland nor borders. This community is always on the road — I do not know where to leave their sustenance.”

Upon hearing this, God says:
“They are the Dom. Scatter their sustenance along the paths they migrate. They will find their share for themselves.”

This narrative suggests that the Dom’s way of life – rooted not in fixed places but in movement, not in borders but in transitions – carries a sacred meaning. For the Dom, the road is not merely a route to pass through, but also a place to inhabit. Their sustenance, too, is hidden along this path.

This story was shared by a Dom resident during the workshop on Dom living heritage, held on May 18, 2025, at Büyükdalyan I Container City in Antakya. It was told in Domari, an orally transmitted language with no written form, as it is transmitted within the community; its written version is transcribed here using Turkish spelling.

Introduction

Mapping the unseen

This booklet presents the findings of a coproductive research project jointly carried out by the Sivil Düler Association and Architecture Sans Frontières – UK (ASF-UK), with support from University College London (UCL)'s Development Planning Unit and Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction in 2025. The project, titled *Mapping the Unseen: recovering living heritage and supporting community-led relocation through data-driven approaches*, was funded by University College London's Data-Empowered Societies Small Grants Programme.

Architecture Sans Frontières UK is a non-profit organisation that uses community-led design and planning to create fairer cities. Sivil Düler Dernei is a rights-based NGO working with peripatetic communities such as the Romani, Dom, and Abdal peoples in Hatay and the broader Mesopotamian region.

This work builds on ASF-UK's broader engagement in Antakya, which began after the February 2023 earthquakes. In collaboration with local organisations, ASF-UK has promoted community-led reconstruction through the lens of living heritage – the dynamic network of knowledge, relationships, and practices that connect people, places, and traditions, cultivating a sense of belonging within communities and continuity across generations. In contrast to essentialist and static understandings of cultural identity, this concept views the city, its history, and its culture as evolving entities, continuously shaped through people's interactions with both the built and natural environment.

From this standpoint, protecting Antakya's living heritage means going beyond the reconstruction of its material fabric to attend also to the repair and reinvention of its social and cultural life in relation to its environment.

The *Mapping the Unseen* project documents the Dom community's living spaces in Antakya, many lost in the 2023 earthquakes. It aims to preserve knowledge of their way of life and provide evidence to support fair, culturally appropriate relocation through negotiations with authorities.

Everyone involved – from local residents to professional bodies – holds valuable knowledge and perspectives that can inform and enrich this process, making "living heritage" a useful entry point for ensuring that diverse voices and ways of knowing are taken into account in shaping the city's future.

As the people of Antakya take an active role in repairing their living environments and maintaining their relational networks, then, any reconstruction that ignores their perspectives and values risks failing to carry forward the city's living heritage. This is even more urgent given the city's composite sociocultural makeup, where different communities have long coexisted in a fragile balance. Advocating for Antakya's plural histories and diverse populations is therefore central to ASF-UK's ongoing work of repairing living heritage and supporting just, equitable recovery.

From this perspective, the Mapping the Unseen project has aimed to gather knowledge and information about the way of life of the Dom community in Antakya, a community that had lived in the city for over 60 years before being displaced by the 2023 earthquakes. The objectives of the project are twofold: first, to document the living spaces of the Dom in Antakya's city centre, many of which were destroyed in the disaster; and second, to build a body of evidence that can support the community in negotiating with authorities for fair and culturally appropriate relocation.

Since settling in Antakya in the 1960s, Dom people have lived in self-built neighbourhoods like Emek, Altınçay, and Saraykent. These areas faced government-led urban transformation and were severely damaged by the 2023 earthquakes.

The Dom of Antakya in the earthquakes aftermath

The Dom, an ethnic group traditionally known for a peripatetic (or itinerant) lifestyle, live in communities scattered across the Middle East. Despite centuries of settlement, they have often remained socially marginalised and legally unrecognised, with their language and cultural practices transmitted primarily through oral tradition. Importantly, the Dom have largely been excluded also by discourses on multiculturalism that celebrate Antakya's socio-cultural diversity.

Since first settling in Antakya in the 1960s, Dom people have concentrated in areas such as Emek and Altınçay, and subsequently Saraykent, largely self-built neighbourhoods that were once on the city's outskirts but have become increasingly central due to urban expansion. Before the earthquakes, these neighbourhoods were marked by socio-economic marginalisation and limited access to infrastructure and public services, often labelled as "gecekondu" areas. However, they also represented spatial expressions of collective memory, artisanal heritage, kinship-based solidarity, and autonomous survival practices developed in response to structural exclusion. Given their central location, these neighbourhoods also offered residents opportunities to participate in the city's public life and access its resources. For Dom communities, these areas represented more than places of shelter: they were spaces of identity. Collective forms of life, oral history, language, craft, and memory were deeply embedded in every corner.

However, these memory-laden spaces have suffered significant physical, social, and symbolic destruction, first through central government-led urban transformation policies in the 2010s, and then in the February 2023 earthquakes. Today, the experience of displacement may be further intensified by the ongoing reconstruction process. As many Dom residents held no official title deeds for their houses, the government is unlikely to recognise their right to access the housing units now being built in their former neighbourhoods, or even in mass housing developments elsewhere in Antakya. Even in cases where the Dom are recognised as right-holders – or if such recognition were extended to the whole community – serious questions remain regarding the suitability of proposed housing locations and typologies for their way of life, their ability to continue living collectively, and the financial conditions required to access such housing.

These concerns highlight a critical issue: whether their right to adequate housing is being fulfilled. This right, as defined by the United Nations, encompasses seven key dimensions: security of tenure; availability of services and infrastructure; affordability; habitability; accessibility; location; and cultural adequacy. Viewed through this lens, the proposed relocation schemes for the Dom are deeply problematic. Beyond the inherent uncertainty surrounding them, they clearly fall short on multiple criteria of this internationally recognised human right.

Displacement for Dom residents may worsen as reconstruction continues. Without official land titles, their right to new housing is uncertain. Questions remain about the suitability of locations, housing types, communal living, and affordability, raising serious concerns about fulfilling the Dom's right to adequate housing.

Figure 01: In-depth drawing interview in Büyükdalyan container city.
Credit: Francesco Pasta

Towards just and participatory relocation

Currently, the Dom community is in a situation of uncertainty regarding future relocation and under threat of being dispersed, something that directly endangers their identity and future well-being as a marginalised minority within Antakya's diverse cultural landscape. Most community members express a strong wish to stay together and see this as a precondition for sustaining their way of life and culture, including the use of their Domari mother tongue. Moreover, there is a widespread demand for housing solutions that allow for communal living and are located close to the city centre and its services and opportunities.

For this reason, this report aims to document the lost neighbourhoods of Emek, Altınçay and Saraykent as they were experienced by the Dom community prior to the earthquakes – outcomes of spatial discrimination as well as practices of collective solidarity. In so doing, it advocates for a fairer, co-produced, reconstruction and relocation process that is rooted in closely listening to the community's local memory.

Working with community members, we mapped and visualized how the Dom in Antakya once lived and identified the places and elements that held value to them, and which they wish to evolve into the future. In doing so, we documented the living heritage of their neighbourhoods – a heritage that survives partly in practice but has largely been destroyed in its material form and now persists only in memory.

Rather than proposing predefined solutions, we focused on gathering and visualizing knowledge that can support advocacy for living spaces reflecting the community's culture, practices, and needs. It is our hope that this document will help ensure the Dom community remains an integral part of Antakya's rich cultural and social fabric, as it has been for decades.

This report documents the living heritage of Dom neighbourhoods, partly preserved in practice but mostly lost physically. It advocates for fair, co-produced reconstruction rooted in the community's memory, aiming to ensure the Dom remain an integral part of Antakya's cultural and social fabric.

Method

This research was grounded in a coproductive approach, involving former residents of Dom-inhabited neighbourhoods in Antakya in identifying research needs and themes, as well as collecting data. ASF-UK and Sivil Düler jointly designed the process to gather information and generate knowledge that both documents the Dom community's heritage and helps them carry it forward.

Over the course of two weeks (18–30 May 2025), we carried out three complementary activities:

"Living Heritage" workshop

This community-based workshop was held at the Sivil Düler headquarters in Büyükdalyan Container City, where the majority of displaced Dom residents now live. Around 25 members of the community took part, including 10 "community researchers" who are themselves Dom residents. Participants collectively explored the meaning of living heritage for their community, discussing which elements they hope to pass on to future generations and which places were central to their way of life before the earthquake. The discussions were structured around five key themes: Livelihoods and Economy; Environment and Infrastructure; Care and Support Systems; Social Life and Gatherings; and History and Memory. The workshop also explored what kinds of data could be collected – and how – to document these elements and places, and how this data should be shared back with the community.

Household survey

Building on the workshop, we developed a survey using KoboToolbox, a free and accessible digital tool already in use by Sivil Düler. The survey was designed to collect geo-referenced data and included open-ended audio questions, options to upload photos, and multiple-choice formats. The aim was to generate evidence to support community advocacy efforts by documenting relationships to homes, neighbourhoods, and the broader city. Ten community researchers were trained and piloted using the tool. Over five days, they surveyed 75 households across various container cities where the Dom community has been relocated, including: Büyükdalyan 1, Büyükdalyan 2, Pınarbaı, Limak, Tayfur Sökmen, Koç Umut, Emlak Konut, ISO, Konya 1, Bursa Kütahya, and Katar 1 and 4 (See **Map 02**, p.33). With an average household size of 4.7, the survey captured data on approximately 350 people, 2% of Antakya's estimated Dom population of 15,000–20,000.

In-depth drawing interviews

In parallel with the household survey, 12 in-depth household interviews were conducted by three researchers – two ASF-UK associates and one Sivil Düler member. The goal was to collect more detailed accounts of daily life, spatial practices, and the Dom community's historical and emotional connections to the city. Nine interviews took place in Büyükdalyan 1 Container City, with the remaining three in Limak. These "drawing interviews" involved co-sketching floor plans of pre-earthquake homes following descriptions made by the interviewees, and conducting virtual "memory walks" through former neighbourhoods, aided by Google Street View, since the actual neighbourhoods have been largely razed. Screen recordings, including commentary by the interviewee, and sketches captured the information emerging through these walks.

History recollection

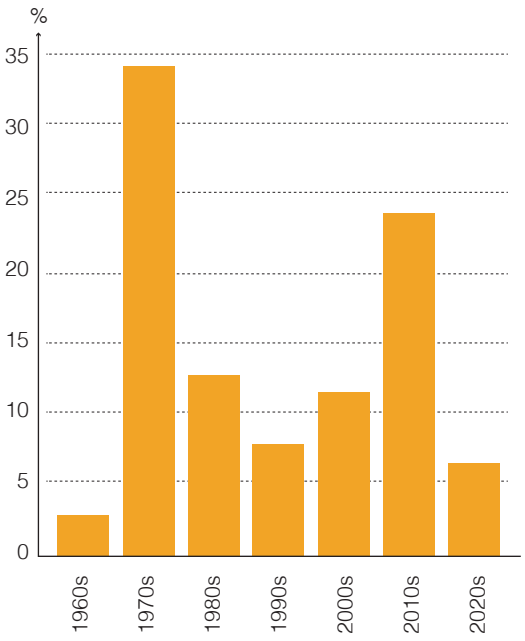
The historical account of the Dom community in Antakya was developed through an experiential narrative shared by a community researcher and activist, based on oral histories passed down by elders and across generations. While not all details are formally documented, contextual historical references were incorporated where possible. Rather than offering a comprehensive historical record, this section aims to provide a community-informed account of a largely undocumented past, as it has been remembered, narrated, and interpreted by Dom themselves.

A brief history of Antakya's Dom community

The Dom community in Hatay has a complex history of settlement, shaped by borders, exclusion, and a persistent struggle for belonging. Their story began in the early 20th century with migration from present-day Syria into the Sanjak of Alexandretta (skenderun), which was then part of French Mandate Syria and was later incorporated into the newly formed Turkish Republic under the name "Hatay". They established settlements based on traditional crafts and kinship networks.

Despite their deep roots, the Doms faced significant marginalisation. Excluded as haymatlos (stateless) during Turkey's annexation of Hatay in 1939, they continued to rely on their artisanal livelihoods. However, due to modernisation, mechanisation, and the restrictive citizenship regime, they experienced increasing legal and spatial marginalisation. A pivotal moment came in the 1970s with a major tent fire in Antakya, which spurred the collective construction of the Emek and Altınçay neighbourhoods.

