

Effect of intergroup contact and peace education on willingness to participate or help

Intergroup contact and peace education programs have a moderate effect on promoting willingness to engage or help others.

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

Effect size: Moderate effect ($g=0.189$)

Confidence in study findings: Low confidence (17studies; 87 ES)

Short Summary

Intergroup contact and peace education interventions have a moderate effect on fostering willingness to participate or help. Longer interventions with behavioral reinforcement tend to yield more sustained impacts, while short-term programs often produce temporary attitudinal changes. Structural and perspective-taking approaches show modest effects. Confidence in this finding is low because most studies fall into low-confidence categories and inconsistent effect sizes.

Long summary

The Intervention

The interventions in this cell include intergroup contact and peace education initiatives such as reconciliation programs, structured dialogues, vicarious contact, and deliberative democracy exercises. These programs generally aim to increase willingness to participate in civic life or help others. While many interventions reported improvements in empathy and prosocial behavior, results were often mixed or short-lived. Limitations such as small sample sizes, selection bias, and limited external validity constrain conclusions about their long-term real-world effectiveness.

How the Intervention is expected to work

Intergroup peace contact and peace education are designed to enhance willingness to participate or help by fostering trust, empathy, and cooperation between groups in conflict. Structured contact activities including dialogue workshops, sports-based initiatives, and reconciliation programs seek to improve intergroup attitudes and reduce prejudice. However, effects vary: while some interventions increase empathy and cooperative behavior, others show no sustained impact or even short-term declines in empathy. The effectiveness of these programs depends on their duration, reinforcement mechanisms, and real-world applicability. Study limitations such as self-reported measures and small samples further reduce confidence in the results.

The evidence base

This cell includes four systematic reviews and seventeen impact evaluations. The evidence base remains fragmented and inconsistent across studies.

The impact evaluations employ a range of designs, including randomized controlled trials (RCTs), longitudinal studies, pre-test/post-test designs, quasi-experimental approaches, and mixed-methods studies.

Research was conducted in Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Liberia, Lebanon, Colombia, Israel, Sri Lanka, Iraq, and Palestine.

Evidence Findings

Evidence suggests that intergroup contact interventions can improve attitudes toward outgroups and increase willingness to participate or help. However, effects vary considerably: some studies demonstrate durable behavioral change, while others show limited or temporary effects..

The review evidence

Systematic reviews indicate that intergroup contact and peace education interventions can support social cohesion and encourage participation and helping behaviors. Their effectiveness depends on contextual conditions, implementation quality, and available resources.

The impact evaluation evidence

Aladysheva (2017) evaluates the LivingSideBySide (LSBS) program, a school-based peacebuilding initiative implemented in southern Kyrgyzstan following the 2010 interethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities. The program aimed to promote interethnic understanding and tolerance among youth aged 13–18 through an extracurricular training program focusing on identity, communication, prejudice reduction, and conflict resolution. The study employed a randomized controlled trial (RCT) using an oversubscription design, where participants were randomly selected from applicants in 10 treatment schools. Control groups were established within the same schools. It included 553 treatment participants and comparable control groups across three oblasts (Osh, Jalalabad, Batken). The data is collected before, immediately after, and one year following program completion. Cooperation levels improved, particularly in Game 2, where the coefficient increased by 0.45 ($p < 0.01$) for all students. Girls showed increased in cooperation but had a decline in self-confidence (-1.85, $p < 0.05$). The study is rated high confidence.

Alan (2020) investigated the impact of a behavioral intervention on social cohesion among school children in a randomized controlled trial (RCT) conducted in a school setting. The sample included 6,500+ students, with outcomes measured through trust, cooperation, and altruism games. Results showed that treated students exhibited higher in-group trust (+0.272) and out-group trust (+0.207), and in-group payoffs increased (+0.269), but out-group payoffs declined (-0.117). Other results reported increased in-group cooperation (+0.044) but no effect on out-group cooperation (-0.003), while in-group payoffs rose (+0.133) with no change in out-group payoffs (-0.011). Additionally, it showed that willingness to donate increased (+0.067) and fraction donated also rose (+0.050). The study is considered low confidence.

