



Wales Centre for Public Policy
Canolfan Polisi Cyhoeddus Cymru

Social cohesion evidence review

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Summary

- Following a Senedd committee inquiry in response to concerns about rising community divisions, in 2025 the Welsh Government established an Expert Group on Social Cohesion (EGSC) to identify actions to strengthen cohesion in Wales for the incoming Welsh Government.
- To inform the EGSC, the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) was commissioned to synthesise evidence on social cohesion interventions, to determine what interventions are effective in strengthening cohesion and, where possible, identify potential policy actions for Wales.
- A wide range of interventions show positive effects on social cohesion. However, variation in how outcomes are measured and the diversity of intervention types make it difficult to compare studies and draw robust conclusions on overall effectiveness.
- Findings that the effectiveness of interventions varies across settings, alongside evidence highlighting the potential for interventions to have unintended consequences, indicate that *how* an intervention is designed and delivered may matter as much as *what* the intervention involves. Features commonly associated with effective delivery include incorporating elements of coproduction and codesign and tailoring approaches to local context.
- It is challenging to determine what potential policy actions for Wales can be drawn from the evidence on social cohesion interventions. This reflects both the challenge of identifying what works as well as the existence of several key evidence gaps such as limited insight into responses to acute tensions and a lack of evaluation of structural and national level actions to strengthen cohesion.
- Despite these challenges, we highlight a range of areas for the EGSC to consider. These include a focus on schools-based interventions, supporting coproduction of cohesion initiatives, strengthening links between volunteering and cohesion, enhancing investment in community spaces and investing in coordinated action at a local level.

Introduction

In December 2024, the Senedd's Equality and Social Justice Committee (ESJ Committee) launched an inquiry into social cohesion in response to concerns about rising tensions in communities in Wales and across the UK. The inquiry aimed to strengthen the evidence base to inform the Welsh Government's action to address community divisions, gathering evidence from community groups, public and third sector organisations, and Welsh Government Ministers and officials. It explored the main issues affecting social cohesion in Wales, collecting examples of good practice and effective interventions, and areas where the Welsh Government support for community groups and organisations could be strengthened (Welsh Parliament, 2024). The inquiry also examined the impact on community cohesion in Wales of the attacks targeting asylum seekers and refugees across the UK during summer 2024.

Following the evidence-gathering process, the Committee published its report, *Co-operation over Conflict: Wales must act*, which set out its conclusions on the key challenges undermining social cohesion in Wales and the urgent actions required to address them. Recommendations for the Welsh Government included protecting community spaces, taking a stronger leadership role in tackling misinformation and disinformation, and responding to the rise of far-right extremism by improving understanding of its presence and impact across Wales (ESJ Committee, 2025). The Committee also recommended that the 2021-2026 Welsh Government establish an expert group on social cohesion to develop short-, medium- and long-term actions ahead of the Senedd elections in May 2026. In response, the Welsh Government established an independently chaired Expert Group on Social Cohesion (EGSC), which met between November 2025 and March 2026 to develop a set of short-, medium- and long-term actions for the incoming Welsh Government.

Research questions

In 2025, the Wales Centre for Public Policy (WCPP) was asked by the 2021-2026 Welsh Government to provide focused evidence support to assist the EGSC in identifying short-, medium- and long-term actions, responding to the following research questions:

- 1 What policy and practice interventions are effective in promoting and strengthening social cohesion?

2 What potential policy actions for Wales are indicated in the evidence on social cohesion interventions?

To address these questions, we reviewed the academic literature submitted to the ESJ Committee's social cohesion inquiry, alongside evidence provided through a call for submissions from members of the EGSC. This was supplemented by a review of existing evidence syntheses on interventions to promote social cohesion. The report brings together this evidence to highlight potential policy actions for Wales. A glossary is provided in [Annex A](#), details of the research methods in [Annex B](#) and the full list of included studies and the search string in [Annex C](#) and [D](#).

Defining social cohesion

Broadly, social cohesion refers to the strength of bonds or social distance between members of society, sometimes described as the 'glue' holding society together (UNECE, 2023). A variety of definitions of social cohesion have been proposed by organisations, governments and academic researchers. One widely used academic definition highlights social cohesion as describing 'a state of affairs concerning [...] interactions among members of society as characterised by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help' (Chan et al., 2006 in Orazani et al., 2023). In Wales, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 establishes a 'Wales of Cohesive Communities' as one of the seven Wellbeing Goals, defining Cohesive Communities as 'attractive, safe, viable and well-connected' (Welsh Government, 2015). More recently, the Senedd's ESJ Committee inquiry into social cohesion adopts the definition set out by the UK-wide Khan review: 'Social cohesion is concerned with how we live well together in a diverse democracy and how we peacefully navigate disagreements for the common good, despite the differences among us' (ESJ Committee, 2025). In January 2026, the Welsh Government also published their working definition of cohesion, which states 'Cohesion is the extent to which people in a community treat each other with respect, get along and participate to ensure everyone can access their human rights and fulfil their potential.' (Welsh Government, 2026)

As these definitions show, social cohesion is a very broad, multi-dimensional concept, making it challenging to directly measure or evaluate. This aspect of defining social cohesion is also something that the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has acknowledged:

'It's not something that can be directly observed or measured, and encapsulates a whole host of different dimensions, which can be overly broad and all-encompassing if not adequately defined through a set of relevant dimensions and levels of analysis.' (UNECE, 2023)

Given its complex and varied definition, within this review we have used the Welsh Government's working definition of cohesion but have also considered the key dimensions that contribute to social cohesion as they provide measurable elements of an otherwise latent concept (Coleman, 2024).