In which period did your family move to the neighborhood?



Before the earthquakes, these neighbourhoods were powerful carriers of Dom identity and tangible expressions of life strategies developed outside state recognition. This historical narrative reveals a clear line of resistance: from forced migration to established settlement, from productive craftsmanship to impoverishment, and from systemic marginalisation to resilient collective solidarity. Despite this long-term presence, there is little documentation about their history and most of the community memory and development trajectory is transmitted orally. This section will summarise the key elements of this history, as captured by us through conversations and oral history transmitted within the community.

Before 1920s: The memory of migration – The Journey of the Dom from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic

The historical roots of the Dom community in Hatay trace back to early 20th-century migrations from present-day Syria's Aleppo, Latakia, and Idlib regions. According to oral traditions, Dom families in Antakya are descended from eight siblings who sustained themselves through skilled crafts like blacksmithing, tin plating, and goldsmithing around Aleppo. During this era, these communities existed outside conventional national and citizenship

The Dom's historical roots in Hatay trace back to migrations from Syria's Latakia and Idlib regions in the early 1900s. To preserve their language and cultural memory, they transmitted Domari orally, deliberately keeping it unwritten to protect it from outside influence.

Dom communities who migrated to Hatay in the 1920s, under French Mandate rule, were marginalised by both colonial authorities and locals. Their seasonal settlement practice, known as *konmak* (setting up camp), centred on rural-urban transition zones like Antakya, Kırıkhan, and Reyhanlı.

frameworks, often identified simply as "Syrian" or "stateless."

In order to preserve their language and cultural memory, migrating groups orally transmitted the Domari language, deliberately keeping it unwritten to protect it from outside influence. While this strategy fostered insularity, it also played an important role in preserving identity cohesion.

A pivotal event in the community's oral history took place just prior to their arrival in Antakya: the haircutting of a young boy, the sole son of a prominent Dom family and the grandfather of a contemporary lineage. According to the narrative, the six-year-old had grown his hair long as part of a religious vow. However, the family chose to cut it before entering Antakya. This act is symbolically interpreted as both a sacrificial offering and a ritual purification, marking their transition into a new place, life, and environment.

According to Dom elders, this ritual embodies the completion of a spiritual commitment within the family, marks the boy's initial step into adulthood, and signifies a significant transition to settled life within the state's framework, represented by Antakya. Such rituals of bodily transformation carry profound significance for the Dom community, acting as critical thresholds for both displacement and identity transformation. Ultimately, this account serves to mark a crucial moment, underscoring the community's shift from nomadism to permanent settlement.

1920s–1950s: Statelessness, discrimination, and resistance in Mandate period and early Republican years

Dom communities that migrated to present-day Hatay province during the 1920s, then part of the Sanjak of Alexandretta under French Mandate, were marginalized by both colonial authorities and the local population.

Amid the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, and within the context of the French–Turkish territorial dispute, the Dom community was largely rendered invisible and positioned as "marginal". Their seasonal settlement practices, known as konmak (setting up camp), concentrated in rural-urban transition zones like Antakya, Kırıkhan, and Reyhanlı. During this time, crafts like blacksmithing, ring and earring making, and gold polishing emerged as vital sources of livelihoods in villages with limited access to services.

Following Hatay's annexation to Turkey in 1939, the Dom were excluded from the Republic's citizenship regime and labeled "haymatlos" (stateless) in population censuses between 1935 and 1940. As a result, many were forced to return to Syria. This exclusion denied the community political representation and property rights for decades.

1960s–1970s: Transition to settled life in Antakya and formation of Emek and Altınçay neighbourhoods

In the 1960s and 70s, under the pressures of modernisation and the decline of traditional crafts, the Dom community in Antakya began to establish more permanent settlements. In areas that were then on the outskirts of the city – particularly Emek and Altınçay – tents were erected with verbal permission from the municipality, eventually giving way to makeshift shacks and one-room portable houses. These spaces evolved into more than mere shelters; they became sites of security, solidarity, and identity construction.

Figure 02: A convivial moment in Emek mahallesi.
Photo shared by a survey respondent.

In the 1960s and 70s, the Dom community in Antakya began to settle, setting up tents on the outskirts of the city with verbal permission from the municipality.

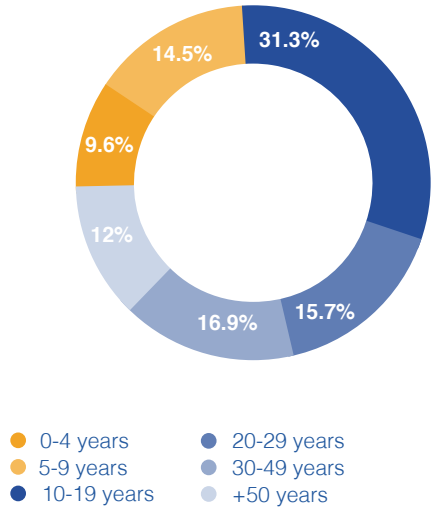
The first settlements formed along the Altınçay creek, which holds significant importance in the community's collective memory. This creek served as a vital water source from the Amanos Mountains and bore symbolic significance linked to gold and craftsmanship. The elders recount how the Dom community collected gold nuggets from the creek and crafted them into jewellery, a practice that resonates in contemporary narratives, establishing a mythical continuity between nature and the community's artisanal knowledge.

A major turning point occurred in the early 1970s with a devastating tent fire. According to accounts, a stove tipped over while a community member was praying, igniting a fire that rapidly spread to adjacent tent structures, leaving many families homeless and several individuals injured. This incident starkly highlighted the community's precarious living conditions and their vulnerability in an environment lacking infrastructure.

Elder community members recounted how in the aftermath of the fire, the municipality promised land and infrastructure on treasury-owned land in the upper parts of Emek Mahallesi. However, no formal support, official planning, or legal guarantees were provided. The neighbourhoods were constructed entirely through collective effort and kin-based divisions of labour. Families rebuilt one-room shacks and portable homes, stabilised with sheet metal and wood, within the designated area. They devised individual solutions for accessing water and undertook collective efforts to secure electricity connections. Land was divided among community members based on kinship ties, with internal neighbourhood boundaries largely shaped by family clusters.

Over time, houses in these neighbourhoods transformed from mere residences into sites of production. Dental work, in particular, emerged as a modernised iteration of traditional goldsmithing, with some residents producing prosthetics at home as a means of livelihood. This transformation illustrates the intersection of production and intergenerational knowledge transfer within the house and neighbourhood space. Yet for many years, Emek and Altınçay were excluded from state planning processes, often branded with derogatory terms such as 'desert,' 'Gypsy neighbourhood,' or 'foreign quarter,' and deprived of essential public services.

How long had you been living in your home before the earthquake?



After a devastating tent fire in the early 1970s destroyed much of the Dom settlement, the municipality permitted them to settle on treasury-owned land in the upper parts of Emek Mahallesi. Without formal support or legal guarantees, the neighbourhood was built entirely through collective effort and kin-based labour.

1980s-1990s: Impoverishment, marginalization, and community solidarity

Starting in the 1980s, industrialisation in Turkey rendered the Dom's craft-based livelihoods economically unsustainable. Trades like goldsmithing, tin plating, and blacksmithing gradually disappeared. Deprived of productive opportunities, the neighborhoods became impoverished. Men began seeking seasonal jobs outside the city, while the neighborhoods adopted a more transient and mobile character. Women, on the other hand, were largely confined to domestic labor or low-paid, precarious work. Although the neighborhoods became more physically established over time, this sense of permanence remained fragile, as residents continued to live without legal recognition, basic services, or stable livelihoods.

Between 1980 and 2000, Emek and Altınçay appeared settled but existed in a state of suspension. To the state, they were largely invisible, receiving little in the way of basic infrastructure or social services. Dom residents who had settled informally on treasury land with local authorities' tolerance were denied formal recognition and access to state regularisation programmes that benefited similar areas elsewhere in Turkey. Their stigmatised status and lack of formal land titles meant they were excluded from infrastructure investments and upgrading. During this period, the community relied on its own networks of solidarity to sustain daily life, defending neighborhood spaces through practices like mutual aid, shared child-rearing, and collective rituals.

2000s to present: Recognition, urban pressure, and new migrations

From the 2000s onward, some administrative developments began to affect the status of the neighborhoods. With Hatay's designation as a metropolitan municipality in 2013–2014, Emek and Altınçay were formally recognized as neighborhoods. This status provided limited access to urban services but failed to address the deep-seated inequalities created by historical exclusion. At the same time, urbanization accelerated, and many previously undeveloped areas surrounding Dom-inhabited neighbourhoods were opened up for construction. Previously located on the city's outskirts, these neighbourhoods had become central areas within the expanding urban fabric.

Around the same period, Dom and other groups fleeing the Syrian civil war began settling in various parts of Hatay, particularly in neighborhoods like Saraykent. This influx diversified the social fabric but also intensified issues of poverty, housing, and discrimination. Emek and Altınçay became contact zones for this new wave of migration and simultaneously faced threats of urban transformation and displacement throughout the 2010s. In 2013, the Ministry of Urbanization declared Emek and the neighbouring Aksaray "Risk Areas," paving the way for urban transformation that would erase the neighbourhoods' spatial fabric and displace much of their population. Community resistance to these plans once again revealed the strength of spatial belonging and collective memory.

Between 1980 and 2000, Dom neighbourhoods lacked basic infrastructure and services, and were excluded from regularisation programmes that supported similar areas elsewhere in Turkey. Stigma and the absence of land titles blocked access to public investment and upgrading.

Figure 03: Revisiting the now destroyed former house through Google Street View. Photo shared by a survey respondent.

Visualizing the way of life of the Dom before the earthquake

As recounted above, before the earthquakes Dom people used to live in clustered areas within central and semi-central neighbourhoods of Antakya, initially Emek and Altınçay and, later on, Saraykent. Interviewees have reported that living in close proximity was also a way to protect themselves from being marginalised or labeled by outsiders. As a minoritised group, togetherness (beraberlik) as a community contributed to a sense of safety and enabled the preservation and transmission of culture, including the Domari language.

Life in these neighborhoods was generally shaped by an economic structure based on informal and temporary work. Jobs such as playing music, collecting scrap materials, and working as porters were among the main sources of income for families. Structural inequalities in access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and housing made life a constant struggle for the Dom communities. Nevertheless, the solidarity networks they established among themselves played a vital role – especially in childcare, supporting sick individuals, and collective decision-making processes.

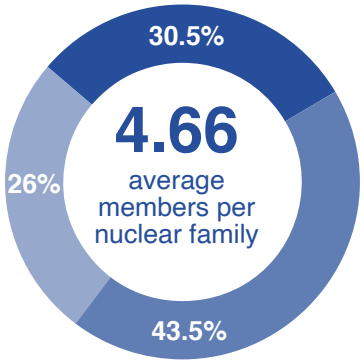
Social spaces and collective memories

Weddings, funerals, religious holidays, and special occasions within the community were important moments of gathering for the Dom, in which the community renewed collective memory and reproduced their identity.

The research mapped neighbourhood layouts and key communal spaces. Primary socialisation spots included door fronts (mentioned by 90% of respondents), gardens and courtyards (68%), and open areas in Emek, particularly two known as “boluk” (empty spaces) (58%).

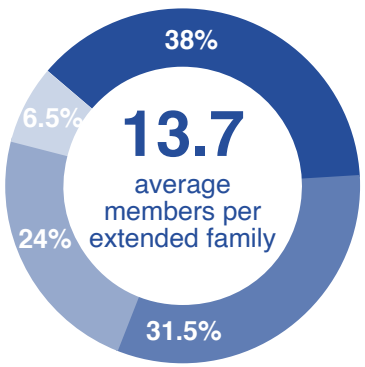
As physical meeting points, these spaces were carriers of cultural practices and a sense of belonging. Conversation circles formed at doorsteps, the streets and gardens where children grew up together, improvised shared meals, and the halay dances at weddings all stood out as everyday practices that strengthened the collective identity of the Dom community. Residents recalled memories of weddings,

How many people lived together in your nuclear family?



- Large Families (6+ people)
- Medium Families (4–5 people)
- Small Families (1–3 people)

How many people lived together in your extended family?



- Large Family (7+ people)
- Medium Family (5–6 people)
- Small Family (3–4 people)
- Very Small Family (1–2 people)

Figure 04: Daily life in the neighbourhoods before the earthquake. Photo shared by a survey respondent.

