ARK has a dedicated, Turkey-based Research and Analysis (R&A) capability, staffed entirely by Arabic speakers with experience living and working in Syria, disseminating outputs via a dedicated reporting officer. This five-person team includes a majority-Syrian Focus Group Unit (FGU) to conduct primary research on and in Syria. To enhance in-country capabilities, ARK has established and trained a network of ten Syrian field officers to conduct interviews, as well as a network of 60 Syrian researchers to conduct broad-based population surveys, supported by academic expertise at the Universities of Michigan and Harvard. Having conducted over 130 workshops with over 1,400 participants and provided over 53,000 pieces of equipment to over 1,460 beneficiaries, ARK’s network covers all 14 governorates and as such is able to be mobilised in response to research taskings. ARK’s extensive network of Syrian contacts and its strong analytical capabilities have enabled it to repeatedly provide evidence-based policy recommendations to governments. These recommendations have included policy direction specifically at the request of clients in the context of ongoing programming, as well as internally-generated analytical assessments highlighting opportunities that might strengthen and support existing government Syria policy.

At the strategic level, ARK has made policy recommendations to inform client objectives of strengthening and consolidating the moderate opposition within Syria. In February 2013, for example, ARK conducted a comprehensive strategy review that analysed the geopolitical context of the Syrian revolution after 22 months, reviewed the impact of ARK’s on-going work in support of the Syrian civilian opposition, and conducted a predictive analysis of the likely upcoming political scenarios in Syria. The detailed report, which was shared with UK and allied governments, reached three main conclusions. First, that the space for the moderate opposition was being heavily constrained by armed actors on all sides; second, that programming designed to counter violent extremism was becoming increasingly necessary; and third, that programming was urgently needed to support non-armed opposition community security efforts.

The third recommendation was discussed in detail with the US Department of State’s Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations which agreed to fund a further analytical assessment. The additional assessment found that there were nascent efforts underway to establish police and judicial bodies in the northern governorates, and that with funding and support from the international community, these could be grown and consolidated. With initial funding from State/CSO, workshops were convened in Aleppo that resulted in the establishment of the Aleppo Free Police. Over the course of 2013, the governments of the UK and Denmark joined these efforts, which became the Integrated Community Security Programme (ICSP). Since then, the project has grown into the larger Access to Justice and Community Security (AJACS) programme and expanded to include support to policing efforts in Idlib and Latakia provinces.

ARK has also provided guidance on the sensitive policy issue of the inclusion of armed actors within the ICSP. At client request, ARK conducted an assessment of the feasible options for the inclusion of armed actors in the programme, both from a practical and legal perspective, and the ways in which they could contribute to strengthen community security efforts. Government representatives and implementers are currently working to convert these recommendations into concrete programming packages.

Beyond ICSP, ARK routinely provides detailed research and analysis services that provide targeted policy recommendations in the fields of justice, security, governance, civil society, civil defence. (See Example 2 in section 2.3.9).