Policy context

In the past three years alone, Wales has experienced at least four major incidents that have affected social cohesion, ranging from anti-immigrant protests and riots to social media attacks targeting organisations that support asylum seekers and refugees (Welsh Refugee Council, 2024). While the Welsh Government holds responsibility for community cohesion, several key policy levers that influence it - including immigration, policing, criminal justice, and media and internet regulation - remain reserved to the UK Government.

In 2009, the Welsh Government published its community cohesion strategy, followed by action plans covering 2014-2016 and 2016-2017. It also established the Community Cohesion Programme in 2012, which has since been extended until 2025-26. A wide range of initiatives aimed at strengthening community cohesion have been delivered at the local level, and UK Government funding streams such as 'Plan for Neighbourhoods' and 'Pride in Place' provide Welsh local authorities with additional opportunities to expand this work. However, the Equality and Social Justice Committee's inquiry concluded that it remains unclear how these efforts align with the 2021-2026 Welsh Government's overall strategy, asserting that this does not fully reflect recent challenges or the impact of more recent community cohesion initiatives (ESJ Committee, 2025).

Challenges to social cohesion are not unique to Wales. In July 2024, the killing of three young girls in Southport triggered the most severe period of civil unrest seen across the UK in decades, fuelled by misinformation and rising anti-immigrant sentiment. Subsequent events in 2025 - including protests targeting accommodation for asylum seekers, the far-right 'Unite the Kingdom' rally in London, and a deadly attack on a synagogue in Manchester - have further undermined community safety and cohesion (ESJ Committee, 2025). In March 2024, the independent Khan Review, commissioned by the UK Government, highlighted key threats to social cohesion and democratic health, including growing distrust in democratic institutions, economic and social pressures, and the exploitation of these grievances by extremist actors. The report also warned of the rise of "freedom-restricting harassment", which it argued erodes both social cohesion and democratic freedoms. In response to these challenges, the review called on the UK Government to adopt a fundamentally different approach to promoting and sustaining social cohesion (Khan, 2024).

Reflecting growing concern about these issues, the UK Government established the Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion in July 2025 to examine how community connectedness, cohesion, and resilience can be strengthened (The Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion, n.d.). Recently, the UK Government announced a new cohesion action plan, ‘Protecting What Matters’, setting out measures to build confident, cohesive, and resilient communities (UK Government, 2026).

Evidence on policy and practice interventions to strengthen social cohesion

What do existing reviews say about what works?

Findings from systematic and rapid reviews provide a substantial overview of the evidence base on social cohesion interventions. Collectively, they highlight the wide range of interventions aimed at strengthening different dimensions of social cohesion. However, variation in how outcomes are conceptualised and measured, together with the diversity of intervention types, makes it difficult to compare findings across studies. Multiple reviews indicate that the effectiveness of interventions varies across contexts, with some approaches producing positive outcomes in certain settings but not in others. As a result, it is difficult to draw robust conclusions about which approaches are most effective overall.

The evidence also highlights the influence of broader societal context in shaping cohesion outcomes. Interventions that have proven effective in strengthening cohesion in particular settings may not be enough to offset the wider negative effects of structural or societal factors in other contexts. Nevertheless, review studies identify several features commonly associated with successful interventions, regardless of intervention type:

1. Designing an intervention around a well-established theory (e.g. contact theory);
2. Incorporating elements of coproduction and codesign, including engaging members of the target community implementation;
3. Using a mix of approaches to reach different groups in the community;
4. Fostering deep and well-established relationships with community leaders and civil society organisations; and

5. Developing an understanding of local context, including existing social infrastructure, socio-economic conditions, local power structures and community norms.

Review findings also highlight the potential for interventions to have unintended negative consequences for social cohesion outcomes. This suggests that *how* an intervention is designed and delivered may be as important as *what* the intervention involves. Reviews emphasise the need for greater use of implementation and process evaluation (IPE) to improve understanding of the mechanisms linking interventions to outcomes, as well as the wider contextual factors shaping these processes.

Several additional factors identified across the reviews further complicate efforts to draw robust conclusions about what works. Firstly, there is limited use of longitudinal and experimental study designs, which makes it difficult to assess long-term effectiveness or establish causal relationships. The limited reporting of effect sizes further constrains efforts to compare interventions and assess their practical significance in real-world contexts. Secondly, there is little standardisation in how social cohesion is measured, with different studies using different definitions and measurement tools. Finally, many studies rely primarily on self-reported measures, which tend to capture individuals' perceptions of change rather than observable behavioural outcomes.

The reviews also highlight several gaps in the current evidence base. In particular, there appears to be limited evidence on population-level and structural interventions, with most studies focusing on interventions at the individual or group level. In addition, none of the studies identified in this review examined interventions designed to respond to acute community tensions or conflicts.

Given the substantial variation in study designs, outcomes, and social cohesion sub-dimensions examined across the evidence base, the following sections focuses on findings on the following types of intervention:

- Contact interventions;
- Education, knowledge and training interventions;
- Volunteering interventions;
- Place and space interventions;
- Cohesion strategies and programmes;
- Health and wellbeing interventions; and
- Online interventions

Contact interventions

A substantial body of evidence examines contact-based interventions as a means of strengthening social cohesion, particularly through promoting acceptance of diversity and reducing prejudice. These approaches draw on intergroup contact theory, which proposes that interaction between people from different social groups under certain specific conditions can reduce prejudice (Hatch et al., 2025). Ten of the sixteen evidence synthesis studies reviewed examined contact-based approaches in some form, including direct, indirect and imagined contact interventions.

