



## WOMEN PREVENTING VIOLENCE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN DOUAR HICHER

Although exact figures are unknown, an estimated 3,000-6,000 Tunisians have travelled to Iraq and Syria since 2011 to join ISIS. Many of these Tunisian foreign fighters come from Douar Hicher — a marginalized community on the outskirts of Tunis — where, on one block alone, 13 residents were killed fighting for ISIS abroad. Residents rarely report to authorities when a friend or family member has departed for or returned from Iraq and Syria, but these incidents are known inside the community.

There is also a strong social and legal stigma attached to those associated with foreign fighters. Family members of foreign fighters are often ostracized by their local communities, who fear that any association will invite unwanted scrutiny and harassment from security services. This isolation weakens social bonds and can have the unintended consequence of further radicalizing those that are predisposed to feelings of marginalization and disassociation.

Since 2018, USIP and its Tunisian Coalition of Facilitators (TCF) have helped rebuild cohesion and facilitate reconciliation between families of foreign fighters and the rest of the community — a key element in strengthening resilience against further recruitment and radicalization. Women, especially mothers, were empowered to lead this process because of their familial role as the adult that often has the most frequent interaction with young men and women vulnerable to terrorist recruitment and the most influence over their behaviour.

In 2018 and 2019, USIP and its partners in Douar Hicher facilitated a gradual healing and reconciliation process between women with family ties to violent extremism and other women in the community. This initiative resulted in the establishment of a women's social club called Lammetna ("Our Reunion"), which has advanced the social reintegration and de-stigmatization of women with family ties to violent extremists and empowered them to directly participate in human security dialogue initiatives with local authorities to address the causes of violence and extremism within the community.

Meanwhile, Lammetna not only provides a safe space for women to discuss and heal from extremism, terrorist recruitment, social trauma and violence, it is also becoming an association for economic empowerment by enabling strong leadership from women in the community.

**Reconnecting the Community and Promoting Peace.** These discussions rebuilt trust and confidence between women in the community. The Lammetna club — which has expanded from 15 to 40 members since its initiation — enabled Douar Hicher's women to work together to address social and community issues stemming from radicalization, becoming a peace movement in the process.

**Engaging Institutional Power.** Through continuous trainings, mentorship, community dialogue and psycho-social support, USIP built the community's confidence to discuss sensitive issues such as radicalization, returnees and the impact on the community with local authorities. Since 2020, Lammetna has organized dialogues between local authorities — including the municipality and National Guard — and women with family ties to foreign fighters to tackle the root causes of fragility and localized drivers of radicalization in Douar Hicher.

As a result of these dialogues, the women were able to address and prevent violence against women and tensions between the community and local authorities. The women have also developed a collaborative action plan with the National Guard to address youth violence. This action plan will be implemented in 2023 and 2024.

**From the Local to Regional Level.** Going forward, USIP and its partners in Douar Hicher will mobilize multiple state actors on the governorate level in Manouba to launch a regional, multi-stakeholder dialogue on youth violence prevention and the prevention of violent extremism. Expanding the geographic scope of intervention will allow USIP to replicate Douar Hicher's approach in other vulnerable communities in Manouba that constitute a hub for violent extremism.