

Effect of intergroup contact and peace education on feeling of trust and acceptance of diversity

Intergroup contact and peace education interventions show a large effect on trust and acceptance of diversity, particularly in the short term, with stronger effects often observed among majority groups.

Geographical region: Europe & Central Asia, Middle East & North Africa, South Asia, Sub Saharan Africa, East Asia & Pacific, Latin America & Caribbean, Global

Effect size: Large effect ($g=0.249$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (60 studies; 371ES)

Short summary

Intergroup contact and peace education interventions had a **large effect** on trust and acceptance of diversity. Programs—including volunteering, dialogue, education, cooperative tasks, and simulated contact—reduced prejudice and discrimination while enhancing empathy, trust, and social cohesion. Most interventions showed positive short-term effects on intergroup trust and acceptance of diversity, with stronger improvements often observed among majority groups. Long-term outcomes were less consistent. Confidence in this cell is low due to inconsistencies across studies.

Long summary

The intervention

Interventions included structured intergroup contact and peace education activities such as volunteering, classroom exchanges, joint training, dialogue sessions, and simulated or virtual interactions. These programs targeted reducing prejudice, improving trust, and fostering positive attitudes between groups in post-conflict or divided societies. Many interventions led to short-term improvements in social cohesion, though long-term effects required sustained engagement.

How the intervention is expected to work

These interventions are expected to foster trust and acceptance of diversity by enabling meaningful, cooperative interactions between individuals from different or opposing groups. Shared tasks, dialogue, and exposure to alternative perspectives reduce prejudice, build empathy, and challenge negative stereotypes. Peace education components enhance skills in conflict resolution, critical thinking, and mutual respect. By promoting empathy and trust in structured environments, these interventions aim to reduce perceived threats, support peaceful coexistence, and contribute to more inclusive and cohesive societies over time.

The evidence base

The cell includes 60 impact evaluations and nine systematic reviews. There is a low degree of consistency in the review findings. The review is concerned with interventions, including intergroup contact and peace education for feeling of trust and acceptance of diversity in fragile settings.

The studies used randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental methods to assess community-driven interventions. The studies were conducted in Lebanon, India, Israel, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, China, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Indonesia, and among U.S. and Israeli participants.

Evidence findings

The intervention had a large effect on trust and acceptance of diversity. Participants reported increased empathy, trust, and positive attitudes toward outgroups, with effects often stronger among majority groups. Variation in impact depended on context, intervention duration, and group dynamics.

The review evidence

Systematic reviews indicate that intergroup contact and peace education interventions in crisis-affected or divided contexts can enhance tolerance, empathy, and social cohesion, contributing to greater trust and acceptance of diversity within communities.

The impact evaluation evidence

Alaref (2019) evaluates the short-term impact of a volunteering and soft skills training program aimed at promoting social cohesion among youth in Lebanon, particularly tolerance. The intervention was part of the National Volunteer Service Program (NVSP) and included 80 hours of inter-community volunteering and 20 hours of soft skills training. A quasi-experimental design was used, involving 759 youth (473 treatment, 286 comparison) across five Lebanese regions. Participants were assigned based on NGO project selection, not randomized. The primary outcome of interest was the tolerance score (normalized). Findings show that selected youth experienced a statistically significant increase in tolerance compared to non-selected youth ($p=0.11$ and 0.12) indicating borderline significance. The effect size stems from a deterioration in tolerance among the comparison group (-0.30 S.D.), while tolerance among the treatment group remained stable. The study is rated low confidence due to its little description of the intervention.

Barnhardt (2009) assesses how religious neighbor diversity affects inter-religious attitudes in Hyderabad, India, through a natural experiment following a fire in a mixed-religion slum. 1,792 new housing units were randomly assigned via a lottery, creating clusters with varying Hindu-Muslim compositions. The randomized assignment allows for causal estimates of neighbor diversity on social cohesion outcomes. Using survey data from 1,363 respondents (95% response rate), the study analyzes five key measures: Favorable Attitudes Index, Living Together Index, Respondent's Network, and two neighbor interaction metrics. For Hindus, exposure to Muslim neighbors significantly improved attitudes. The Favorable Attitudes Index increased in equal clusters and in minority clusters ($p<0.05$). However, Muslims' attitudes showed no significant change. Living Together Index (willingness to live together) remained high overall with no significant change across treatments. In the Respondent's Network, exposure increased the proportion of other-religion contacts from 20% to 50–70%. Daily conversations with neighbors were common ($>85\%$), and agreement on talking daily was higher in mixed pairs in equal clusters ($p<0.05$), indicating increased inter-religious interaction without social exclusion. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Benatov (2021) evaluated the "Play2Talk" intervention, a cooperative video game-based program (via Minecraft) designed to reduce intergroup bias among 6th-grade Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli children in Haifa, Israel. The intervention involved six virtual and two face-to-face sessions and compared outcomes with a control group engaged in similar activities within their own ethnic groups. The total sample included 89 students (46 experimental, 43 control). Key findings across time points include a significant reduction in emotional prejudice against outgroup in the intervention group ($p<0.001$), while prejudice increased in the control group. Positive characteristics of the outgroup increased significantly and negative characteristics decreased ($p=0.006$). Negative outgroup stereotyping also declined, as did negative behavioral expectation. Finally, willingness for social contact with the outgroup significantly increased ($p<0.001$). These effects persisted six months post-intervention. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Berger (2016) tested the Extended Class Exchange Program (ECEP), a multi-theoretical prejudice-reduction intervention for 3rd and 4th grade Israeli–Jewish and Israeli–Palestinian students in Jaffa, Israel. Using a randomized controlled design, 322 students (161 intervention, 161 control) from four schools participated. Outcomes were measured pre-intervention, post-intervention, and at 15-month follow-up. The intervention