Findings from systematic and meta-analytical reviews consistently point to the value of creating opportunities for positive intergroup contact. For example, Orazani et al.'s (2023) systematic review identified interventions that facilitate positive intergroup interaction as among the most effective strategies for strengthening social cohesion. Similarly, several meta-analyses (Banas et al., 2020; Bartos et al., 2014; Hatch et al., 2025; Hsieh, Faulkner and Wickes, 2021) provide converging evidence that contact-based approaches - including when combined with educational components - can reduce out-group prejudice.

Across these studies, contact interventions were associated with improvements in attitudes towards a range of groups. For example, Hatch et al. (2025) found that contact interventions were the most consistently effective approach for reducing prejudice towards transgender people, regardless of study design. Bartos et al. (2014), focusing on sexual prejudice reduction, similarly identified contact-based approaches and education combined with contact as producing moderate positive effects on attitudes towards LGB people. Banas et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis also found reductions in prejudicial beliefs following contact interventions, with positive effects observed across both direct and indirect contact formats.

Further support for the effectiveness of contact interventions is provided by Hsieh, Faulkner and Wickes (2021). In their meta-analysis, contact-based approaches represented almost half (49%) of all interventions examined, most commonly targeting prejudice across racial, ethnic or religious groups. Many of the studies were conducted with school or university student populations. Overall, the review found that contact interventions produced stronger effects than awareness-raising approaches, which were the second most common intervention type.

Indirect contact interventions

Evidence on indirect contact interventions was identified primarily through a single rapid evidence review (Hesketh et al. 2023), which included three studies exploring the effects of indirect contact interventions (vicarious contact via videos, online contact or virtual reality (VR)), with mixed findings. Hesketh et al. (2023)

referred to a systematic review of VR-based interventions aimed at reducing prejudice, which reported inconsistent outcomes, with some studies showing reductions in prejudice while others found increases. Another identified study in their review evaluated a school-based video intervention with Italian high school students from both majority and immigrant backgrounds. The findings indicated that the intervention improved out-group attitudes, but only when the videos portrayed intercultural friendships and when out-group members were presented as belonging to a shared group identity (for example, as students at the same school).

In their experimental study, Cameron et al. (2011) explored the effectiveness of an extended contact intervention, finding that extended contact was most effective for children that have less cross-ethnic friends. Those who already had cross-group friendships, did not benefit from the extended contact intervention. Additionally, findings suggest that this intervention was more effective amongst younger children.

Imagined contact interventions

Imagined contact interventions encourage individuals to imagine positive interactions with members of an out-group and have been explored as a potential strategy for improving intergroup attitudes. Vrodojak et al.'s (2024) systematic review examined the effects of imagined contact interventions delivered to children and young people and found mixed evidence regarding their effectiveness. Some studies reported improvements in behavioural intentions and intergroup attitudes, but there was little evidence that these interventions influence intergroup emotions.

Several factors appeared to shape the effectiveness of imagined contact interventions. Interventions targeting younger children tended to produce stronger effects than those delivered to adolescents, pointing to the importance of intervening early in the life course when attitudes are still developing. Delivery format also appeared to matter; interventions implemented individually or in small groups, and those led by researchers rather than teachers, were more likely to produce significant effects.

Further evidence is provided by Paluck et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis of extended and imagined contact interventions, which are typically used in contexts where in-person contact is difficult or unlikely. Most of the studies examined focused on imagined contact with out-groups defined by race or ethnicity and were conducted in university settings. The analysis reported a moderate overall effect size ($d = 0.36$), with stronger effects observed among younger participants, including preschool-aged children ($d = 0.62$). However, the authors highlight several limitations. In particular, imagined contact interventions often rely on explicit instructions that may prompt socially desirable responses, and some previous findings reporting large effects have proven difficult to replicate.

Overall, the evidence suggests that contact-based interventions - including indirect and imagined contact approaches - can contribute to improved acceptance of diversity through reductions in prejudicial attitudes. However, the literature also highlights several important caveats. Many studies face methodological limitations and are conducted in controlled settings, raising questions about how well these findings translate to real-world contexts.

Education, knowledge and training interventions

Evidence from both systematic and meta-analytic reviews highlights the role of educational and awareness-raising interventions in improving social cohesion, particularly through reducing prejudice. Orazani et al.'s (2023) systematic review identified awareness-raising programmes as one of the most frequently used strategies to promote social cohesion.

Meta-analytic evidence further illustrates how educational interventions operate across different target groups. Hatch et al. (2023) found that interventions providing structured information about an outgroup (such as the challenges faced by transgender communities) produced the largest reductions in transgender prejudice. Similarly, Bartos et al. (2014) reported that knowledge-based interventions yielded moderate improvements in attitudes towards LGB people.

Hsieh, Faulkner & Wickes (2021) also examined awareness interventions, which aimed to reduce prejudice through cognitive processes (Tajfel, 1969), for instance by highlighting the negative consequences of prejudice or correcting stereotypical thinking. These were the second most common intervention type in their meta-analysis. However, compared with contact-based approaches, awareness interventions produced smaller effect sizes, indicating more modest impacts on prejudice reduction.