Alan (2021) evaluates the effect of an education cohesive program in ethnically diverse elementary schools in Sanliurfa and Mersin, southeastern Turkey. The program, "Understanding Each Other," emphasizes perspective-taking to reduce peer violence, social exclusion, and ethnic segregation while improving prosocial behaviors and academic

outcomes. A cluster randomized controlled trial was used, with a sample of 6,500 students (16% refugees) from 80 elementary schools. The intervention focused on perspective-taking through three-hour extracurricular lecture for a year. Control schools continued standard extracurricular projects. Treated children also showed an increase of reciprocity and altruism in incentivized tasks, being 6.9% more likely to donate - 3.4% higher if to a Syrian refugee. 5.3% more tokens are donated as well to both groups. Refugee children are particularly less likely to report feelings of social exclusion in the treatment group. There was a large and significant effect improving on Turkish test scores for refugee children, but not for Math scores. The study is rated low confidence due to its little description of the intervention.

Blair (2016) examines the impact of ethnic balancing policies in the Liberian National Police (LNP), which were implemented after the Liberian civil war to integrate minority ethnic groups into the security sector. The authors test the competing arguments that ethnic balancing reduces discrimination against minority groups but erodes cooperation and social cohesion. The study uses surveys and lab-in-the-field experiments with LNP officers to measure discrimination against Mandingo civilians and cooperation among LNP officers. They find that teams with minority (Mandingo) officers are no more or less cooperative than homogeneous teams but are more discriminatory against Mandingo civilians. This counterintuitive result suggests that pressure to assimilate can lead minority officers to publicly discriminate against their own co-ethnics to prove their loyalty to the integrated institution. The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to lack of reporting attrition.

Blattman (2011) aimed at promoting peace, human rights, and civic participation. The program provided training and facilitated community dialogues to build skills for non-retributive dispute resolution and promote constructive engagement in Liberia. The study used a randomized evaluation design, comparing outcomes between communities that received the CEP program and control communities that did not. The analysis focused on "potential trainees" identified in advance as well as other community members who attended the program. The program had modest impacts on respect for human rights and equality, but significant impacts on conflict and conflict resolution, increases in non-violent interpersonal and inter-group disputes, suggestive evidence of a decrease in violent disputes, increased rates of dispute resolution and satisfaction with resolutions. The results indicate varying impacts of community participation, within potential trainees with contributions to public goods showing a slight decline of 4%, while total group membership (excluding peace groups) increased by 10%. Notably, membership in a community peace group exhibited the highest rise at 22%, whereas leadership in a community group saw a modest 3% increase. The results within community members indicate a 2% increase in both contributions to public goods and total group membership (excluding peace groups). Membership in a community peace group shows the highest rise at 50%, while leadership in a community group also sees a notable 22% increase. These findings suggest a significant boost in participation in peace groups and leadership roles, with smaller gains in general group membership and public goods contributions. These findings highlight differing engagement levels across community roles. The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to lack of reporting attrition.

Chang (2019) assesses the participant group discussions, comparing groups subjected to these interventions with baseline groups without interventions using laboratory-in-the-field experiment. Each group remained fixed throughout the study, with tasks and games facilitated by moderators. The laboratory-in-the-field experiment is set in Lebanon's capital, Beirut, and involves interactions between 180 Shia and 180 Sunni Muslim participants. Participants were recruited across Beirut to achieve a representative sample, ensuring sect, neighborhood, and age diversity. On arrival, individuals were randomly assigned to six-member groups. Each group was balanced regarding sect (three Shia and three Sunni), gender (three men and three women), and age (three participants aged 18–40 and three aged 41–64). The findings show that the expert appeal intervention significantly reduced sectarian voting by 19–23%, indicating an increase in unconditional cooperation. In contrast, group discussions did not

significantly reduce sectarian voting; instead, they slightly increased the likelihood of voting for a co-sectarian by 7–9%, though this effect was not statistically significant. Disaggregated results confirmed that expert appeals led participants to vote less frequently along sectarian lines, especially when the candidate exclusively favored their sect. The results indicate that the expert appeal intervention significantly reduced the allocation of tokens to co-sectarians by about one token (from seven to six), showing a meaningful increase in altruistic regard toward the outgroup. This suggests that the expert appeal successfully encouraged intersectarian cooperation in unconditional exchanges. In contrast, group discussion did not significantly reduce token allocation to co-sectarians, indicating it did not impact altruistic behavior across sectarian lines. 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.

