

Effect of training & job creation on sense of belonging

Vocational training and mentorship programs have a moderate effect on social connectedness and cross-group interactions, contributing to participants' sense of belonging.

Geographic region: Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, Sub Saharan Africa

Effect: Moderate effect ($g=0.114$)

Confidence in study findings: Low (2 studies with 13 effect sizes)

Short Summary

Training and job creation programs, including vocational and technical training initiatives, aim to improve economic opportunities while fostering social cohesion. In Afghanistan, the INVEST program, which provided vocational training, showed moderate improvements in social connectedness and cross-tribal interactions. Participants reported stronger social networks and a modest shift toward broader national identity, though the program did not influence personal confidence, perceived respect, or social status. In Uganda, a mentorship program pairing refugees with experienced business owners increased support for inclusion. Overall, the evidence suggests moderate effects on belonging, but confidence is low due to the limited number of studies.

Long summary

The intervention

The programs assessed include mentorship and vocational training courses. The Ugandan mentorship program matched refugee entrepreneurs with experienced mentors in the same industry, fostering inclusion through close collaboration across social groups. In Afghanistan, vocational and technical training was offered at nine TVET centers, covering skills aligned with labor market needs such as tailoring, IT, and mobile phone repair. Both interventions aimed to improve employment prospects and strengthen social connections.

How the intervention is expected to work

Vocational training and mentorship programs can enhance belonging through multiple mechanisms: improving economic stability, expanding social networks, promoting interactions across social groups, and fostering a shared sense of purpose or identity. Exposure to structured learning and mentorship provides opportunities for cross-group engagement, reinforcing inclusion. However, these programs may not fully address entrenched social hierarchies or shift perceptions of respect and status in stratified societies.

The evidence base

This cell includes 3 studies: 2 quantitative studies and 1 qualitative study. The study locations include Afghanistan, Uganda, and Colombia.

Evidence findings

In Afghanistan, the TVET program improved social connectedness: graduates were 10.7 percentage points more likely to report having friends to turn to for help and advice, and 8.1 percentage points more likely to identify as Afghan above tribal or religious affiliations. However, the program did not significantly affect personal confidence, social respect, or status. In Uganda, the mentorship program increased support for inclusion and inclusive refugee hosting. These findings indicate moderate effects on sense of belonging, particularly through cross-group interactions and social connectedness.

Included studies

Baseler (2021) investigated two programs for Ugandan (host) microentrepreneurs: cash grants delivered with information that connects the grant with Uganda's inclusive refugee policies and existing aid-sharing policy, and mentorship by an experienced refugee. This tests whether mentorship is an effective means to promote skill transfer across nationalities and increase small business profits. The study is designed as a randomized controlled trial. The main sample consisted of 1,406 Ugandan businesses. These were randomly assigned to treatments (cash and information, cash, information, a refugee mentor, a Ugandan mentor) or control. The study found a positive effect of all treatment groups on the main outcome, a pre-specified index of policy preferences – inclusive policies including refugees' right to work and hosting additional refugees, that is statically significant at the 10% level. The cash and information combined treatment (T1), however, has a larger effect than the other four treatments. The study is rated as medium confidence.

Kurtz (2015) examines the effect of the UK-supported INVEST program, which offered vocational and technical training courses in nine technical vocational education and training (TVET) centres in Helmand Province in Southern Afghanistan from 2011. The programme was implemented by a US NGO, Mercy Corps. At the time of the evaluation 25,000 students had graduated from the programme of which nearly on-third were women. The study used propensity score matching to match recruits from February to April 2014 with successful applicants who had not yet started the programme. There was some effect on social connectedness. Participants reported that they had more friends to turn to for help or advice (10.7 percentage points), as well as affecting participants' identifying as an Afghan above a tribe or religion (8.1 percentage points). INVEST also had a positive effect on participants' social interactions with people from other tribes. But the program had no impact on participants' feelings of being respected, personal confidence, or their perceived social standing in their community.

Confidence Assessment:

Overall low: The overall rating is low due to the limited number of studies and the low confidence rating of included studies.

Other outcomes in the study:

Violence and atrocity prevention / Social norms regarding violence and atrocities

Social cohesion / Willingness to participate or help

Social cohesion / Feelings of trust and acceptance of diversity

Community and state governance / Government performance

Human security / Economic security

Human security / Food security and nutrition & health security

Human security / Intermediate social cohesion outcomes