



The Global
SDG Synthesis
Coalition

Preventing violence, saving lives: What works for reducing homicides and conflict-related deaths?

A synthesis of evaluative evidence
related to the peace pillar of the SDGs.

FINAL REPORT

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



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Complimentary products and resources

This synthesis report forms part of a suite of knowledge products developed under the Peace Pillar Management Group of the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition. Together, these products examine *what works to reduce homicides and conflict-related deaths*, offering a comprehensive evidence base and multiple entry points for different audiences.

Readers are encouraged to consult the following complementary products, which accompany and enrich the findings presented in this full report. These are accessible from: <https://www.sdgsynthesiscoalition.org/pillar/peace-pillar>

- **Plain Language Brief** – A concise and accessible summary highlighting the key takeaways, implications, and actionable insights emerging from this synthesis.
- **Evidence Gap Maps** – Two interactive, visual tools that provide an overview of the evidence base underpinning this synthesis:
 - *Evidence gap map of quantitative impact evidence*
 - *Evidence gap map of qualitative performance and process evaluations*
- **Brief on the Evidence Base and Gaps** – An interim publication produced during the synthesis process, summarizing the nature, scope, and characteristics of the compiled evidence. It is best read alongside the evidence gap maps.

Abstract

Background

Global progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 16 – promoting peace, justice and strong institutions – has been set back by escalating conflict and violence. Between 2000 and 2022, homicide rates reached their highest point in 2021, while conflict-related deaths surged in 2022. Despite growing investment in peacebuilding and violence prevention, evidence on effective approaches remains limited and often inconclusive. To address this gap, the Peace Pillar Management Group of the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition commissioned the first synthesis of evaluative evidence on initiatives to reduce homicides and conflict-related deaths (SDG targets 16.1 and 16.4).

Objectives

This synthesis examined the effectiveness of interventions designed to reduce homicides and conflict-related deaths in low- and middle-income countries. It asked: (1) What works, where, and for whom? (2) Why and how do interventions achieve their outcomes – or not? (3) How do interventions address gender and equity dimensions aligned with the “leave no one behind” principle?

Key Interventions and outcomes covered

The synthesis focused on three categories of interventions:

- **Social inclusion initiatives** aimed at strengthening social cohesion, reintegrating ex-combatants, and promoting gender/youth inclusion and civic engagement.
- **Peace process interventions**, including peacekeeping missions, governance-strengthening during conflict, transitional justice, and peace agreement implementation.
- **Safe environment initiatives**, such as police presence and capacity-building, community policing, hotspot policing, early warning systems, and firearms regulation.

Outcomes assessed included: reductions in homicides (SDG 16.1.1); conflict-related deaths (SDG 16.1.2); illicit financial and arms flows (SDG 16.4.1 and 16.4.2); as well as intermediate outcomes such as trust in institutions, attitudes toward violence and perceptions of safety.

Methods

The synthesis applied a mixed-methods approach, combining 39 impact evaluations with 438 process and performance evaluations published between 2019 and 2024, of which a sample of 75 were analysed in-depth. Systematic searches and machine learning facilitated identification and screening. Theory-driven coding and quantitative and qualitative synthesis methods were used to extract lessons from a range of institutional and geographic contexts.

Findings

Effective interventions varied across contexts but common enabling factors included institutionalization, community engagement and government buy-in.

- Social inclusion initiatives improved trust and civic participation. They were most effective in promoting peace and reducing violence when supported by livelihood components and community involvement.
- Peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts showed consistent reductions in violence when aligned with local needs and backed by clear mandates.
- Policing initiatives contributed to reductions in crime and violence when implemented at a national scale, though it was unclear which approach worked best under what conditions.

Cross-cutting barriers included: limited contextual understanding; poor coordination; and weak sustainability planning. Most impact evaluations were concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, with limited geographic diversity or attention to marginalized populations. This restricted the potential to generalize findings to other regions.

Implications

The synthesis identifies promising interventions that support SDG16 targets but emphasizes the need for context-sensitive, equity-oriented designs. It recommends greater integration of gender and inclusion lenses, long-term institutional investments, and the use of performance and process evaluations to complement evidence gathered through impact evaluations.

There is an urgent need to build and apply evidence on effective violence reduction, particularly in underrepresented regions and among excluded populations, to accelerate progress towards peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

01

Introduction

The 2023 Sustainable Development Report highlighted how cascading global crises, including a rising number of conflicts, were undermining progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16, which focuses on peace, justice and strong institutions (Sachs et al., 2023). Between 2000 and 2022, homicide rates peaked in 2021, and conflict-related civilian deaths surged by 53 percent in 2022 to 16,988 (UNODC, OHCHR & UNDP, 2023). The resurgence of conflict in Ethiopia and Sudan, along with ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, suggest that these figures are unlikely to improve in the near future. Consequently, achieving SDG targets 16.1 – to “significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere” – and 16.4 – to “significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets, and combat all forms of organized crime” – remains increasingly challenging.

Despite a growing body of impact and performance/ process evaluations, significant knowledge gaps persist regarding effective strategies to reduce homicides and conflict-related deaths. To address these gaps, the Peace Pillar Management Group of the Global SDG Synthesis Coalition commissioned its first-ever synthesis of evaluative evidence. Co-chaired by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Independent Evaluation Office (IEO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) IEO, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the synthesis was conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Campbell South Asia (CSA).

This synthesis examines the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at advancing SDG targets 16.1 and 16.4, focusing on three broad categories:¹

1. Social inclusion initiatives;
2. Initiatives to stimulate peace processes;
3. Initiatives to generate safe environments.

¹ Initiatives can include interventions, policies, programmes, etc.

The thematic scope of this synthesis was shaped by an initial scoping process conducted by the Peace Pillar Management Group, which considered the availability of evidence across SDG 16 targets, progress against those targets, and consultations with partner United Nations (UN) agencies. A technical advisory panel comprising academics, practitioners and policymakers provided further input.

For each category, AIR analysed what works to reduce homicides (e.g., initiatives targeting organized crime) and conflict-related deaths. The review involved extensive searches across academic and non-academic databases, identifying 39 experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluations on the effectiveness of various interventions. Additionally, searches in the evaluation databases of UN agencies and bilateral donors yielded 438 performance and process evaluations, offering insights into how and why different initiatives achieved their objectives.

This report presents the findings of the synthesis. It begins with an overview of the synthesis questions, theory of change and methodology, including key decisions made during the inception phase.² It then provides a descriptive analysis of the evidence base and identifies gaps. The report concludes with answers to the synthesis questions and a discussion of key takeaways and implications.

The intended audience includes United Nations Member States across income levels, UN agencies, multilateral development banks, international financial institutions, researchers, evaluators, and other stakeholders working toward SDG 16.

2 The protocol presents more details related to the methodology (de Hoop et al., 2024a). Available at: https://www.sdgssynthesiscoalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/SDG_16_Protocol_final_0.pdf

2.1 Synthesis questions

This synthesis of evidence related to targets 16.1 and 16.4 of the Peace Pillar covered the following broad questions (the full questions are presented in Annex A):

- 1 What works? Where?** What interventions are effective **in reducing homicides and conflict-related deaths**? What is the impact of these interventions on homicides and conflict-related deaths? How do these impacts differ across different contexts (e.g., low-income vs middle-income countries, acute crisis vs. protracted crisis vs. non-crisis lower-middle-income country contexts³).
- 2 How or why does it work?** Why are interventions to reduce conflict-related deaths and homicides effective (or not)? How do these interventions achieve their objectives (or not)? How do contextual, implementation and design factors influence the effectiveness of these interventions?
- 3 Leave no one behind.** How do gender and marginalization affect the impact of interventions to reduce conflict-related deaths and homicides? How did interventions consider non-discrimination, equity and equality considerations in their design and implementation?

2.2 Thematic scope and eligibility criteria

This synthesis examined initiatives explicitly designed to reduce homicides and conflict-related deaths, aligning with SDG targets 16.1 (reducing all forms of violence and related deaths) and 16.4 (combating illicit financial and arms flows, recovering stolen assets, and addressing organized crime). Interventions with only indirect links to violence reduction – such as cash transfers, vocational training or social inclusion programmes not specifically targeting violence – were excluded. **Exhibit 1** presents the priority indicators and targets.

3 Acute crisis refers to “a crisis in which the events creating the disruption have occurred recently or have recently increased in intensity. This may refer to both the initial phase of a conflict or its worsening impact” (Burde et al., 2015, pp. 77). In protracted crises a “significant proportion of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease, and disruptions in livelihoods over a prolonged period of time” (FAO, n.d.).

Exhibit 1.

Priority SDG-16 targets and outcome indicators

Target N	Target	Indicator N	Outcome Indicator
16.1	Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere	16.1.1	Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age
		16.1.2	Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause
16.4	By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime	16.4.1	Total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows (in current United States dollars)
		16.4.2	Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments

The synthesis followed World Health Organization (WHO) definitions of violence (Krug et al., 2002; Sardinha et al., 2022), which differentiate between self-directed, interpersonal, community and collective violence. It included evaluations of initiatives aimed at reducing community violence (e.g., gang violence in public or institutional settings) and collective violence (e.g., social, political or economic violence among larger groups, including civil war or ethnic cleansing). Interventions focused on self-directed violence (e.g., suicide, self-harm) or interpersonal violence (e.g., gender-based violence in households) were excluded.

Finally, the synthesis included initiatives that aimed to reduce conflict-related deaths or homicides through violence prevention⁴ (rather than protection⁵) within the following categories: 1) social inclusion; 2) peace processes; and 3) safe environments (Sonnenfeld et al., 2020). These categorizations – developed in the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) Building Peaceful Societies Evidence Gap Map developed by Sonnenfeld et al. (2020) – guided discussions to define the scope and to develop the search strategy. Exhibit 2 below provides an overview of these categories, and the activity categories and specific initiatives included in the synthesis.

4 “Violence prevention involves taking direct actions to reduce violent victimization or perpetration by addressing the underlying causes. These causes encompass structural inequalities, social and cultural norms, traditional power dynamics, and risk factors at individual, family, and community levels” (Institute for Security Studies, 2021, p. 6).

5 For this reason, we did not include studies that focused on protecting children and women against child or gender-based violence, for example. We also did not include military interventions to protect populations.

Exhibit 2.

Activity categories and initiatives⁶

Activity Category	Initiatives
Social inclusion (strengthening social cohesion and conflict resolution as well as inter-group perceptions and relations)	Communications
	Economic inclusion
	Gender/ youth inclusion for conflict prevention
	Reintegration of ex-combatants or other ex-offenders
	Social cohesion for conflict prevention
Safe environments (ending violence and building a safe and secure environment)	Border management
	Democracy and peaceful elections
	Early warning systems
	Governance strengthening to prevent conflict, violence, or crime
	Law enforcement capacity
	Youth crime prevention
	Other (e.g., natural resource management, firearms initiatives)
Peace processes and conflict resolution (supporting peace processes, oversight, and post-conflict justice)	Gender for peace
	Governance strengthening to respond to conflict
	Natural resource management
	Peace agreement implementation
	Security and stabilization strengthening
	Social cohesion for conflict resolution
	Transitional justice
	Youth for peace

In the social inclusion category, both social inclusion and social cohesion initiatives were considered, each playing a distinct yet complementary role in peacebuilding. Social inclusion ensures equal access to opportunities for full participation in society, regardless of background, while social cohesion fosters connectedness, trust, shared values and a sense of belonging among communities (IOM, 2019).

⁶ We listed the categories in Exhibits 2 and F-1 after conducting searches and identifying studies that met the inclusion criteria – an indicative list. This Exhibit differs from Exhibit 2 in the synthesis protocol, which showed example categories that we developed based on an initial scoping of the literature.

Eligibility criteria were defined based on a theory of change (see Exhibit 3) that outlines three intervention categories, three key moderators and mediators, and expected intermediate outcomes and impacts. Intervention categories broadly include: (1) anti-violence programmes and policies focused on social inclusion or changing community norms to prevent conflict; (2) safe environment initiatives aimed at reducing violence; and (3) peace processes and conflict prevention efforts.

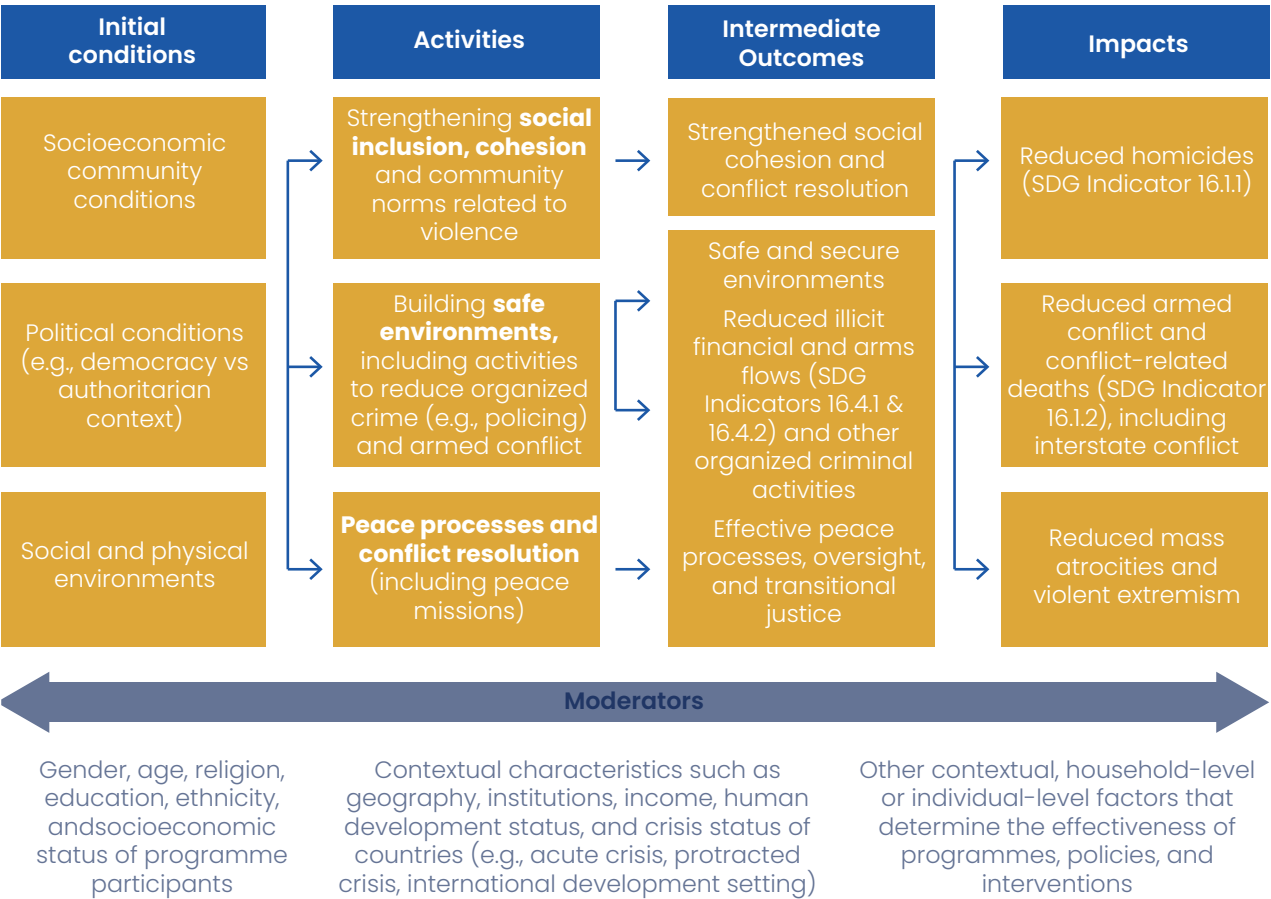
The theory of change hypothesizes that these interventions contribute to effective peace processes and oversight, reduced illicit financial and arms flows (SDG outcome indicators 16.4.1 & 16.4.2); strengthened social cohesion and conflict resolution; and a safer and more secure environment (Sonnenfeld et al., 2020). Other intermediate outcomes may include shifts in knowledge and attitudes toward violence. Additionally, interventions targeting organized crime may lead to reductions in illicit financial flows and seized, found or surrendered arms (aligned with *SDG 16.4*).

The direct, long-term impacts of these programmes include decreases in community and collective violence, encompassing public and institutional violence, as well as social, political and economic violence among larger groups or States (Krug et al., 2002; Sardinha et al., 2022). These impacts align with SDG targets, including reductions in homicides (SDG Indicator 16.1.1), armed conflict and conflict-related deaths (SDG Indicator 16.1.2), interstate violence, mass atrocities and violent extremism.

The synthesis protocol (de Hoop et al., 2024a) provides a detailed breakdown of the inclusion criteria, along with an expanded discussion of the theory of change and its role in guiding the database search, evaluation mapping and evidence synthesis. It is available at: https://www.sdgsynthesiscoalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/SDG_16_Protocol_final_0.pdf

Exhibit 3.

Theory of Change



03

Methods

A mixed-methods synthesis approach was used, incorporating:

- Experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluations, sourced from academic journals and institutional databases.
- Process and performance evaluations, independently conducted or commissioned by UN entities, multilateral and bilateral development partners, civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector.

Although UN entities and international organizations use different labels for evaluations with similar objectives, the term “process and performance evaluation” is used here to refer to centralized or decentralized evaluations conducted at corporate/ thematic, strategic, regional, country programme and project levels. The eligibility criteria encompassed various evaluation types, such as implementation science studies, formative research, developmental evaluations, participatory evaluations, midterm evaluations, midterm reviews and summative evaluations. The synthesis protocol provides further methodological details, including the approach to searching for and compiling evidence (de Hoop et al., 2024a).

Systematic searches were conducted across multiple databases using search terms aligned with the thematic scope. Search results were screened for relevance based on the eligibility criteria (Exhibit 4). The following sections outline the approaches used to synthesize impact and process/ performance evaluations. Further details on the screening, coding and critical appraisal processes can be found in the protocol (de Hoop et al., 2024a). The full list of search terms is presented in Annex G.

Exhibit 4.

Eligibility criteria

Domain	Inclusion criteria
Publication dates	2019–2024
Publication accessibility	Published in English, Spanish, or French. Publicly available or shared with the synthesis team.
Sample	Focused on sample(s) in low- and middle-income countries. Includes studies which link interventions in high-income countries with outcomes in low- and middle-income countries.
Phenomenon of interest	Assesses the impacts or implementation process of programmes pertaining to social inclusion, peace processes and safe environments, using impact and performance/ process evaluations.
Design	Impact evaluations (randomized controlled trials [RCTs]/experiments or quasi-experimental studies with a comparison group), small-n impact evaluations (process tracing, contribution analysis, most significance change, outcome mapping, etc.), and performance or process evaluations (e.g., process evaluations or implementation science). Studies included if they cover both impact and performance/process elements (e.g., mixed-methods studies).
Gender and other leave no one behind considerations	Estimation of heterogeneous impacts by gender, youth and other leave no one behind considerations (e.g., persons with a disability) and examination of gender considerations in performance and process evaluations. ⁷
Evaluation	Outcomes related to violence prevention and peacebuilding at micro and macro levels. Outcomes include terms such as homicides, violent crime, conflict-related deaths, attitudes toward violence, trust in the police, and trust in political institutions.

3.1 Impact evaluation synthesis methods

Impact evaluations (experimental and quasi-experimental studies) were identified through the Web of Science portal and the 3ie database of impact evaluations. These studies were screened for relevance against the eligibility criteria using the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) systematic review software (EPPI-Reviewer) in two stages: by title and abstract; and then by full text. To ensure consistency, a pilot phase was conducted where articles were double screened, followed by group discussions to ensure a shared understanding of the eligibility criteria. Reviewers achieving interrater reliability of 0.8 or higher transitioned to independent screening of abstracts and titles. An initial review of 1,575 abstracts and titles was conducted. A machine learning algorithm in EPPI-Reviewer (Thomas et al., 2022) was then used to prioritize further screening by identifying studies with a higher likelihood of meeting the inclusion criteria. Screening continued until 100 consecutive studies were found ineligible. Finally, a full-text review was conducted to confirm the eligibility of the remaining studies.