"We built the bakery so that our people could bake and learn a trade. But they didn't eat our bread."
(Oral saying passed on among Dom)

funerals, community assemblies, family visits, football games, and informal gatherings centred around tea, coffee, and conversation (sohbet or muhabbet).

In addition to landmarks like the cemetery – which included a Dom section – the Altınçay creek, several mosques, the taxi stand, and Cumhuriyet Caddesi (a main thoroughfare leading to the city centre), respondents highlighted a number of informal reference points and local figures embedded in the community's shared memory. These informal references – such as "so-and-so's mulberry tree," "the old neighborhood tandır," or "Uncle Cuma's arbor" – served as markers of local memory for the community. Space became intertwined with memories, carrying a form of lived knowledge passed down from generation to generation.

"Settled communities have always excluded us Dom, who live as nomads, in every aspect of life, because they have always seen us as potential criminals..."
(Oral saying passed on among Dom)

Residents recalled memories of weddings, funerals, community assemblies, family visits, football games, and informal gatherings centred around tea, coffee, and conversation (*sohbet* or *muhabbet*).

Figure 05: Photos shareb by Dom residents during the household survey, recalling their old neighbourhoods and activities (2025).

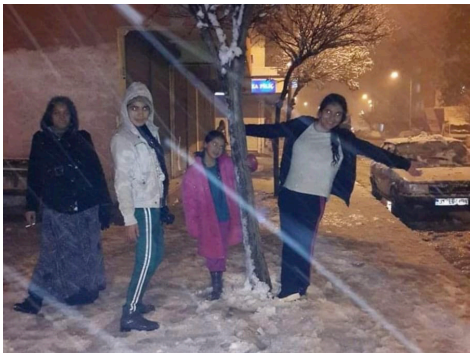


Figure 06: The “Living Heritage” workshop held in Büyükdalyan I container city. Credit: Francesco Pasta.

Livelihoods

Throughout history, Dom communities have been known for their lifestyles that rejected livestock herding, property ownership, and warfare. However, after the 1950s, the mechanisation of agriculture and changes in rural production models in Turkey made it increasingly difficult for them to sustain their traditional livelihoods.

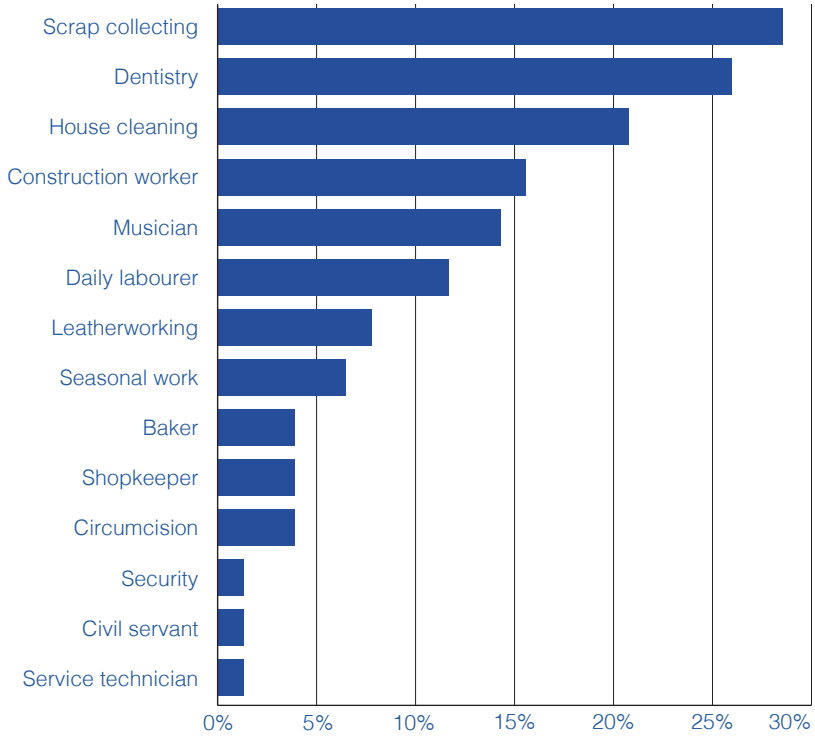
As traditional crafts such as blacksmithing and jewellery-making declined, Dom communities were largely excluded from many sectors of the formal economy and pushed into low-paid, labour-intensive jobs. These types of work were often physically demanding, economically unstable, and socially excluding in terms of access to social security. Some members turned to alternative forms of income, including waste collection, scrap dealing, fortune-telling, leatherwork, house cleaning, construction work, and seasonal agricultural labour.

Traditionally, Dom people have also earned income as musicians hired for weddings and celebrations, traditional dentists (see Box) and as circumcisers (sünnetçiler) for religious ceremonies. However, over time, these jobs were also increasingly restricted by the shrinking of public space, discriminatory discourses, and legal regulations.

A few members of the community run small-scale shops or neighbourhood businesses, and some work in the formal service sector – as technicians, security guards, health workers, or even as public officials. However, many Doms live day to day without a stable job, relying on “freelance” or “on-call” work (serbest meslek), taking up whatever opportunities arise. This situation makes both economic instability and social insecurity permanent.

In many houses, spaces served not only residential functions but were also adapted for income-generating activities — such as rooms for dentistry, depots for scrap collection, or spaces for leatherwork. These domestic transformations often followed existing gendered divisions of labor. While men primarily engaged in income-generating activities such as dental work, women were often confined to unpaid domestic work or precarious, low-paying jobs. This imbalance reflected broader patriarchal norms but also highlighted women’s essential role in sustaining community life through childcare, ritual organization, and maintaining social networks.

What were the main sources of income in your nuclear family?



Dentistry

Unique artisanal practices like crafting gold teeth led Doms to develop a specialised expertise in dentistry, which has since expanded through experiences both in Turkey and abroad. According to community narratives, a key turning point came when a respected elder, Hüseyin Ali, crafted the first gold tooth in Horlak village near Reyhanlı, transforming the Dom’s traditional jewellery knowledge into a new trade: dentistry. This artisanal practice turned homes and courtyards into workplaces. The production of gold and silver teeth eventually diversified into prosthetics made with bone dust. As economic opportunities narrowed in the modern world, Doms adapted by turning their living spaces into craft-based production zones.

Economic hardships and coping strategies

With low household incomes (44% reported 10–15,000 TL; 33% under 5,000 TL) and mostly informal, low-paid work, Dom residents lived in ways that minimize expenses. While 25% of respondents were tenants, most lived rent-free in family homes – although only 19% held official title deeds. This situation both weakens housing security and reduces households' resilience to any economic shocks. For most respondents, the main expenses were related to basic necessities such as food, bills, transportation, and health.

Family- and community-based mutual support networks played an important role. Workloads were shared within the household, and collective activities like carpet washing or food preparation often brought people together in front of doorsteps or in courtyards. Such collective activities served important functions both in terms of economic savings and social cohesion. Children were cared for by family members or neighbours, while the elderly remained in extended family homes rather than being placed in hospices. These caregiving practices were indicators not only of material support but also of cultural and emotional solidarity.

People relied on weekly neighbourhood markets (pazar) and small grocers (bakkal) for basic needs, preferring them over chain stores because they offered lower prices, the ability to buy in small quantities, and flexible payment options. For example, when an individual wakes up in the morning, they can meet their daily needs at the neighborhood grocery store with very small amounts – 5 TL for eggs, 5 TL for cheese, 5 TL for olives. Unlike large supermarkets, which demand bulk purchases and cash payments, these local shops often allowed customers to buy on credit, recording small daily purchases against trust and familiarity. This informal economic cycle, rooted in mutual trust and community solidarity, enabled poor households to manage day-to-day expenses and sustain their livelihoods through community-based means.

What was the ownership status of your household?

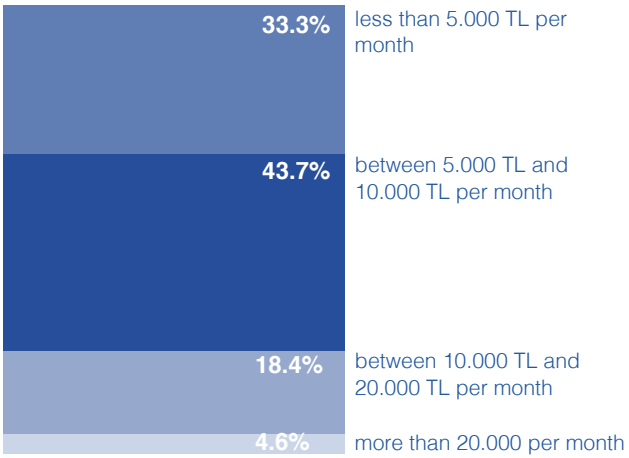
41% Owner, without title deed

26% Tenant

19% Owner, with title deed

14% The house belonged to relatives (no rent was paid)

What was your nuclear family's monthly income?



What were the main expenses in your household?

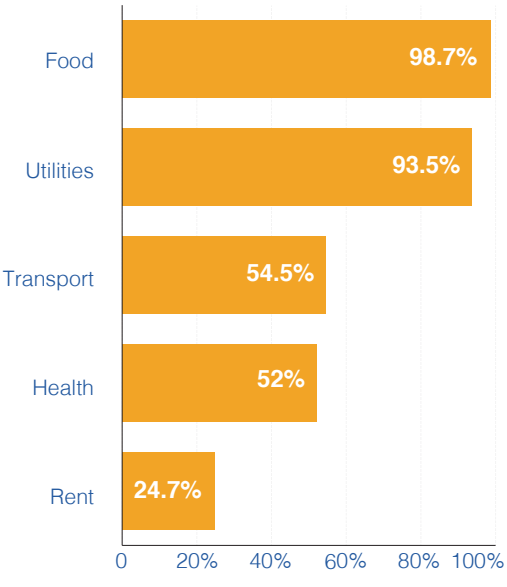


Figure 07: Streets of Emek neighbourhood following the earthquakes, and before the demolitions. Photo shared by a survey respondent.

Housing arrangements

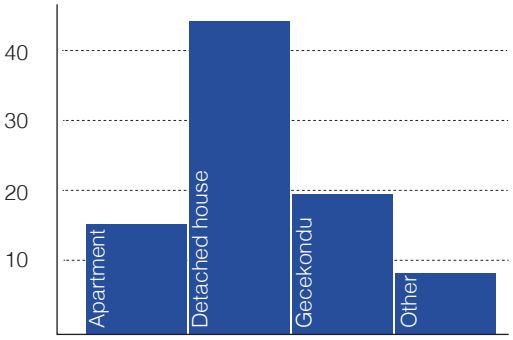
Survey and interviews detailed the housing forms developed by the Dom people. 54% lived in detached houses (müstakil ev), 24% in low-rise gecekondu, and 20% in apartments, typically “family apartments” (*aile apartmanı*). This distribution reveals a hybrid housing structure shaped between the Dom community’s informal settlement practices on the urban outskirts and their efforts to establish themselves in the city center.

“Nuclear” and “extended” families typically lived in close proximity, often occupying different units within the same building, structures frequently built by the families themselves, either by hiring construction workers (55%) or through self-construction (34%). This situation demonstrates that, due to both economic constraints and intra-family trust relations, housing becomes a “community issue.”

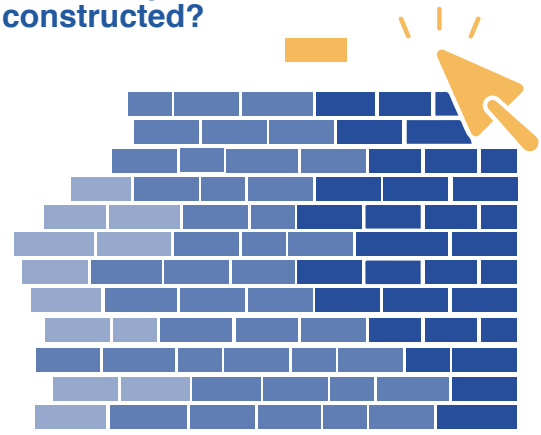
Outdoor spaces played a key role in daily life: 84% of respondents had gardens or courtyards, 78% had balconies, and 86% had rooftop terraces, all of which were used for both social interaction and work. These spaces also serve as places where everyday social life and its reproduction are reestablished for a community excluded from public spaces.