Stefaniak et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of eight studies evaluating the effectiveness of the 'school of dialogue', an intergroup intervention aimed at improving middle and high school aged Poles attitudes towards Jews through educating them about their shared history. Throughout the sessions, students learn about the past of their local residence, including Jewish heritage, through a wide range of activities and workshops. Findings highlight that participating in the intervention led to more positive attitudes towards Jews and a greater openness to ethnic diversity more broadly. However, students' attitudes towards other specific out-groups (e.g. Roma people, Muslims, Ukrainians) remained unchanged.

Slobodin, Noufi & Caspi (2023) systematically reviewed studies exploring the effectiveness of anti-bias interventions for pre-school children. Ten of the eleven included studies demonstrated reductions in racial bias, and importantly, none

reported adverse effects. Although interventions could be categorised into four subtypes, heterogeneity in study designs limited conclusions about the relative effectiveness of each approach.

Broader evidence from Paluck et al.'s (2020) comprehensive meta-analysis adds further nuance. Reviewing 107 studies of cognitive and emotional training interventions targeting implicit and explicit prejudice, they found small-to-moderate average effects ($d = 0.35$). Anti-bias, multicultural, and moral education interventions (20 studies) similarly produced small-to-moderate effects, as did diversity training (six studies). Crucially, the authors observed that studies with larger sample sizes tended to report smaller effects, suggesting that some moderate effect sizes in the literature may be inflated due to small-study biases and methodological limitations.

Taken together, these findings indicate that educational and awareness-raising interventions can contribute to improved acceptance of diversity and reductions in prejudice. However, effects are generally small, vary across groups and contexts, and are constrained by methodological weaknesses in the evidence base. This underscores the need for more rigorous research to determine when, how, and for whom such interventions are most effective.

Volunteering interventions

Four studies examined the relationship between volunteering and social cohesion, with particular attention to outcomes such as a sense of belonging and trust in others. Two of these studies used evidence-synthesis designs. Across this body of work, findings consistently indicate a positive, bidirectional relationship between volunteering and social cohesion (Abrams et al., 2023a; Abrams et al., 2023b; Davies et al., 2023; Horsham et al., 2024). In other words, volunteering contributes to stronger social cohesion, and higher levels of social cohesion, in turn, strengthen volunteering. However, when different forms of volunteering and dimensions of social cohesion are considered, the picture becomes more nuanced.

A key distinction concerns formal volunteering (undertaken through organisations) versus informal volunteering (helping others outside organisational structures). Evidence indicates a complex dynamic: formal volunteering tends to yield greater benefits for social cohesion than informal volunteering (Horsham et al., 2024), yet it is also more common in already advantaged communities, whereas informal volunteering predominates in more disadvantaged areas (Abrams et al., 2023b). At the same time, because formal volunteering is disproportionately undertaken by individuals who are religious, women, highly educated, or of higher socioeconomic status, its benefits may be unevenly distributed and risk reinforcing existing social inequalities (Abrams et al., 2023b). These inequalities are further shaped by barriers

such as time constraints linked to work and childcare, which were among the most frequently reported obstacles to volunteering (Abrams et al., 2023a). Cohesion outcomes were also affected by the different domains of volunteering people engaged in; for instance, people volunteering in areas related to harm prevention reported lower levels of social cohesion compared to those volunteering to support others and improve their local neighbourhood (Abrams et al., 2023a).

Distinguishing between vertical and horizontal social cohesion provides further nuance. Horizontal cohesion - connections and trust among members of society, including neighbourliness and tolerance of others - shows a bidirectional relationship with volunteering: volunteering enhances perceptions of horizontal cohesion, and stronger horizontal cohesion increases the likelihood of volunteering. In contrast, the relationship with vertical cohesion - trust in government, political actors, and public institutions - appears unidirectional: while volunteering improves perceptions of vertical cohesion, higher levels of vertical cohesion do not predict greater engagement in volunteering (Abrams et al., 2023a; Davies et al., 2023).

Place and space interventions

We identified seven studies examining the effectiveness of place and space interventions in improving social cohesion across different sub-themes. Studies investigating place and space interventions explored specific interventions, such as community hubs (Bagnall et al, 2018, 2023; Pride House, 2014; Social Value Cymru, 2025), place-based arts interventions (Daykin et al., 2021), nature-based interventions (Fatehrad et al, 2024) and neighbourhood design interventions (Bagnall et al 2018, 2023). Worth highlighting is an initial review of 51 studies conducted in 2018 (Bagnall et al, 2018), and a rapid update in 2023, which identified an additional 51 studies and led to a significant expansion of the evidence base for place and space interventions. Overall, findings across these studies demonstrate evidence to suggest that place and space interventions can strengthen social cohesion and improve intergroup relations. However, there is also evidence of place and space interventions having unintended negative consequences for cohesion, raising a need for cohesion outcomes to be carefully considered as part of design and delivery.

Community hubs

Community hubs are community centres or buildings that are open to the public and typically provide multiple services and activities focused on health, wellbeing, and the wider determinants of health (Bagnall et al, 2023). We include two systematic reviews of place and space interventions which together identified 16 studies evaluating the impacts of community hubs specifically. We further identified two individual evaluation studies on community hubs.