⁷ This criterion was not used to determine inclusion but was screened to enable analysis of gender and other leaving no one behind considerations.

The risk of bias in each included impact evaluation was assessed, with a focus on selection and performance bias. An existing tool designed for RCTs and quasi-experimental studies – originally developed by Hombrados & Waddington (2012) and applied in multiple Campbell Collaboration reviews – was adapted for this synthesis (Brody et al., 2017; Chinen et al., 2017; Stone et al., 2020; Nakamura et al., 2023). Annex B provides further details on this tool.

A narrative quantitative synthesis was conducted. The initial plan was to calculate effect sizes and perform a meta-analysis if at least five impact evaluations examined the same initiative-outcome combination. However, due to an insufficient number of qualifying studies, a meta-analysis was not feasible.

The characteristics of the included studies were analysed through descriptive statistics and integrated into the quantitative narrative synthesis. The primary focus was on initiatives with more than two evaluations, enabling cross-context comparisons. However, impact evaluations from initiatives assessed in only one or two studies were also included. While these evaluations may have limited generalizability, they often provided highly reliable evidence on specific programmes within particular settings. Their findings were incorporated with appropriate caveats to prevent overgeneralization.

Despite their contextual limitations, these impact evaluations were valuable for highlighting promising initiatives and identifying potential unintended consequences. Where possible, findings from impact evaluations are cross-referenced with performance and process evaluations. Additional details on programmes with supporting evidence are provided in Exhibit E-1 in Annex E.

3.2 Performance and process evaluation synthesis methods

Performance and process evaluations were identified through a comprehensive search across multiple databases, including the United Nations Evaluation Group, World Bank, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the German and Swedish Development Agencies (GIZ and SIDA), the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action and others. Full details are outlined in the synthesis protocol (de Hoop et al., 2024). These evaluations were supplemented by additional studies provided by the Management Group and partners. Titles and abstracts (or executive summaries) were screened for relevance based on the eligibility criteria. When relevance could not be determined from the initial screening, full texts were reviewed to confirm eligibility.

Through this process, over 3,000 evaluations were screened and 886 full texts reviewed, and 438 performance and process evaluations met the inclusion criteria for the Evidence Gap Map (EGM). Due to time and capacity constraints, 77 evaluations were selected for full-text analysis, based on four criteria: (1) representation of the three primary intervention categories; (2) potential for triangulation with experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations; (3) regional representation; (4) language considerations.

The decision to sample was guided by qualitative research principles, particularly the principle of saturation, which suggests that analysing additional data beyond a certain point yields diminishing new insights. By focusing on a diverse yet representative subset of evaluations, the analysis aimed to capture key patterns and variations while ensuring a manageable and rigorous synthesis of evidence. Of the selected evaluations, 40 covered multiple intervention categories, further enhancing comparative insights across different contexts.

A rapid assessment of the methodological quality of the sampled evaluations was conducted using a shortened quality appraisal tool (de Hoop et al., 2023) adapted from evaluation tools used by UN agencies (Annex B). Each evaluation was rated on a three-point scale: (1) High: mentioned and well explained; (2) Medium: mentioned but missing at least one element; and (3) Low: alluded to but not fully described or explicitly stated. Evaluations were only excluded if they were rated low quality in both evaluation design and methodology or reliability of findings. Two evaluations were excluded on this basis, leaving 75 studies for full analysis.

To analyse performance and process evaluations, all eligible evaluations were imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. Data extraction focused primarily on the programme design and findings sections, while full-text documents were available to provide additional contextual insights. A thematic analysis of the extracted data was conducted using NVivo to synthesize evidence from performance and process evaluations. A deductive approach was applied, developing *a priori* themes informed by the conceptual framework, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria, and similar syntheses of performance and process evaluations (Johansson et al, 2022). An inductive approach complemented this process, allowing the identification of new thematic patterns and a deeper understanding of barriers and facilitators to SDG-16 initiatives.

3.2.1 Limitations

The evidence synthesis generated rich information about how to accelerate progress on SDG 16, but the ambitious timeline and quantity of evaluations led to some inherent limitations that are common in rapid evidence syntheses. Exhibit 5 summarizes the limitations and how they were addressed by AIR.

Exhibit 5.

Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

Limitation	Method to Address the Limitation
Ambitious timeline. Unable to conduct a full systematic review in the time required.	Conducted a rapid review, using AI to speed screening and employing sampling and saturation to limit the analysed studies.
Searches. Searches were conducted in a limited number of databases, somewhat limiting the comprehensiveness of the review.	Limited the scope to the extent possible, as discussed in previous sections. Conducted very thorough search of impact and performance/ process evaluations through various means.
Lack of effect size calculations. Effect size calculations were not conducted because five evaluations with the same initiatives and outcomes were not identified.	Focused on rigorous narrative synthesis as discussed in the protocol (de Hoop et al., 2024a).
Language. Only performance and process evaluations in English were analysed.	Included evaluations in French and Spanish in the full mapping of performance/ process evaluations.
Access to evaluations. Not all evaluations on the topic may be publicly available.	Requested Management Group and Thematic Advisory Panel suggestions for evaluations, including those not publicly available.



04 Characteristics of included evaluations and studies

4.1 Interactive evidence maps

This section summarizes the characteristics of the included impact and performance and process evaluations. It complements the interactive evidence maps developed alongside this synthesis report, which illustrate the distribution of evidence across SDG targets 16.1 and 16.4. These maps highlight areas where evidence is strong, as well as gaps where evidence remains limited. The interactive evidence maps and an accompanying narrative brief are available at:

Evidence map of included impact evaluations: <https://www.sdgsynthesiscoalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Peace-Pillar-EGM-Impact-evaluations.html>

Evidence map of included performance and process evaluations: <https://www.sdgsynthesiscoalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Peace-Pillar-EGM-PP-evaluations.html>

Evidence map brief: https://www.sdgsynthesiscoalition.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/Peace_Pillar_Brief.pdf

4.2 Volume and distribution of included evaluations and studies

A significantly higher number of performance and process evaluations met the eligibility criteria than impact evaluations. As shown in Exhibit 6, 438 performance and process evaluations were eligible (compared to only 39 impact evaluations), with 77 sampled and 74 included in the synthesis.

Exhibit 6.

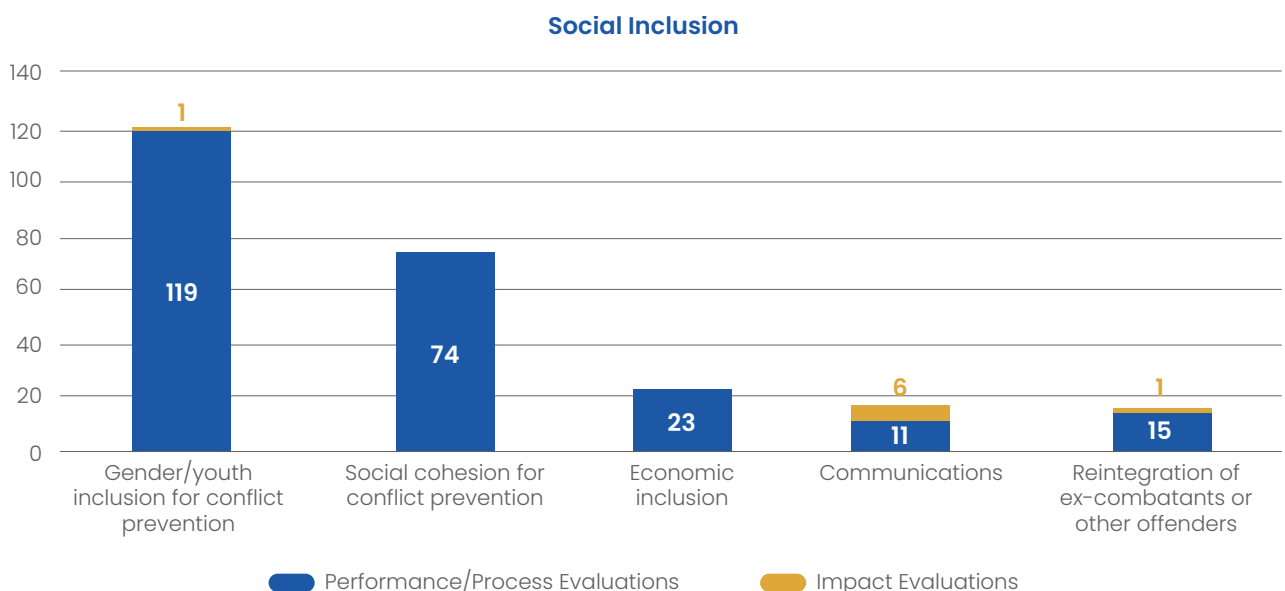
Overview of included evaluations and volume of evidence



Evidence on social inclusion: Most performance and process evaluations related to a social inclusion focus on gender and youth inclusion (119) or social cohesion for conflict prevention (74). In contrast, impact evaluations on social inclusion were more fragmented. The most common category – communications – was addressed in only six impact evaluations. Exhibit 7 summarizes the evaluations that focused on social inclusion.

Exhibit 7.

Types of social inclusion initiatives covered and level of coverage in included evaluations

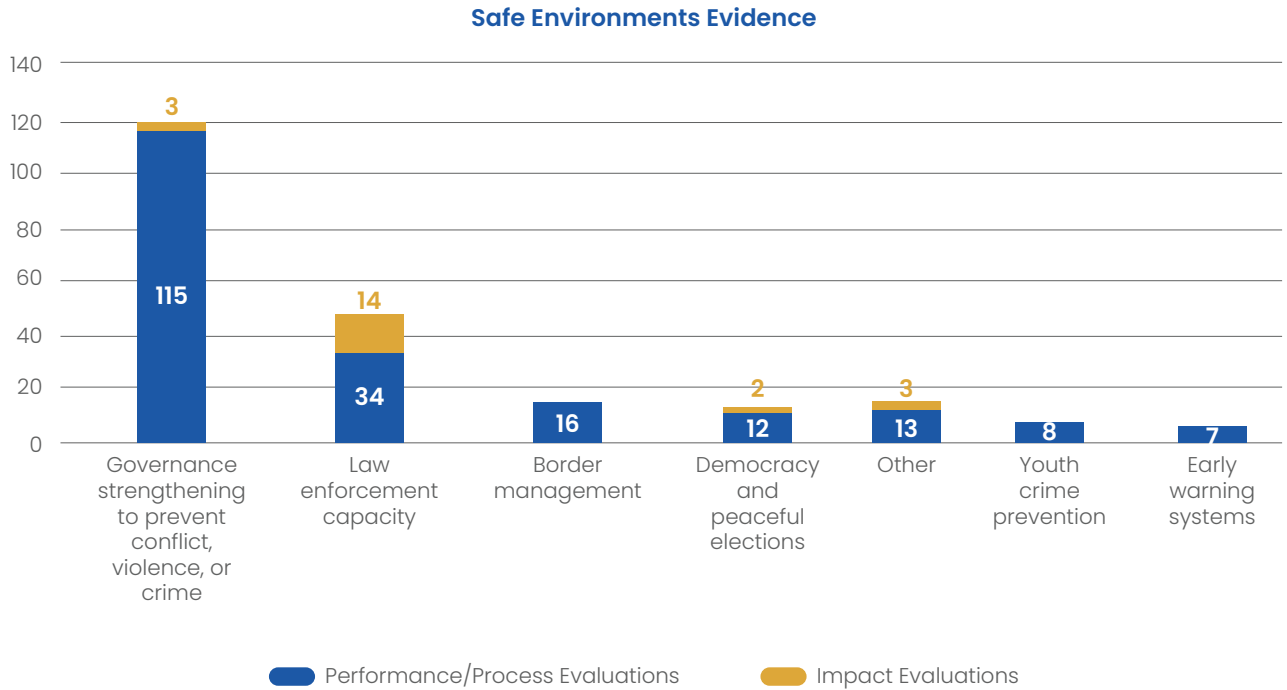


Note: Some evaluations fell under multiple categories, so the total number of initiatives exceeds the number of included evaluations.

Evidence on safe environments: A large proportion of performance and process evaluations in the safe environments category focused on strengthening governance to prevent conflict, violence, or crime. As seen in Exhibit 8, 115 performance and process evaluations assessed governance-related strategies for preventing violence. Among impact evaluations, nearly two-thirds (14 evaluations) focused on enhancing law enforcement capacity.

Exhibit 8.

Types of safe environment initiatives covered and level of coverage in included evaluations

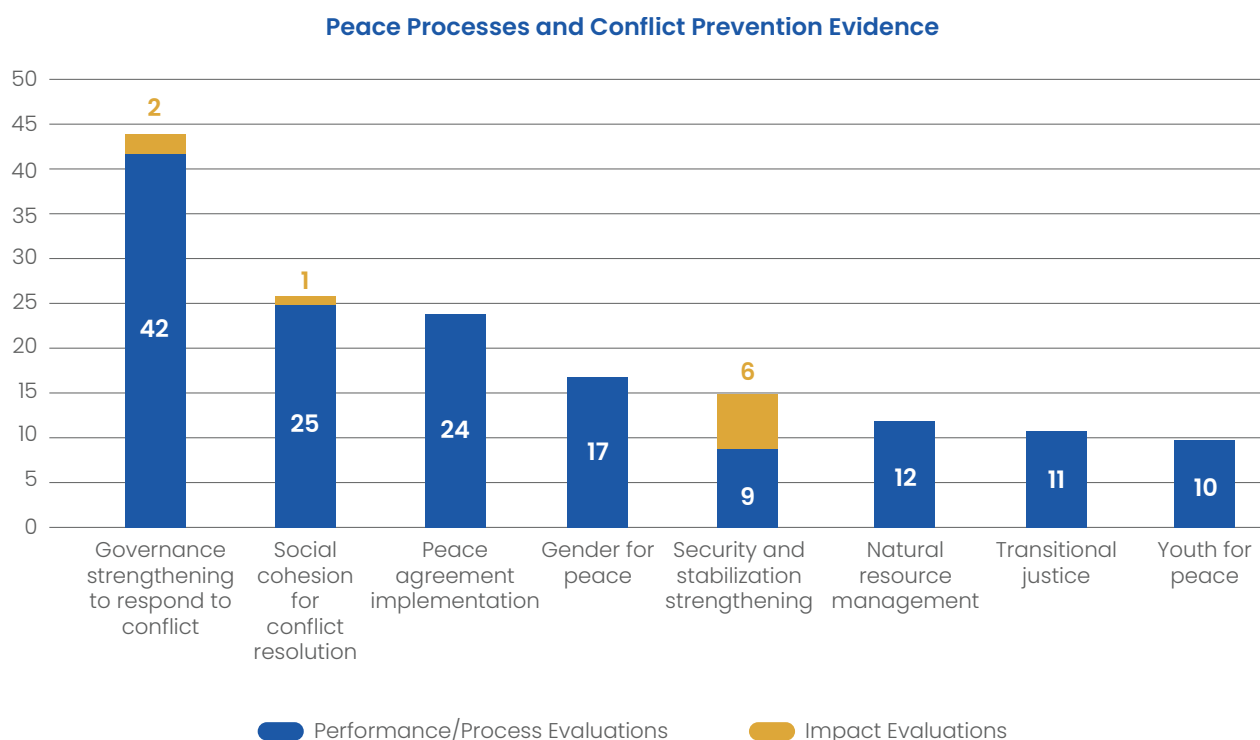


Note: Some evaluations fell under multiple categories, so the total number of initiatives exceeds the number of included evaluations.

Evidence on peace processes and conflict prevention: Most performance and process evaluations assessing peace processes and conflict prevention focused on governance strengthening to respond to conflict (42 evaluations), social cohesion initiatives for conflict resolution (25 evaluations), and peace agreement implementation (24 evaluations). Among impact evaluations in this category, two-thirds focused on security and stabilization strengthening. Exhibit 9 provides an overview of these evaluations.

Exhibit 9.

Types of peace process and conflict prevention initiatives covered and level of coverage in included evaluations



Note: Some evaluations fell under multiple categories, so the total number of initiatives exceeds the number of included evaluations.

4.3 Characteristics of included impact evaluations

Volume and selection: Of 10,096 studies identified through the initial search, 6,498 were excluded after abstract screening, 3,353 were removed based on the machine learning model and 245 were selected for full-text screening, leading to 74 studies being coded. During coding, 35 additional evaluations were excluded based on inclusion criteria, leaving 39 impact evaluations for synthesis. Annex C presents the PRISMA diagram illustrating this selection process.

Intervention focus: The majority of included impact evaluations focused on law enforcement capacity, communications, and security and stabilization strengthening. These categories accounted for more than 50 percent of the included impact evaluations. Other areas examined included social cohesion for conflict resolution and reintegration of ex-combatants or other ex-offenders. Very few focused on gender or youth inclusion, social cohesion for conflict prevention, early warning systems, democracy and peaceful elections, youth crime prevention, or natural resource management.

Outcomes evaluated: Many impact evaluations assessed interventions aimed at reducing homicides and violent crime, but few examined conflict-related deaths or violence outcomes. In conflict settings, impact evaluations tended to focus on intermediate outcomes such as attitudes towards violence or trust in political institutions.

Methodologies used: Approximately two-thirds of the impact evaluations used a quasi-experimental design, while approximately one-third of the impact evaluations used RCT. This suggests that, while conducting rigorous impact evaluations of violence prevention programmes – including RCTs – is challenging, it remains feasible.

Geographic focus: Nearly all impact evaluations focused on Latin America and the Caribbean or sub-Saharan Africa, and very few examined violence prevention programmes in other regions. Limited evidence from the Middle East highlights an important evidence gap. The concentration of studies in sub-Saharan Africa reflects the prevalence of active conflicts (UNDP, 2023), while those in Latin America and the Caribbean are driven by historical conflicts and high levels of organized crime (UNODC, 2023).

Gender and youth social inclusion: Only a minority of impact evaluations explicitly focused on disadvantaged groups. One-third of the evaluations included some emphasis on gender or youth inclusion.

Risk of bias assessment: A relatively small proportion of impact evaluations demonstrated a low risk of selection bias, highlighting the difficulty of generating credible evidence on causal effects related to violence reduction. Selection bias arises when impact evaluations fail to establish causal relationships because participants self-select into initiatives, or because interventions are deliberately targeted to specific populations. In total, only 36 percent of impact evaluations were found to have a low risk of selection bias, while 38 percent exhibited a medium risk and 26 percent a high risk. Although evaluations with medium or high selection bias may still yield causal insights, concerns persist about the credibility of their impact estimates.

Methodological concerns were generally lower in relation to performance bias, which refers to the risk of spillover effects or contamination between the control and treatment groups. Among the impact evaluations reviewed, 54 percent were found to have a low risk of performance bias, 36 percent exhibited a medium risk, and 10 percent a high risk.

4.4 Characteristics of included performance and process evaluations

Volume and selection: A search of over 3,000 evaluations identified 438 performance and process evaluations that met the inclusion criteria. Following full-text screening of 886 evaluations, these 438 were mapped to the indicators on the interactive evidence map. Based on the sampling methodology outlined in Section 3.2, 75 evaluations were selected for full-text coding and analysis, with two excluded as they did not meet key quality criteria. Annex D presents the PRISMA diagram detailing the selection process for the included performance and process evaluations.

Intervention focus: The majority of these evaluations focused on governance strengthening, social cohesion and the inclusion of gender and youth in peacebuilding or violence prevention efforts. In contrast, fewer evaluations assessed security and stabilization through peacekeeping, early warning systems or youth crime prevention.

