



## Building peaceful societies: an evidence gap map

More than 1.8 billion people, close to a quarter of the world's population, live in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Estimates suggest that more than 80 per cent of the world's poorest will be living in such contexts by 2030.<sup>1</sup> In response to this situation, development assistance in fragile contexts has reached record levels.<sup>2</sup>

As resources dedicated to addressing fragility and conflict increase, there is a growing demand for high-quality evidence to support policymaking and programming to build peaceful and resilient societies.<sup>3</sup>

This brief presents the findings of an evidence gap map (EGM) that charts the rapidly growing evidence base of interventions that aim to build peaceful societies in fragile contexts. The 2020 map updates and expands on the framework used in 3ie's 2015 peacebuilding EGM to highlight changing approaches and continuing evidence gaps.

### Highlights

- The evidence base is growing but is unevenly distributed amongst intervention types, with most of the research focusing on mental health and psychosocial support interventions.
- There is a lack of evidence for several countries that have both high levels of fragility and development assistance, including South Sudan, Syria and Yemen.
- Most existing studies do not address gender and equity.
- Few studies have evaluated complex interventions that target change at both individual and socio-political levels, although theory suggests both may be key to sustainable peace.
- Only five studies report any measures of cost-effectiveness, although this is an important question for programme funders and decision makers.
- An alarming number of studies do not report ethics approval, even though the studies involve vulnerable population groups.



## Main findings

Conducting research in fragile contexts is challenging. However, as of this update, we have identified 276 studies: 195 completed and 47 ongoing impact evaluations, and 29 completed and 5 ongoing systematic reviews. The 158 additional studies included since the 2015 EGM on peacebuilding represent both the growing evidence base and the broader scope of this EGM.

**The evidence base is growing, with a sizeable and increasing collection of high-quality systematic reviews.** The number of impact evaluations has risen, with a noticeable increase since 2013. There are also more systematic reviews of interventions in areas such as mental health and psychosocial support, violence and crime reduction, community-driven development and reconstruction, and cash-based transfers in emergency settings. Although the available evidence often limits the extent to which these reviews can identify clear policy implications, we recommend consulting these syntheses in the design and development of new policies and programmes.

**The evidence base is fractured and unevenly distributed amongst intervention types.** Almost a third of the impact evaluations and one half of the systematic reviews focus on mental health and psychosocial support interventions. There are clusters of studies on gender equality behaviour change communications and community-driven development and reconstruction, and a rapidly increasing evidence base for cash transfer and subsidies programmes.

There are also smaller clusters of evidence around peace education and messaging, intergroup dialogues and dispute resolution, and building inclusive and accountable state institutions in fragile contexts, as well as a growing evidence base for life skills and employment training. But for 12 of the 40 intervention types, we were unable to identify a single impact evaluation.

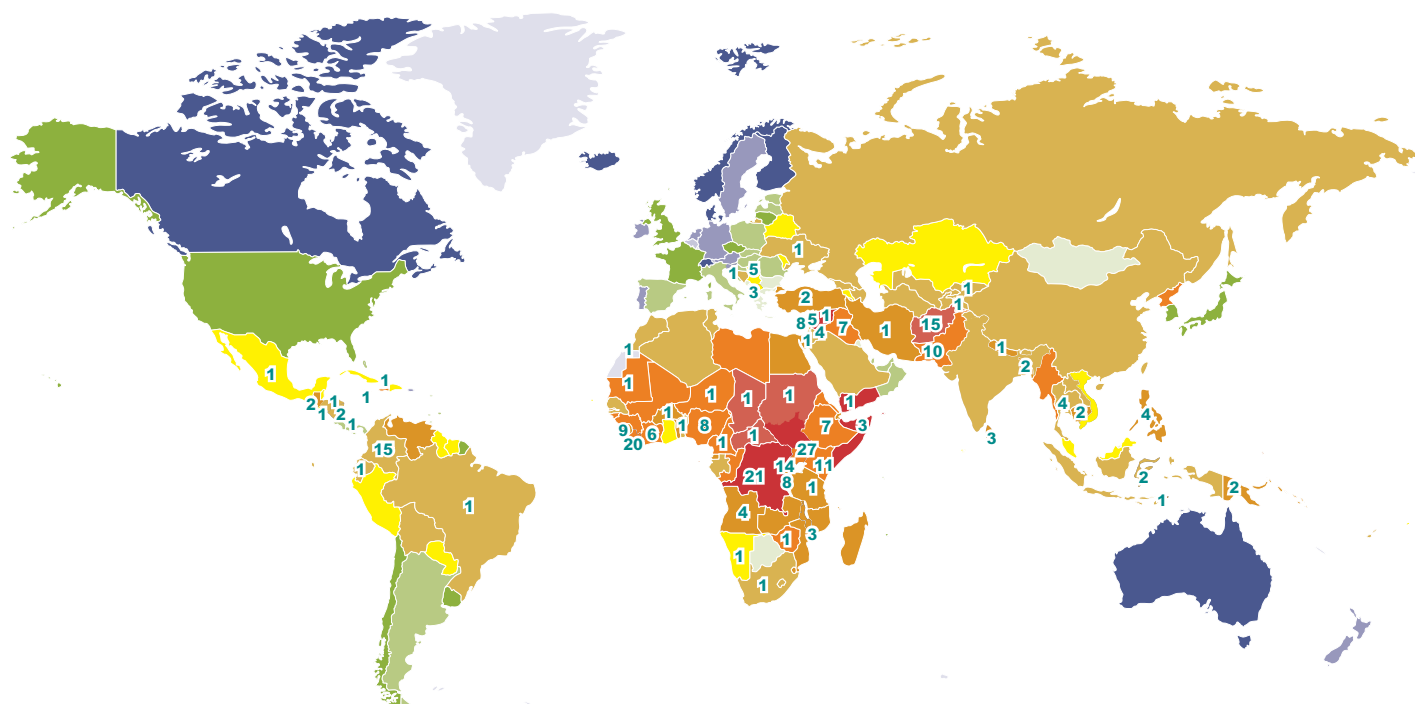
Few studies look at complex interventions that pair support for individual-level changes in people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours with socio-political changes that aim to create sustainable shifts in