Across both the 2018 review and the 2023 update (Bagnall et al 2018, 2023), community hubs were found to strengthen social cohesion through bringing together different social and generational groups, strengthening trust and expanding social networks within communities, including by creating both bonding and bridging capital. However, the 2023 update identified stronger evidence, compared to previously found moderate evidence for these outcomes, highlighting growing confidence in the effectiveness of community hubs. These findings are echoed in two grey literature community hub evaluation reports we identified in our review. Social Value Cymru (2025) conducted a qualitative evaluation study of the Northeast Wales Multicultural Hub, which aims to support diverse cultural and art programmes to promote and celebrate diversity in Wales. Beneficiaries consistently reported that activities delivered at the Hub helped improve their understanding of diversity within their communities, fostering a sense of belonging. Similarly, an evaluation of Pride House Glasgow, a temporary space to welcome LGBT athletes and visitors and their friends and families as part of the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Scotland, found that participants reported that it had supported cohesion through promoting greater tolerance and acceptance of LGBT communities (Pride House International, 2014).

Neighbourhood design initiatives

Neighbourhood design refers to the scale, form or function of buildings and open space, with good neighbourhood design identified as having an important role in promoting cohesion by providing public spaces that are comfortable and inviting for local people (Bagnall et al, 2023). Across the original 2018 review of place and space interventions and the 2023 update (Bagnall et al 2018, 2023), studies evaluating neighbourhood design initiatives link these interventions to improvements in community wellbeing, social relations and an increased sense of belonging, with an observed increase in the strength of the evidence between the original review and the 5-year update. However, the two reviews also found evidence of negative unintended consequences of neighbourhood design initiatives, particularly for urban development initiatives which led to feelings of exclusion among existing residents and an exacerbation of community divisions.

Nature-based interventions

Nature-based interventions involve natural green spaces (e.g. parks, woodlands, gardens) or blue spaces (e.g. rivers, canals, coasts). The two systematic reviews of place and space interventions found that improvements in social cohesion were frequently reported in studies of nature-based interventions, including between people with different ethnicities, different age groups, people with and without disabilities, and between longer-term and newer residents of an area (Bagnall et al, 2023, 2018). These findings are further echoed in Fatehrad et al.'s (2024) evaluation report of Nature-Engaged Integration Initiatives across the UK. The study found that

community building and social interactions were facilitated through these initiatives by providing access to regular group activities (e.g. gardening, picnic events and festivals). Communal spaces and aesthetic appeal were seen as facilitators to social interactions. However, it is worth noting that financial and safety concerns were identified as barriers restricting access to natural spaces for some groups.

Alternative use of space interventions

Alternative use of space interventions involve temporary changes to the way people use and interact with a space. Many alternative use of space interventions identified in the two systematic reviews were linked to positive outcomes for social cohesion, including through bringing together people of different social class/status, people with and without disabilities, established and newer residents, people of different ethnicities, and different ages and generations (Bagnall et al, 2023). Similarly, Hesketh et al's systematic review of social cohesion intervention studies (2023) identified a systematic review of evaluations of the Play Streets intervention, which involves temporary road closures for children to play freely and has been evaluated across multiple contexts. Authors found that while the 'Play Streets' intervention mainly aimed to increase individual physical and mental health, it also contributed to improvements in cohesion and enhanced neighbourhoods through partnership building.

Cohesion strategies and programmes

We identified some evidence pointing to the benefits of investing in coordinated local programmes to strengthen social cohesion. For example, Lalot et al. (2022) used survey data to compare levels of social cohesion across UK areas during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on differences between local authorities that had implemented coordinated cohesion programmes through the UK Government's Integrated Communities Action Plan (ICAP) and comparable areas without such programmes. The ICAP areas had been identified in 2018 as experiencing significant challenges related to far-right activity and local community divisions. Their local plans included a range of actions, such as strengthening community leadership, supporting new migrants and longer-term residents, improving English language provision, focusing on place-based community initiatives, and expanding economic opportunities while protecting rights and freedoms. The study found that respondents in ICAP areas reported higher levels of social cohesion across several indicators, including greater political trust, more positive attitudes towards immigration, stronger personal relationships during lockdown, higher levels of social activism, and greater trust that others would comply with pandemic restrictions.

These findings are tentatively supported by evidence from a study included in Cairns et al.'s (2022) rapid review of social capital interventions. This study examined the

impact of including social cohesion targets within Local Area Agreements (LAAs). It found that areas with explicit cohesion targets experienced greater improvements in community cohesiveness than those without such targets, particularly where targets were more ambitious. Case study evidence suggested that more demanding targets stimulated an expansion of community development activities aimed at improving residents' perceptions of cohesion (Andrews et al., cited in Cairns et al., 2022).

Evidence from Wales similarly suggests that coordinated strategies and dedicated institutional support can help strengthen cohesion. The Welsh Government's 2009 community cohesion strategy, *Getting on Together*, established a Community Cohesion Unit within government to embed cohesion as a cross-government priority and to provide a framework for local delivery. The strategy was supported by an annual £1.5 million Community Cohesion Fund distributed across all 22 Welsh local authorities to support locally delivered projects.

An evaluation of the strategy (Robinson et al., 2013), based on interviews with Welsh Government officials and local cohesion leads, case studies of funded projects, and analysis of survey and administrative data, found that *Getting on Together* contributed to a more coordinated national and local approach to cohesion. The authors concluded that the Community Cohesion Unit helped raise the profile of cohesion across Welsh Government policy areas, with the linked funding programme supporting more than 600 locally tailored projects. Findings indicated that where successful, these initiatives improved intergroup understanding, supported the integration of new residents, facilitated conflict mediation, and encouraged local services to recognise community cohesion as a policy priority.