Outcomes evaluated: 246 evaluations examined programmes aimed at preventing violence and conflict, while 153 focused on conflict resolution. Additionally, 31 evaluations assessed initiatives designed to prevent or reduce trafficking, 50 explored efforts to combat violent extremism, and 24 investigated interventions targeting other forms of organized crime. Many of these programmes addressed multiple outcomes, such as reducing violence and organized crime simultaneously.

Geographic focus: The evidence was unevenly distributed. A total of 221 evaluations assessed programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, while 52 focused on Latin America and the Caribbean, 36 on Europe and Central Asia, 27 on the Middle East and North Africa, 25 on East Asia and the Pacific, and 20 on South Asia. Additionally, 57 evaluations covered multiple regions.

Gender and youth social inclusion: 111 evaluations examined efforts to incorporate gender and youth perspectives in conflict prevention or resolution. A smaller subset of 20 evaluations specifically explored the inclusion of women and youth in peace processes, with 10 addressing both areas.



What works to reduce homicides and conflict-related deaths?

This section examines the first synthesis question: “What initiatives are effective in reducing homicides and conflict-related deaths?” It includes an assessment of the impact of these initiatives and how impacts vary across different contexts, such as low- and middle-income countries, acute and protracted crises, and non-crisis low- and middle-income country settings. The analysis begins with evidence on the effectiveness of social inclusion initiatives, followed by an analysis of initiatives focused on safe environments and peace processes.

5.1 Social inclusion

This section focuses on evidence on social inclusion initiatives. These are broadly categorized into social cohesion initiatives, media initiatives, programmes targeting the reintegration of ex-combatants, and gender and youth inclusion initiatives. See section 2.2 for a more detailed definition.

Social inclusion initiatives may contribute to strengthened social cohesion, safer environments, and effective peace processes. However, effectiveness varies based on contextual factors, such as government involvement, leadership and public awareness, which serve as key moderators. For example, impact evaluations in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Jordan highlighted how different approaches, including civic engagement, infrastructure investments, and trust-building activities, shaped intermediate social cohesion and conflict resolution outcomes.

Media and communication initiatives further reinforce these pathways by shifting public attitudes and promoting peace through trusted voices, while reintegration programmes for ex-combatants illustrate how political and economic incentives can drive long-term stability. The evidence underscored that successful interventions require adaptive strategies that consider sociopolitical conditions, crisis settings and community engagement to achieve sustainable reductions in violence and conflict-related deaths.

5.1.1 Social cohesion initiatives

Social cohesion initiatives can foster trust and cooperation – but only when visible, participatory and supported by credible leadership. Infrastructure alone is insufficient. Successful interventions actively created spaces for engagement, ensuring that communities recognized and valued the institutional actors involved. Where trust was absent or undermined by poor communication, even well-designed programmes struggled to shift attitudes or reduce violence.

Three impact evaluations in Colombia, DRC and Jordan provided mixed evidence of the effectiveness of interventions to improve social cohesion. In Colombia, a civic inclusion campaign successfully engaged ex-combatants in political processes, leading to increased trust in political institutions and engendering more moderate political views (Curiel et al., 2023). A reconstruction programme in DRC (the Peace Fund) focused on reconstruction and rehabilitation of social and economic infrastructure such as schools, roads, markets and medical stations, with a hypothesis that these activities could help improve attitudes of the population towards state institutions. However, the initiative struggled to enhance political trust, likely because programme participants only had limited awareness of the Government's involvement in activities, and it ultimately did not lead to violence reduction (De Juan et al., 2022). However, an initiative in Jordan led to improvements in social cohesion after activities focused on building trust, interaction and cooperation between Jordanian host and Syrian refugee populations were combined with investments in schools, health centres, roads and water and wastewater networks (Ferguson et al., 2019).

Process and performance evaluations highlighted the importance of effective leadership in encouraging participation and meaningful interaction to facilitate peace (Nuwakora, 2020; Social Impact, Inc., 2023; Spearing & Kamya, 2022; WIZ Support Services, 2022). For example, the engagement of senior UN staff in a project in the autonomous region of Bougainville (Papua New Guinea) provided leadership in peacebuilding (Spearing & Kamya, 2022). In Nigeria, government involvement was instrumental in fostering collaboration among diverse actors and ensuring effective implementation of a social cohesion project (WIZ Support Services, 2022). Similarly, in Sudan, the Government's commitment to reforms and the establishment of the Office of National Security positively influenced the implementation of the Security Sector Reform project (Nuwakora, 2020). Social Impact, Inc. (2023) reported progress towards peace outcomes when the Government of Mali started hosting regular public discussions related to public expenditure and planning for citizens' needs (Social Impact, Inc., 2023). These meetings contributed to greater accountability, which then led to improved trust.

While senior leadership was critical in many cases, a complex external environment diverted attention and impeded the achievement of outcomes. For example, targeted advocacy from senior leaders in support of social cohesion was limited during the implementation of a multicountry peace initiative between Mali, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and DRC (Arapakos et al., 2021).

5.1.2 Communications and media

Media and communication initiatives can promote peace when they deliver context-specific, trusted, and targeted messages – especially when paired with enabling economic and social conditions. To effectively shift behaviour and reduce violence, interventions appear to benefit when they are guided by clear objectives, integrated into broader programming, and responsive to the social and economic realities of the communities they aim to influence.

Impact evaluations of four diverse initiatives—in Colombia, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Uganda—demonstrated that communication strategies could be effective, though their impacts varied based on medium, messaging and context (Gallego et al., 2019; Blair et al., 2021; Bilali, 2019; Armand et al., 2020). Despite the varied contexts (no conflict, post-conflict, protracted crisis and acute crisis) and delivery formats (ranging from social media bots to radio messages and storytelling) each intervention demonstrated positive effects on attitudes towards peacekeeping, and some initiatives resulted in reductions in violence.

Effectiveness was typically bounded by the specific objectives of each initiative. For example, a radio show in Nigeria changed attitudes toward peace, but did not change emotions towards former Boko Haram fighters because that was not its aim (Blair et al., 2021). An edutainment drama in Burkina Faso, while raising awareness and intentions, did not significantly alter deeper beliefs or attitudes towards the police (Bilali, 2019).

A radio messaging campaign to stimulate defection from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda did result in a reduction in fatalities following the defection of LRA rebels, however, indicating that large-scale radio campaigns can result in reductions in violence (Armand et al., 2020). In this acute crisis context, messaging via FM radios to encourage defection in LRA-affected areas was especially effective when LRA rebels found additional opportunities on the labour market (Armand et al., 2020). Increases in cotton prices reduced conflict and provided LRA rebels with labour market opportunities in the cotton sector, thereby reducing their incentives to participate in the conflict. Conversely, positive shocks to groundnut prices increased conflict and reduced the effectiveness of messaging, as groundnuts are easily looted by the LRA (Armand et al., 2020), thus limiting employment opportunities for former LRA rebels.

Across the cases explored in impact evaluations, one common success factor for changing social norms was the use of trusted voices or sources. In Nigeria, religious leaders helped convey peace narratives (Blair et al., 2021), while in Burkina Faso, the use of relatable characters in an edutainment format encouraged resonance and credibility (Bilali, 2019). These findings align with evidence that social norm change is more likely when messengers are embedded in the communities they aim to influence.

Performance and process evaluations focused on different communication channels, but demonstrated the ability of media and communication to improve social cohesion initiatives. These evaluations variously assessed awareness-raising trainings, media campaigns, curriculum development, and research generation and dissemination targeting government stakeholders, CSOs, educators and communities.

Communication initiatives targeting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments were especially successful when they digitalized informational material on trafficking, violent extremism, and conflict and violence prevention through e-module trainings and social media campaigns and platforms (Haarr, 2022, Triangle Consulting SAL, 2022, Arora et al., 2020, Wood et al., 2022). For example, a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) programme to strengthen the national response to human trafficking in Albania (Haarr, 2022) published research on the impact of trafficking relationships on recruitment, developed a digital literacy course on online recruitment/ trafficking and safety measures for children and youth, and created information channels via Facebook and other websites. These digital resources were key to the project's ability to raise awareness on trafficking and paved the way for potential long-term sustainability of results since stakeholders could continue to use the resources online (Haarr, 2022).

5.1.3 Reintegration of ex-combatants

Reintegration programmes may help to reduce violence and foster institutional trust when they are rooted in family and community systems, supported by livelihood opportunities, and accompanied by transparent communication. Programmes that take a more holistic, multilevel approach – addressing not only individual reintegration but also the wider economic and social vulnerabilities that sustain cycles of violence – seem to show greater promise.

Impact evaluations demonstrated that, under the right conditions, re-integration programmes could positively affect trust in political institutions and result in reductions in violence while successfully reintegrating ex-combatants into society. In Colombia, a civic inclusion programme for demobilized FARC combatants increased ex-combatants' trust in political institutions and democratic processes, while also promoting more moderate political views. These shifts were achieved through a combination of political engagement activities and efforts to correct misinformation about how state institutions function (Curiel et al., 2023). As discussed above, radio broadcasts in Uganda encouraging defection from the LRA led to considerable defections of LRA rebels during the LRA insurgency (Armand, Atwell, & Gomes, 2020). These defections resulted in reductions in fatalities, and reduced violence against civilians, as well as fewer clashes

with security forces, demonstrating the potential of radio broadcasts to reduce violence during conflict, especially when economic incentives align with defection (Armand et al., 2020).

Performance and process evaluations indicated that initiatives targeting the whole family – not just ex-combatants – were particularly effective for reintegration and peacebuilding (PBSO, 2022; Peirce, 2020). In an evaluation of a UNDP-European Union (EU) programme in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia (Preventing Violent Extremism through Promoting Tolerance and Respect for Diversity) family breakdown was identified as a key enabler of recruitment into extremist groups. When a parent died or was arrested, households were more economically marginalized, and children were less educated and more vulnerable to recruitment efforts (Peirce, 2020), thus demonstrating the importance of targeting family members of ex-combatants.

Some performance and process evaluations also show the importance of considering economic conditions when examining the effectiveness of initiatives to reintegrate former combatants. An evaluation of a Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) project to reintegrate ex-FLDR combatants in Rwanda (PBSO, 2022), for example, found that by directly including dependents (i.e., women and youth) in livelihood-building activities, the intervention created a supportive environment for the entire family and reduced susceptibility to future recruitment of family members.

However, evaluations also underscored implementation gaps, particularly related to information sharing and coordination. In some cases, the absence of clear communication strategies impeded the ability of key stakeholders to access the peacebuilding and reintegration programming information needed for effective planning and decision-making (Mansour & Armal, 2021; Marimo & Hatendi, 2021). These findings highlight that reintegration is not only about individual transitions, but also about building institutional and community systems that support reintegration trajectories over time.

5.1.4 Differences across contexts

The limited number of impact evaluations made it difficult to draw firm conclusions about whether social inclusion initiatives are more effective in acute crisis, protracted crisis, post-conflict, or other settings. **A key challenge lies in the variation of interventions across contexts. Initiatives tend to be tailored to the specific challenges of each setting, which limits direct comparisons.** For example, in post-conflict settings, interventions often focused on rehabilitation and political reintegration of former combatants, while in acute crisis contexts, efforts typically centred on encouraging defections from active armed groups. Such interventions are not easily transferable between settings, as strategies effective in one context may not be appropriate – or effective – in another.

These patterns underscore the contextual relevance of social cohesion initiatives. The design and effectiveness of such interventions often reflect the specific political, social and security dynamics of their environments. While this targeting poses a challenge for synthesis efforts, which require comparability across similar intervention types in different settings to draw broader lessons, it is appropriate and necessary.

As discussed further under Question 2, **a lack of attention to cultural factors and contextual nuances emerges as a common barrier across intervention types.** This further limits the generalizability of findings and highlights the need for deeper contextual understanding in both the design and evaluation of social cohesion initiatives.

5.2 Peace processes

This section examines the evidence on peace missions as a strategy for reducing violence and supporting peacebuilding. Drawing primarily on impact evaluations from sub-Saharan Africa, it explores the conditions under which peace missions are most effective. In addition, it reflects on how peace missions can support social cohesion and democratic engagement.

5.2.1 Peace missions

There is relatively consistent evidence of peace missions contributing to violence reduction at national level, though effectiveness varies across contexts. While evidence suggests that impact often depends on more than mere presence, there are gaps in the evidence on the types of peace mission that are most effective under different conditions.

Most impact evaluations of peace missions focused on outcomes related to the reduction of violence (such as conflict-related deaths or homicides) during and after conflict, particularly in acute and protracted crisis settings in sub-Saharan Africa. While some studies evaluated comprehensive peace missions, others isolated specific components, such as the role of civilian vs. uniformed personnel. However, many of these evaluations offered limited detail on the exact type or mandate of the mission, and **few explored intermediate outcomes such as trust, perceptions of security, or democratic engagement.**

Most evaluations suggested that peace missions were able to reduce violence, particularly when deployed at national scale. Five quasi-experimental evaluations suggested that peacekeeping missions resulted in reductions in violence in sub-Saharan Africa (Fjelde et al., 2019; Carnegie & Mikulascheck, 2020; Bove et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022; Blair et al., 2019). A quasi-experimental evaluation examining various peace missions in sub-Saharan Africa indicated that, for every 100 additional peacekeepers deployed, the monthly number of civilian casualties in each conflict country was reduced by three, on average (Carnegie & Mikulascheck, 2020). Households living in counties where the United Nations Mission in South Sudan was deployed were about 12.5 percentage points more likely to report feeling secure, compared to households in counties without deployment (Bove et al., 2021).

However, effectiveness varied by mission type and mandate. UN peacekeeping missions tended to be more successful in protecting civilians from rebel violence, but faced greater challenges in addressing abuses by government forces, potentially due to constraints imposed by host-country consent and political mandates (Fjelde et al., 2019). In contrast, non-UN peacekeeping missions appeared more capable of mitigating violence perpetrated by State actors (Kim et al., 2022).

Evaluations of macro-level mechanisms generally showed reductions in violence, while those of local-level mechanisms found smaller or no effects. This difference appeared to stem from the scale of intervention, with local initiatives confined to limited areas of a country. For example, an evaluation of a local-level peace mission in Liberia did not find effects on local security measured in terms of physical victimization, fear of victimization, or migration patterns (Mvukiyehe et al., 2020). Similarly, an evaluation of a peacebuilding initiative in East Darfur comprised of various components (which we discuss in more detail below) did not show effects on perceived conflict likelihood or personal safety, despite reductions in recorded instances of land conflict and improved perceptions of the effectiveness of peace committees (Thissen & Ansari, 2024).

Evaluations explored variations in outcomes across population groups and personnel types, although the evidence is limited and context-specific, and caution is required in interpreting and generalizing the results. One study found that increasing the number of uniformed UN personnel led to greater reductions in violence, whereas civilian deployments had smaller effects (Blair et al., 2023). In Liberia, the deployment of the national police had smaller effects on violence reduction due to backlash from socially and economically advantaged citizens benefiting from customary law in Liberia. Residents of treatment communities

reported more frequent appearances of the “bush devil”, a ceremonial figure that secret societies in Liberia use to maintain social order, often at the expense of non-members (Isser, Lubkemann and N’Tow 2009; Blair et al., 2019). At the same time, non-members of secret societies saw larger increases in violence reduction following the deployment of the Liberian national police than members, possibly because they benefited less from customary law (Blair et al., 2019). The latter finding indicates that marginalized populations may benefit more from UN peace missions, though the same evaluation did not show larger effects of peace missions for women or youth (Blair et al., 2019).

In addition to reducing violence, peace missions and peacebuilding efforts can strengthen social cohesion by increasing individuals’ optimism about the potential for cooperation with, and mutual support from, members of other groups. In Mali, contact with UN peacekeepers increased the likelihood of individuals collaborating across group lines (Nomikos, 2022). Evaluations in East Darfur and Nigeria also suggested that peacebuilding could contribute to intergroup contact, trust and social cohesion and, in turn, to reductions in violence (Wolfe et al., 2019; Thissen & Ansari, 2024). As discussed above, initiatives that aim to improve social cohesion may achieve additional benefits if they combine programme components focused on social cohesion with community-driven development approaches to improve infrastructure (Ferguson et al., 2019).

Performance and process evaluations emphasized the importance of understanding the motivations of law enforcement personnel and ensuring that their psychological needs are met (Ferreira and Seymour, 2023, Ferreira and Wilmin, 2022, Diehl, 2019, Retzlaff et al., 2021, UNOCT, 2022). Several initiatives recognized the extreme stress and ethical challenges faced by personnel in conflict zones, and integrated psychological resilience into pre-deployment training (Ferreira & Wilmin, 2022; Retzlaff et al., 2021). For instance, training in emotional regulation and role boundaries was found to reduce stress and dismantle harmful stereotypes among personnel (Ferreira & Wilmin, 2022). However, an evidence gap remains in understanding what motivates or demotivates peacekeepers, which may be essential for sustaining effective engagement (Ferreira & Seymour, 2023).

5.2.2 Governance strengthening to respond to conflict

Strengthening governance during conflict can reduce violence, but only when these efforts are grounded in legitimacy and local engagement. Successful initiatives prioritized sustainable reforms over short-term fixes and focused on building legitimacy and trust at both the community and institutional levels.

Governance strengthening initiatives examined in impact evaluations typically involved a combination of activities, including infrastructure investments, dispute resolution mechanisms, and efforts to enhance civic inclusion. In East Darfur, efforts combined land dispute resolution committees, basic services provision, and support for civil society, involving multiple UN agencies working in concert (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], International Organization for Migration [IOM], UNDP, UN-Habitat, UNHCR and UNICEF) (Thissen et al., 2024). In Nigeria, an intervention engaged pastoralist and farming communities through training, dialogue forums and jointly implemented projects addressing local sources of friction, such as waterpoint access, grazing routes and crop damage (Wolfe et al., 2019).

These initiatives contributed to intermediate outcomes such as increased trust, cooperation and social cohesion. In East Darfur, evidence suggested the programme led to reductions in land-related disputes (Thissen & Ansari, 2024), while in Nigeria, participants reported improved perceptions of local security (Wolfe et al., 2019). These findings align with the theory of change pathway that positions inclusive and trusted governance as a mechanism for defusing conflict drivers.

Performance and process evaluations further reinforced the importance of institutionalizing governance structures. Policies, training resources, conflict management mechanisms, paralegal services, or early warning systems demonstrated positive outcomes for improved governance and, therefore, the potential for reducing violence, conflict or crime. Many of these initiatives to improve community and national governance had clear linkages to peace-related improvements. For instance, village mediation and community conflict management mechanisms helped communities to resolve conflicts before they escalated, thereby freeing up time for village chiefs and court systems (Matinde and Chingaipe, 2022, Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021). In Uganda, the implementation of an early warning system in which community members could anonymously report signs of violence and radicalization strengthened the ties between law enforcement and communities, allowed police officers to quickly respond to community concerns, and reduced crime rates (Bukuluki, 2021). Several evaluations recommended that implementers should focus on the institutionalization of governance initiatives (such as the development of laws, implementation of policies, and provision of training resources) to achieve more sustainable governance outcomes and greater impact on peace and violence reduction (Grellier, 2022, KPMG, 2020, Cullis et al., 2021).

Not all governance strengthening efforts were successful. Several initiatives struggled to overcome implementation barriers such as the turnover of public officials, siloed coordination across sectors, and unclear outcome reporting (AIR, 2022; Ching Ho et al., 2024; Cullis et al., 2021; Diaz & Lopez, 2020; Grellier, 2022; KPMG, 2020; OIOS, 2021; Patscher-Hellbeck, 2020, Retzlaff et al., 2021; Teskey et al., 2020). Interventions with broad or ambiguous objectives often faltered, highlighting a key insight from the theory of change: when interventions fail to account for local power dynamics and institutional fragility, their peacebuilding potential diminishes.