In Dom neighbourhoods in Antakya, domestic space is not only for dwelling but also a site of production, shaped by an evolving artisanal legacy. Indeed, about one-third of respondents reported using part of their homes for work-related activities, including dentistry, scrap dealing, craftsmanship, baking, bird feeding, and storage for various trades. The multifunctional use of housing reflects both the necessity of generating income and the community’s historically different ways of separating home and work.

What was the typology of your house?

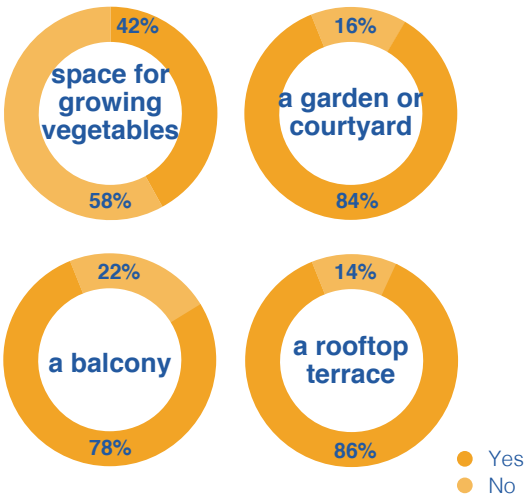


How was your house constructed?



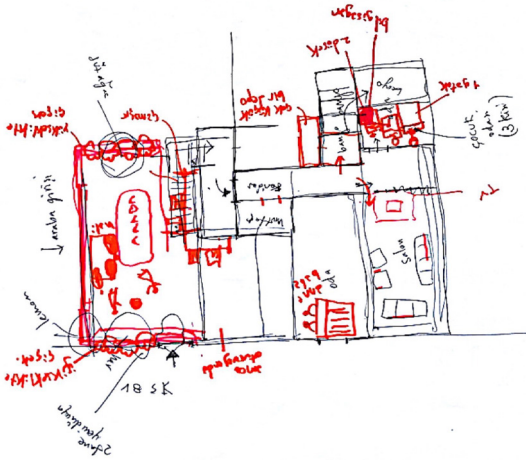
- We built it ourselves as a family (33.7%)
- We built it with the help of workers (54.6%)
- We bought it already built (11.6%)

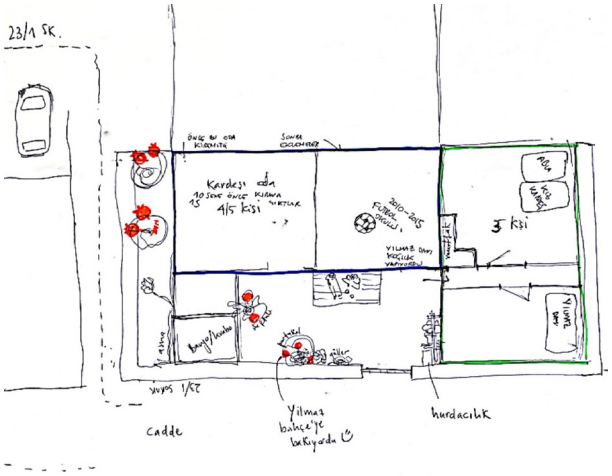
Did your house have...

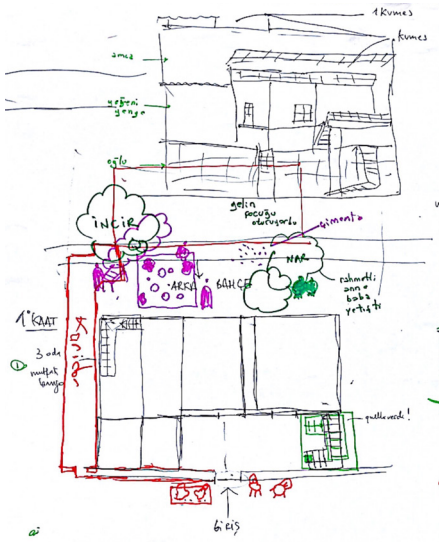


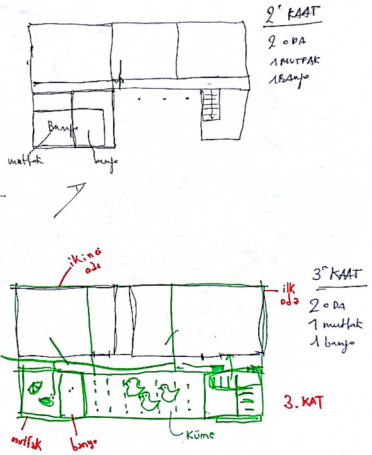
“How was your house?”

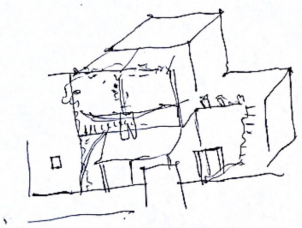
Over the course of 12 in-depth “drawing interviews,” residents described their pre-earthquake living arrangements while we sketched their layouts and annotated key details. Drawing on these interviews and the data from 75 household surveys, we then distilled common housing features into four typologies. Each typology is presented through the story of an imaginary character whose home reflects the typical spatial patterns found in Antakya’s Dom neighbourhoods.

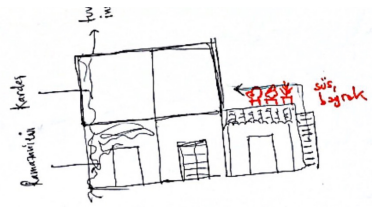


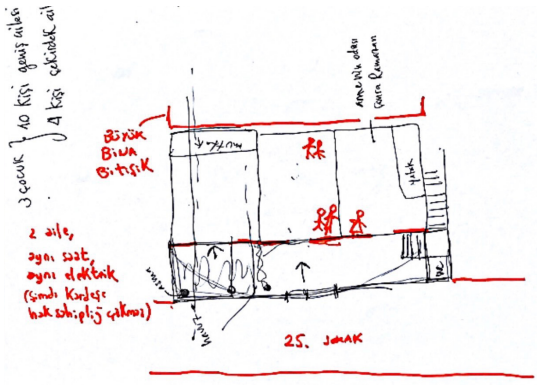


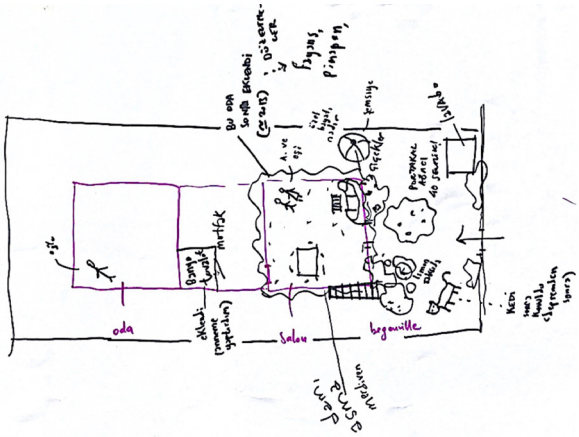






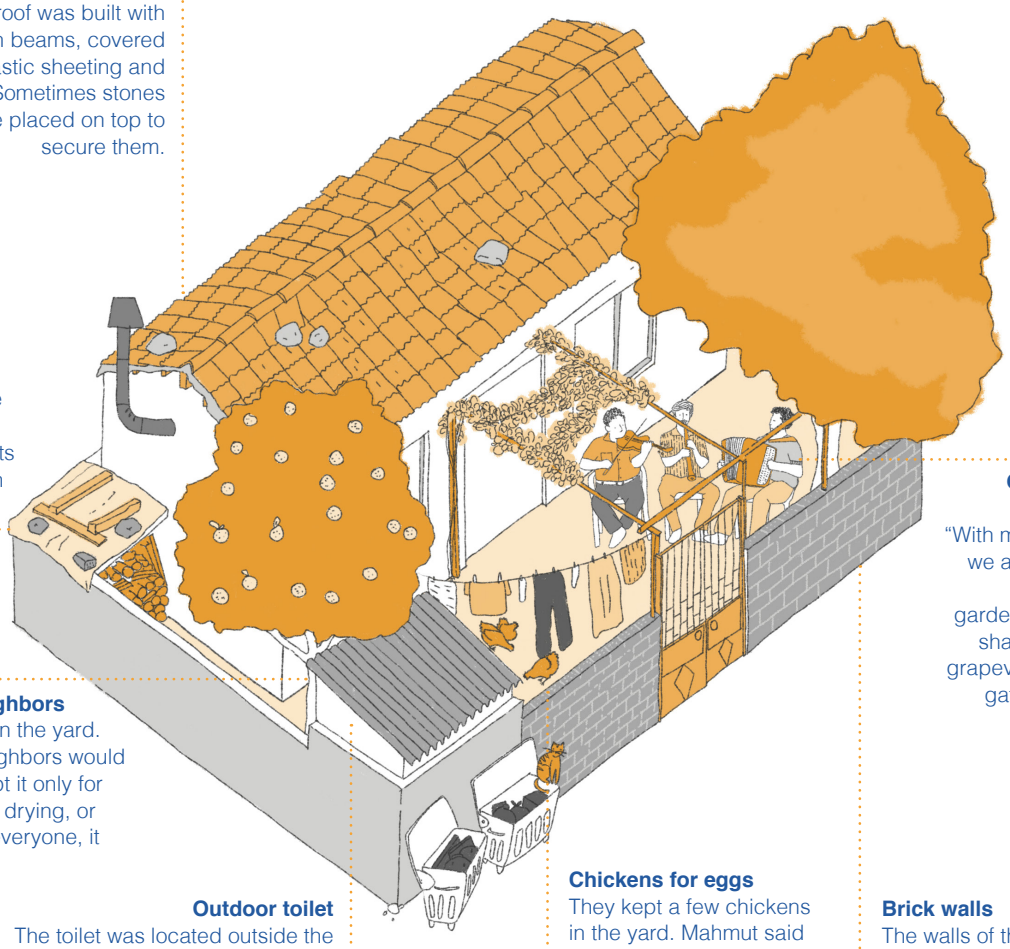






Tiled roof structure
The roof was built with wooden beams, covered with plastic sheeting and tiles. Sometimes stones were placed on top to secure them.

Firewood and stove chimney
A small woodshed next to the house was used to store firewood for the winter. The stove inside heated the home, and its chimney poked through the roof.



Garden as a music space
"With my musician friends, we always used to meet and rehearse in our garden," he recalled. The shaded area under the grapevine was where they gathered, played, and spent time.

Sharing fruit with neighbors
"There was a fruit tree in the yard. During the season, neighbors would come to pick fruit. I kept it only for fresh fruit – not for jam, drying, or pestil… I gave fruit to everyone, it was lovely."

Outdoor toilet
The toilet was located outside the main house, as was common in many homes in the area.

Chickens for eggs
They kept a few chickens in the yard. Mahmut said they were "only for the eggs," not for meat.

Brick walls
The walls of the house were made of simple brickwork.

"My name is Mahmut, I'm a musician. Before the earthquake, I played at weddings and celebrations with my band. We lived in a one-storey house in Emek Mahallesi, a gecekondu my parents built in the 1970s. I lived there with my wife and our three children. The house had two rooms, one for us, one for the kids, and a kitchen in the middle. It was the second house I ever lived in, and I really looked after it. I had installed a proper, beautiful door at the entrance.
In the garden, I planted a walnut tree and an orange tree. We kept chickens and took care of them ourselves. I built a depo to store firewood for winter. In front of the house, there was a structure for the grapevine to grow, creating shade in the garden. That's where we'd sit, especially in summer. I often used that space to practice music with other musicians. The kids played in the garden, and we'd eat meals outside, often with friends or neighbors."

Mahmut's house

Mahmut, a musician in his fifties, lived with his family in a one-storey brick gecekondu with some open space and greenery. These types of homes were common in Emek, Altınçay, and Saraykent, often among the first built in the 1970s when Dom families transitioned to a settled lifestyle. They were sometimes minimally expanded over time and often lacked formal property deeds.