Chatruc (2021) used two perspective-taking interventions to increase empathy toward Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. Participants were randomized into one of three groups: 1) Game Treatment: Participants played "En Otros Zapatos (EOZ)," where they took on the role of Mile Rodriguez, a fictional Venezuelan migrant. The game required participants to make life-altering decisions for her, read her story, and interact with immersive content (e.g., letters and messages). 2) Video Treatment: Participants watched a 6:39-minute documentary titled "Walking for Freedom," showcasing Venezuelan migrants' struggles as they crossed into Colombia. 3) Control Group: Participants did not engage in any activity but completed a survey. Recruitment involved an email invitation sent to 2,132 individuals from the REBEL pool, encouraging participation in a one-hour online experiment in exchange for monetary compensation. From these, 897 individuals registered, and 858 completed the intervention. The result showed that Both the game and video significantly increased donations to a Venezuelan NGO by 10.6 and 11.1 percentage points, respectively, raising the donation probability from 66.7% (control) to around 77%. This represents a 16% increase for both interventions, showing equal effects on altruistic behavior. Although the point estimates are positive, the video does not have statistically significant effects on any of the scales. The study is rated as low confidence, given online self-reported data.

Feuchte (2020) examined the impact of Forum Theater, a participatory performance approach by Boal (1989), as an intervention to foster improved intergroup attitudes, community sense, and collective action intentions in post-conflict settings. Two Forum Theater plays were presented: one focused on rebuilding trust after intergroup conflict, and the other addressed a public health issue. The plays encouraged audience interaction and engagement with themes relevant to post-conflict recovery. In two Liberian communities, 218 participants were recruited for this field experiment. These participants were drawn from diverse backgrounds to represent the local community's variation, and they were randomly assigned to either one of the Forum Theater play interventions or a control group that did not receive any intervention. The study showed that Participants who experienced intergroup contact had a mean social distance score of 2.28 (SD = 0.79) compared to the control group's mean score of 2.59 (SD = 0.76). The t-test result was $t(64) = -2.09, p < .05$, indicating a significant difference with an effect size of $d = -0.39$. These findings suggest that intergroup contact can effectively reduce social distance, while intergroup conflict scenarios also have a positive impact, though to a lesser extent. It is a low confidence quantitative study.

Goldenberg (2016) examined a pre-encounter intervention focused on changing perceptions of group malleability to increase cooperation and improve intergroup emotions between Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli adolescents during a contact encounter in Israel. The intervention was conducted in a classroom setting prior to the intergroup contact. The participants were Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli middle school students, specifically 8th and 9th graders. The school principals were not aware of the specific goals of the study. The study used a randomized controlled design. Participants were randomly assigned to either a group malleability condition or a coping skills control condition. The cooperative behaviour

score was 37% higher in the group malleability condition compared to the coping condition, with an effect size of $r=0.37$ [0.13,0.57]. Observers rated participants in the group malleability condition as having 33% more positive emotions than those in the coping condition, with an effect size of $r=0.33$ [0.08,0.54]. Participants in the group malleability condition self-reported 15% more positive emotions compared to those in the coping condition, with an effect size of $r=0.15$ [0.01,0.31]. This is a high and medium confidence quantitative study due to a well-designed and executed study with a robust methodology and clear findings.

Halabi (2018) investigates the effects of different types of apologies (intergroup vs. interpersonal) on help-seeking behaviors among members of low status groups, particularly in the context of educational disparities between Jewish and Arab populations in Israel. The study consists of two main experiments: Study 1: participants were divided into two groups based on the type of apology they received (intergroup vs. interpersonal) and the stability of their status (stable vs. unstable). Study 2: this study further explored the effects of the type of apology and stability of status on various outcomes, including evaluations of help and perceptions of the helper's honesty. The total sample size included 78 Israeli-Arab high school students (19 male and 59 female). Results of study 1 showed that Help-Seeking Behavior for participants with unstable status receiving intergroup apologies, the mean for autonomy-oriented help seeking was 2.47 (SD = 0.96), while dependency-oriented help seeking was 0.50 (SD = 0.76). In contrast, for stable status, autonomy-oriented help seeking was lower compared to dependency-oriented help seeking. Results of study 2 showed that participants evaluated the dishonesty of the helper significantly lower in unstable intergroup apologies compared to stable intergroup apologies. The evaluation of help was higher for stable intergroup apologies (4.68, SD = 1.81) compared to unstable intergroup apologies (3.20, SD = 1.74). This study is rated as low confidence quantitative study due to highly contextual results focusing on a specific demographic and the nature of the apologies and the experimental setup could introduce biases in participants' responses.