institutional structures, power relations and access. Three quarters of the included studies evaluate interventions that pursue a single strategy for building sustainable peace. This contrasts with the programming reality, in which interventions are often complex, and points to a priority for future research.

**Many key outcomes are assessed infrequently.** Eighty-five completed impact evaluations report on physical and psychological health security, almost double any other outcome category. Just over 40 impact evaluations each report on intergroup relations and social norms and measures of economic situations. Less frequently assessed outcomes include violence and displacement due to violence, peace-positive behaviours, dispute resolution, social norms regarding violence, perceptions of personal and community safety, political security, sexual and gender-based violence, and sustainable and equitable resource management. The lack of agreed upon common outcome-sets limits cross-study learning and synthesis.



## Number of impact evaluations per country, by country fragility



Fragile States Index Heat Map



**Note:** The data source for the Fragile States Index is Fund for Peace (2019). Colours on the map refer to the country's Fragile States Index score for 2019; overlaid numbers refer to the number of completed IEs identified for this EGM.

**There are significant geographical evidence gaps.** The distribution of studies does not overlap with the geographical distribution of fragility or development aid. Of the 10 most fragile countries according to the 2019 Fragile States Index, only the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan have substantial evidence bases, with 15 and 12 completed impact evaluations, respectively.<sup>4</sup> There are no or very few studies for other fragile states – including Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea, Haiti, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen and Zimbabwe – that receive significant development assistance.<sup>5</sup>

### Very few studies report any measures of cost-effectiveness.

Only five studies include some level of cost data. Three of these are studies of life skills and employment training. One mental health and psychosocial support interventions study and one gender equality study also report some cost evidence, while one ongoing study of a cash transfers and subsidies intervention has committed to reporting cost evidence. No systematic reviews report on cost-effectiveness.

**There is limited use of theory-based, mixed-methods approaches.** Approaches that incorporate theory of change and mixed-methods approaches can help evaluations understand why change may or may not be happening and how the intervention has interacted with contextual factors, including barriers, facilitators and moderators. Although fragile contexts are commonly recognised as complex, the use of methods that help address complexity in impact evaluation is relatively low. Only roughly a third of the studies adopt a mixed-methods approach, and around a third incorporate a theory of change. Mixed-methods and theory-based approaches could be particularly helpful when evaluating complex and multi-component interventions.

### Attention to gender, equity and key population groups is limited.

Few studies adopt an equity-sensitive approach, such as ensuring the research process is informed by gendered inequality considerations, undertaking statistical sub-group analysis, or using qualitative methods to

understand the differential impacts for key vulnerable or marginalised population groups. Only four studies each report on interventions targeting or disaggregating effects for returned refugees or communities that host displaced populations, while only three look at impacts for migrant populations. There are also synthesis gaps for key populations, as no reviews were found that report evidence for ex-combatants, host communities or returned refugees.

### Less than a third of the studies report ethics approval.

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of approaches such as 'do no harm' in the peacebuilding community, few impact evaluations report having received ethical approval from an independent review board. Ethics approval is a core requirement of human subjects research, particularly when research is dealing with sensitive topics and vulnerable populations. Because the requirement applies to most, if not all, research covered in this EGM, this low rate of reporting is concerning.