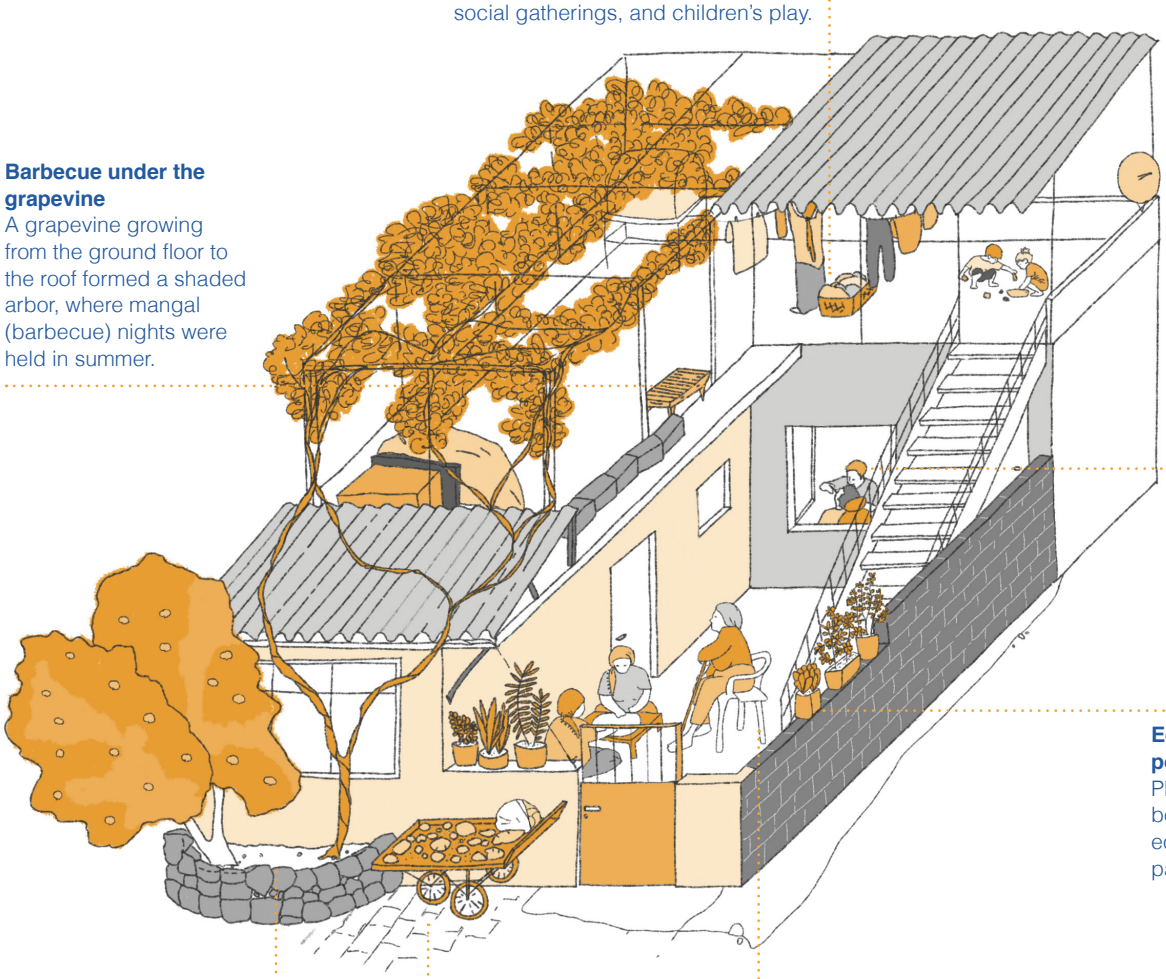
Selma’s house

Selma, a woman in her forties who occasionally worked in cleaning, lived in Altınçay Mahallesi in a one-storey gecekondu. The house was self-built and later expanded to accommodate more members of the extended family, though it remained a single-storey structure.

“Once there was just a tent and a shack. Then my mother had the first room built with bricks, and later we added other rooms with concrete. We’ve been living in Altınçay for two generations, three if you count my children. But we never got any property deeds, and that’s why now we’re not entitled to a flat.
We built stairs so we could use the terrace all the way up to the roof for many things: we always hung the laundry there, kept our water tank and other materials. In summer, it was so nice to sit under the grapevine and have barbecues at night. We had a courtyard where I kept flowers and grew kitchen herbs like parsley, mint, peppers. We used to sit there, chat, and cook together. The children could play outside, in the courtyard or up on the terrace.
My sister moved back in with us after her husband died. And my husband is a dentist, he used to work from home in a room we had set up for him.”

Dam (Rooftop terrace)
The concrete roof is used as an open-air terrace for various purposes, including drying laundry, storage, social gatherings, and children’s play.

Barbecue under the grapevine
A grapevine growing from the ground floor to the roof formed a shaded arbor, where mangal (barbecue) nights were held in summer.



Home-based dentist
“In the house, there was a room where my husband practiced as a dentist.”

Edible and ornamental potted plants
Plants in pots included both decorative and edible varieties like parsley and mint.

Family tree
“Just in front of the house, there was a pomegranate tree that my mother planted.”

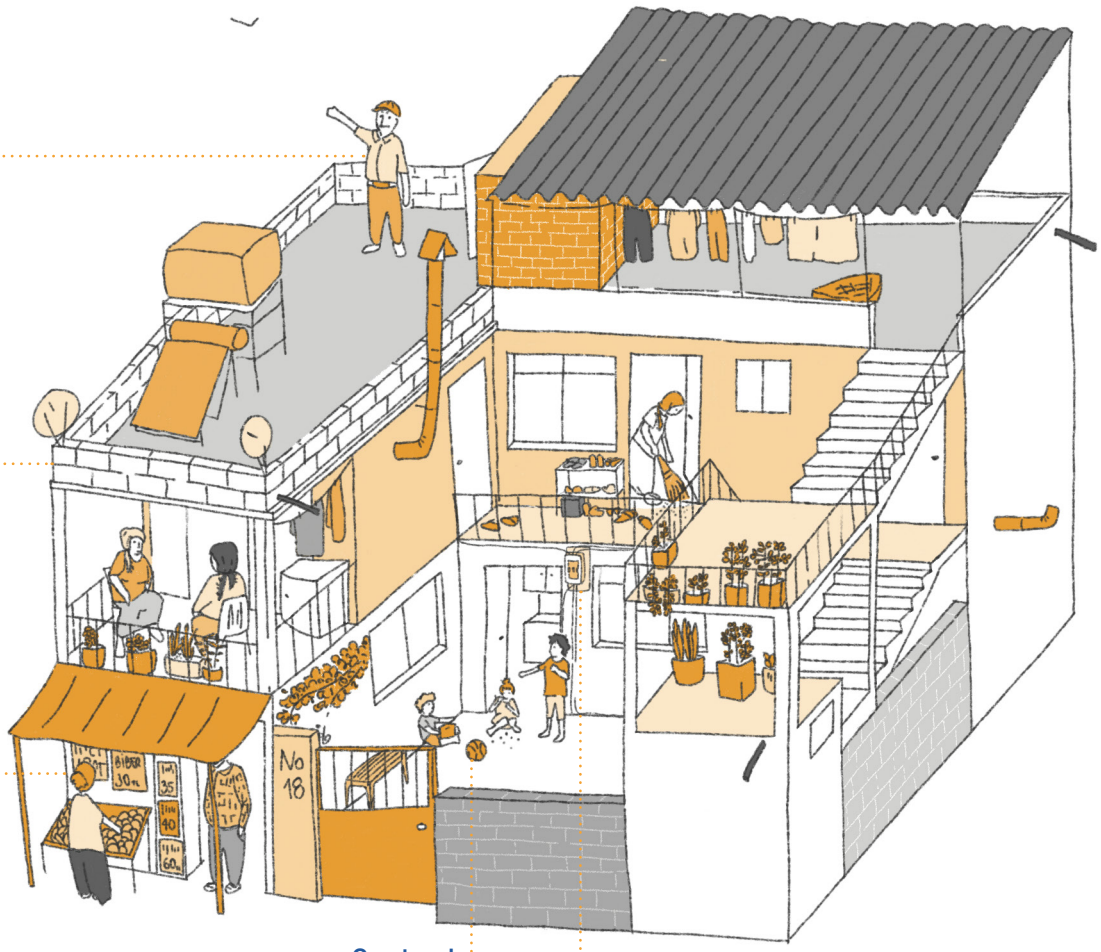
Feeding the birds
“We used to leave stale bread on the scrap-dealing cart in front of the house for the birds — we believe it’s a sin to waste food.”

Lively courtyard
“We had a courtyard where I kept flowers and plants, and we would sit there, chat, and cook together.”

Pigeon loft on the roof
"On the roof, I had a pigeon loft (kümes) where I raised my pigeons."

Additional floors built incrementally
The house was expanded over time. Adem's father built the first floor, and when Adem's son got married, he added the second and third floors, one after the other.

Small grocery store
Adem's son ran a small bakkal (neighbourhood grocery shop) in one of the ground-floor rooms, opening directly onto the alley.



Courtyard
There was no garden, as the area had been fully built up, but a small open courtyard remained just inside the metal gate. Most of the windows faced onto it, and it served as a shared space where children often played.

Shared utilities and meters
"Since all the apartments had the same utility connection (water, electricity), now, in the aftermath, we are only entitled to one apartment even though we had three."

Adem's house

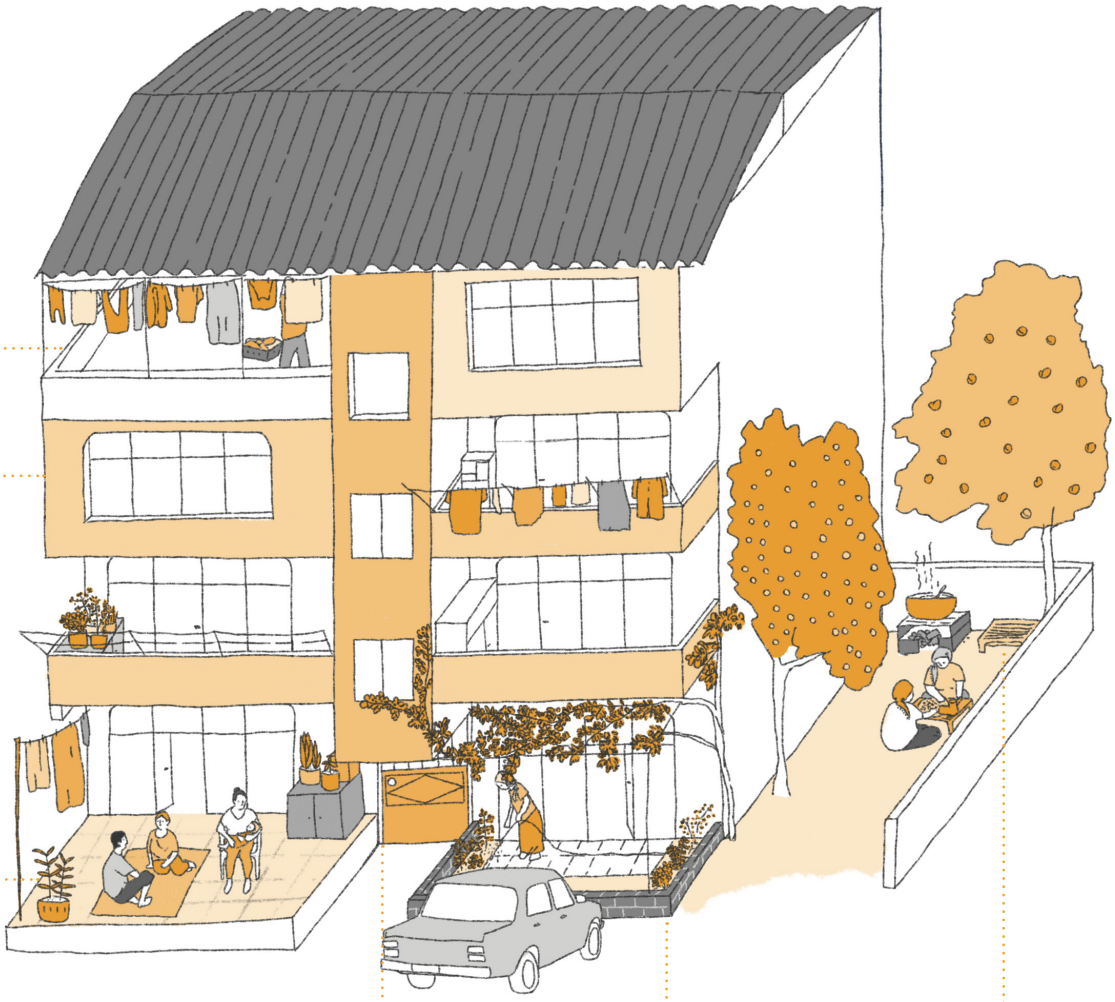
Adem is in his sixties and lives with his extended family in a multistory building in Altınçay that they gradually expanded over time. He and his wife occupy the ground floor, while his mother-in-law and his son's family live on the second floor, each in separate rooms.