5.2.3 Democracy and peaceful elections

Evidence suggests that peace missions can contribute to democracy, an outcome that some authors suggested could influence the achievement of peace and reductions in violence (e.g., Blair et al., 2023). A quasi-experimental study examining the effects of various peace missions in sub-Saharan Africa indicated that peace missions were positively associated with democracy, especially during periods of peace, and when peacekeepers engage with – rather than bypass – governments. **However, UN peace missions seemed less effective in stimulating democracy during periods of civil war** (Blair et al., 2023).

Elections in post-conflict democracies often risk instability, though evidence from Liberia indicates that **peaceful transitions of power during crucial elections can reduce the risk of violence in the future.** Police and youth who experienced successful crucial elections improved their attitudes toward each other, limiting the risk of violence during subsequent elections. However, a civic engagement programme aiming to influence citizen attitudes towards violence and democracy through information provision did not result in additional reductions in the risk of violence during elections (Pruett et al., 2024). This finding shows that external contextual factors are sometimes more critical for reducing violence than initiatives that explicitly aim to reduce violence.

5.2.4 Differences across contexts

The limited number of impact evaluations makes it difficult to assess how geographic and contextual factors influence the effectiveness of peace process initiatives. While existing evaluations generally suggest that peace missions can reduce violence across different contexts, the evidence base is heavily concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa. This geographic concentration limits the ability to draw firm conclusions about their effectiveness in other regions, such as the Middle East, where dynamics may differ significantly.

5.3 Safe environments

This section presents evidence on the impact of initiatives related to safe environments, including on police presence and capacity, military policing, community policing, and firearms initiatives. It focuses more strongly on initiatives covered in impact evaluations (especially when an initiative appears in more than two impact evaluations) or by a substantial number of performance and process evaluations. Additional details are provided where opportunities exist for triangulation between impact and performance or process evaluations.

5.3.1 Police presence and capacity

Police presence can reduce violence, but the effects are amplified when supported by investments in basic capacity, public accessibility and rights-based training. Law enforcement interventions are most effective when they replace or reduce the perceived need for vigilantism and offer a credible, trustworthy alternative to informal or violent justice systems.

Impact evaluations across Brazil, South Africa and the Philippines showed that increasing police presence (or access) reduced crime and violent citizen responses. In Brazil, police strikes and an abrupt reduction in police presence led to an increase in homicides of between 110 and 250 percent (Aziani, 2022). Conversely, increased police presence in Rio de Janeiro's favelas led to considerable reductions in crime, although some displacement of drug-related violence occurred to nearby areas with less police coverage (Arvate & Souza, 2022). Nonetheless, the net effects remained positive, with estimates suggesting a net reduction of 34 homicides per 100,000 between 2002 to 2012 (Arvate & Souza, 2022). In the Philippines, the introduction of a police hotline increased crime reporting by 10–19 percentage points, suggesting more opportunities for citizens to report crimes to the police (Nanes, Ravanilla, & Haim, 2023). Similarly, in South Africa, communities with access to police alarm systems were less likely to resort to vigilante violence, highlighting the intermediate outcome of reducing retaliatory violence through institutional alternatives (Wilke, 2023).

Performance and process evaluations suggested that initiatives to improve basic skills using short term, practical training opportunities were perceived to have enhanced local and national law enforcement capacity (Nordic Consulting Group, 2022; Ferreira and Wilmin, 2022; Diehl, 2019; Disch, 2020; Retzlaff et al., 2021; Haarr, 2022; Perez, 2023). This finding applied to situations where law enforcement personnel had no other basic training. In such cases, training programmes covering skills such as logistics management, weapons and storage management, crowd management and proportionate use of force, managing direct reports, and statistical capacity likely enhanced law enforcement capacity. An evaluation of efforts by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to strengthen peacekeeping and police capacities in Mali and the Sahel region initially cited “little to no background or experience in public order management” (p. 26), but, “newly acquired skills supported preparedness to deploy and simultaneously bridge technical gaps in the national training curricula especially in relation to skills such as elections management or medical assistance that will benefit policing functions upon return” (p. 38).

Beyond technical capacity, performance and process evaluations suggested that rights-based approaches to law enforcement could positively influence the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of officers, particularly in supporting the reintegration of ex-combatants and adopting less coercive, more community-oriented approaches to policing (Retzlaff et al., 2021; UNOCT, 2022; Haarr, 2022; Matinde & Chingaipe, 2022; Patscher-Hellbeck, 2020). An evaluation of an initiative for training and capacity-building law enforcement officials on human rights, the rule of law and the prevention of terrorism noted, “The participants elaborated that exposure to a different form of investigation, especially in terrorism cases, changed their view on how existing investigation practices can be impacted by adhering to Human Rights norms while countering terrorism” (UNOCT, 2022, p. 30).

5.3.2 Other law enforcement initiatives

Efforts to improve public safety and reduce violent crime include a range of law enforcement interventions beyond police presence, such as hotspot and military policing, community engagement models, accountability institutions, and firearms regulation. These interventions rest on the idea that more strategic, inclusive or rights-based policing can enhance effectiveness and legitimacy. **Impact evaluations suggested that most law enforcement initiatives beyond basic presence had limited or highly variable effects on violent crime.** Furthermore, variation among programmes meant that generalizability was limited. For instance:

- A **hotspot policing** intervention in Colombia led to short-term improvements in perceptions of safety, and reductions in car theft, but did not affect other crimes or satisfaction with the police (Collazos et al., 2019).
- **Military policing**, often used in low- and middle-income countries, showed particularly concerning results. In Colombia, **it not only failed to reduce crime but led to increased human rights abuses**, particularly by regular police rather than military officers, and may have even led to increases in crime after the deployment ended (Blair & Weintraub, 2023).
- **Community policing**, used to address human rights abuses by military personnel, showed mixed effectiveness depending upon the context. In Uganda, one initiative had no impact on crime, perceptions of safety, attitudes towards the police, or norms of cooperation with the police (Blair et al., 2024). However, in DRC, a community policing initiative improved access to policing services and police legitimacy and led to an overall improvement in a security index, suggesting that community policing may result in reductions in violence in acute crisis contexts (Wisler, 2019).

Whether through community policing or efforts to enhance trust in police, performance and process evaluations underscored the value of community engagement as a vehicle for improving law enforcement legitimacy (Nordic Consulting Group, 2022, Diplomacy, Trade and Corporate Affairs Division (PRE), 2020, Nuwakora, 2020, Bela and Kanneh, 2019, El Moulart, 2023, Nuwakora, 2023, Tennant & Cowley, 2019, Retzlaff et al., 2021, Bukuluki, 2021). Several evaluations noted that law enforcement initiatives incorporating a community trust component – either between officers and communities or officers and their superiors – humanized law enforcement and helped citizens become more aware of their rights. For instance, in Uganda, participants in a community policing initiative reported greater appreciation for dialogue as an alternative to force, recognizing its role in promoting peaceful coexistence (Bukuluki, 2021). In several countries, community trust was associated with increased willingness to share security-related information with law enforcement authorities (Onana et al., 2019; EnCompass, 2020).

Innovative institutional approaches showed promise under the right conditions.

- In India, the introduction of **all-women police stations** had some positive effects, leading to increased reporting of gender-based crimes (such as female kidnappings) and improvements in women's perceptions of safety, which may have supported higher labour force participation among women. However, these stations did not significantly reduce overall crime rates or domestic violence (Amaral et al., 2021).
- The creation of **court-mandated accountability institutions** was demonstrated as one alternative to reduce violence by police officers. Evidence from India suggested that the creation of regional bodies to which citizens report allegations of police abuse could result in large decreases in human rights violations by police officers (Hu & Conrad, 2020). While this intervention is promising, caution is required in interpreting this finding, because it is based on a single evaluation.
- On the regulatory side, **firearms initiatives** in Latin America provided evidence of reductions in gun-related violence (Arvate & Souza, 2022; Ortiz & Guzman-Tordecilla, 2020). In Bogotá and Medellín (Colombia), a permanent gun-carrying restriction led to a 22.3 percent reduction in the monthly gun-related mortality rate in those regions (Ortiz & Guzman-Tordecilla, 2020). In Brazil, armed police units showed greater engagement in crime control – seizing more narcotics, making more arrests, and recovering more stolen vehicles – which was linked to reductions in violent crime. However, these results may stem more from strategic enforcement than from arming alone (Arvate & Souza, 2022).

5.3.3 Differences across contexts

The fragmented and limited nature of impact evaluations on law enforcement initiatives makes it difficult to assess how contextual factors shape their effectiveness. Most initiative types are evaluated in only a few studies, often within similar settings, offering little variation in geographic, political or social contexts. This lack of diversity constrains the ability to draw meaningful conclusions about how different environments may influence outcomes.

06

How and why are initiatives to reduce homicides effective?

This section explores the second synthesis question: *Why are initiatives to reduce homicides and conflict-related deaths effective—or not?* It examines how interventions achieve (or fall short of) their intended outcomes, and how design, implementation and contextual factors shape their effectiveness. Drawing on insights from performance and process evaluations, the analysis identifies common barriers and enabling factors that influence implementation quality and overall impact across different types of initiatives.

6.1 Cross-cutting facilitators

This section highlights a set of cross-cutting factors that contributed to the success and sustainability of peace, justice and security interventions across varied contexts. Five key facilitators are identified: institutionalization; formalized community partnerships; government engagement; community ownership and trust-building; and economic empowerment. These are summarized in Exhibit 10.

Exhibit 10.

Key facilitators for intervention effectiveness

Facilitator
Institutionalizing activities increases the likelihood of sustainability.
Evaluations showed support for efforts to advance systemic and organizational capacity, particularly when they rely on continuous, long-term engagement.
Initiatives that explicitly planned for concrete approaches to sustain project activities were more likely to report achieving or being on track to achieve outcomes.
Initiatives that institutionalized laws and protocols at the national or local level were more likely to lead to sustainable practices.

Facilitator

Formalizing community partnerships improved intervention design and implementation.

Formalized community partnerships in the initiative design and throughout implementation drove programme success and promoted sustainability.

Implementation partnerships with CSOs, NGOs and other local organizations facilitated the success of communications projects.

Initiatives depend on government engagement, buy-in and accountability.

Programmes that prioritized mutual accountability increased the commitment and willingness of involved countries to continue working together.

The success of trafficking prevention initiatives, specifically, was contingent upon government willingness to engage.

Community engagement, ownership and trust-building are crucial across topics.

Approaches that involved communities in project planning and implementation enhanced project ownership and sustainability.

Initiatives that directly involved community members in the development and dissemination of informational materials increased local ownership.

Awareness-creation and community involvement in peacebuilding processes enabled trust and led to more people-centred activities and balanced power.

Support to economic empowerment and livelihoods is a promising approach.

Limited evidence suggests that interventions focused on economic empowerment show promise for alleviating conflict and violence.

Among interventions focused on reintegration of ex-combatants, those that included strong livelihood-building activities were considered more successful in strengthening peace and reintegration.

6.1.1 Institutionalizing activities increases the likelihood of sustainability

Evaluations across a wide range of interventions suggest that institutionalization and long-term planning significantly enhance the durability of outcomes. Interventions that built systemic and organizational capacity, embedded activities into structures, or formalized laws and protocols were more likely to sustain their results beyond the life of the intervention.

Across thematic areas, evaluations consistently highlighted the value of investing in systemic and organizational capacity, particularly when such efforts are grounded in sustained, long-term engagement (Diehl, 2024; Puente et al., 2023; Tennant & Cowley, 2019; Nuwakora, 2020; Stigter & Aning, 2022; Yodah, 2021; Retzlaff et al., 2021; Bela & Kanneh, 2019). These approaches typically involved leadership and transition support, the development of formal feedback mechanisms, and efforts to institutionalize practices over time. For instance, a capacity development initiative in Sri Lanka enhanced the use of operational guidance and systematic documentation. As noted in the evaluation: “The use of dynamic security and crisis management skills and knowledge, combined with the new SoPs and equipment [...] led to a more secure environment for staff and prisoners” (Stigter & Aning, 2022, p. 17), despite the initiative not achieving its intended outcomes on terrorism prevention. In contrast, a UNDP security sector reform project succeeded in establishing a coordination framework, but lacked a dedicated coordinating body to continuously identify and respond to evolving strategic needs (Nuwakora, 2020).

Across initiatives, explicit planning for sustainability – through embedding activities into existing systems, fostering local ownership and aligning with institutional priorities – emerged as a key success factor (Ferreira and Seymour, 2023, Ferreira and Wilmin, 2022, Khoury & Firas Mirrar, 2023, Cullis et al., 2021, Retzlaff et al., 2021, Diaz & Lopez, 2020, Haarr, 2022, UNOCT, 2022, Stigter & Aning, 2022, Candelera, 2023, Amiot & Afolabi, 2020). Approaches to increase the likelihood of sustainability included tracing a path to sustainability, fostering partnerships, prioritizing local ownership, and embedding activities within organizations. For example, several initiatives found that focusing capacity-building approaches at the organizational level was a more sustainable approach than training individuals (Ferreira and Seymour, 2023, Tennant & Cowley, 2019, Puente et al., 2023, Khoury & Firas Mirrar, 2023). Initiatives that did not plan for sustainability were more likely to end project activities after the implementation period because of shifting priorities or a lack of funding to maintain activities (Miranda et al., 2021, Ferreira and Wilmin, 2022).

The institutionalization of laws, protocols and standards at national and local levels was frequently associated with greater sustainability and adaptability of peace and justice initiatives over time (Disch, 2020, Retzlaff et al., 2021, Diaz & Lopez, 2020, Stigter & Aning, 2022, Miranda et al., 2021, OIOS, 2022, Grellier, 2022, Ferreira and Seymour, 2023, Nuwakora, 2020, Bela and Kanneh, 2019). In the Kyrgyz Republic, for example, an UNODC-supported initiative aimed at preventing radicalization contributed to the formal institutionalization of the probation department under the Ministry of Justice. The project design and implementation were developed in collaboration with government partners and included elements of social rehabilitation for ex-offenders through probation services (Retzlaff et al., 2021; UNOCT, 2022). Similarly, a project supporting the ECOWAS regional action plan on illicit drug trafficking and organized crime in West Africa facilitated the signing of memoranda of understanding between countries to enable joint operations, illustrating how formalized cooperation mechanisms can promote sustained cross-border collaboration (Amiot & Afolabi 2020).

6.1.2 Formalizing community partnerships improved intervention design and implementation

Formalizing community partnerships during both planning and delivery stages strengthens programme design, implementation and sustainability. Inclusive ownership facilitates cooperation across actors, builds trust and anchors peace and justice initiatives in the realities of local governance and civil society.

Formalizing partnerships in initiative design and throughout implementation drove programme success and promoted sustainability (Grellier, 2022, George, 2023, Matinde and Chingaipe, 2022, Diaz & Lopez, 2020, Amiot & Afolabi, 2020, Fergusson & Ahmed, 2022, Cullis et al., 2021, George, 2023, Haarr, 2022, Stigter & Aning, 2021). In a joint UNDP–Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) programme to build national capacity for conflict prevention, the involvement of a range of stakeholders led to a more effective “system response” (Fergusson & Ahmed, 2022). Similarly, the USAID Judiciary Against Corruption Activity in Bosnia and Herzegovina attributed the success of institutional capacity-building for addressing organized crime to consultations with participants and tailoring trainings to their needs (AIR, 2022).

All performance and process evaluations on social cohesion noted that the engagement of local partners (governments, groups involved in conflict, women, youth, rights groups and others who influence policy and practice) supported programme implementation (Arapakos et al., 2021; Bjorn & Gianluca, 2022; EnCompass, 2020; Mbzibain et al., 2022; UNDP IEO, 2023). Inclusive ownership and buy-in led to better cooperation towards shared goals. Joint planning and implementation in all but one of these evaluations (Hassan, 2022) also led to a balanced approach to budgeting, facilitating activity implementation and meaningful contribution by all partners. In other cases, insufficient stakeholder engagement, formalized partnerships, or local coherence hindered programme effectiveness and efficiency (Ching Ho et al., 2024; Guerrero & Alymbaeva, 2022; KPMG, 2020; OIOS, 2021; Patscher-Hellbeck, 2020). These findings are consistent with a quasi-experimental evaluation demonstrating that the effects of peace missions on democracy are larger when peacekeepers engage with – rather than bypass – governments (Blair et al., 2023), suggesting that formalized government partnerships and engagement with local partners likely increases the effectiveness of peace process initiatives.

Local implementation partnerships with CSOs and NGOs facilitate the implementation of communications initiatives. Evaluations of media and messaging initiatives consistently found that partnerships with local actors improved the localization, relevance and uptake of interventions (Peirce, 2020, Ibarguen et al., 2020, Wood et al., 2022, Turay 2022, Arora et al., 2020). For instance, a PBF-supported project in Sierra Leone partnered with NGOs rooted in target communities to scale up community-based dispute resolution efforts, enabling greater ownership of conflict resolution processes by local youth (Turay, 2022).

6.1.3 Initiatives depend on government engagement, buy-in and accountability

Government engagement plays a critical role in the success of peace and security programmes. Where governments are actively involved – as partners in design, implementation and oversight – initiatives tend to have stronger foundations for sustainability and institutionalization. Efforts to build trust with government counterparts, co-develop accountability mechanisms, and strengthen governance systems contributed to longer-term impact, particularly when these systems were embedded beyond the lifespan of donor funding. When governments are co-owners of peacebuilding and violence prevention strategies, the conditions for lasting results appear more likely to emerge.

Programmes that prioritized mutual accountability increased the commitment and willingness of involved countries to continue working together (Onana, Togba, & Kouassi, 2019; Mbzibain et al., 2022; USAID 2023). As part of a peacebuilding initiative, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia endorsed the Paris declaration and submitted progressive performance reports towards peace goals, which enhanced cross-border cooperation (Onana, Togba, & Kouassi, 2019). Collaboration among regional actors also enhanced the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions. For example, the success of the EU Emergency Trust Fund in elevating migration challenges to the regional agenda and strengthening regional initiatives contributed to addressing the root causes of irregular migration (Disch, 2020).

The success of trafficking prevention initiatives, specifically, was contingent upon government willingness to engage (Cullis et al., 2021, Haarr, 2022, Oldsman, 2020). Effective and impactful initiatives required strong collaboration and partnership from local governments. Well-designed governance structures provided a framework for effective decision-making and accountability (Momoh, 2020). For example, strong existing infrastructure and collaboration among Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao authorities in the Philippines facilitated multisectoral UNDP support (Peirce, 2020). In some instances, lack of government buy-in and participation in project activities limited the effectiveness of trafficking prevention interventions. This was a finding from evaluations of a UNICEF intervention to strengthen the national response to human trafficking in Albania and an International Labour Organization (ILO) project to combat exploitation and trafficking in sea fisheries in South Asia (Haarr, 2022; Oldsman, 2020). Conversely, the effectiveness of initiatives such as the UNODC Global Firearms Programme was increased because governments were highly engaged during implementation (Cullis, Robert, and Langeani, 2023).

6.1.4 Community engagement, ownership and trust-building are crucial across intervention types

Across all intervention types, community involvement is a critical factor in ensuring relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. Programmes that prioritized inclusive participation, local leadership and culturally grounded approaches were more likely to foster lasting outcomes and strengthen social cohesion.

Evidence suggests that when communities are meaningfully engaged from the outset – particularly in the design and implementation of interventions – initiatives are more likely to align with local needs, remain responsive to evolving contexts, and build sustained momentum (Peirce, 2020; Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021; Turay, 2022; Disch, 2020). Interventions that demonstrated flexibility, incorporated traditional structures and worked with cultural champions were more likely to achieve lasting results. For example, drawing on traditional leadership or community-based structures created entry points for reaching marginalized groups and fostering inclusive dialogue, thereby strengthening community engagement (Peirce, 2020; Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021; Fergusson & Ahmed, 2022). Conversely, initiatives that failed to involve key stakeholders often struggled to meet their objectives, highlighting the importance of inclusive and locally grounded approaches (Ching Ho et al., 2024; KPMG, 2020; Guerrero & Alymbaeva, 2022; Patscher-Hellbeck, 2020).