significantly improved social attitudes and reduced prejudice. Readiness for social contact increased significantly in the intervention group from baseline to follow-up ($p < 0.001$). Negative feelings toward the outgroup decreased ($p < 0.001$). Discriminatory tendencies significantly declined ($p < 0.001$) and negative stereotyping also reduced ($p < 0.001$). Discriminatory tendencies toward Ethiopians decreased significantly ($p = 0.002$), and negative stereotyping of Ethiopians dropped ($p = 0.016$). All effects persisted 15 months after program completion, despite escalated intergroup conflict. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Bilali (2013) tested the effects of the reconciliation radio drama *Musekeweya* on intergroup attitudes, using an audio-based priming method. Participants ($N = 842$, 53% female) from across Rwanda were randomly assigned to hear a questionnaire read either by a main character of the drama (experimental condition) or a neutral voice (control). The aim was to assess the drama's impact on intergroup mistrust, specifically the belief that "It is naïve to trust members of the other ethnic group." Findings showed a significant interaction between priming and listening status. In the experimental condition, listeners were significantly less likely to agree with the mistrust statement compared to non-listeners ($p = 0.007$). No difference was found in the control condition ($p = 0.77$). While there was no significant main effect of priming alone ($p = 0.16$), listeners overall reported lower mistrust ($p = 0.01$) and higher education was also associated with reduced mistrust ($p = 0.04$). The results suggest media-based priming can reduce intergroup mistrust when combined with prior engagement. The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to use of single-item measures instead of longer, more reliable scales due to practical constraints in field research.

Biton (2006) evaluated the impact of the Pathways into Reconciliation peace education program on Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian 10th-grade students ($N = 564$; 320 Israelis, 244 Palestinians). Conducted during the second Intifada, the intervention aimed to promote more constructive understandings of peace. Students were surveyed pre- and post-program. Perception of Positive Peace significantly increased among participants. Among Palestinians, those referencing positive peace in free association rose from 5.4% to 26.4%, while non-participants stayed near 1%. Among Israelis, positive peace references increased from 9.6% to 37.0%; in contrast, non-participants dropped from 6.7% to 2.3%. These shifts were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Perception of Structural Peace remained dominant among Palestinians but declined slightly among participants suggesting broadening views. Among Israelis, structural peace mentions rose from 2.4% to 5.3%, showing increased recognition ($p < 0.001$). Overall, the program shifted both groups toward more positive and shared conceptions of peace, counteracting the polarization exacerbated by conflict. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Blair (2016) examined the effects of ethnic balancing in police teams on discriminatory behavior in post-conflict Liberia. The sample included 232 officers from the Liberian National Police (LNP), randomized into teams of four, some with one or two Mandingo officers—Liberia's most marginalized ethnic group. The study assessed team-level discrimination using responses to mock crime scene and testimony evaluations, with indicators like assuming guilt, disbelief in victim testimony, and de-prioritizing crimes involving Mandingo civilians. Contrary to expectations from contact theory or descriptive representation, teams with Mandingo officers were significantly more discriminatory against Mandingo civilians. The Average Effect Size (AES) for teams with any Mandingo officer was 0.76 standard deviations ($p < 0.01$). Discrimination was even higher in teams with two Mandingo officers ($p < 0.01$). Notably, Mandingo suspects were judged more guilty ($p < 0.01$) and their cases considered less important ($p < 0.1$). The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to lack of reporting attrition.

