



A Syrian refugee returns to Homs, Syria (Xinhua/Pan Chaoyue)

In partnership with a local Syrian organization, USIP allayed tensions among Kurds and Arabs, and between the two communities.

Combined Reach:



60+

villages and towns reached as part of **dialogue efforts.**



20+

religious, civic, and tribal leaders from northeast Syria **engaged.**



1

One road critical to the surrounding communities' economies **reopened.**

CURRENT SITUATION

Now in its 10th year, the Syrian conflict has led to more than 500,000 deaths and displaced an estimated 13 million—over half of Syria's pre-war population. Over 6.2 million Syrians are internally displaced, and 5.6 million are refugees, predominantly in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

The war began after the Syrian regime cracked down against peaceful civilian protestors, quickly evolving into a more complex conflict. Various factions—the Syrian regime, Syrian rebels, the self-styled Islamic State, al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist organizations, Kurdish-led organizations, and foreign militias including Hezbollah—have engaged in a costly contest for control. Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the United States have also intervened. Most recently, the emergence of COVID-19 poses great risk both for an ISIS resurgence and for conflict-affected refugee and displaced communities, and threatens to exacerbate the country's existing health, economic, political, and security crises.



USIP'S WORK

The U.S. Institute of Peace has been working in Syria since the war began in 2011. We have supported local leaders, Syrian and international NGOs, and civil society as they cope with the consequences of conflict. Working with a local Syrian partner, USIP undertakes local-level, outcome-oriented dialogues in northeast Syria. These dialogues focus on facilitating the return of internally displaced persons to their home communities—yielding important successes—as well as helping to promote peace and shift thinking in local communities

toward nonviolent means and the pursuit of compromise. USIP also works to increase the knowledge and skills of local leaders who are trying to resolve conflicts in their communities nonviolently.

Since the Turkish incursion in 2019, and more recently with the COVID-19 global health pandemic, in-person dialogue activities in northeast Syria are not possible due to security and health risks. However, USIP continues to support its local partners to conduct conflict analysis, build their capacity for peacebuilding, and monitor outcomes of dialogues to date.

Resolving Conflicts in Communities. Since 2015, USIP has helped Syrian leaders resolve conflicts in their communities. In 2015, USIP and our Syrian partner convened 14 leaders—representing religious, tribal, and civic segments of society—for talks on tensions in the al-Qahtaniya area of northeast Syria. Although Kurdish-led forces had cleared al-Qahtaniya of ISIS, more than 100 families—mostly Kurds not aligned with the dominant political parties—were still unable to return home. After six months of USIP-supported dialogues, meetings, and informal discussions, more than 100 families returned home and a key local road reopened, linking Arab villagers to the al-Qahtaniya town center in al-Hasakah province.

Building upon our al-Qahtaniya work, USIP and our Syrian partner continued local-level, outcome-oriented dialogues in other diverse towns and villages in al-Hasakah. By providing strategic support and targeted trainings, USIP has strengthened the ability of its partner organization to work with local leaders in northeast Syria to reduce barriers to the return of displaced people, address tensions triggered by the conflict, and identify and solve problems shared by different segments of society. Since 2017, USIP has:

- ▶ Helped local leaders adopt agreements to facilitate the return of 684 families to their places of origin in the town of Tal Hamis.
- ▶ Coordinated traditional reconciliation on a case-by-case basis between displaced families and people in their home communities with concerns about suspected ISIS ties, resulting in the so-far sustainable return of 34 families to their home communities in the towns of Tal Hamis and Tal Brak.
- ▶ Brought 600 people together for a coexistence fair, providing opportunities to build trust and create momentum for community groups.

Informing Policy through Convenings, Conflict Analysis, and Expert Engagement. USIP convenes U.S. government and nongovernment stakeholders to address various aspects of Syria's complex conflict. In 2018, USIP was mandated by Congress to facilitate the bipartisan Syria Study Group, which was established to develop a forward-looking military and diplomatic strategy for Syria. The Group's Final Report represented a bipartisan consensus on U.S. policy on the Syrian conflict. USIP has also brought together government and nongovernment actors to address the complex challenges embedded in Syria's Al Hol displacement camp. We inform policymakers and legislators in Washington through private briefings, conflict analysis, congressional testimony, and private roundtables. USIP informs practitioners and the public through research, media interviews, and public events on Syria and related issues.

Reducing Tensions Between Refugees and Hosts. Neighboring countries struggle to host Syrian refugees. In Jordan and Lebanon, USIP has helped local and international organizations train young Syrians and host communities on how to cultivate cooperative relationships. USIP has also supported education for journalists in Lebanon on conflict-sensitive reporting.