Local ownership was particularly strong when community members directly contributed to messaging, communications and awareness efforts (Wood et al., 2022, Triangle Consulting SAL, 2022). In Kenya, the USAID *NiWajibu Wetu* programme to strengthen awareness of and response to violent extremism, helped communities create and maintain *WhatsApp* networks for sharing information on preventing violent extremism – networks that continued to operate even after project closure (Wood et al., 2022). A youth-led social media initiative in Lebanon, launched through a UNDP project competition, enabled young people to develop conflict-sensitive fact-checking platforms. Youth not only maintained these platforms without further donor support but continued to use them actively on *Instagram* and other sites (Triangle Consulting SAL, 2022).

Awareness-creation and community involvement in peacebuilding processes enabled trust and led to more people-centred activities and balanced power (EnCompass, 2020; Marimo & Hatendi, 2021; Mbzibain et al., 2022; Onana et al., 2019). Awareness activities help enforce the need to collectively build social cohesion as a public good. For example, an evaluation conducted in Somalia focusing on interclan conflicts influenced the reestablishment of state authority. These efforts emphasized inclusivity and strengthened community-government relations, to address power imbalances and build trust. The evaluation reported positive effects on social cohesion (e.g., better interclan interactions and co-existence), but social cohesion initiatives require continuous engagement to sustain inclusive reconciliation practices (EnCompass, 2020).

6.1.5 Economic empowerment and livelihoods support can contribute to peace outcomes

Integrating economic inclusion into governance and reintegration efforts, particularly for youth and former combatants, can enhance both participation and effectiveness. Programmes that addressed economic drivers of violence alongside political and social dimensions were more likely to foster sustained engagement and contribute to longer-term stability. While not universally successful, these integrated approaches appeared to offer pathways for addressing the underlying conditions that fuel conflict.

Initiatives that combined livelihood development with governance-focused interventions, particularly for marginalized and conflict-affected groups, reported meaningful gains in stability and wellbeing. While standalone economic inclusion interventions fell outside the scope of this synthesis, several governance-oriented programmes included economic inclusion and livelihood components (Disch, 2020, Patscher-Hellbeck, 2020, Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021, Bukuluki, 2021). Evaluations often highlighted the economic inclusion elements as among the most impactful. For example, the Community Security and Stabilization Programme in Sudan supported alternative livelihoods for unemployed youth and invested in community economic infrastructure, positively influencing beneficiary livelihoods, especially for migrants and refugees

(Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021). In Uganda, a programme offering vocational training and support for youth employment and entrepreneurship was associated with gains in youth livelihoods and social cohesion, factors identified as important in mitigating drivers of violence (Bukuluki, 2021). In many cases, the benefits of these economic empowerment components were more apparent and straightforward than those related to the governance-focused components.

Livelihoods support was also critical for the reintegration of ex-combatants (Balasundaram, 2020; PBSO, 2022; OIOS, 2022). For instance, an evaluation of a PBF project aimed at reintegrating former FDLR combatants in Rwanda found that income-generation support helped participants to resume more stable lives and reintegrate peacefully into their communities (PBSO, 2022). In contrast, an evaluation of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in DRC (MONUSCO) identified limitations in reintegration programming where livelihood-building activities were insufficient or absent. Evaluators noted that the lack of economic opportunities contributed to some former combatants returning to armed groups, underscoring the risks of neglecting the economic dimensions of reintegration (OIOS, 2022).

These findings align with impact evaluations of other, previously mentioned interventions, such as radio campaigns, that demonstrated greater effectiveness when paired with positive economic conditions. For example in Uganda, radio messages encouraging defection from the LRA were particularly effective in reducing violence when former rebels had economic opportunities after increases in cotton prices, which led to more labour market opportunities (Armand et al., 2020).

6.2 Cross-cutting barriers

This section identifies common barriers that limited the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at reducing homicides and conflict-related deaths. Drawing on findings from process and performance evaluations, it highlights how **weak contextual understanding, fragmented implementation, overambitious goals, external disruptions and poorly defined theories of change collectively undermined programme relevance, coherence and sustainability**. Exhibit 11 summarizes these barriers and their implications.

Exhibit 11.

Barriers to Achieving Outcomes

Barriers
Contextual misunderstandings are a fundamental impediment to achieving outcomes.
Contextual misunderstandings among implementation teams hindered initiative effectiveness in several cases.
Some initiatives failed to fully account for existing tensions and unintentionally sparked additional conflict due to negative economic impacts of interventions or misunderstandings related to the programming.
Variations in cultural understanding, particularly in multilingual and multicultural settings, resulted in misunderstandings and misinterpretations of intervention goals and approaches.
Approaches require attention to coherence across initiatives and policies.
Designing interventions based on analyses of the drivers of conflict, gap analyses, previous project evaluations or other evidence on the phenomena helped improve the relevance of peace-related programming.
Ensuring continuity with past initiatives and stakeholders during the initial phases of new initiatives yielded substantial improvements in implementation quality.

Barriers

Initiative scope and timeline should be commensurate to desired outcomes.

Initiatives often had goals that were too ambitious compared to the planned activities, available funding or proposed timeframe.

Several initiatives had a scope too broad to achieve outcomes.

Initiatives benefit from planning for likely external disruptions.

Changing political landscapes created uncertainties and disrupted programme continuity, while armed conflict displaced populations and affected infrastructure.

Initiatives to promote peace in politically complex environments required long-term investments for sustainability.

Law enforcement could be strengthened by emphasizing cross-border collaboration and a regional approach to capacity-strengthening.

6.2.1 Misunderstanding the context undermines implementation, reduces relevance and can escalate conflict

Greater attention to contextual and cultural nuance – early in programme design and throughout implementation – is essential. This includes conflict-sensitive economic programming, meaningful political economy analysis, and linguistically and culturally tailored engagement strategies. Without this, even well-intended interventions risk alienating communities or entrenching existing divisions. Several cases highlighted the importance of anticipating unintended consequences and adapting programme design to complex, context-specific realities.

A lack of understanding of geopolitical, institutional or migration dynamics often limited the effectiveness of interventions (Diehl, 2019; Puente et al., 2023; Nordic Consulting Group, 2022; Guerrero & Alymbaeva, 2022; Teskey et al., 2020). In North Africa, for example, a UNODC initiative aimed at strengthening local law enforcement to combat human trafficking struggled to achieve its goals in part because it misjudged regional migration patterns, focusing on horizontal flows between North African countries while most migration originated from Sub-Saharan Africa (Puente et al., 2023). In the Solomon Islands, a programme intended to strengthen governance and justice systems underestimated the complexity of public service reform and overlooked critical bottlenecks, such as a large backlog in the magistrate court system (Teskey et al., 2020). Similarly, in the Kyrgyz Republic, a conflict analysis intended to guide PBF-supported initiatives to prevent violent extremism failed to sufficiently assess the role of religion and did not fully situate its findings within the broader peacebuilding context (Patscher-Hellbeck, 2020). A multicountry initiative implemented in Nairobi, Mexico City and Tashkent also faced challenges due to insufficient recognition of stark contextual differences across these locations, which reduced the relevance and effectiveness of the programme design (Guerrero & Alymbaeva, 2022).

In several cases, interventions that did not fully account for existing tensions or local dynamics unintentionally contributed to new sources of conflict, often due to economic disruptions or misperceptions about the intent and fairness of programming. In Niger, for example, an EU-supported law aimed at curbing migrant smuggling had consequences for the local economy, which relied heavily on migration-related income. Although implementers anticipated these challenges and introduced livelihood support and community dialogue to mitigate the impact, community members expressed dissatisfaction with the level of compensation provided, and tensions persisted (Disch, 2020). Similar concerns arose in other EU-supported border control initiatives, where implementers acknowledged that stricter enforcement could adversely affect forcibly displaced people and other vulnerable groups dependent on cross-border movement. They recommended the formalization of alternative livelihood strategies to reduce negative effects on these populations (Disch, 2020). In Sudan, the Community Security and Stabilization Programme

also experienced unintended backlash, as perceived inequalities in service provision and misunderstandings within community councils led to local tensions (Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021). In a cross-border initiative between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, implementers adopted a “mirroring approach” to avoid perceptions of unfairness, delivering similar activities on both sides of the border. While this approach helped reduce grievances, stakeholders emphasized the need for greater flexibility to accommodate local and national specificities (Patscher-Hellbeck, 2020).

Cultural misunderstandings further undermine trust and engagement, particularly in multilingual or socially conservative contexts. Several law enforcement capacity-building efforts were weakened when trainings were conducted in English, despite low levels of comprehension among trainees (Puente et al., 2023; Stigter & Aning, 2022; Stigter & Aning, 2021). In the Kyrgyz Republic, a project on preventing radicalization to violence faced challenges due to differing cultural interpretations of ‘extremism’ and the reluctance of religious women leaders to participate in trainings (Hellbeck, 2020; OIOS, 2021; PRE, 2020). Similarly, an initiative in West Africa faced challenges in promoting a balanced approach to drug use due to differing legal systems and cultural attitudes across member States (Amiot & Afolabi, 2020). A programme in Southern Africa combating cross-border trafficking of children encountered difficulties because of local cultural practices and the leniency of immigration officials (Disch, 2020). Some initiatives found similar challenges in addressing Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) issues and gender equality (Haarr, 2022; Candeler, 2023).

Interventions grounded in context-specific evidence – such as conflict driver analyses, gap assessments or prior evaluation findings – were generally more relevant and effective (Alymbaeva, 2022; Amiot & Afolabi, 2020; Guerrero & Alymbaeva, 2022; KPMG, 2020; OIOS, 2021; Retzlaff et al., 2021). In contrast, initiatives that lacked a robust evidence base often encountered design flaws. For example, one initiative targeting tensions in slum communities did not include a needs assessment to validate the presumed root causes. The evaluator noted that, “Given that formative studies/needs assessments are instrumental in identifying needs and adapting projects to the contexts of beneficiaries, failure to conduct these assessments may have affected the depth of understanding of the needs and context” (Bukuluki, 2021, p.17). Similarly, the governments of some countries questioned the relevance of anti-extremism initiatives that were externally driven and poorly aligned with their national priorities. In Thailand, for instance, one such project was considered irrelevant due to the country’s lack of recent extremism and sensitivity to international influence (George, 2023; Patscher-Hellbeck, 2020; Retzlaff et al., 2021). These examples underscore the importance of using evidence and ensuring national ownership in programme design.

Some initiatives struggled to achieve intended outcomes due to weak or poorly articulated theories of change. Evaluations identified gaps between activities, outputs and intended impacts (Diehl, 2024; Miranda et al., 2021; Guerrero & Alymbaeva, 2022; Nordic Consulting Group, 2022; UNITAR PPME, 2023). Contributing factors included: unclear plans for capacity-development (Diaz & Lopez, 2020); unexamined assumptions (Teskey et al., 2020); and indirect or fragmented approaches to conflict mitigation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Limitations in data collection and monitoring further impeded accountability for outcomes (Amiot & Afolabi, 2020; Diaz & Lopez, 2020; Teskey et al., 2020). Numerous evaluations noted a predominant focus on outputs, such as the number of trainings conducted, rather than outcome-level changes, such as demonstrated improvements in skills or behaviour (Diaz & Lopez, 2020; Guerrero & Alymbaeva, 2022; KPMG, 2020; Retzlaff et al., 2021).

6.2.2 A lack of coherence across initiatives, institutions and borders limits impact and sustainability

Evaluations consistently found that where interventions were fragmented or poorly coordinated – across time, stakeholders, institutions, or borders – implementation quality and long-term impact were diminished. Insufficient continuity with previous initiatives, misalignment with partner structures, or weak regional coordination created further barriers to effectiveness.

A lack of coherence across time, stakeholders and institutions emerged as a key barrier to successful implementation. Evaluations of law enforcement and security reform initiatives found that maintaining continuity with prior activities and engaging relevant stakeholders early in new projects helped to improve implementation quality (Bela & Kanneh, 2019; Diehl, 2019; Ferreira & Wilmin, 2022; Nordic Consulting Group, 2022; Nuwakora, 2020, 2023; OIOS, 2022; Polska, 2019; Puente et al., 2023; Stigter & Aning, 2021; UNITAR PPME, 2023). For example, in Sudan, the establishment of the Office of the National Security supported the implementation of a security sector reform project by anchoring it institutionally (Nuwakora, 2020). In contrast, one initiative in Liberia that was designed by a previous government but implemented under a new administration faced major coordination challenges. As one evaluation noted, “All involved UN agencies and implementing partners expected the [Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection] to be more active and to take stronger ownership of the project activities” (Bela & Kanneh, 2019, p. 43). Other challenges included lack of alignment with the structures of partner organizations, uncoordinated training topics, and weak reinforcement across related activities.

Regional coherence and cross-border collaboration were also considered essential, especially in initiatives addressing transnational threats. Evaluations of law enforcement capacity-building projects emphasized the importance of a regional approach, noting that unilateral efforts were less effective when not aligned with parallel efforts in neighbouring countries (Disch, 2020; Yodah, 2021; Puente et al., 2023; Khoury & Mirrar, 2023; OIOS, 2022). For example, an evaluation of a UNODC initiative to counter human trafficking in North Africa highlighted the need for joint mechanisms to share information across origin, transit and destination countries. The evaluation noted that, “Counterparts underlined the importance of facilitating information access and exchange between the origin, transit and destination countries, easing procedural matters involved in the identification and prosecution of transnational criminal networks” (Puente et al., 2023, p. 23). The evaluation pointed to significant barriers to cross-border coordination, such as reluctance to share sensitive data and lack of internal alignment within participating countries.

6.2.3 Unrealistic scope and timelines undermine meaningful and sustainable outcomes

Across topics, many initiatives had goals that were disproportionately ambitious relative to their scope, funding or duration. Overly expansive goals paired with limited resources led to diluted impacts. “For example, during its 2016–2020 five-year programme, the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre implemented more than 50 projects at global, regional and national levels to build counter-terrorism capacity. However, an institutional evaluation for this period found that the programme was hindered by weak management, inadequate planning and variable delivery quality, underpinned by an unclear and unrealistic programme logic (KPMG, 2020). The Joint UNDP–DPPA programme to build national capacities for conflict prevention, while guided by a clear theory of change, was considered overambitious in its objectives to foster peace and prevent conflicts because it was just a single programme (Fergusson & Ahmed, 2022, p. 19). Evaluators noted that such overreach risks shifting accountability away from national stakeholders, who ultimately hold the reins of sustainable peace (Fergusson & Ahmed, 2022).

Overly broad thematic scopes further weakened intervention coherence and impact (Disch, 2020; Fergusson & Ahmed, 2022; KPMG, 2020; Teskey et al., 2020). For example, the EU Emergency Trust Fund financed a variety of activities related to expanding economic opportunities for youth and women, strengthening community resilience, improving migration management, and promoting governance, which, together, were too broad to achieve its objective to address root causes of instability (Disch, 2020). Similarly, the Solomon

Islands Justice Programme included activities to strengthen rule of law, maintain security, and promote government service delivery, and ultimately bore a fragmented approach with insufficient influence across intervention areas (Teskey et al., 2020). The evaluation noted that the programme's, "multiple goals for justice have resulted in a programme designed to implement a challenging set of interventions across many state agencies and non-state actors, without a clearly stated programme logic or strategic intent" (Teskey et al., 2020, p. 38). While the intervention sought to improve governance, the type of governance targeted was unclear.

Geographic scope also limited intervention depth and effectiveness. The UNODC Urban Safety Governance Approach, implemented in Kenya, Mexico and Uzbekistan, aimed to equip local authorities to better prevent organized crime and extremism. The evaluation found that a focus on one country instead of three would likely have led to better results (Guerrero and Alymbaeva 2022).

6.2.4 Failure to anticipate external disruptions undermines continuity and impact

Many peace and governance initiatives were disrupted by external shocks – such as political turnover, economic instability and ongoing conflict – yet few were explicitly designed to anticipate and manage these risks.

Changing political landscapes created uncertainties and disrupted programme continuity, while armed conflict displaced populations and affected infrastructure. For instance, the Community Security and Stabilization Programme in Sudan faced implementation challenges due to economic instability, political turmoil and currency fluctuations (Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021). In Madagascar, ministerial reshuffles and delays in appointing key officials disrupted project coordination and implementation (Diaz & Lopez, 2020). In Iraq, government staff turnover and ongoing political disputes created challenges in building and sustaining relationships with counterparts (Amiot & Afolabi, 2020; Candelera, 2023; Cullis, Robert, & Langeani, 2021; PRE, 2020; Miranda et al., 2021; OIOS, 2021; PBSO, 2022; Polska, 2019; Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021). Governance-focused initiatives also faced challenges with turnover of public officials (Guerrero and Alymbaeva 2022; AIR, 2022; OIOS, 2021; Cullis et al., 2021; Retzlaff et al., 2021; Diaz & Lopez, 2020), thus abating the impact and sustainability of programming.

Initiatives to promote peace in politically complex environments required long-term investments for sustainability. Some initiatives nevertheless managed to sustain engagement through adaptive, politically sensitive approaches. The ZIM-CATT project in Zimbabwe faced delays due to difficult negotiations and political barriers. However, by prioritizing consensus-building, ongoing dialogue and trust cultivation, the project was able to generate meaningful results even in a restrictive environment (Marimo, 2021).



How do gender and marginalization influence effectiveness?

This section addresses synthesis question three, “How do gender and marginalization affect the impact of interventions to reduce conflict-related deaths and homicides?” To answer this question, we examined how interventions considered non-discrimination, equity and equality in their design and implementation. The synthesis indicates that initiatives incorporated these considerations through several strategies focused on ensuring the inclusion and participation of marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, and people with disabilities. Many projects explicitly used gender-sensitive approaches, incorporating sex-disaggregated data in monitoring and evaluation processes and ensuring equitable access to opportunities for men and women. While these initiatives demonstrated alignment with human rights principles by incorporating gender inclusion, participatory governance and anti-trafficking efforts, most faced challenges in scaling up and achieving long-term sustainability due to institutional barriers and resource limitations.

Exhibit 12.

Findings on marginalization in design, implementation and impact of initiatives to reduce conflict-related deaths

Equity considerations were stronger in design than in implementation.
Initiatives aimed to incorporate equity and non-discrimination by aligning with human rights frameworks and explicitly including marginalized groups. However, a clear gender-inclusive strategy incorporating culturally acceptable roles for women and men was often missing.
Many youth-targeted initiatives focused on urban youth, leaving rural and other marginalized youth underserved.
Evaluations emphasized difficulties in addressing overlapping vulnerabilities across gender, ethnicity, disability and regional disparities.
Although some initiatives successfully aligned implementation with human rights principles, sustainability was limited.

There has been limited evidence of impact of including marginalized groups in initiatives to reduce conflict.

Inclusion of youth is an important facilitator for effective programming.

Initiatives that focused on women's inclusion tended to include insufficient logic to achieving peace-related goals.

Systemic inequalities and cultural beliefs hindered impacts of women's inclusion in various programmes.

7.1 Equity considerations were stronger in design than in implementation

Many peace and governance initiatives explicitly recognized the importance of equity and inclusion during project design, yet these commitments were inconsistently translated into implementation. As a result, marginalized groups – particularly women, youth and ethnic minorities – were often unable to fully benefit from interventions. While design documents often aligned with international human rights frameworks, few initiatives embedded practical mechanisms to ensure sustained, inclusive engagement or track differentiated outcomes.

Initiatives aimed to incorporate equity and non-discrimination by aligning with human rights frameworks and explicitly including marginalized groups. However, a clear gender-inclusive strategy incorporating culturally acceptable roles for women and men was often missing. Some initiatives described integrating gender frameworks – such as United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 – into their design, to promote women's inclusion in leadership and workforce participation. For example, initiatives in Ukraine (Polska, 2019) and Uganda (Bela et al., 2022) emphasized women's roles in law enforcement and peacebuilding, while an initiative in West Africa (Ferreira & Seymour, 2023) promoted women's involvement in security and peacekeeping. In Libya, although counter-terrorism training for female officers incorporated UN frameworks on gender and rights-based inclusion to promote gender equity in security forces, impacts were limited due to systemic gaps in service delivery (Stigter & Aning, 2022).