However, the evaluation also found that outcomes varied across local authorities, with the effectiveness of funded projects being strongly influenced by local capacity, particularly whether authorities had a dedicated cohesion officer or their own strategic approach to cohesion. In some cases, the Community Cohesion Fund was perceived primarily as a grant scheme rather than as part of a broader strategic framework. The evaluation therefore highlighted several factors that could strengthen future cohesion strategy, including maintaining dedicated capacity within both national and local government, improving coordination across related policy areas, and strengthening the collection of data to monitor cohesion trends and inform policy responses.

Health and wellbeing interventions

Evidence from four studies indicates that health and wellbeing promotion activities can positively influence aspects of social cohesion, including sense of belonging, trust in others, and social relationships within the wider community.

The Centre for Thriving Places (2022) evaluated a range of wellbeing interventions—such as physical activity programmes, public health initiatives, and mental and physical health interventions—and their impact on social cohesion and social support. Only two intervention types had more than one high-quality study demonstrating significant improvements. The first was tai-chi based interventions, which showed positive effects on social support. The second was the National Citizen Service (NCS), a government-funded youth programme in England offering 16–17-year-olds opportunities to develop skills and engage in community-based projects. Review studies highlight the NCS as an intervention which has been robustly evaluated (Cairns, 2022; Hesketh et al., 2023), showing positive effects in improving community cohesion and social support among young people. Hesketh et al. (2023) highlight that the programme’s ability to foster ‘positive mixing behaviours’ across ethnic groups is central to its impact on community relations. Notably, young people from ethnic minority backgrounds and those living in areas of high deprivation experienced the greatest gains in social cohesion and integration, suggesting that the NCS can help bridge gaps between ‘more and less integrated young people’ (Hesketh et al., 2023).

The Centre for Thriving Places (2022) also identified other wellbeing programmes, but high heterogeneity in measures, populations, and intervention types limited their ability to draw firm conclusions about which approaches most effectively support community-level or individual-level change.

Finally, drawing on data from qualitative studies, Daykin et al.’s (2021) systematic review found that arts-based projects can help people ‘grow together’, access new spaces, and feel safe in unfamiliar settings. These projects were seen as valuable for fostering connection and encouraging engagement with new or unfamiliar communities.

Online interventions

Most of the evidence we identified on online interventions relates to the sub-dimension of community resilience to extremism. Hesketh et al.’s (2023) rapid evidence review identified eight studies evaluating counter-extremism and radicalisation-prevention interventions. The authors concluded that the lack of high-quality evaluations makes it difficult to determine the overall impact of such interventions on social cohesion.

Four additional studies examined online interventions aimed at strengthening community resilience to extremism (Birdwell & Skellett, 2018; Davey, Birdwell & Skellett, 2018; Durán et al., 2025; Hangartner et al., 2021; Munger, 2017). These studies explored strategies such as online content moderation (Durán et al., 2025) and counter-speech approaches (Davey, Birdwell & Skellett, 2018; Hangartner et al., 2021; Munger, 2017).

One natural experiment evaluated Germany's Network Enforcement Act, which fines platforms that fail to remove hateful content. Findings showed that the Act helped reduce the hatefulness of posts on Twitter/X and contributed to a reduction in offline anti-refugee hate crimes. These effects appeared to operate by reducing collective mobilisation rather than changing individual attitudes towards refugees (Durán et al., 2025).

Studies on counter-speech strategies also reported promising findings. An experimental study (Hangartner et al., 2021) found that empathy-based counter-speech on Twitter increased the deletion of xenophobic posts and reduced the creation of new ones over a one-month period, outperforming other counter-speech strategies such as issuing warnings or using humour. An experimental study (Munger, 2017) explored the effectiveness of using different fake accounts/bots to respond to racist tweets. Results showed that disapproving messages from high-follower, white male bots were most effective in reducing racist slurs, whereas messages from perceived out-group bots (e.g., Black male accounts) were less effective. This highlights the importance of perceived social status and in-group identity in online norm enforcement.

Research on Facebook by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (Davey, Birdwell & Skellett, 2018) examined direct outreach to individuals showing signs of radicalisation. Around 70% of identified individuals engaged with intervention providers via chat, with sustained engagement achieved among both Islamist and extreme-right participants. Approximately 10% of conversations led to positive shifts in attitudes or willingness to engage further. Although the programme is limited to individuals interacting with public extremist content, it demonstrates the potential for identifying and engaging at-risk individuals at scale.

Beyond counter-extremism, one study highlights the broader value of online spaces for mobilising community resilience. Litvak et al.'s (2024) systematic review of interventions aimed at preventing religion-based hate crime victimisation among youth found that online efforts—such as counter-speech, legal campaigns, online protests, and sharing accurate information—can help mitigate risks of religion-based victimisation.

Potential policy actions for Wales

As outlined in the introduction, this evidence review was conducted to inform the work of the Expert Group on Social Cohesion in developing recommendations for short-, medium- and long-term actions to strengthen social cohesion in Wales. In formulating its recommendations, the Group will need to consider both (1) the nature and strength of the evidence base for different social cohesion interventions and the policy implications of these findings, and (2) how these may translate to the specific social and political context of Wales. It will be particularly important to consider the distribution of powers within the current devolution settlement in relation to social cohesion policy. The picture is complex: while many key levers sit firmly with the Welsh Government, some aspects of delivery are further devolved to local government and other partners, and several policy areas that shape social cohesion remain reserved to the UK Government, including policing, immigration, and media and internet regulation. At a UK level, wider political developments - such as the recent publication of the UK Government's cohesion action plan (UK Government, 2026) and the work of the ongoing Independent Commission on Community and Cohesion – also merit detailed consideration.