Levy (2022) assessed a dialogue-enhancing intervention called "Tools of Dialogue," targeting Israeli and Palestinian youth aged 16-18. Conducted in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this intervention aimed to reduce implicit prejudice and foster attitudes toward peace. The intervention included synchronized activities and group discussions on affiliation, empathy, and conflict resolution, intending to promote prosocial attitudes and reduce neural markers of prejudice. Implementing a randomized controlled trial design, with a sample of 47 participants comprising Jewish-Israeli and Arab-Palestinian adolescents. Adolescents underwent magnetoencephalography before and after the 8-week intervention to assess a neural marker of implicit prejudice and were interviewed on their attitudes toward the conflict. Peace support attitudes, measured on a 3-point scale, increased significantly in the intervention group after the intervention. At T1 (pre-intervention), the intervention group had a peace support score (M = 1.46, SD = 0.14), which rose to (M = 1.60, SD = 0.18) at T2 (post-intervention). This change was statistically significant ($t(1,20) = -3.56$, $P = 0.001$, Cohen's $d = 0.76$), a large effect size. In contrast, the control group showed no significant change in peace support attitudes between T1 and T2 ($P = 0.99$). Seven years after the intervention (T3), peace proactivity was measured on a similar scale, and participants in the intervention group reported moderate-to-high levels of peace proactivity (M = 2.52, SD = 0.26). Although there was no significant difference in T3 peace proactivity between the intervention and control groups ($P = 0.66$), a positive correlation was found within the intervention group between the neural change from T1 to T2 and peace proactivity at T3 ($r = 0.47$, $P = 0.04$). The study is high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Loneragan (2017) involved a five-week reconciliation program designed for a diverse student body, aiming to foster positive relationships among different ethnic groups (Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim) in Sri Lanka. The program included interactive learning activities, team-building exercises, and sessions focused on themes such as identity, coexistence, trust, empathy, and mutual acknowledgment of past wrongs. The study employed a mixed-methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. It included pre- and post-program

surveys to measure changes in attitudes related to atrocity risk and reconciliation outcomes, alongside semi-structured interviews with participants to gain deeper insights into their experiences. The sample consisted of university students from three ethnic groups: Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim. The selection aimed to reflect the demographic dynamics of the country, ensuring representation across gender and ethnicity. Approximately 50% of the sample was Sinhala, 25% Tamil, and 25% Muslim, with an equal distribution of men and women. The total sample size was around 50 participants. statistical results on willingness to participate or help in reconciliation efforts. The findings indicate a significant increase in positive attitudes toward reconciliation ($p = 0.023$), suggesting a greater openness to engagement. However, empathy levels decreased ($p = 0.021$), which may affect the depth of willingness to help. These mixed results highlight both progress and challenges in fostering long-term commitment to reconciliation. The study is rated as low confidence quantitative study because the uneven representation of the sample, short duration of the intervention.

Malhotra (2005) designed to foster intergroup contact between young adults from the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, who have been engaged in political and violent ethnic conflict for decades. The program aimed to promote understanding and empathy through structured dialogue and activities over a four-day workshop. The study employed a longitudinal design, measuring attitudes and behaviors of participants one year after the completion of the peace workshop. The sample consisted of young adults from two ethnic groups in Sri Lanka: the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. Participants were selected based on their involvement in the peace workshops. The study found that even brief contact (four days) could have a long-term impact on participants' attitudes, measured one year later. the results indicate a positive effect of the workshops on intergroup attitudes. Results found that participants in peace workshops exhibited significantly greater empathy (3.4 vs. 3.0) and donated more money (Rs. 186 vs. Rs. 148) to help poor children from the other ethnic group compared to non-participants. These effects persisted one year after the four-day intervention, demonstrating long-term impact. The statistical significance of the findings further strengthens its reliability in assessing the effectiveness of peacebuilding programs. The study is rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study.

Mousa (2020) assesses the intergroup contact intervention in reducing prejudice and improving behaviors in a post-conflict setting marked by deep mistrust and social segregation between Christians and Muslims in post-ISIS Iraq. This randomized controlled field experiment involved approximately 459 Christian participants across 42 teams, with Muslim players comprising around 25% of mixed-team squads. Christian soccer players were randomly assigned to either all-Christian teams or mixed teams that included Muslim players. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of intergroup contact in fostering tolerance and reducing prejudice. The study found that treated players on mixed Christian-Muslim soccer teams were significantly more likely to engage in positive behaviors toward Muslim peers, including being 13% more likely to accept a mixed team ($P = 0.044$), 26% more likely to vote for a Muslim player for a sportsmanship award ($P = 0.003$), and 49% more likely to train with Muslims six months after the intervention ($P < 0.001$). The national unity index increased by 0.43 standard deviations ($P < 0.001$), reflecting stronger beliefs in the arbitrariness of ethnic/religious divisions. Players on successful teams showed stronger tolerance toward Muslim strangers, while no increased hostility was detected in matches. This study can be rated as low confidence.