The use of data to inform gender inclusive strategies was limited. Although nine evaluations (Candelera, 2023; Wood & Ahmed, 2022; Bela et al., 2022; Ferreira, & Seymour, 2023; Bukuluki, P., 2021; Nuwakora, 2023; OIOS, 2022; Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021; George, 2023) noted the use of sex-disaggregated data to inform project monitoring frameworks, the evaluations showed limited application of data insights to address structural barriers as part of their projects. For instance, a project focused on slum populations in Uganda collected sex-disaggregated data and targeted female youth but failed to use the data to address structural barriers faced by women, such as access to employment (Bukuluki, 2021).

Many youth-targeted initiatives focused on urban youth, leaving rural and other marginalized youth underserved. Seven evaluations addressed youth participation across peacebuilding, governance, anti-trafficking and financial inclusion, mainly focusing on urban youth (Candelera, 2023; Wood & Ahmed, 2022; Peirce, 2020; Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021; Ferreira & Wilmin, 2022; Bukuluki, 2021; Bela et al., 2022).

Evaluations emphasized the difficulties in addressing intersecting vulnerabilities across gender, ethnicity, disability and geographic exclusion (Wood & Ahmed, 2022; Ferreira & Seymour, 2023; Candelera, 2023; Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021; OIOS, 2022; George, 2023). The GLO.ACT programme in Bangladesh faced challenges in balancing the intersectional needs of youth participants, with limited capacity to adapt initiatives to various social groups (Candelera, 2023). In Sudan, the Community Security and Stabilization Programme aimed to empower youth but was restricted by structural and resource limitations that constrained the programme's ability to address overlapping barriers (Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021). An outcome evaluation of MONUSCO in DRC underscored difficulties in translating intersectional insights on people with

disabilities into actionable policies for equitable access to education and services (OIOS, 2022). Lastly, prevention of violent extremism initiatives in Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia engaged ethnic minorities and LGBTI communities in participatory policy frameworks, ensuring equal access to services, though maintaining consistent engagement across all groups was difficult (George, 2023).

Although some initiatives successfully aligned implementation with human rights principles, sustainability was limited (George, 2023; Stigter & Aning, 2022; Nuwakora, 2023; Candelera, 2023; El Moulat, 2023). For example, in Sri Lanka, human rights training for defence lawyers and prosecutors sought to align national legal practices with international standards, but broader adoption was hindered by limited institutional capacity (Stigter & Aning, 2022). Nigeria's gender audits and anti-trafficking campaigns also adhered to human rights frameworks, promoting gender-sensitive service delivery, but weak follow-up mechanisms curtailed their long-term effectiveness (Nuwakora, 2023). In Bangladesh, the GLO.ACT programme embedded a human rights framework to support marginalized youth in anti-trafficking efforts, but its sustainability was undermined after donor funding ceased (Candelera, 2023). In the Gao and Ménaka regions of Mali, technical and logistical support empowered women's groups to engage in peacebuilding and community dialogue, reflecting alignment with human rights principles, but insufficient resources prevented these efforts from being fully sustained (El Moulat, 2023).

Initiatives for youth participation in governance and employment also reported challenges in achieving sustained engagement and equity. The GLO.ACT programme in Bangladesh involved marginalized youth in anti-trafficking initiatives but struggled to maintain participation due to funding constraints (Candelera, 2023). In West Africa, the Regional Stabilization Strategy positioned youth as key stakeholders in peacebuilding and governance, though limited resources hindered long-term employment support (Ferreira & Wilmin, 2022). Uganda's Youth Leadership and Governance Programme trained 150 youth leaders for conflict resolution and governance roles but faced difficulties in sustaining engagement beyond training (Bela et al., 2022). A community security and stabilization programme in Sudan provided vocational training and start-up grants for youth employment, achieving short-term economic empowerment, but lacked follow-up mechanisms for sustaining lasting impact (Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021). In Kampala, Uganda, youth cooperatives expanded financial inclusion and entrepreneurship opportunities, though challenges in maintaining long-term youth engagement persisted (Bukuluki, 2021).

7.2 Limited evidence demonstrating that the inclusion of marginalized groups reduced conflict

The inclusion of marginalized groups – especially youth and women – is widely recognized as vital to peace and governance programming, but there is limited causal evidence that such inclusion directly reduces conflict or violence. Only a handful of impact evaluations explicitly examined this relationship. However, process and performance evaluations suggest that inclusion contributes to programme relevance and lays the groundwork for longer-term stability.

While only four impact evaluations explicitly examined how the inclusion of youth can facilitate reduction in violence, **performance and process evaluations suggested that the inclusion of youth was an important facilitator for effective programming**. Programmes focused on youth were considered highly relevant to peace-related goals, as young people are particularly vulnerable to conflict or violence (Guerrero and Alymbaeva 2022, Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021; Bukuluki, 2021). These initiatives included livelihoods support as part of reintegration (Bukuluki, 2021, Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021), peace education (George, 2023) and relationship-building (Bukuluki, 2021).

Impact evaluations indicated that communication and media initiatives could be particularly relevant to reducing violence that negatively affects youth. Radio messages were successful in reaching LRA rebels, for example, which led to defections and reductions in violence, especially when young people had alternative economic opportunities (Armand et al., 2020).

Youth civic engagement initiatives produced mixed results. In Liberia, an impact evaluation of a programme to reduce electoral violence found no significant attitudinal change among youth. Instead, exposure to peaceful elections – specifically the 2017 transition of power – had a more positive influence on attitudes toward nonviolence. This suggests that programme success may depend more on lived democratic experiences than on short-term civic interventions alone (Pruett et al., 2024).

Impact evaluations highlighted how informal justice systems can structurally disadvantage youth. In Liberia, customary laws limited youth participation in decision-making (Blair, 2019), indicating the potential value of formalized legal systems. Still, few evaluations disaggregated results to analyse differential impacts by age. For instance, an evaluation of a social cohesion programme between Jordanians and Syrian refugees targeted vulnerable youth but did not assess its effects on this subgroup (Ferguson, 2019).

While the inclusion of women in peace and security initiatives is a widely recognized normative objective, there is limited evaluative evidence directly linking such participation to reduction in violence. Of the 70 evaluations in the evidence map that addressed women's participation, most focused on outcomes related to empowerment or gender equality, rather than impacts on conflict or security. For instance, the PBF-supported initiative in Liberia, Nothing for Us without Us, articulated a theory of change that connected gender-responsive systems to peace outcomes, yet the evaluation assessed only inclusion-related results (Bela & Kanneh, 2019). Similarly, a UN Women programme in Uganda referenced global studies suggesting that women's participation contributed to more durable peace agreements, but these studies primarily relied on correlational evidence (Coomaraswamy, 2015; Paffenholz et al., 2016; O'Reilly et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, some evidence points to indirect pathways through which women's participation may influence broader outcomes. An evaluation of all-women police stations in India found no overall reduction in gender-based or violent crime, but did observe increased reporting of female kidnappings and improvements in women's perceptions of safety. These perceptions, in turn, were associated with higher rates of women's labour force participation (Amaral et al., 2021). While limited in scope, such findings suggest that changes in perceived security may offer important, if often overlooked, pathways toward more inclusive and resilient peacebuilding outcomes.

Systemic inequalities and cultural beliefs hindered impacts of women's inclusion in various programmes, limiting meaningful engagement (Bela and Kanneh, 2019; PRE, 2020; Peirce, 2020; Hellbeck, 2020; Olomola, 2022; Fergusson & Ahmed, 2022; Stigter & Aning, 2022). In Nigeria, gender units were created within security institutions, but cultural norms hindered their impact on institutional change (WIZ Support Services, 2022). In Gambia, gender units were established to promote women's inclusion in security roles (Nuwakora, 2023). While such interventions succeeded in increasing female representation, their impact on broader systemic changes remained limited (Polska, 2019; Bela et al., 2022). Though women occupied office positions in some initiatives, their roles tended to be less significant (Bela and Kanneh, 2019; Momoh, 2020; Peirce, 2020).

Evidence from Colombia suggested that providing regular status to Venezuelan migrants in Colombia did lead to an increase of the number of crimes reported. While the programme did not have demonstrable impact on the incidence of crimes, it did provide women with the freedom to report sex crimes without fear of deportation or other punishment (Ibáñez et al., 2022).

Key takeaways and implications

The findings from the synthesis highlight several areas that could improve the design and implementation of initiatives to reduce homicides and conflict-related deaths, therefore contributing toward accelerating progress on SDGs 16.1 and 16.4

Key takeaway	Implication
Strengthening social inclusion	
Media and communication initiatives were able to promote positive attitudes towards peace and contribute to violence reduction, especially in acute crisis settings where they promoted positive attitudes toward peace and stimulate defections. Evidence from impact evaluations suggested that their effectiveness was significantly enhanced under favourable economic conditions, such as when increased cotton prices provided alternative livelihood opportunities in Chad and Uganda. However, their effects could be short-lived without broader engagement strategies.	Media and communication initiatives appear to be more effective when implemented alongside economic efforts, such as social protection and job creation initiatives. Evaluations highlight the value of tailoring messages to local linguistic and cultural contexts, and suggest that sustained impacts may depend on complementary investments in livelihoods improvement. These findings point to the potential benefits of embedding communication initiatives within more comprehensive strategies that reflect long-term economic investments.
Community engagement, policy advocacy, and implementer capacity-building were critical enablers for sustained impacts of communication initiatives. Evaluations found that while media campaigns could shift attitudes, they often failed to produce durable outcomes without embedding these efforts within broader local systems. Sustainability was further strengthened by the digitization of information and strong local partnerships.	The effectiveness and sustainability of communication initiatives are often enhanced when they involve structured engagement with communities and local organizations from the outset. This includes formalizing partnerships with community-based organizations, ensuring local leadership in implementation, and investing in the digitization of campaign materials. Evaluation strategies could also assess long-term attitudinal and behavioural change beyond initial campaign exposure.

Key takeaway	Implication
Combining interventions – such as infrastructure investment with social cohesion and governance reforms– was associated with more substantial reductions in violence than from standalone interventions. However, the mechanisms behind these synergies and their external validity remained unclear due to fragmented evidence.	Integrated approaches that combine infrastructure, governance and social cohesion tend to show stronger results than stand-alone projects. To strengthen understanding of causal pathways, evaluations could be designed to unpack how each component contributes to outcomes.
Peace processes	
Peace missions were generally effective at reducing violence at the national level, especially when they involved significant deployments of uniformed personnel. However, their effectiveness varied depending on mission type, operational model, deployment size and regional context. Local-level initiatives showed some positive effects, though these were typically smaller in scale and less consistent.	Peace missions and governance reforms can contribute to reduced violence, though their influence often depends on mandate, context and scale. Considering local dispute resolution and governance mechanisms alongside deployments may increase effectiveness.
Safe environments	
Expanding access to police services, particularly through investments in basic law enforcement training and capacity, could potentially reduce violence in fragile settings. However, militarized policing approaches were associated with negative unintended consequences, including potential human rights violations, and showed limited evidence of effectiveness.	Expanded policing can lower violence in some settings, though rights-based approaches and accountability appear central to sustaining gains without negative side effects. Caution is required in deploying military police, particularly where such forces have histories of abuse. The evidence suggests that programmes are more effective when following a ‘do no harm’ principle and supported by strong oversight and accountability mechanisms.
Evidence on community policing remained inconclusive. While impact evaluations provided mixed findings regarding the effectiveness on reducing violence, performance and process evaluations suggested that these approaches were generally well-received and could improve perceptions of safety and police-community trust, especially when implemented in high-conflict areas with limited formal policing.	Community policing has shown mixed outcomes, while firearms regulation has delivered more consistent reductions in deaths. Designs could emphasize community ownership, cultural sensitivity and trust-building. Evaluations could measure both perceived safety and actual violence outcomes to fully assess impact.
Economic conditions	
Combining peacebuilding efforts with economic inclusion – such as livelihoods support or employment programmes – enhanced outcomes. One impact evaluation noted stronger reductions in violence when economic opportunity was available to former combatants alongside media messaging. Process evaluations echoed this finding across diverse settings.	Linking peacebuilding with livelihoods and employment support appears to enhance effectiveness, particularly for vulnerable groups. Designs that anticipate local labour market conditions and align with social cohesion or reintegration objectives are likely to be more effective. Evaluations could do more to track both peace and economic outcomes to capture full impacts.

Key takeaway	Implication
Facilitating factors	
Institutionalizing peacebuilding efforts – through codifying policies, creating protocols and investing in systemic capacity – increased the likelihood of sustainable results. Long-term engagement and national or local legal anchoring appeared to enhance the durability of outcomes and programme continuity.	Institutionalization through laws, policies and systemic capacity – combined with broad partnerships – seems to strengthen sustainability. This includes embedding peace initiatives within national strategies, securing legal frameworks for continuation, and establishing mechanisms for institutional memory and staff capacity retention across political transitions.
Partnerships with governments, CSOs and community stakeholders enhanced programme design, implementation and sustainability. Formalized cooperation increased legitimacy, facilitated local ownership, and strengthened mutual accountability, especially in cross-border or regional initiatives.	Inclusive partnerships that begin early and evolve over time appear to strengthen programmes. Those with clear roles and shared commitments, spanning community to national levels and adapting to political dynamics, often show greater resilience and effectiveness.
Barriers to effective implementation	
Failure to understand contextual and cultural dynamics – including conflict drivers, gender norms, language and political economy – undermined programme effectiveness and sometimes exacerbated tensions. This was a consistent barrier across multiple evaluations, with examples of misjudging migration flows, cultural sensitivities and community divisions.	When conflict drivers, gender norms, language and political economy are overlooked, programmes often lose effectiveness or even worsen tensions. Analyses that are ongoing and context-sensitive seem to help shape more relevant and less harmful interventions.
Many initiatives were overly ambitious, with scopes and timelines misaligned to the complexity of violence reduction objectives. Some initiatives aimed to transform national governance or conflict systems within short timeframes and limited resources, reducing their effectiveness and straining implementers.	Initiatives with very broad or transformational aims sometimes struggle under short timelines and limited resources. Approaches that phase objectives or match ambitions to political and institutional realities appear to achieve more consistent results.
Political instability and external shocks – such as armed conflict and displacement – frequently disrupted implementation and undermined outcomes. Lack of coordination between actors further compounded these challenges, especially in fragile contexts.	Programmes that anticipate shocks and adapt flexibly seem better able to sustain outcomes.

Key takeaway	Implication
Leave no-one behind	
There was limited evidence of how women's inclusion in peace and security initiatives contributed to violence reduction. Many evaluations focused on empowerment or representation rather than peace outcomes, and few presented clear theories of change linking participation to reductions in violence.	Gender-responsive programming could be strengthened by developing robust theories of change that explain the mechanisms by which women's participation can reduce violence. Future evaluations could assess both inclusion outcomes and impacts on safety and conflict outcomes to build stronger causal links.
Youth were often the focus of peacebuilding initiatives, but few impact evaluations assessed how their inclusion affected violence outcomes. Evidence from radio and civic engagement programmes suggested youth engagement was context-sensitive and depended on accompanying economic or social supports.	Future programming could more clearly articulate how youth engagement leads to peace outcomes and incorporate robust evaluation designs to assess impact, particularly on elections and reintegration.
Limited evidence should be interpreted with caution, but customary legal systems may have provided unequal protection, particularly for poorer or marginalized groups. In Liberia, formal police presence improved safety outcomes for low-income adult men, suggesting formal justice systems may have better served those underserved by customary law.	Customary legal systems may not protect all groups equally. In some cases, formal justice systems provide greater safety for marginalized groups. Considering how different systems affect different populations could shed light on where reforms might enhance equity.

Areas for future research, evaluation, and syntheses

This section outlines priorities for future research, evaluation and synthesis, drawing on the key takeaways and implications presented earlier, as well as two evidence gap maps (EGMs) developed in a companion brief (de Hoop et al., 2024b). The brief can be accessed [here](#). An EGM of included impact evaluations can be accessed [here](#), and another EGM of included process and performance evaluations can be accessed [here](#).

While the synthesis identifies promising initiatives that contribute to violence reduction, as well as others with limited or potentially negative effects, the impact evaluation evidence base remains fragmented. Only a few initiatives have been rigorously evaluated across multiple contexts, limiting generalizability. This fragmentation partly reflects differences in target populations, with distinct programming needs in acute crisis, post-conflict, protracted crisis and lower-income settings. However, the overall number of impact evaluations remains low for most intervention types, constraining robust conclusions about what works to reduce violence. In contrast, a substantial body of performance and process evaluations was identified, evidence often excluded from conventional syntheses. These evaluations provide valuable insights into how and why initiatives succeed or fail, highlighting factors such as implementation, relevance, and stakeholder engagement. Few of them address violence-related outcomes, however.

Taken together, the scarcity of impact evaluations, their limited comparability across contexts, and the absence of outcome data in performance and process evaluations highlight key opportunities for future work, outlined below.

9.1 Increase focus on outcomes through mixed-methods evaluations

Impact evaluations could have a more explicit focus on measuring conflict-related deaths. While many impact evaluations address homicides and violent crime, only a small number estimate the impact on conflict-related deaths and broader violence. In conflict settings, impact evaluations often concentrate on intermediate outcomes, such as attitudes toward violence or trust in political institutions.

Performance and process evaluations would likely generate more important and credible lessons if they focused on how specific implementation components are linked to violence outcomes. Currently, most performance and process evaluations focus on large initiatives with many components or entire portfolios of UN missions. While such evaluations are valuable in examining indicators such as spending against outputs, they generally do not serve to produce lessons about the implementation factors which contribute to reductions in conflict. Performance and process evaluations that focus more deeply on specific implementation features

of larger initiatives or portfolios are more likely to generate lessons on conflict reduction, especially when guided by theories of change to develop explicit hypotheses about such mechanisms. For example, a project in Malawi included a coherent design and results framework that demonstrated how establishing community mediation mechanisms and providing legal aid services helped improve access to justice and contribute to peaceful communities (Matinde & Chingaipe, 2022). This suggestion to clearly link activities to outcomes is consistent with findings from the synthesis of the partnership pillar of the SDGs, which indicated that stronger theories of change could contribute to improved outcomes and sustainability (de Hoop et al., 2024a).

Performance and process evaluations would particularly benefit from increased measurement of conflict outcomes through mixed methods. Few of the performance and process evaluations assessed outcomes directly related to violence or conflict-related deaths. Instead, they tended to focus on intermediate outcomes such as community social cohesion to prevent conflict, leadership development for local government and law enforcement, and the design and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Studies that combine such intermediate outcomes with impact measurement of outcomes on violence would help to increase the understanding of what works to prevent violence.

Mixed-methods evidence could provide more in-depth lessons on what works, why, and how in reducing violence. The growing body of evidence underscores the need for evaluation commissioners and evaluators to invest in mixed-methods evaluations to better understand how and why violence prevention programmes succeed or fail. Currently, most impact evaluations rely solely on quantitative methods, with minimal use of qualitative approaches, while performance and process evaluations tend to focus exclusively on qualitative methods. This lack of mixed-methods evaluations limits our ability to draw comprehensive conclusions about the effectiveness of violence prevention strategies and the mechanisms behind them.

9.2 Increase the geographic focus of evaluations

Impact evaluations could generate more externally valid lessons if donors and researchers coordinated to conduct impact evaluations of promising initiatives in a diverse set of contexts. The current fragmented impact evaluation evidence base raises questions about the external validity of current impact evaluation findings. As a result, it is unclear whether initiatives with positive results would generate the same effects in different contexts. Relatedly, it is important to examine how ground situations evolve after the evaluation period. Replicating promising initiatives and estimating their effects in different contexts and over time would likely enable donors to identify initiatives that can be scaled up in acute crisis, protracted crisis and post-conflict settings globally, thus producing significant improvements in the SDG objectives related to the peace pillar and especially goals 16.1 and 16.4.