Having conducted this review, we identify several challenges in determining what potential policy actions for Wales can be drawn from the evidence on social cohesion interventions.

Firstly, echoing previous reviews, the literature encompasses a very wide range of interventions, study designs, targeted dimensions of social cohesion, and approaches to conceptualising and measuring social cohesion. This highly diverse and heterogeneous evidence base makes it difficult to compare interventions or draw robust conclusions about which approaches may be most effective. These challenges are compounded by several limitations in the existing evidence, including a lack of longitudinal studies and studies using control conditions, which makes it difficult to establish causal relationships or assess whether observed effects on social cohesion are sustained over time. The literature also relies heavily on self-reported outcome measures, which may capture subjective perceptions of change rather than observable behavioural change resulting from interventions. In addition, in some areas of the review, many studies have been conducted in controlled or experimental conditions, making it difficult to assess how readily their findings translate to real-world settings.

A further challenge in identifying potential policy actions is the limited evidence on national, structural, and multi-level interventions, even though there is a strong theoretical case for concluding that these interventions will have greater impact

(Orazani et al, 2023). The studies included in this review overwhelmingly focus on single-level interventions at the individual, group, or intergroup level. The limited evaluation of national, structural, or multi-level policy approaches means that policymakers have relatively little evidence to draw on regarding the effectiveness of national-level interventions in other contexts. Findings from studies examining individual- or group-level interventions do not always translate clearly into implications for higher-level policy action.

Similarly, we found limited evidence on interventions designed to address the emergence of acute community tensions. Given widespread concern about increasing community tensions and rapid outbreaks of division in communities in Wales and across the UK (Welsh Parliament, 2025), this appears to be an area where research on social cohesion interventions may lag behind policymaking and practice. Policies and initiatives may already be implemented in response to emerging tensions, but often in circumstances that make formal evaluation more difficult. We are also aware of a substantial wider evidence base on interventions addressing online polarisation and the spread of mis-, dis- and malinformation. Although this literature fell outside the scope of the present review, it is likely to be highly relevant to identifying potential policy actions to strengthen social cohesion in Wales.

To support identification of potential policy actions, we conducted a synthesis of policy implications and recommendations highlighted across the studies included in the review. One finding to note is that discussion of policy implications or recommendations is relatively uncommon in the literature on social cohesion interventions, potentially reflecting some of the challenges outlined above. Where policy recommendations were made in the studies we reviewed, it was not always possible to clearly discern how a given recommendation related to the empirical findings of the study. In some cases, the basis for recommendations appeared to be more theoretical than empirical, but this was not something we appraised in any systematic way.

Nonetheless, it is possible to identify some recurring themes in the policy recommendations and implications highlighted across studies, as outlined below.

1. One clear message emerging is the value of intervening early in the life course. Several studies highlight that childhood and adolescence are periods when attitudes are still forming, and when interventions can have a more lasting impact (Orazani et al, 2023; Hsieh et al, 2021; What Works Wellbeing, 2018, Litvak et al., 2024). This includes school-based programmes and other interventions working with young people.

2. Also highlighted in the literature is the case for developing universal (as opposed to targeted) interventions. For instance, Orazani et al (2023) highlight that while co-design processes can boost engagement and participation, reaching less-interested groups remains a challenge. For these reasons, interventions which can be delivered more universally may be most efficient because of their potential to reach those unlikely to voluntarily access a specific intervention (Orazani highlight schools-based interventions as an example). Similarly, for interventions to reduce anti-transgender prejudice specifically, Hatch et al. (date) highlight the potential for workplace-based education and awareness raising interventions, though recommend incorporating elements of contact interventions to strengthen their impact. Finally, Bagnall et al. (2023) suggest that applying interventions according to the public health equity approach of proportionate universalism may have the greatest impact across the social gradient but conclude that stronger evidence is needed.
3. Across studies, community engagement, coproduction and codesign approaches emerge as important ingredients of successful interventions. Orazani et al (2023) highlight that approaches that engage community members in design and implementation can bring about wider benefits both to community members and to social and political institutions (including increasing institutional trust). Engaging with the community extends to developing culturally congruent spaces in a way that involves the community (Fatehrad et al., 2024) and considering the need of and development of trust with vulnerable communities (Daykin et al., 2021). Similarly, Bagnall et al (2023) point to the importance of inclusion and co-design with a diverse range of community members when implementing community-based interventions to mitigate against potential negative impacts.
4. Another area with clear policy implications is the evidence on social cohesion and volunteering. Evidence shows that while volunteering and cohesion outcomes can reinforce each other – in that strengthening volunteering can promote social cohesion and vice versa – this is not automatic. This highlights a need for policy strategies to explicitly address the connection between the two and be more intentional about ensuring that volunteering interventions strengthen cohesion between groups, not only within them.
5. Also highlighted in the literature is the value of investing in community infrastructure. Building on an updated assessment of the role of community infrastructure in strengthening cohesion, Bagnall et al (2023) highlight the need for adequate investment in community infrastructure, linked to longer

term funding with attention to inclusive engagement, to ensure interventions have positive outcomes for a diverse range of communities. Relatedly, they highlight the need for conducting a wellbeing inequality impact assessment before implementing new policy related to community place and space interventions, as well as meaningful community involvement to mitigate against unequal or negative impacts.