"The first floor of the house was built by my father. Later, when my son got married, I added the second and third floors so he and his wife could move in upstairs. After they settled there, we converted one of the ground floor rooms into a small grocery shop that opened onto the alley. My son and his wife ran it together, and it became a little hub in the neighbourhood.
On the roof, I had built a pigeon loft (kümes) where I raised my pigeons. That was my pastime.
We never had property deeds for the house, so we weren't eligible for a new apartment. Lately, they said maybe we could apply if we could show utility bills. But since all floors shared the same water and electricity connection, we might only be entitled to one flat, if they ever assign it to us, even though we lived across three."

Seda's house

Seda, a middle-aged woman, lived in a multi-storey building jointly built by members of her extended family, with different relatives occupying separate flats. Utilities were shared, and if a title deed existed, it typically covered the whole building rather than individual units. This was a common housing typology among families who could afford it, particularly in the more recently urbanised Saraykent neighbourhood.

"We were living on the ground floor with my husband, in Saraykent. Our relatives lived in the other flats, and one was rented out to another family. We had the building constructed in the 2000s, when we moved here from Emek. It was a nice apartment. We had built a big terrace out front where we'd sit with friends and family, and play with our grandchildren. My brother-in-law and his wife, who lived next door, made a small garden with flowers and greens, and a big grapevine that climbed all over the building. Each flat had a balcony, but some people closed theirs in and turned it into a veranda. We all shared the roof to hang laundry, use as storage, or for work.
On the side of the building, there was a patch with some trees where I'd light a fire to cook for weddings and celebrations that were held in our alley—whenever people asked me to cook for big events."



Shared terrace and later extension
The top floor was originally a shared tiled terrace (dam), used for sitting and gathering. Over time, part of it was enclosed and turned into a residential space.

Balconies turned into verandas and rooms
Each apartment had a balcony. Some relatives later closed theirs off to create enclosed verandas or rooms.

Tiled terrace as a place to sit outside
The tiled terrace opened directly onto the street, but still felt like part of the house. It was used to sit outside on mats. Seda's mother, who was older, preferred to sit on a plastic chair.

Single entrance and internal staircase
The building had a single shared entrance and an internal staircase. Some windows were left without glass.

Small garden and grapevine
Seda's brother-in-law and his wife tended a small garden and had a grapevine in front of their flat.

Outdoor cooking area in the courtyard
"In the building's courtyard, there was a space where I would light a fire to cook for big events when people asked me to."

The Dom within Antakya

Geolocating pre-earthquake house locations visualized the Dom communities of Antakya were historically located in central neighbourhoods of the city. This gave them access to income-generating opportunities and essential amenities such as schools, hospitals, markets, and public transport (see **Map 1**). Living spaces close to the city center have allowed Dom communities to maintain some connection to urban networks over many years, despite their marginalization.

Over 60% of respondents, for instance, said they could reach the local health branch or school on foot, most within 15 minutes. For 88%, the central market and old town were accessible in under 30 minutes; 62% used public transport to get there. Despite facing significant social exclusion, their proximity to the city center provided not only physical but also social access – enabling participation in everyday life, economic activities, public services, and was essential for maintaining their livelihoods.

Emek

Emek is the first area where Dom communities, who migrated to Hatay in the 1970s, transitioned to a settled lifestyle. During this period, Dom groups established permanent living spaces by setting up tents and makeshift shelters in the area, becoming the neighbourhood's first residents. As the land they settled on was mostly state-owned, Dom communities were legally considered "squatters." Emek remained a key living space for Dom culture for many years, and it is estimated that approximately 3,500–4,000 Dom individuals once lived in the neighbourhood.

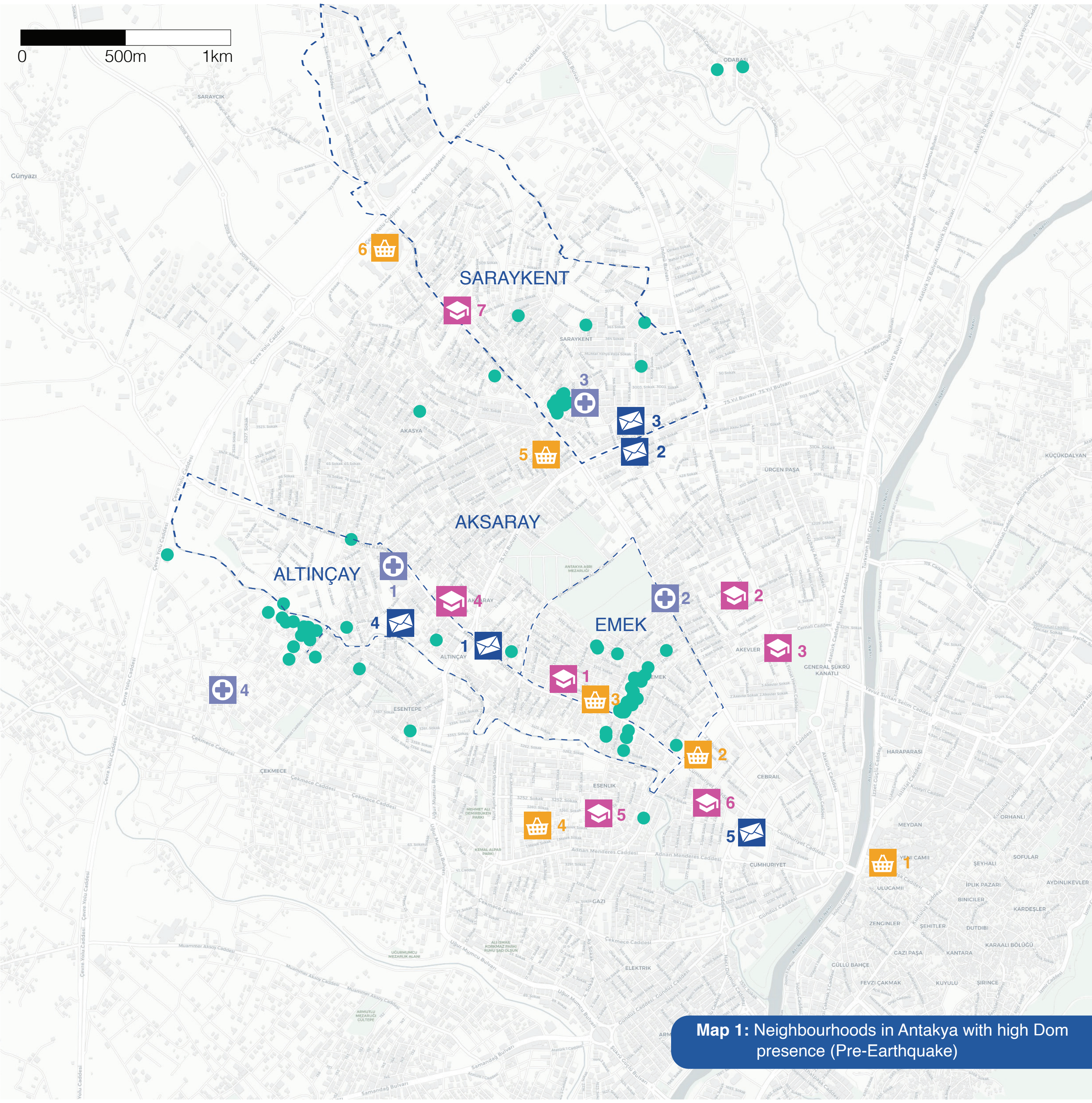
Altınçay

Once considered part of Emek, Altınçay gradually gained a distinct identity as Cumhuriyet Avenue came to divide the area. The Altınçay Stream, from which the neighbourhood takes its name, holds historical significance for local residents. According to elders in the community, Dom individuals used to pan for gold in the stream and would melt down what they found to make gold teeth or jewelry. This neighbourhood has a high concentration of Dom and Abdal communities, with an estimated pre-earthquake population of 8,000–9,000. As in other areas, most of the land here is state-owned, and community members have again been classified as "squatters." When Hatay became a Metropolitan Municipality in 2013–2014, parts of Altınçay were incorporated into Çekmece neighbourhood and Defne district.

Saraykent

Saraykent was among the areas Dom communities increasingly moved into, especially in the early 2000s. As plots of land with shared title deeds were relatively more affordable, Dom families purchased parcels here and built detached houses suited to their way of life. Although the community lives in a more dispersed manner in Saraykent, they have managed to maintain a sense of unity through shared culture and identity. It is estimated that around 2,000–2,500 Dom individuals used to live in this neighbourhood.

Dom communities in Antakya lived in central neighborhoods, which enabled access to livelihoods, services, and long-term ties to urban networks, despite their marginalization.



Map 1: Neighbourhoods in Antakya with high Dom presence (Pre-Earthquake)

LEGEND

Pre-earthquake respondent's house location

Schools

1. Şehoğlu İlkokulu
2. B. Sabuncu Ortaokulu
3. H. Mursaloğlu İlkokulu
4. B. Gencay Anaokulu ve Ortaokulu
5. H. Özkan Ortaokulu
6. Atatürk İlkokulu

Health services

1. Eğitim ve Araştırma Hastanesi
2. Sağlık Ocağı (Emek)
3. Sağlık Ocağı (Saraykent)
4. Sağlık Ocağı (Çekmece)

Services

1. Post office (Cumhuriyet)
2. Post office (75. Yıl)
3. Yüzme Havuzu
4. HBB Spor Kompleksi
5. Sosyal yardımlaşma vakfı

Shopping

1. Çarşı
2. Perşembe pazarı
3. Salı pazarı
4. Cuma pazarı
5. Cuma pazarı
6. Primemall AVM

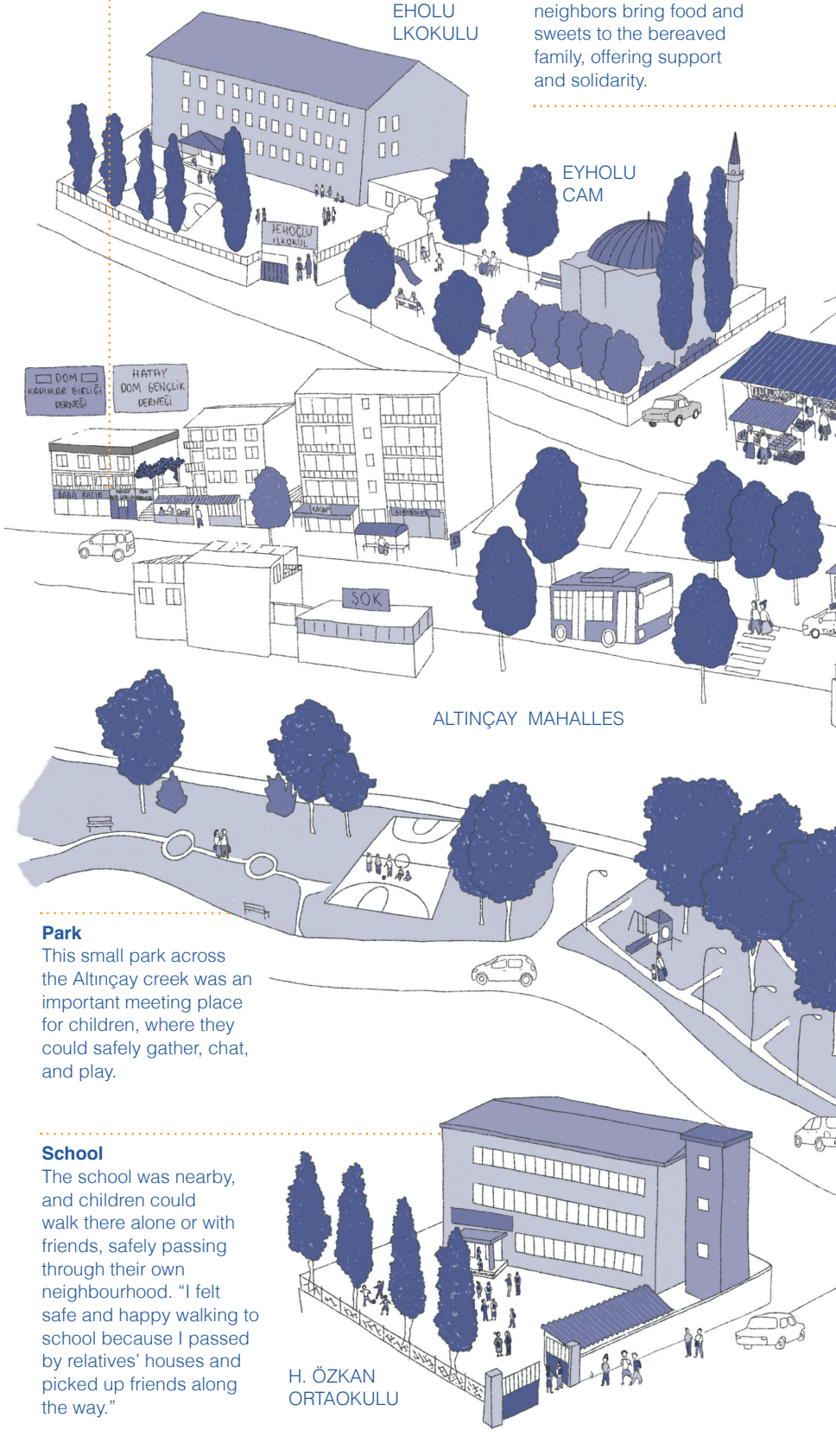
Many residents walked to key services — 82% to the health branch, 68.5% to school, 35% to the post office, 34% to the hospital. Public transport gave convenient access to the Old Town market (62%), hospital (44%), and post office (48%). Most could reach the hospital (69%), health branch (58%), schools (54%), and city centre (56%) in under 15 minutes.