Evaluations could focus more strongly on initiatives outside sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Only a small number of impact evaluations explore what works to reduce violence outside of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. While the focus on these regions is as expected, due to their high rates of conflict-related deaths and homicides, it remains important to gather evidence from other geographic contexts. The synthesis suggests a particularly large evidence gap in the Middle East.

9.3 Create linkages between environmental factors and conflict

Evaluations could focus more strongly on how environmental factors interact with programmes aiming to reduce violence. Environmental factors such as climate change will continue to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and competition over limited natural resources, and create new challenges for interventions. The water diplomacy community faces several key challenges, including building trust among competing stakeholders, organizing multisector and multilevel interactions, and managing a growing multi-actor policy environment. Stakeholders often have conflicting claims about water, and communication between actors can be insufficient and ill-informed (Disch, 2020; MFA, 2021), showing the importance of evaluations focusing on the interaction between environment and violence. Understanding these linkages, particularly in the context of the Planet Pillar SDGs (SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, SDG 13 on climate action, SDG 14 on life below water, and SDG 15 on life on land), will be crucial for developing effective, sustainable interventions.

9.4 Design better initiatives and evaluations to understand leaving no one behind

Evaluations could focus on generating clearer theories of change on how women's participation can contribute to reduced violence, especially in combination with other promising initiatives. The accompanying EGM showed that 70 of the 438 performance and process evaluations included a focus on women's participation as an intermediate peace outcome. While women's inclusion may promote peace outcomes, and should be a purposeful element in the approaches of other promising initiatives, there is a tenuous link between women's participation and peace outcomes. Clearer theories of change combined with more rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations would help to increase evidence on how women's participation initiatives impact peace and conflict reduction. Political economy analyses may also contribute to an increased understanding of this.

Impact evaluations could have a stronger focus on gender and youth inclusion. Although a considerable number of performance and process evaluations focus on the inclusion of gender and youth, few impact evaluations examine this issue, leaving a gap in causal evidence.

Evaluations could benefit from a stronger focus on vulnerable groups beyond women and youth. While many performance and process evaluations, as well as a notable subset of impact evaluations, emphasize gender and youth inclusion, few evaluations address other vulnerable populations, including indigenous populations, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTI-identifying individuals, and migrants. The synthesis found limited evaluations focused on indigenous populations, and almost none addressed persons with disabilities.

Evaluations could present more lessons on durable peace by using participatory approaches or by examining the "voices of the peace kept". This is in line with the idea that success of interventions to reduce violence ultimately depends on people, suggesting that they should be afforded a more active role in evaluations of initiatives.

9.5 Areas for future syntheses

Systematic reviews and evidence syntheses could generate more value by including evaluations from searches in non-academic databases. The 438 performance and process evaluations included in the EGM for this synthesis, primarily published by UN agencies and bilateral donors, highlight the importance of searching non-academic databases in systematic reviews and evidence syntheses. Most existing systematic reviews overlook such evaluations, resulting in an incomplete picture of the evidence. Syntheses could benefit from systematically searching evaluation databases from UN agencies and bilateral donors.

Syntheses of performance and process evaluations could benefit from narrower questions that address a much smaller number of evaluations, enabling deeper analysis on barriers and facilitators to specific approaches. A topically broader sample, without sufficient funding and time, compromises the ability to better understand challenges to specific approaches. More time up front to identify the highest quality performance and process evaluations on specific intervention approaches, perhaps focusing on promising initiatives identified in the current synthesis, would lead to a better understanding of the context, mechanisms and outcome configurations that lead to reduced conflict. It is less clear whether syntheses of impact evaluations would benefit from a similar narrower focus. This is because only very few impact evaluations examine the effectiveness of violence reduction initiatives, suggesting that narrow synthesis questions may result in syntheses with only very few impact evaluations, which would limit the relevance of these syntheses.

Future syntheses could focus on the impact of economic inclusion programmes on violence outcomes. While this synthesis did not include initiatives with primarily economic objectives, the results still suggest that economic conditions are an important facilitator of reductions in violence. For example, media interventions were more effective in reducing violence when rebels had other livelihoods opportunities. This finding suggests that programmes with economic objectives (e.g., vocational and business training, cash transfers) may influence violence outcomes as well. A future evidence synthesis on this topic could provide valuable lessons on what works to achieve the objectives of the peace pillar of the SDGs.

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Annex A:

Research questions

Exhibit A-1.

Synthesis questions

Synthesis questions	Impact evaluation narrative synthesis	Meta-analysis	Methodological triangulation	Thematic analysis of performance and process evaluations	Heterogeneous effects by geography	Heterogeneous effects by gender
What does the evidence say about the impacts of interventions on conflict-related deaths and homicides? (synthesis question 1)	●	●	●	●		●
How does effectiveness differ across different contexts and subregions? How does effectiveness differ between acute crisis, protracted crisis, and other international development settings? (synthesis question 1)	●	●	●	●	●	
What does the evidence say about unanticipated effects of these interventions? (synthesis question 1)	●		●	●		●
How well suited to the context were interventions, and what was the quality of analysis that underpinned activity? (synthesis question 2)			●	●		
What are the common bottlenecks in or barriers to outcomes and/or operational effectiveness? This includes bottlenecks or barriers related to social and environmental factors. (synthesis question 2)			●	●		
Under what conditions have interventions been most effective and sustainable? (synthesis question 1)	●	●	●	●	●	
To what extent and in what ways were the needs of those furthest left behind addressed? (synthesis question 3)	●		●	●	●	●
To what extent and in what ways were human rights principles incorporated? Which principles were or were not incorporated? (synthesis question 3)			●	●		●

Annex B:

Risk of bias assessment

Exhibit B-1.

Risk of bias tool for experimental and quasi-experimental studies

Ask these questions for all quantitative studies

Are the mean values or the distributions of the covariates at baseline statistically different for the control or comparison group ($p < 0.05$)?

Are these differences controlled for using covariate analysis in the impact evaluation?

Is difference-in-difference estimation used?

If the study is quasi-experimental and uses difference-in-difference estimation, is it showing that the parallel trends assumption is valid?

If the study does not use difference-in-difference, does the study control for baseline values of the outcome of interest (ANCOVA)?

Attrition

Is the attrition rate from the study below 10 percent?

Is the attrition rate statistically significantly different between the treatment and comparison group?

Spillovers and Contamination

Are comparisons sufficiently isolated from the intervention (e.g., control or comparison group are sufficiently geographically separated)?

Contamination: does the control group receive the intervention?

Contamination: if the control group receives the intervention but for a shorter amount of time, does the study assess the likelihood that the control group has received equal benefits as the treatment group?

Sample Size

Does the study account for lack of independence between observations within assignment clusters if the outcome variables are clustered?

Is the sample size likely to be sufficient to find significant effects of the intervention?

Ask questions below only for studies that apply randomization

Does the study apply randomized assignment?

Ask questions below only for studies that apply regression discontinuity designs

Is the allocation of the programme based on a pre-determined continuity on a continuous variable and blinded to the beneficiaries or, if not blinded, individuals cannot reasonably affect the assignment variable in response to knowledge of the participation rule?

Ask questions below only for studies that apply matching

Are the characteristics of the treatment and comparison group similar? (based on statistical significance tests) after matching?

Ask questions below only for studies that apply instrumental variable estimation

Does the study describe clearly the instrumental variable(s)/identifier used and why it is exogenous?

Are the instruments jointly significant at the level of $F \geq 10$? If an F test is not reported, does the author report and assess whether the R-squared of the instrumenting equation is large enough for appropriate identification ($R\text{-sq} > 0.5$)?

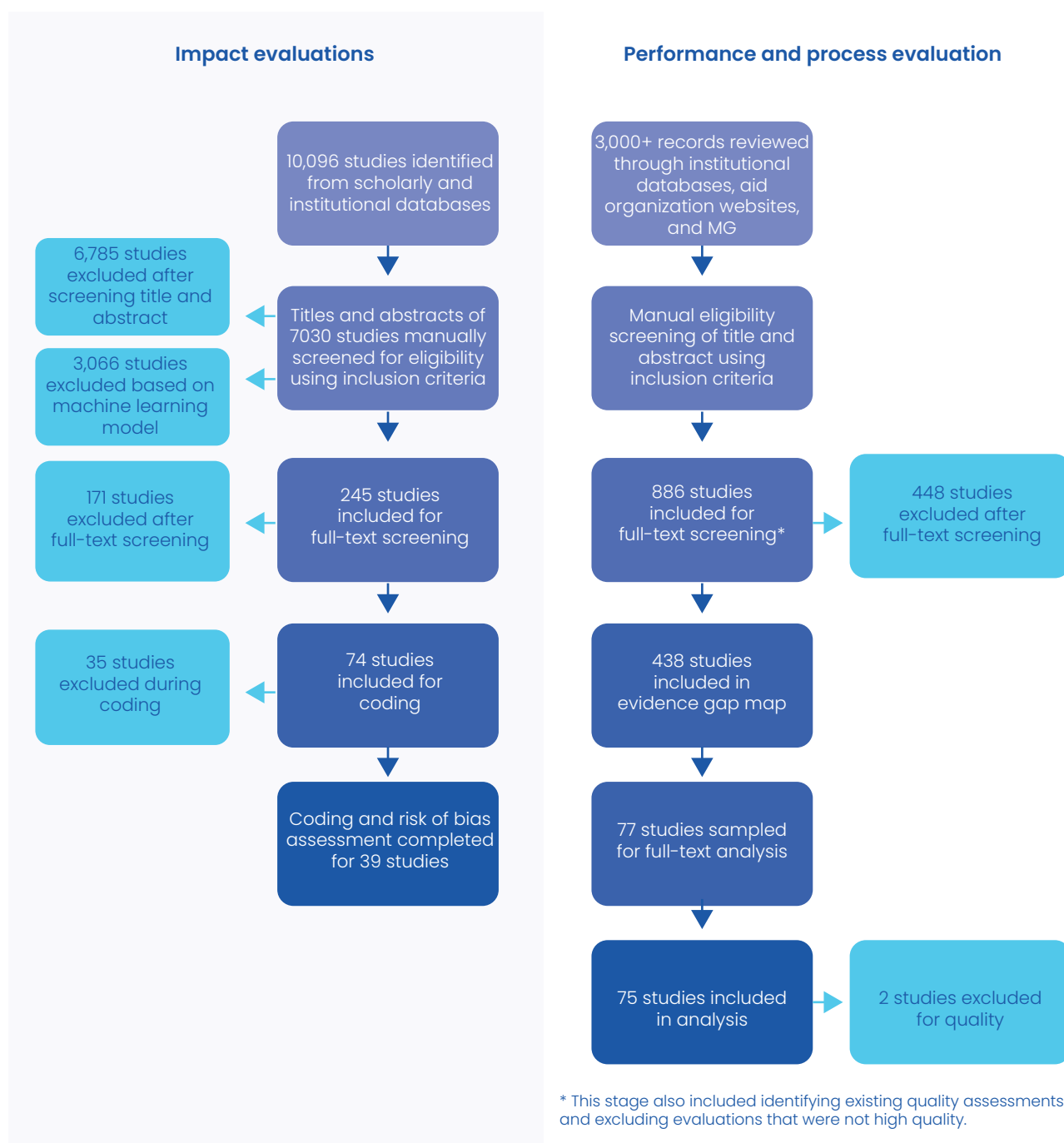
Exhibit B-2.

Quality appraisal criteria for performance and process evaluations

Question	Category
A	Clear description of evaluation purpose
B	Well-articulated theory of change or results logic
C	Questions and criteria appropriate for purpose of evaluation
D	Adequate specification of methods for data collection, analysis, and sampling
E	Findings address all evaluation objectives and scope
F	Findings derived from conscientious, explicit and judicious use of the best available, objective, reliable and valid data and by accurate analysis of evidence

Annex C:

Prisma diagrams



Annex D:

Use of artificial intelligence and machine learning

This report incorporates the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tool to enhance and support content analysis in the screening phase of the synthesis. The AI tools utilized in this report adhere to the UN Evaluation Group's Ethical Principles for Harnessing AI in UN evaluations, ensuring ethical and responsible use, inclusivity and non-discrimination, human oversight and accountability, transparency, validation of results, and responsible data governance (UNEG, 2025).

Using supervised machine learning methods through EPPI-Reviewer, AIR partnered with staff from EPPI to train a classification model based on the existing screening data to separate unscreened studies into two classes: studies to include and studies to exclude.⁸ In doing so, the EPPI-Reviewer classifier sorted unscreened studies by the probability of their inclusion in the review, according to existing screening data (i.e., the set of studies⁹ that already underwent title and abstract screening and were coded with include or exclude codes). According to their respective probability of inclusion, EPPI Reviewer banded studies into probability deciles, and based on those deciles, we prioritized screening studies with the highest probability of inclusion. Thereafter, we coded remaining studies without screening according to their likelihood of inclusion.

To build this classifier, EPPI-Reviewer uses several underlying machine learning algorithms to detect patterns in studies' references as well as in their titles and abstracts. This pattern detection transcends mere searches for particular words and phrases by examining trigrams, context, sentiment, and other features specific to natural language processing (Thomas et al., 2022).

8 Through EPPI Reviewers' "build model" functionality, we uploaded the training data to EPPI Reviewer's machine learning server, which is where the classification model was trained.

9 The underlying training data consisted of 2,800 studies that had undergone title and abstract screening and that reviewers coded with include or exclude codes.

Annex E:

Topical and institutional breakdown of included evaluations

Exhibit E-1.

Included performance, process, and impact evaluations by category

Activity Category	Initiatives	Number of included Performance/ Process evaluations for EGM	Number of included Impact evaluations
Social inclusion (strengthening social cohesion and conflict resolution as well as inter-group perceptions and relations)	Communications	11	6
	Economic inclusion	23	-
	Gender/youth inclusion for conflict prevention	119	1
	Reintegration of ex-combatants or other ex-offenders	15	1
	Social cohesion for conflict prevention	74	-
Safe environments (ending violence and building a safe and secure environment)	Border management	16	-
	Democracy and peaceful elections	12	2
	Early warning systems	7	-
	Governance strengthening to prevent conflict, violence, or crime	115	3
	Law enforcement capacity	34	14
	Youth crime prevention	8	-
	Other (e.g., natural resource management, firearms initiatives)	13	3

Activity Category	Initiatives	Number of included Performance/ Process evaluations for EGM	Number of included Impact evaluations
Peace processes and conflict prevention (supporting peace processes, oversight, and post-conflict justice)	Gender for peace	17	-
	Governance strengthening to respond to conflict	42	2
	Natural resource management	12	-
	Peace agreement implementation	21	-
	Security and stabilization strengthening	9	6
	Social cohesion for conflict resolution	25	1
	Transitional justice	11	-
	Youth for peace	10	-
Total		438	39

Exhibit E-2.

Analysed performance and process evaluations by category

Initiatives		Performance/ Process evaluations sampled for full-text analysis		Number of studies
Social inclusion	Communications	• Arora et al., 2020 • Haarr, 2022 • Ibarguen et al., 2020 • PBSO, 2022	• Peirce, 2020 • Triangle Consulting SAL, 2022 • Turay 2022 • Wood et al., 2022	8
	Reintegration of ex-combatants or other ex-offenders	• Balasundaram, 2020 • Byrld et al., 2020	• PBSO, 2022 • Westerhof et. al., 2021	4
Safe environments	Governance strengthening to prevent conflict, violence, or crime	• AIR, 2022 • Amiot & Afolabi, 2020 • Bela et al., 2022 • Bizimana, 2020 • Bukuluki, 2021 • Candelera, 2023 • Ching Ho et al., 2024 • Cullis et al., 2021 • Diaz & Lopez, 2020 • Disch, 2020 • Fergusson & Ahmed, 2022 • George, 2023 • Guerrero & Alymbaeva 2022	• Jessup et al., 2023 • KPMG, 2020 • Matinde and Chingaipe, 2022 • Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021 • OIOS, 2021 • Oldsman, 2020 • Olomola, 2022 • Patscher-Hellbeck, 2020 • Retzlaff et al., 2021 • Specht & El-Mahdi, 2021 • Teskey et al., 2020	24
	Law enforcement capacity	• Bela and Kanneh, 2019 • Casillas and Sosa, 2024 • Diehl, 2024 • PRE, 2020 • Khoury & Firas Mirrar, 2023 • Miranda et al., 2021 • Nuwakora, 2020	• Nuwakora, 2023 • OIOS, 2022 • Perez, 2023 • Puente et al., 2023 • Stigter & Aning, 2021 • Stigter & Aning, 2022 • Tennant & Cowley, 2019 • UNOCT, 2022 • Yodah, 2021	16

Initiatives		Performance/ Process evaluations sampled for full-text analysis		Number of studies
Peace processes and conflict prevention	Security and stabilization strengthening	• Diehl, 2019 • El Moulat, 2023 • Ferreira and Seymour, 2023 • Ferreira and Wilmin, 2022	• Nordic Consulting Group, 2022 • Polska, 2019 • UNITAR PPME, 2023	7
	Social cohesion for conflict resolution	• Arapakos et al., 2021 • Bjorn & Gianluca, 2022 • EnCompass, 2020 • Hassan, 2021 • Hassan, 2022 • Management Systems International, 2023 • Mansour & Armal, 2021 • Marimo & Hatendi, 2021	• Mbzibain et al., 2022 • Momoh, 2020 • Onana et al., 2019 • Robertson & Yunu, 2023 • Social Impact, Inc., 2023 • Spearing & Kamya, 2022 • Streets et al., 2023 • UNDP IEO, 2023	16
Total				75

Exhibit E-3.

Institutional origin of performance and process evaluations

Institution	Number of Performance/ Process evaluations included in EGM	Number of Performance/ Process evaluations included in full analysis
Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	3	1
Canadian International Assistance Programme	1	1
Denmark Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1	1
European Union	3	1
Finland Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1	1
FAO	13	
GIZ	1	
Global Affairs Canada	1	2
ILO	7	2
IOM	49	6
Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs	1	

Institution	Number of Performance/ Process evaluations included in EGM	Number of Performance/ Process evaluations included in full analysis
New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade	1	1
Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation	4	1
OHCHR	4	1
OIOS	14	3
SIDA	6	
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	3	
PBSO	133	8
The Netherlands Foreign Trade and Development Agency	1	
The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs Policy and Operations Evaluation Department	2	1
UK FCDO	1	
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	1	1
United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre	1	1
United Nations country offices	8	3
UNDP	88	14
UNESCO	4	1
UNESCWA	1	1
UN Women	24	3
United Nations Environment Programme	2	
UN Habitat	1	
UNICEF	14	3
UNITAR	7	5
UNOCT	2	1
UNODC	4	13
UNFPA	6	1
USAID	19	6
World Bank	2	
World Food Programme	3	1

Note: Some evaluations included the involvement of more than one organization. Therefore, some evaluations are counted more than once.

Annex F:

Summary of evidence

Exhibit F-1.