Mazziotta (2014) focuses on post-conflict intergroup relations in Liberia following its civil wars. The intervention involved guiding participants to adopt different perspectives on their group's role during the conflict. This field experiment used a randomized controlled design with 146 participants, who were randomly assigned to one of two focus conditions (perpetrator-focus or victim-focus) to assess shifts in intergroup perceptions and behavioral intentions. Participants who were assigned to the perpetrator-focus condition showed increased willingness to engage in cross-group contact. These participants also exhibited a greater need for acceptance and higher levels of intergroup empathy. The standardized effect size ddd for

the outcome as a positive measure is -0.889, indicating a negative effect in the given context. The variance is 0.031, and this value remains the same even after cluster adjustment $V(d)V(d)V(d)$ with cluster-adjustment = 0.031. The Hedges' g value is 0.884, which adjusts for small sample bias for social cohesion. Notably, the intervention did not impact the participants' need for empowerment, indicating a specific effect on social emotions and contact intentions rather than on broader psychosocial needs. The study rated as low confidence quantitative study because of small sample size and no follow-ups.

Nasie (2021) focused on a vicarious contact intervention program designed to improve intergroup attitudes among Jewish-Israeli children. The intervention utilized persona dolls representing various social groups (secular Jews, religious Jews, Ethiopian-descendant Jews, and Arabs) to promote empathy and understanding. The research was conducted in two middle-class cities in central Israel, specifically within the educational settings of kindergartens. The study employed a mixed design with kindergarten religious affiliation (secular vs. religious) as a between-subjects variable. Time (T0 vs. T1) and group membership of the targets (ingroup vs. outgroup) were treated as within-subjects variables. The participants were 109 Jewish-Israeli children, included from both secular (54 participants) and religious (55 participants) kindergartens. The intervention resulted in significant increases in children's knowledge and attitudes towards outgroups. Knowledge regarding an Israeli increased significantly ($p = .01$). Knowledge about Ethiopian descendants showed a substantial increase ($p < .001$). Knowledge about secular individuals ($p < .001$) and religious individuals ($p < .01$) also improved significantly. The results show that the intervention significantly improved willingness to participate or help, as indicated by increased liking and reduced social distance towards certain outgroups. Religious children's liking for Arabs increased from 2.17 (SD = 1.04) at T0 to 2.57 (SD = 1.14) at T1 ($F = 6.22$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2 = .10$), and both secular and religious children showed reduced distance from Ethiopian-descendant individuals (T0: 4.98, SD = 2.50; T1: 4.36, SD = 2.61; $F = 5.06$, $p = .020$, $\eta^2 = .04$). The low confidence quantitative study.

Ugarriza (2016) examines the potential for deliberative democracy to transform beliefs and behavior in post-conflict settings with high levels of polarization, social grievances, and a history of violence—the deliberation treatment involved providing participants with classic deliberative instructions to produce higher discourse quality. The authors conducted a randomized controlled experiment in Colombia, organizing discussion groups with a mix of former combatants and members of conflict-affected communities. A total of 174 individuals were randomly drawn from our pool of potential participants (82 ex-combatants and 92 community members), and then randomly assigned to treatment and control conditions in 21 almost perfectly balanced groups. The remaining individuals from the pool of potential participants were assigned to non-experimental discussion groups, which are not included in the present analysis. Results showed that the overall deliberative mean score (DQI-Discourse Quality Index scores) revealed that the experimental group (Deliberation) was 4.79, compared to 4.71 in Control 1 and 4.92 in Control 2. However, no statistically significant difference existed between the deliberation group and the controls ($t = 0.054$, ($p = 0.956$)). The intervention (deliberation group) showed a significant positive impact on participation (intervention) and marginal effects on sophisticated reasoning and disposition to change due to the force of a better argument. Other dimensions, including respect, justification, reciprocity, and common-good orientation, did not show statistically significant differences. This study can be rated as high and medium confidence quantitative study due to robust methodology.

Confidence assessment

The confidence rating is low because the majority of studies are rated low in methodological quality and show inconsistent effect sizes across contexts.

Link to review summaries

Sonnenfeld (2021)

Ditlmann (2017)
Burde (2016)
King (2010)

Other outcomes in this study

- Violence and atrocity prevention/ Nature and scale of violence or atrocities/ Diplomatic relations and peaceful dispute resolution/ Social norms regarding violence and atrocities
- Social Cohesion/ Feelings of trust/ Acceptance of diversity/ Sense of belonging/ Intermediate social cohesion outcome
- Community and state governance/Government performance
- Human Security/ Educational Security/ Intermediate social cohesion outcomes/ Physical security