“Take us to your favourite place!”

Both our drawing interviews and household surveys collected information about shared neighbourhood spaces, including reference points, activities, infrastructure, and gathering spots. In interviews, we piloted a virtual transect walk using Google Street View, asking respondents to guide us from their home to a place they loved and describe the built environment along the way. This method helped us document memories and qualities of Dom neighbourhoods now erased by post-disaster demolition and rebuilding.

Syrian shops
During the war in Syria, many Syrians – including Dom families – settled in neighbourhoods such as Emek and Saraykent, drawn by their affordability, and lived alongside local residents.

Funerals
Funerals were important communal events. In times of mourning, especially during the first week after the passing, neighbors bring food and sweets to the bereaved family, offering support and solidarity.



We were independent in our home. We would sit in our courtyard. We would sit in the garden with people coming from the neighbourhood. That aspect was nice, I mean. […] Well, there would be a girl’s hand-asking ceremony and we would go, then there would be a *mevlüt* (prayer gathering), we had a shared place like a village square.
Anonymous respondent

Park
This small park across the Altınçay creek was an important meeting place for children, where they could safely gather, chat, and play.

We spent the best years of our childhood and youth in Emek neighbourhood. Washing carpets together, sitting in a circle making sarma filling, chatting with the elderly, our kinship bonds [...] Believe me, our best years were in Emek Mahallesi.
B., 51 years old

School
The school was nearby, and children could walk there alone or with friends, safely passing through their own neighbourhood. “I felt safe and happy walking to school because I passed by relatives’ houses and picked up friends along the way.”

H. ÖZKAN
ORTAOKULU

MEZARLIK
The cemetery included a historic Dom section.

Socializing in the neighborhood
Instead of cafés, parks, or coffeehouses, people often socialize with neighbors by sitting on rugs laid out in front of homes, sharing tea, coffee, and sunflower seeds while chatting.

Urban transformation
Before the earthquake, Emek was slated for complete redevelopment. Plots whose owners had signed agreements were sometimes demolished and left as idle rubble.

Community trips
For picnics or trips to the sea, the community acts collectively, organizing a large shared vehicle and preparing food and drinks together.

Tuesday Market
Weekly street markets were preferred over supermarkets or shops for their fresh and affordable products – groceries, clothing, and household goods. Markets within walking distance took place on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays.

EMEK MAHALLES

BOLUK

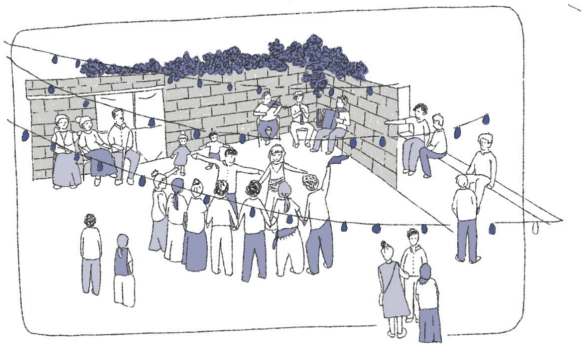
Boşluk
Emek Mahallesi had two "empty spaces" that served as the main gathering points for daily socialising, community meetings, and special events such as festivities and weddings.

BOLUK

Community gatherings (*Gün*)
Similar to "gold days," monthly gatherings are held in which neighbours pool together a small amount of money each. A draw determines whose turn it is to receive the collective contribution for that month.

CUMHURYET CADDES

ALTINÇAY DERES



Neighborhood weddings
People are invited to weddings through a tradition called *okuntu*, where items like fabric, socks, or undershirts are gifted door to door. These gifts serve as invitations. On the wedding day, sweets are also distributed door to door accompanied by drumming, and people are invited for the evening celebrations. Weddings are held in neighborhood streets rather than in halls, as it's believed that wedding halls do not offer enough entertainment.

Post-disaster displacement

Mapping also showed their displacement to distant temporary shelters, with proposed future relocation sites even more remote. After the earthquake destroyed their neighbourhoods, they, like many other residents, were relocated to container settlements far from their original homes (see **Map 2**). Most survey respondents were placed in Büyükdalyan I, the temporary settlement with the highest concentration of Dom residents (see **Figure 08**), though others were scattered across locations as distant as Kırıkhan. This situation entailed both spatial disconnection and the fragmentation of social networks. The process of displacement was not only a physical loss but also caused a loss of memory and identity by eliminating the limited spaces where the Dom community could maintain ties to the city.

Due to insecure tenure, most Dom residents from Emek, Altınçay, and Saraykent are not eligible for new housing being constructed in their former neighbourhoods. Unofficial discussions with authorities suggest that potential relocation sites for these communities include remote areas such as Kuruyer, Karaksı and Maraboazı – places that are poorly connected and lack access to services and economic opportunities. These proposed areas can be seen as spaces where spatial exclusion is reproduced and urban inequality is perpetuated.

We had a peaceful life before the earthquake. After the earthquake, we continue to live in the container city. We are struggling with life on one hand. That is, we are doing everything we can to survive right now.

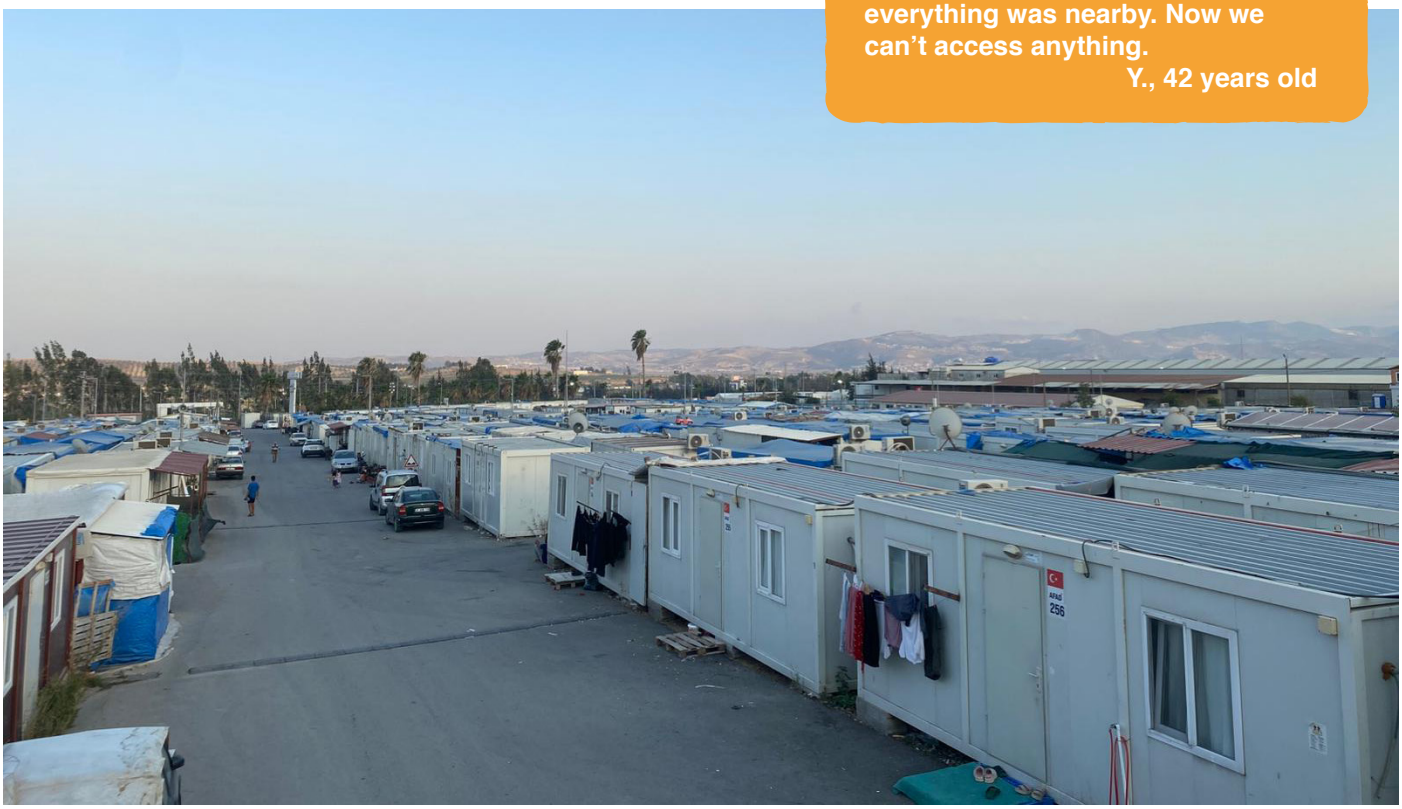
D., 40 years old

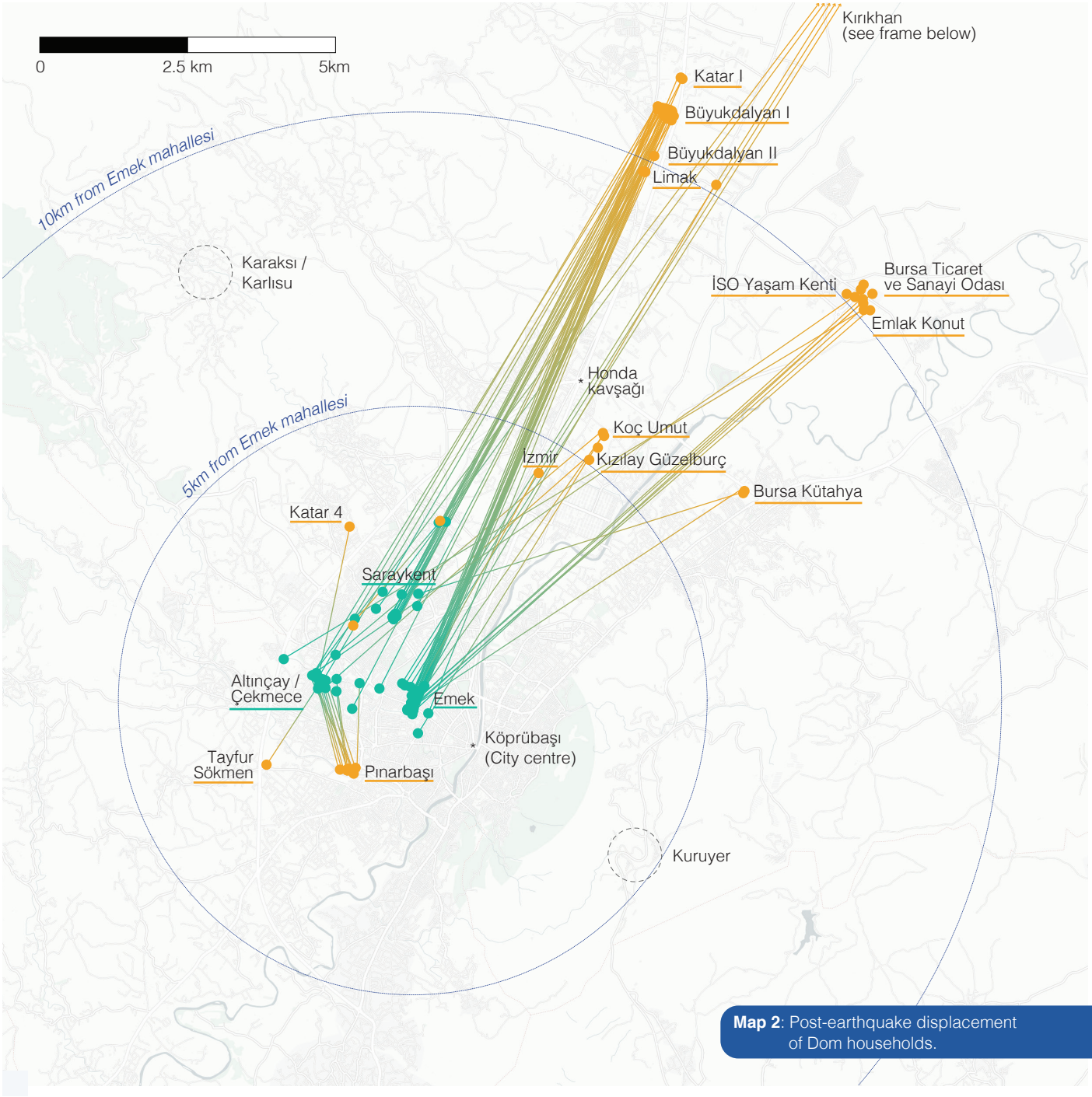
Following the earthquakes, Dom families were displaced to container cities across Antakya, often several kilometres away. This displacement risks becoming permanent, as most households are ineligible for government-built housing, and the few relocation options informally discussed are distant and disconnected from the city.