Chang (2019) examined how two interventions (1) expert appeal and (2) cross-sectarian discussion-affect cross-sectarian cooperation and trust between Sunni and Shia Muslims. A total of 360 participants (180 Shia, 180 Sunni) were randomly assigned to six-person mixed-sect groups across three conditions: baseline, expert appeal, and expert appeal plus discussion. One-third of participants also received a clientelism treatment. Cross-sectarian trust was measured via self-reported attitudes on 4-point (absolute) and 7-point (relative) scales. Findings show that neither the expert appeal nor the group discussion interventions significantly increased cross-sectarian trust. However, higher cross-sectarian trust was significantly associated with increased contributions in the public goods game (a measure of conditional cooperation) ($p < 0.01$). Given the structured approach and robust experimental design with balanced group composition and randomization,

this study appears to be of medium to high confidence, though limitations regarding real-world applicability may reduce external validity.

Collins (2022) examined how individuals perceive learning and persuasion goals in attitude conflict, focusing on U.S. political polarization and Israeli-Palestinian disputes. Participants underestimated disagreeing others' learning goals but overestimated their persuasion goals ($p < 0.001$). This pattern persisted across contexts (politics/sports) and formats (open-ended vs. Likert). Disagreeing others were perceived as less willing to learn than agreeing others ($p = 0.001$) while agreeing others were seen as more persuasive ($p < 0.001$). In live political conversations actors' perceptions of partners' learning goals predicted partner evaluations ($p < 0.001$) and enjoyment ($p < 0.001$) more strongly than any other variable. A disagreeing counterpart with high learning goals was evaluated more positively than an agreeing counterpart with no goal info ($p < 0.001$). High learning goals also led to better tone ($p < 0.001$) and content ($p < 0.001$) evaluations. The study is rated as high confidence quantitative as its multi-study experimental design, controlled experimental conditions, preregistration and Sample Size and Statistical Power: With a cumulative sample size of 2,614 participants.

Gu (2016) tested whether cooperative intergroup contact between urban and rural–urban migrant adolescents in Xiamen, China can reduce prejudice. A total of 118 students (59 urban, 59 migrant) were paired into dyads and assigned to either a contact group (joint puzzle-solving) or no-contact group (independent task). Participants then rated their attitudes toward the outgroup. Contact significantly improved attitudes. Urban students in the contact group had more favorable attitudes toward migrants ($p = 0.01$). Migrant students in the contact group also reported more positive attitudes ($p = 0.01$). However, in a 10-month follow-up, effects diminished. For urban participants, behavioral differences were marginal ($p = 0.08$), and attitude change vs. baseline was modest ($p = 0.03$). No long-term effects were found for migrants. This study is rated as high confidence.

Maiti (2022) examined whether intergroup contact between Hindu and Muslim women in conflict-prone Kanpur Nagar, India, could reduce religious prejudice. In a randomized controlled field experiment, 764 women (81% Hindu, 19% Muslim) from 30 urban slums were assigned to 5-person groups for a week-long vocational beautician training that required close cooperation. Post-training attitudes were measured using a shortened Generalized Group Attitude Scale, one week after the training and for a 6-month follow-up subsample ($n = 345$). Muslims placed in groups with at least one Hindu exhibited reduction in prejudice toward Hindus ($p < 0.05$). Hindus assigned to a group with at least one Muslim showed a reduction in prejudice toward Muslims ($p < 0.01$). At 6-month follow-up, the effect persisted only for Hindus still evident ($p < 0.05$), while effects for Muslims dissipated. These findings suggest that intergroup contact fosters meaningful short-term attitude change especially for majority groups, but long-term change may require sustained engagement. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Samii (2013) examines the impact of quota-based ethnic integration in Burundi's military following its civil war (1993–2004), using a natural experiment exploiting an age-based cutoff (45.5 years) that determined who remained in the integrated military versus who was demobilized. The sample consisted mainly of former Forces Armées Burundaises (FAB) soldiers, predominantly Tutsi ($N \approx 1,086$). Integrated soldiers were significantly less prejudiced toward outgroup enumerators. Among non-integrated soldiers, being interviewed by a non-coethnic led to a +1 SD increase in nonresponse to sensitive questions, while this effect was absent for integrated soldiers ($p < 0.05$) indicating reduced interethnic bias. No statistically significant effect of integration on ethnic salience was observed suggesting that integration neither increased nor decreased ethnic identity importance. This study can be rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study due to robust analysis method used.