## How to read an evidence gap map

3ie presents EGMs using an interactive online platform that allows users to explore the evidence base. Bubbles appearing at intersections between interventions and outcomes denote the existence of at least one study or review. The larger the bubble, the greater the volume of evidence in that cell. The colour of each bubble represents the type of evidence and, for a systematic review, a confidence rating (as indicated in the legend). In the online version, hovering over a bubble displays a list of the evidence for that cell. The links for these studies lead to user-friendly summaries in the 3ie evidence database. Users can filter the evidence by type, confidence rating (for systematic reviews), region, country, study design and population.

## What is a 3ie evidence gap map?

3ie EGMs are collections of evidence from impact evaluations and systematic reviews for a given sector or policy issue, organised according to the types of programmes evaluated and the outcomes measured. They include an interactive online visualisation of the evidence base, displayed in a framework of relevant interventions and outcomes. They highlight where there are sufficient impact evaluations to support systematic reviews and where more studies are needed. These maps help decision makers target their resources to fill these important evidence gaps and avoid duplication. They also facilitate evidence-informed decision-making by making existing research more accessible.



# Building Peaceful Societies Evidence Gap Map\*

- Impact evaluations
- High confidence
- Medium confidence
- Low confidence
- Protocol

## Outcomes

Confidence in confidence confidence col		Interventions												
		Governance			Social cohesion and trust				Violence reduction			Human security and resilience		
		Government performance	Civic participation	Access to justice, rights, and public services	Equality and empowerment	Intergroup relations and social norms	Peace-positive behaviours	Trust and public confidence	Sexual and gender-based violence	Instances of violence and displacement due to violence	Social norms regarding violence	Dispute resolution	Perceptions of personal and community safety	Perceptions of political security
Social inclusion	Peace education	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>		<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
	Peace messaging and media					<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>		<div><div></div></div>		<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
	Dispute resolution									<div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>		<div><div></div></div>
	Intergroup dialogues	N/A	<div><div></div></div>		<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	N/A	<div><div></div></div>		<div><div></div></div>		
	Social inclusion / reintegration initiatives					<div><div></div></div>				<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>		<div><div></div><div></div></div>	
	Gender equality behavioural-change communications			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>		<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	N/A
	Mental health and psychosocial support		<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	N/A
Peace processes	Support for peace processes and negotiation							N/A						
	Support for peace agreement implementation and oversight				N/A			N/A						
	Transitional justice processes							N/A						
	Peace policy influencing							N/A						
	Peacekeeping missions		<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	N/A				N/A	<div><div></div><div></div></div>			<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
Safe environments	Disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) and gang drop-out programmes	N/A				<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>	N/A	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>				N/A
	Conflict-focused early warning systems			N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A			N/A			N/A
	Countering violent extremism		<div><div></div></div>	N/A	N/A	<div><div></div></div>		<div><div></div></div>	N/A	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div><div></div></div>	N/A		
	Demining	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A		N/A

\* This image shows only a part of the Building Peaceful Societies EGM. For the full map, please visit the [website](#).





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## About this map

This brief is based on [Building peaceful societies: an evidence gap map](#), by Ada Sonnenfeld, Hannah Chirgwin, Miriam Berretta, Kyla Longman, Marion Krämer and Birte Snilstveit. The authors systematically searched for published and unpublished impact evaluations and systematic reviews conducted through mid-2019, and then identified,

mapped and described the evidence base of interventions that aim to build peaceful societies in fragile contexts in low- and middle-income countries. The map contains 195 completed and 47 ongoing impact evaluations and 29 completed and 5 ongoing systematic reviews. The characteristics of the evidence are described and mapped according to a framework of 40

interventions and 18 outcomes, with 5 cross-cutting themes. This brief was developed through a collaborative agreement between 3ie and the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), made possible thanks to generous funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2018. States of fragility 2018: highlights. OECD. Available at: <[https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/OECD%20Highlights%20documents\\_web.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/OECD%20Highlights%20documents_web.pdf)> [Accessed 14 April 2020].

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2019. Global humanitarian overview 2019: United Nations coordinated support to people affected by disaster and conflict. New York: OCHA. Available at: <<https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO2019.pdf>> [Accessed 18 March 2019].

<sup>3</sup> Broegaard, E, Bull, B and Kovsted, J, 2013. Evaluation approaches in situations of conflict and fragility. In: OW Anderson, B Bull and M Kennedy-Chouane, eds. Evaluation methodologies for aid in conflict. New York: Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> The Fund for Peace, 2019. Fragile states index – global data. Washington, DC: Fund for Peace. Available at: <<https://fragilestatesindex.org/data/>> [Accessed 12 April 2019].

<sup>5</sup> According to data from the OECD, these countries (minus Syria) received more than US\$11.3 billion in official development assistance in 2017. OECD, 2019. Data warehouse, OECD.Stat (database). Available at: doi: <<https://doi.org/10.1787/data-00900-en>> [Accessed 13 September 2019].

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For more information on 3ie's evidence gap maps, contact [info@3ieimpact.org](mailto:info@3ieimpact.org) or visit our website.

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