Back then, the bazaar was close, the markets, the grocery — everything was nearby. Now we can't access anything.

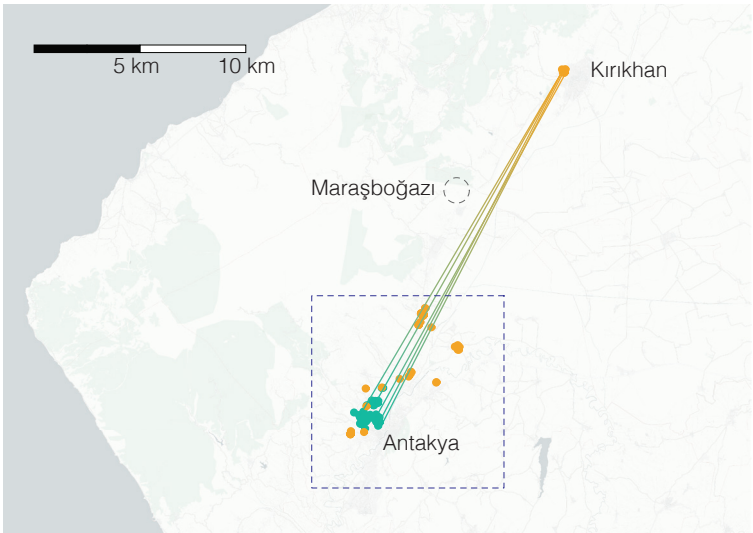
Y., 42 years old

Figure 08: Büyükdalyan container city, where the majority of Antakya's Dom households have relocated following the earthquakes. Credit: Mehmet Kuyumcu.





Map 2: Post-earthquake displacement of Dom households.



LEGEND

- pre-earthquake house location
- current place of residence

Emek neighbourhood

Katar I container city

potential relocation site

How do the Dom envision adequate housing?

The future settlement preferences of the Dom community reflect a consideration for community cohesion, social and spatial justice, and access to urban life. Their responses reveal a clear desire not just for shelter, but for the ability to live together, in central locations, with dignity, security of tenure, and equal access to urban rights.

When asked to choose among four settlement options, 57% of respondents preferred “Near our previous location, together with my community,” 25% chose “Anywhere, if with my community,” and 14% selected “In central Antakya, not necessarily with my community.” These responses suggest that, for much of the Dom community, the primary concern is to stay together and preserve their communal structure. At the same time, many also stressed the importance of remaining close to the city centre, where they previously had access to opportunities and essential services.

Voice-recorded responses to open-ended questions revealed three main priorities:

1. Living near relatives, neighbours, and the extended community

This was described as vital for both everyday survival and emotional well-being. Respondents emphasised the value of strong social ties and mutual support networks, including shared childcare, informal caregiving, neighbourhood-based economies, and collective coping mechanisms. Community togetherness was also seen as essential for protection against discrimination and for maintaining and passing on cultural identity to future generations. In this context, keeping the social spaces where children grow up together intact was seen as essential for helping them feel a sense of belonging in their education. This reflects the importance of culturally adequate housing, which supports social practices and collective identity.

2. Staying in a central area with access to services and work

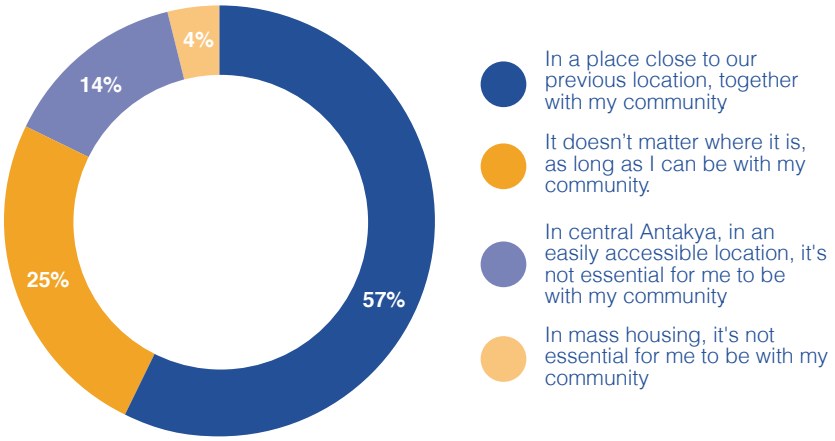
Proximity to the urban core is considered crucial for sustaining livelihoods, accessing healthcare and education, and participating fully in urban life. Respondents noted that being pushed to distant areas increases isolation and vulnerability. Education, in particular, was highlighted as key to breaking the cycle of exclusion. For women, who often shoulder the main responsibilities for childcare, household income, and mutual support, access to safe and accessible spaces to carry out these roles was described as a vital need. Indeed, the right to adequate housing includes access to employment, schools, and public infrastructure. Many expressed awareness that their former neighbourhood was centrally located and valuable, and that this fact may be contributing to their exclusion from returning.

3. Living in safe and supportive environments

Participants highlighted the importance of creating safe, peaceful, and supportive living environments – especially for children – free from discrimination, harmful social influences, and unsafe conditions. Safety was understood not just as physical protection, but also as the ability to live with dignity, to be accepted by society, and to have stability and the chance to settle in one place over the long term. Many shared that the difficulties they had faced in their previous neighborhoods, including crime and drugs, had shaped both their daily lives and how they were perceived by others. For this reason, it was emphasized that new settlement areas should be designed in ways that foster social cohesion, encourage mutual support, and help the community feel secure and at home. Habitability and protection from threats to health and safety are essential components of adequate housing.

Together, these insights show that the Dom community's priorities are not merely about access to shelter and location, but about preserving collective life, sustaining livelihoods, and accessing rights as urban citizens. At the same time, it should be emphasized that ignoring these needs in the ongoing reconstruction processes in Antakya after the February 6 earthquakes could further deepen the historical exclusion. Any future planning must therefore respond to these interconnected needs, rather than treating them as secondary to technical or legal considerations.

What kind of living arrangement would you like in the rebuilt city?



What kind of city would you like your children to live in in the future?

"We want our children to live the best lives possible. We couldn't live that way – let them live it. We don't want anyone to exclude them like they did us. We were excluded; God willing, they won't be. We want them to get a good education, not fall into the traps of bad people. We don't want them to develop bad habits. We couldn't make it, but hopefully they will live good lives."

Ç., 35 years old

"I'd want it to be a modern city – or more than modern, a safe one. I'd want them [my children] to live in a society that doesn't exclude us. I wouldn't want them to go through the difficulties we went through. I want no one to treat them according to their identity, but to talk to them as fellow human beings."

M., 29 years old

"I would like my children to live in safer, more central places. I want my children to be safe, not in danger."

Anonymous interviewee

"All we want is a place where our children can get a good education, a place where they can go to school. It doesn't matter to us whether it's a two-storey or three-storey house — we're fine with a single-storey home, as long as our children can study."

V.A., age unspecified

"I'd want my children, above all, to live far, far away from evil. I'd want them to receive a proper education, I'd want peace of mind and health for myself, a good future for my children. Not much money, but plenty of peace. A life where they can access everything they need, away from high prices."

Anonymous interviewee

"First and foremost, good education for our children. Because right now, there is nothing worth calling education. [...] Before, I was sending two of my children to tutoring. But after the earthquake, everything became very expensive. The children fell far behind. After the earthquake, their lessons got worse. When their lessons got worse, the children didn't want to study anymore. [...] So, as I said, education is the priority. Then, social facilities so our children can do sports and social activities. Because the children get bored at home. Hopefully, in the future, there will be places where children can participate in social activities and go to sports."

- F., 37 years old

Repairing living heritage in the reconstruction

To support a just and sustainable return for the Dom community, relocation strategies must respond to their specific needs, cultural practices, and aspirations. This means moving beyond one-size-fits-all solutions and engaging with the way of life, or living heritage, of the Dom. Based on the priorities identified through fieldwork, this section outlines four key considerations for future planning that centre the fulfillment of the right to adequate housing, including community cohesion, cultural appropriatedness, urban accessibility, affordability, and security of tenure. These principles are not only essential for rebuilding lives disrupted by disaster but also for challenging the structural inequalities that have long shaped the Dom's exclusion from society in Antakya.

Recommendation #1

Relocation solutions must allow the Dom to remain together as a community.

Living together is a precondition for the continuity of the Dom's cultural life, language, and support networks. Dispersal would not only undermine their ability to maintain their way of life but could also deepen marginalisation. Being relocated into settings where they are isolated from one another may create social tensions and increase pressure to conform to dominant norms. Relocation options should include the possibility for extended families and wider kinship networks to live together in neighbourhood clusters. Planning must be developed in conversation with the community, ensuring their right to co-determine how and where they live.

Recommendation #2

Relocation sites should be close to the city centre and well connected.

Proximity to urban services, public institutions, and economic opportunities is essential for sustaining livelihoods, especially for a group relying on informal jobs and irregular employment. As the city is being rebuilt, the Dom should not be pushed to the physical margins. If relocation sites fail to support daily life and income-generating practices, people may be compelled to leave again in search of alternatives. Future housing sites must therefore be not only geographically central but also well connected through accessible transportation networks and walkable environments that enable full accessibility and participation in urban life, as integral elements of adequate housing.

Recommendation #3

Housing must be affordable, with secure tenure guaranteed.

Given that the Dom are largely a low-income group, housing must be financially accessible, both in terms of initial costs and ongoing expenses. Many Dom families lack formal land or property documentation, which has contributed to their exclusion from return processes. Future housing solutions must therefore include clear guarantees of legal security of tenure, to prevent further dispossession and secondary displacement. Without legal recognition or protection, even well-located or well-designed homes remain precarious. Secure tenure is essential not only for enabling long-term settlement but also for allowing families to invest in their homes and live with dignity and stability.

Recommendation #4

Housing design must reflect Dom ways of life and allow for user-led adaptation.

New housing must respond to the Dom's specific spatial and social practices. This includes the possibility for extended families to live together or nearby, access to open and semi-open spaces, and flexible layouts that can accommodate changing household compositions and communal activities. Therefore, homes must allow for incremental construction, modification, and flexible use, so that families can adapt them over time in line with their needs and resources. Standardised mass housing formats are unlikely to meet these needs and risk disrupting the social and spatial dynamics that hold the community together. Designs should be co-developed with residents to reflect how they actually live, ensuring habitability and cultural adequacy.

Acknowledgements

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Many **contributors** have been central to this work.

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Change by Design
Antakya

Change by Design – Antakya is a participatory initiative by ASF-UK in response to the 2023 earthquakes in Antakya, Türkiye. Working with local organisations and residents, it promotes community-led recovery by recognising living heritage as a foundation for dialogue, collaboration, and locally rooted solutions.

Architecture Sans Frontières UK (ASF-UK) is a non-profit organisation working to transform cities through community-led design and planning. We amplify the voices of those most affected by urban change, building collective power for more just and sustainable cities.

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