Shani (2017) examined the impact of Mixed-Model Encounters (MMEs) a program integrating coexistence and confrontational dialogue on intergroup relations between Jewish and Palestinian high school students in Israel. The study included 498 students (Jewish: 153, 64 control; Palestinian: 162, 119 control), surveyed before and after the intervention. Among Jewish participants, the MME significantly increased readiness for contact ($p < 0.001$) and readiness for joint activities ($p < 0.001$). It also reduced perceived threat and perceived equality. Among Palestinian participants, perceived threat did not change significantly ($p = 0.92$), but perceived equality decreased. Readiness for contact and activities showed small, nonsignificant increases. Mediation analysis showed increases in empathy and hope, especially among Jews, were key drivers of positive outcomes. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Steinfeld (2021) assessed whether simulated virtual intergroup contact can influence perceptions in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A total of 89 right-leaning Israeli students participated in a lab-based eye-tracking experiment where they engaged in an interactive session with a pre-recorded video of a Palestinian speaker. The study combined pre- and post-session surveys with real-time eye-tracking data to examine changes in perception and attention during the contact. Participants showed a marginally significant increase in perceived trustworthiness of Palestinians after the session ($p < 0.06$). Trustworthiness was measured through agreement with statements such as “Palestinians are unreliable” and “I do not believe in Palestinian peace intentions.” Notably, changes in perceived trustworthiness were not significantly correlated with eye-tracking measures, suggesting that emotional shifts occurred independently of attentional engagement. This study is rated as low confidence quantitative study.

Ugarriza (2022) examined the effects of two perspective-giving protocols standard vs. issue-restrictive on intergroup attitudes between ex-combatants and community members in post-conflict Colombia. The study involved 140 participants (68 ex-combatants, 72 community members) from 10 municipalities. Ex-combatants’ attitudes toward community members improved significantly overall ($p = 0.032$). Community members’ attitudes toward ex-combatants showed no significant change overall. After controlling for gender, no significant effects were found. After controlling for empathy (TEQ), no significant effects were found for either group. Controlling for deliberative perception, no significant effects were found. Although community attitudes remained stable, the perspective-giving protocol yielded small but significant improvements in ex-combatants’ attitudes, supporting its potential as a reconciliation tool. This study can be rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study due to robust methodology.

Werner (2020) This lab-in-the-field experiment in Ambon, Indonesia, tested whether memories of violent inter-religious conflict reduced prosocial behavior among 724 Christian and Muslim students. Participants played dictator, ultimatum, and trust games, with treatment groups exposed to identity cues (religion or ethnicity), activating conflict memories, while the control group received only neutral cues (culinary preferences). In the non-activation (control) group, participants allocated an average of 31.4% of their endowment across games. In treatments where religious or ethnic identity was made salient, allocations dropped significantly; religious out-group ($p < 0.001$), ethnic out-group ($p < 0.001$), ethnic in-group ($p < 0.01$), religious in-group ($p < 0.01$). Among participants injured in the conflict, reductions in prosocial behavior were even stronger ($p < 0.001$). These results support emotional numbing theory that conflict memories reduce empathy and generosity, overriding in-group/out-group distinctions. This study can be rated as low confidence quantitative study.

Zhang (2016) The Education for a Just Society initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina aimed to foster reconciliation and interethnic understanding through school-based extracurricular activities. Using a quasi-experimental Difference-in-Differences design, the evaluation surveyed 2,794 treatment and 1,083 comparison students across 18 treatment and 9 comparison schools. Results showed modest but positive changes in student interactions across ethnic and religious lines. Compared to the control group, students in treatment schools were slightly more likely to say they would not mind being best friends (+0.75%), celebrating birthdays (+1.23%), visiting homes (+1.39%), and writing on social media (+1.42%) with peers from other ethnic or religious backgrounds. The number of students reporting friendships in other regions of BiH increased by 13%, although this result was not statistically significant. Additionally, perceptions of the teacher’s role in addressing social divisions improved. Students in treatment schools were more likely to report that teachers discussed why people have conflicts (+3.08%) and how other children in BiH live (+4.37%, $p < 0.1$). While most changes were modest and not all reached statistical significance, the findings suggest that structured, inclusive school activities can promote intergroup openness and shift student perceptions of teachers as agents of reconciliation. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Confidence assessment

We have low confidence in this cell, as over 50 percent of the studies are rated as low confidence, and there is considerable inconsistency in the effect sizes across studies.

Link to review summaries

Ada (2021)

Carthy (2020)

Dano (2015)

Dana (2016)

King (2010)

Lwamba (2022)

Ruth (2017)

Spangaro Jo (2021)

Wing (2021)

Other outcomes in the study

- Violence and atrocity prevention/diplomatic relation and dispute resolution/nature and scale of violence or atrocities/ sexual and gender-based violence/social norms regarding violence and atrocities
- Social cohesion/sense of belonging/ willingness to participate or help
- Community and state governance/access to justice, rights and public services/civic participation/government performance/ presence and quality of social safety nets/transitions of power
- Human security/economic security/educational security/food security and nutrition & health security/political security/physical security/intermediate social cohesion outcomes