

ARK employs a multi-national project team with extensive experience managing programmes and conducting research funded by many different governmental clients in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, Turkey, the Palestinian Territories, Iraq and other conflict-affected states. The vast majority of these staff are either native Arabic speakers or fluent Arabic speakers who have spent years developing relationships in the region.

ARK's Syria programme team is 40% Syrian and comprises Sunni Arab, Kurdish, Alawite and Christian Syrian staff from throughout the country. Three years of investment and complex government (including HMG) programming through ARK to support Syrian opposition and political groups, local governance entities, nascent civil society organisations, human rights defenders, media activists, defected police and justice actors, opposition armed groups and civil defence teams has led to the cumulative development of a broad range of relationships with Syrian networks (as well as refugee communities in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon). In addition to dedicated network and relationship managers, ARK's Syrian IT manager maintains a searchable database of all training and equipment beneficiaries, as well as network contacts, including biodata and vetting data, contact details and organisational affiliation. Relationships of trust have been built over years; ARK staff are in regular contact with activists and civil society actors whom they initially met during the outbreak of protests in spring 2011. These established relationships range from the National Coalition President and the Interim Government Prime Minister (whom ARK first met when he participated in a training workshop as a dentist from Dayr az-Zawr), and its associated Ministries, to senior members of the Free Syrian Army, Provincial and Local Council leaders, the Commands of the Free Syrian Police (which ARK helped establish in 2013-2014), the beneficiaries of the many training courses ARK has run, and the extensive network of civil society and community actors that ARK has helped through a dedicated capacity building centre ARK established in Gaziantep and ran through its registered Turkish affiliate, 'Project and Programme Management' (PPM). Twenty-five percent of ARK's staff are Turkish, facilitating local operations in Turkey, the main base for ARK's Syria programming. Utilised for research, needs assessments, and Monitoring and Evaluation, ARK also maintains a majority Syrian bilingual primary research Focus Group Unit (FGU) that can mobilise dozens of trained Syrian researchers able to access thousands of Syrians throughout the country. Through ARK, HMG can benefit from programmatic and funding synergies with other governmental clients, which have been developed through years of work on the Syria conflict, ensuring value for money and amplified programmatic effect.

In addition to ARK's own contacts within the Syrian refugee community in Lebanon, many ARK staff members have up to five years' experience of programming in Lebanon for the UK Conflict Pool. Having worked in all 12 Palestinian camps, they have relationships throughout the Lebanese and Palestinian communities, from small community-based refugee youth groups comprising the Palestinian Youth Network, to Lebanese civil society (of which many staff are active members) and senior Lebanese politicians and security officials, and can therefore partner with established Lebanese entities as needed. Similarly, ARK staff also have Yemeni experience, having established and maintained the Yemeni Civil Peace Network, comprising civil society organisations from throughout Yemen committed to battling extremism. ARK's partner TSN specialises in countering violent extremism research and programming. TSN maintains sensitive relationships within Syria that inform policy-relevant research designed to counter the threat of ISIL and extremism in both Syria and Iraq. Through this collective, networked effort, ARK and its partners are embedded within a network of thousands of contacts in Arabic-speaking conflict-affected states, and have a proven track record of developing relationships of trust with some of the most marginalised communities in conflict-prone areas, from the deserts of southern Yemen and the overcrowded Palestinian camps of Lebanon, to Syrian refugee camps in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, the beleaguered cities of northern Syria and areas such as Raqqa and Mosul that have fallen into the hands of extremists.