Evidence summary on social inclusion initiatives

Initiative	Evidence on Impacts	Context and Mechanism
Social cohesion	- Some evidence suggests that civic inclusion campaigns increase political trust and encourage moderate political views, though caution is required in interpreting this finding because this finding is based on only one evaluation. - While caution is required because of the small number of studies, some evidence indicates that reconstruction programmes can improve socioeconomic conditions, which can in turn contribute to reductions in violence. - Limited evidence suggests that reconstruction programmes do not have positive impacts on political trust.	Related to evidence on impacts - Civic inclusion campaigns and reconstruction programmes tend to promote social cohesion in post-conflict settings but only seemed effective in achieving their direct objectives, with limited indirect effects on behaviours that were not specifically targeted by the initiative. Unrelated to evidence on impacts - Effective leadership can drive project implementation, encouraging participation and meaningful interaction to facilitate peace.
Communications and media	- Evidence from four evaluations suggests that media initiatives have the ability to shift attitudes towards peace and collaboration, but they often do not shift beliefs about former combatants or outsiders. - Messaging to stimulate defections in rebel groups can significantly reduce conflict-related fatalities in acute crisis contexts, though caution is required because only one evaluation specifically covers this topic. - While media and communication messages can improve attitudes and reduce conflict-related deaths, the impact of such initiatives is sometimes temporary and can vary based on the context.	Evidence related to impacts - Communication messages tend to have larger effects when they come from trusted sources. - Economic incentives, alongside ideological motivations, play a crucial role in determining the outcomes of radio messaging about defection in acute crisis contexts.

Initiative	Evidence on Impacts	Context and Mechanism
Reintegration of ex-combatants	- While evidence is limited to one impact evaluation, radio broadcasts can lead to defection from rebel groups, which can ultimately result in reductions in violence and conflict-related deaths. - Civic inclusion programmes can help increase trust in political institutions and result in more moderate political views though evidence is based on only one impact evaluation. - Initiatives targeting the whole family – not just ex-combatants – were particularly effective for reintegration and peacebuilding.	Evidence related to impacts Programmes aiming to reintegrate ex-combatants can increase political trust and reduce violence in post-conflict and acute crisis settings.
Inclusion of gender and youth for conflict prevention	Performance and process evaluations show the relevance of including youth in programme design, but there is only limited evidence suggesting that the approach to including women in programme activities leads to a reduction in violence.	Evidence related to impacts Only a small number of impact evaluations focus on the inclusion of youth, women and gender minorities, limiting the ability of the synthesis to establish causality.

Exhibit F-2.

Evidence Summary on Peace Processes Initiatives

Initiative	Evidence on Impacts	How and why
Peace Missions	- Five evaluations from sub-Saharan Africa indicate that peace missions tend to result in reductions in violence during or after conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. - UN peacekeeping missions seem more effective in protecting civilians against rebel abuse than against violence from government forces, while non-UN missions seem more effective in protecting civilians against government violence.	Evidence related to impacts - Peace missions tend to have effects at the macro-level with less evidence demonstrating effectiveness of micro-level initiatives. - Peace missions and other security and stabilization efforts can further increase their effectiveness through cross-border collaboration, regional approaches to capacity strengthening, and meeting the psychological needs of law personnel.

Initiative	Evidence on Impacts	How and why
Governance strengthening to prevent conflict, violence or crime	- Peacebuilding interventions during conflict have the potential to reduce violence though evidence is limited. - While more evidence is needed, investments in infrastructure can strengthen the effects of intergroup dialogue on social cohesion.	Evidence related to impacts - Social cohesion, trust, and intergroup contact established through peacebuilding initiatives often contribute to building peace. Unrelated to evidence on impacts - Projects that focused on nationally or locally institutionalized governance mechanisms—such as policies, training resources, conflict management mechanisms, paralegal services, or early warning systems—demonstrated positive outcomes for improved governance and, therefore, potential for reducing violence, conflict, or crime. - Peace missions can contribute to collaboration between different groups.

Exhibit F-3.

Evidence summary on initiatives related to safe environments

Initiative	Evidence on Impacts	Why and How
Police presence and capacity	- Evidence from four evaluations indicates that access to police considerably reduces violent crime. - While evidence is limited, access to police can reduce vigilantism.	Evidence related to impacts - While access to police can result in the displacement of crime in <i>Favelas</i>, the net benefits of increased access to police remain positive. Evidence unrelated to impacts - Initiatives aiming to improve basic skills using short term, practical trainings were perceived to have enhanced local and national law enforcement capacity, along with rights-based approaches to law enforcement.

Initiative	Evidence on Impacts	Why and How
Military policing	- While evidence is limited military policing likely does not lead to reductions in violent crime. - Military policing sometimes results in human rights abuses though more evidence is required to examine this hypothesis.	Evidence related to impacts Military policing can result in human rights abuses by the police if the military can only interrogate and detain but not arrest suspects. .
Community policing	Evidence from two evaluations suggests that community policing sometimes results in crime reductions though evidence is mixed.	Evidence related to impacts - Community policing may have larger effects on violence in acute crisis contexts than in post-conflict settings. Evidence unrelated to impacts - Community engagement was perceived as a highly effective strategy to improve law enforcement capacity.
Firearms initiatives	- While evidence is limited, gun-carrying restrictions can result in significant decreases in violent crime in Latin America. - Increased access to guns for the police may result in reductions in crime though more evidence is needed to assess this claim.	Evidence related to impacts Increased access to guns for the police can increase incapacitation efforts, which could explain reductions in violent crime.

Annex G:

Search terms

Final SPIDER search strings to identify impact studies:

- **Sample:** Humanitarian OR emergency OR conflict OR crisis OR disaster OR conflict-ridden OR conflict-affected OR crisis-affected OR "fragile state" OR "fragile country" OR "low income countr*" OR "low-income countr*" OR "low-income econom*" OR "low income econom*" OR "lower-middle-income countr*" OR "lower middle income countr*" OR "lower-middle-income econom*" OR "lower middle income econom*" OR "middle income countr*" OR "middle-income countr*" OR "middle-income econom*" OR "middle income enconm*" OR "developing countr*" OR "less developed countr*" OR "less-developed countr*" OR "underdeveloped countr*" OR "under developed countr*" OR "under-developed countr*" OR "underserved countr*" OR "under served countr*" OR "under-served countr*" OR "LMIC*" OR "low GDP" OR "low-GDP" OR "low GNP" OR "low-GNP" OR "fragile state" OR "third world" OR "transitional countr*" OR "high burden countr*" OR "high-burden countr*" OR Asia* OR "South Asia*" OR "Africa*" OR "Latin America*" OR "South America*" OR "Central America*" OR "Middle East*" OR "sub-Saharan Africa*" OR "sub Saharan Africa*" OR Caribbean OR "West Indies" OR Afghanistan* OR Afghan* OR Albania* OR Algeria* OR "American Samoa*" OR Angola* OR Argentin* OR Armenia* OR Azerbaijan* OR Azeri OR Bangladesh* OR Belarus* OR Belize* OR Benin* OR Bhutan* OR Bolivia* OR Bosnia* OR "Bosnia and Herzegovina" OR Botswana OR Botswana OR Brazil* OR Bulgaria* OR "Burkina Faso" OR Burkinabè OR Burkinabe OR Burundi* OR "Cabo Verde*" OR "Cape Verde*" OR Cameroon* OR Cambodia* OR "Central African Republic" OR "Central African" OR Chad* OR China OR Chinese OR Colombia* OR Comoros OR Comorian OR "Cote d'Ivoire" OR "Ivory Coast" OR Ivorian OR Congo* OR "Costa Rica*" OR Cuba* OR "Democratic Republic of Congo" OR "Republic of Congo" OR "Democratic People's Republic of Korea" OR "North Korea*" OR Korea* OR Djibouti* OR Dominica* OR "Dominican Republic" OR Ecuador* OR Egypt* OR "Arab Republic of Egypt" OR "El Salvador" OR Salvador* OR Eritrea* OR Eswatini OR Swazi OR Ethiopia* OR "Equatorial Guinea*" OR Equatoguinean OR Fiji* OR Gabon* OR Gambia* OR Gaza* OR Palestin* OR Georgia* OR Ghana* OR Grenada OR Grenad* OR Guatemala* OR Guam* OR Guinea* OR "Guinea-Bissau" OR Guyana* OR Haiti* OR Hondura* OR India* OR Indonesia* OR Iran* OR "Islamic Republic of Iran" OR Iraq* OR Jamaica* OR Jordan* OR Kazakhstan* OR Kazakh* OR Kenya* OR Kiribati OR "I-Kiribati" OR Kosovo OR Kosova* OR Kyrgyz* OR Lao* OR Lao PDR OR Lao People's Democratic Republic OR Lebanon OR Leban* OR Lesotho OR Mosotho OR Basotho OR Liberia* OR Libya* OR Madagascar OR Malagasy OR Malawi* OR Malaysia* OR Maldives OR Maldivian OR Mali* OR "Marshall Islands" OR Marshallese OR Mauritius OR Mauritian OR Mauritania* OR Mexic* OR Micronesia* OR "Federated States of Micronesia" OR Moldova* OR Mongolia* OR Montenegro* OR Morocc* OR Mozambique OR Mozambican OR Burma OR Burmese OR Myanmar OR Myanma* OR Namibia* OR Nepal* OR Nicaragua* OR Niger* OR Nigeria* OR "North Macedonia" OR Macedonian OR Palau* OR Pakistan* OR Paraguay* OR Peru OR Philippines OR Philipines OR Phillipines OR Phillippines OR Filipino OR "Papua New Guinea*" OR "Republic of Congo" OR "Republic of Korea" OR "South Korea*" OR Rwanda OR Rwand* OR "Russian Federation" OR Russia* OR Samoa* OR "Sao Tome and Principe" OR "São Tomé*" OR "Sao Tome*" OR Santomean OR "SãoToméan" OR Senegal* OR Serbia* OR "Sierra Leone*" OR "Sri Lanka*" OR "Solomon Island*" OR Somalia* OR "South Africa*" OR "South Sudan*" OR Sudan* OR "St. Lucia" OR "Saint Lucia*" OR "St. Vincent" OR "Saint Vincent and the Grenadines" OR "St. Vincent and the Grenadines" OR "Vincentian and Grenadinian" OR Vincy OR Swaziland OR Emaswati OR Liswati OR Suriname* OR Syria* OR "Syrian Arab Republic" OR Tajikistan* OR Tajik OR Tanzania* OR Thailand OR Thai OR "Timor-Leste" OR "Timor Leste" OR "East Timor*" OR Timorese OR Maubere OR Tokelau* OR Togo* OR Tonga* OR Tunisia* OR Turkey OR Turkish OR Turkiye OR Turk OR Turkmenistan* OR Turkmen* OR Tuvalu* OR Uganda* OR Ukraine OR Ukrainian OR Uzbekistan OR Uzbek OR Vanuatu* OR "Ni-vanuatu" OR Vietnam* OR "Viet Nam" OR "West Bank" OR Gaza* OR Yemen* OR "Republic of Yemen*" OR Zambia* OR Zimbabwe* OR Zimbo

- **Phenomenon of Interest:** "peace educat*" OR "peace messag*" OR "peace medi*" OR "dispute resol*" OR "mental health" OR "psychosocial" OR "psycho-social" OR "behavioral therapy" OR "behavioural therapy" OR "cognitive behavioral" OR "cognitive behavioural" OR "mental health service" OR "mental health treatment" OR "mental healthcare" OR "social inclusion" OR "reintegrat*" OR "re-integrat*" OR "intergroup dialo*" OR "inter-group dialo*" OR "peace process*" OR "peace negotiat*" OR "peace agree*" OR "peace implement*" OR "transitional justice process*" OR "peace polic*" OR "peacekeeping" OR "peace-keeping" OR "disarmament*" OR "demobili*" OR "gang dropout" OR "gang drop-out" OR "violen* extrem*" OR "demin*" OR "policing" OR "police" OR "prevent* protect*"
- **Design:** evaluation OR "impact evaluation" OR "impact analysis" OR "random* control* trial" OR RCT OR experiment* OR "quasi-experiment*" OR "regression discontinuity" OR "difference-in-difference*" OR "difference in difference*" OR "propensity score" OR "evidence synthesis" OR "quasi random" OR "quasi-random" OR "instrumental variable*" OR "random* eval*" OR "random* assign*" OR "interrupted time series" OR "ITS"
- **Evaluation:** conflict OR war OR battle OR violen* OR "armed clash" OR insurgen* OR killing* OR paramilitarism OR guerrilla OR kidnapping OR "war crime" OR abuse OR torture OR exploitation OR trafficking OR refugee* OR displace* OR IDP OR exile* OR "asylum seeker*" OR "forced migration" OR homicid* OR "use of force" OR brutality OR crackdown OR persecution OR vigilantism OR "atrocit*" OR genocide OR "ethnic cleansing" OR shelling OR "bomb*" OR explosion OR IED OR casualties OR "child soldier" OR combatant OR "rebel*" OR uprising OR riot OR "enforced disappearance" OR "arbitrary detention" OR "arbitrarily detain*" OR "physical punishment" OR "psychological aggression against children" OR "unsentenced detention" OR "unsentenced detain*" OR "illicit financial flow*" OR "illicit arms flow*" OR "arms proliferation" OR "organized crime" OR peace OR "Paris principl*" OR "conflict resolution" OR "dispute resolution" OR amnesty OR disarmament OR DDR OR ceasefire OR security OR "rights violation" OR "social cohesion" OR "lawlessness" OR "rebellion" OR "property right*" OR "toleran*" OR "criminal organisation" OR "criminal organization" OR "criminal association" OR "organized crime" OR "organised crime" OR mafia OR "crim* network*" OR dto* OR "drug trafficking organ*" OR "drug cartel*" OR "crim* group*" OR "crim* cartel" OR "undeclared capital" OR "undeclared income" OR "undeclared profit*" OR "evade tarif*" OR "criminal proceeds" OR "corrupt payment*" OR "drug law enforcement" OR "drug crime*" OR "drug gang*" OR "smuggl*" OR "traffick*" OR "black market*" OR "peace" OR "rule of law" OR "stabil*" OR "solidar*"

3ie Database

We conducted 3ie searches on 26 April 2024 for all hits that returned from publication date of 1 January 2019, through 1 April 2024. The following list of search terms should be searched for Title, and Abstract fields only (using the search string below specific for the 3ie database).

Phenomenon of Interest/Design terms in all searches:

(title:(("peace educat*" OR "peace messag*" OR "peace medi*" OR "dispute resol*" OR "mental health" OR "psychosocial" OR "psycho-social" OR "behavioral therapy" OR "behavioural therapy" OR "cognitive behavioral" OR "cognitive behavioural" OR "mental health service" OR "mental health treatment" OR "mental healthcare" OR "social inclusion" OR "reintegrat*" OR "re-integrat*" OR "intergroup dialo*" OR "inter-group dialo*" OR "peace process*" OR "peace negotiat*" OR "peace agree*" OR "peace implement*" OR "transitional justice process*" OR "peace polic*" OR "peacekeeping" OR "peace-keeping" OR "disarmament*" OR "demobili*" OR "gang dropout" OR "gang drop-out" OR "violen* extrem*" OR "demin*" OR "policing" OR "police" OR "prevent* protect*") AND (conflict OR war OR battle OR violen* OR "armed clash" OR insurgen* OR killing* OR paramilitarism OR guerrilla OR kidnapping OR "war crime" OR abuse OR torture OR exploitation OR trafficking OR refugee* OR displace* OR IDP OR exile* OR "asylum seeker*" OR "forced migration" OR homicid* OR "use of force" OR brutality OR crackdown OR persecution OR vigilantism OR "atrocit*" OR genocide OR "ethnic cleansing" OR shelling OR "bomb*" OR explosion OR IED OR casualties OR "child soldier" OR combatant OR "rebel*" OR uprising OR riot OR "enforced disappearance" OR "arbitrary detention" OR "arbitrarily detain*" OR "physical punishment" OR "psychological aggression against children" OR "unsentenced detention" OR "unsentenced detain*" OR "illicit financial flow*" OR "illicit arms flow*" OR "arms proliferation" OR "organized crime" OR corruption OR bribery OR

"pay bribe*" OR "paid bribe*" OR "solicit bribe*" OR "solicited bribe*" OR peace OR "Paris principl*" OR "conflict resolution" OR "dispute resolution" OR amnesty OR disarmament OR DDR OR ceasefire OR security OR "rights violation" OR "social cohesion" OR "lawlessness" OR "rebellion" OR "property right*" OR "toleran*" OR "criminal organisation" OR "criminal organization" OR "criminal association" OR "organized crime" OR "organised crime" OR mafia OR "crim* network*" OR dto* OR "drug trafficking organ*" OR "drug cartel*" OR "crim* group*" OR "crim* cartel" OR "undeclared capital" OR "undeclared income" OR "undeclared profit*" OR "evade tarif*" OR "criminal proceeds" OR "corrupt payment*" OR "drug law enforcement" OR "drug crime*" OR "drug gang*" OR "smuggl*" OR "traffick*" OR "black market*" OR "peace" OR "rule of law" OR "stabili*" OR "solidar*")) OR abstract:(("peace educat*" OR "peace messag*" OR "peace medi*" OR "dispute resol*" OR "mental health" OR "psychosocial" OR "psycho-social" OR "behavioral therapy" OR "behavioural therapy" OR "cognitive behavioral" OR "cognitive behavioural" OR "mental health service" OR "mental health treatment" OR "mental healthcare" OR "social inclusion" OR "reintegrat*" OR "re-integrat*" OR "intergroup dialo*" OR "inter-group dialo*" OR "peace process*" OR "peace negotiat*" OR "peace agree*" OR "peace implement*" OR "transitional justice process*" OR "peace polic*" OR "peacekeeping" OR "peace-keeping" OR "disarmament*" OR "demobili*" OR "gang dropout" OR "gang drop-out" OR "violen* extrem*" OR "demin*" OR "policing" OR "police" OR "prevent* protect*") AND (conflict OR war OR battle OR violen* OR "armed clash" OR insurgen* OR killing* OR paramilitarism OR guerrilla OR kidnapping OR "war crime" OR abuse OR torture OR exploitation OR trafficking OR refugee* OR displace* OR IDP OR exile* OR "asylum seeker*" OR "forced migration" OR homicid* OR "use of force" OR brutality OR crackdown OR persecution OR vigilantism OR "atrocit*" OR genocide OR "ethnic cleansing" OR shelling OR "bomb*" OR explosion OR IED OR casualties OR "child soldier" OR combatant OR "rebel*" OR uprising OR riot "enforced disappearance" OR "arbitrary detention" OR "arbitrarily detain*" OR "physical punishment" "psychological aggression against children" OR "unsentenced detention" OR "unsentenced detain*" OR "illicit financial flow*" OR "illicit arms flow*" OR "arms proliferation" OR "organized crime" OR corruption OR bribery OR "pay bribe*" OR "paid bribe*" OR "solicit bribe*" OR "solicited bribe*" OR peace OR "Paris principl*" OR "conflict resolution" OR "dispute resolution" OR amnesty OR disarmament OR DDR OR ceasefire OR security OR "rights violation" OR "social cohesion" OR "lawlessness" OR "rebellion" OR "property right*" OR "toleran*" OR "criminal organisation" OR "criminal organization" OR "criminal association" OR "organized crime" OR "organised crime" OR mafia OR "crim* network*" OR dto* OR "drug trafficking organ*" OR "drug cartel*" OR "crim* group*" OR "crim* cartel" OR "undeclared capital" OR "undeclared income" OR "undeclared profit*" OR "evade tarif*" OR "criminal proceeds" OR "corrupt payment*" OR "drug law enforcement" OR "drug crime*" OR "drug gang*" OR "smuggl*" OR "traffick*" OR "black market*" OR "peace" OR "rule of law" OR "stabili*" OR "solidar*"))

Annex H:

Acronyms

3ie	International Initiative for Impact Evaluation
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIR	American Institutes for Research
CSO	Civil society organization
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EGM	Evidence Gap Map
EPPI	Evidence for Policy and Practice Information
EU	European Union
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in Democratic Republic of Congo
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OIOS	United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services
PBF	Peacebuilding Fund
PBSO	United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNOCT	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

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The Global SDG Synthesis Coalition brings together evaluation offices from the United Nations, multilateral development banks, and international financial institutions to generate and share evidence on what works, how, and why to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Co-chaired by UNDP's Independent Evaluation Office and UNICEF's Evaluation Office, the Coalition promotes joint learning and actionable syntheses that inform policy and practice toward achieving the 2030 Agenda.



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