June 2017 – The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan hosts approximately 660,000 Syrian refugees, and its census records reflect a population increase of 1.4 million since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011. Over 80 percent of the refugees live outside of camps, in Jordanian communities throughout the country.

Host communities struggle to cope with the exacerbated strain on resources and demand on municipal services. Common problems include skyrocketing rent, water cutoffs, increased unemployment rates, and overcrowded schools.

At the Jordanian-Syrian border, the Mafraq Governorate bears the tremendous responsibility of providing services to tens of thousands of Syrians fleeing conflict. The world’s largest Syrian refugee camp, Zaatari refugee camp, sprawls into the capital city of Mafraq and many more refugees live within the city’s boundaries.

Within the governorate lies the Salhyeh & Nayfeh Municipality, one of 20 communities participating in the USAID [Community Engagement Project](https://www.usaid.gov/jordan/fact-sheets/usaid-community-engagement-projecthttps:/www.usaid.gov/jordan/fact-sheets/usaid-community-engagement-project). The project seeks to make communities more resilient by helping government, citizens, civil societies, and the private sector work together to identify and alleviate stressors. Teams comprised of men, women, youth, adults, elected officials and citizens design and implement solutions.

Providing safe spaces for youth to play was one of Salhyeh & Nayfeh’s top priorities. With support from USAID, the community partnered with the municipality, the Directorate of Youth, local civil society organizations, and citizens to establish the soccer field in 2015 at the Al Shrafieh Boys’ School for its central location accessible to all participants. While respecting societal norms for gender segregation, but also seeking to increase gender equality, specific days were allocated for girls.

“[The students] are very eager now to come to school and they don’t want to leave. They count the minutes for their PE class. This played a major factor in bringing the drop-out rate down to zero,” said Abdullah Al Khurman, principal of the Al Shrafieh Boys’ School.

Salhyeh & Nayfeh’s effort demonstrates the evolving nature of civic engagement within Jordanian communities. USAID’s Community Engagement Project runs from April 2013-April 2018. To date, the program has partnered with communities to reduce diverse stressors, equipping health clinics, rehabilitating schools, conducting awareness campaigns on the dangers of drug use, and more. The common thread between varied projects is the creation of inclusive communication pathways between citizens and their government, increasing communities’ ability to leverage resources and improving service delivery and citizen satisfaction.