6. Studies assessing the effectiveness of local cohesion strategies highlight that their findings support calls for expanding investment in coordinated strategic action to strengthen cohesion at a local level. Findings also suggest that negotiated performance contracts – with ambitious social cohesion targets– may be an important tool for policymakers seeking to improve local cohesion outcomes. Evaluation data also highlight the benefits of linking national funding to support cohesion with investment in dedicated local institutional capacity and strategic local coordination.
7. Finally, numerous studies make recommendations for strengthening the evidence base for social cohesion interventions, including developing standardised and validated measures for cohesion to support evaluation and facilitate larger scale analysis, incorporating longitudinal and experimental designs to assess the longevity of impacts and help establish causality, and including behavioural measures rather than relying solely on self-report.

Conclusion

This review highlights both the potential and the limitations of the existing evidence base on interventions to strengthen social cohesion. While a wide range of approaches show promise across different settings, the diversity of intervention types, the predominance of self-reported measures, and the lack of longitudinal and experimental studies mean that firm conclusions about what works best - and under what conditions - remain difficult to draw. Evidence on national, structural and multi-level interventions is particularly limited, despite strong theoretical grounds for expecting these approaches to have the greatest impact. Likewise, there is little robust evaluation of interventions designed to respond to acute community tensions, even though such tensions are an increasingly urgent policy concern in Wales and across the UK.

Nevertheless, the review does point to several areas where the Expert Group may wish to focus further attention as it develops potential next steps for strengthening cohesion in Wales. Table 2 below sets out a rationale for each of these areas for consideration and poses a question that the Expert Group could usefully consider, to help support the identification of policy actions.

Table 2: Areas for consideration

Promoting cohesion in schools	Evidence indicates that interventions early in the life course – especially school-based programmes – have strong potential for reducing prejudice and strengthening intergroup relations.	<i>How can the Welsh Government and other key partners better support schools (and other services for children and young people) to strengthen cohesion?</i>
Coproduction of cohesion initiatives	Our findings highlight the value of designing and delivering cohesion interventions through inclusive community engagement and coproduction.	<i>How can the Welsh Government and other key partners better encourage and enable coproduction of cohesion initiatives?</i>
Community infrastructure and neighbourhood design	Evidence highlights that community infrastructure and neighbourhood design interventions can enhance social cohesion but may also generate unintended consequences.	<i>How can the Welsh Government and other key partners support more effective investment in community spaces and ensure that cohesion outcomes are fully considered in planning and neighbourhood design?</i>
Strengthening volunteering and cohesion	While volunteering can promote cohesion, this is not guaranteed, especially as benefits of volunteering may be unevenly distributed across communities. This evidence highlights the importance of designing volunteering initiatives with potential cohesion impacts in mind.	<i>What can the Welsh Government and other key partners do to better promote positive links between volunteering and cohesion?</i>
Investing in coordinated strategic	We found some evidence pointing to the benefits of developing and investing in coordinated and strategic	<i>How can the Welsh Government and other key partners better</i>

action at a local level	local programmes to strengthen cohesion.	<i>invest in and improve the strategic coordination of local action to strengthen cohesion?</i>
Addressing acute community tensions	We identify a significant gap in the social cohesion interventions research concerning effective responses to the emergence of acute community tensions.	<i>How can the Welsh Government and other key partners draw on other sources of evidence – for instance, local good practice – to improve local and national responses to acute community tensions?</i>
Tackling online polarisation and mis-,dis- and malinformation	Wider evidence on interventions to tackle online polarisation and mis-, dis- and malinformation was outside the scope of this review, but is likely to be highly relevant to identifying policy actions for strengthening social cohesion in Wales.	<i>What policy actions should the Welsh Government and other key partners prioritise to tackle online polarisation and mis-, dis- and malinformation?</i>

Taken together, these areas represent promising directions for policy development, even where the underlying evidence base remains uneven. Continued investment in high-quality evaluation will be essential for understanding which interventions are most effective, how they can be adapted for the Welsh context, and how national and local levers can work most effectively together. Strengthening the evidence base in these ways will help ensure that future policy to support social cohesion in Wales is both grounded in robust research and responsive to the evolving challenges facing communities.

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Annex

Annex A: Glossary

Effect / impact size

Statistical significance measures whether an observed relationship between two variables is likely to be by chance, whereas the effect size / impact measures the extent to which one variable meaningfully influences another, indicating the practical strength of the relationship. Within this review, we describe the following:

Small effect

The relationship between variables is weak and may have limited real-world significance

Moderate effect

The relationship is noticeable and may have real-world relevance, depending on context

Significant effect

The relationship is strong and likely to have substantial real-world importance

Extended contact intervention

Based on the idea that merely being aware of intergroup friendships between a member of one's own group and another group can also improve intergroup attitudes (Cameron et al., 2011, p193)

Horizontal cohesion

Cohesion within society (Abrams et al., 2023a, p4)

Imagined contact intervention

The imagined contact hypothesis suggests that just imagining a pleasant contact with an outgroup member has positive consequences on intergroup attitudes (Vrdoljak et al., 2024, p2144)

Indirect contact

Exposure to members of another group without direct face-to-face interaction

Meta analysis

Meta-analysis is a technique used to quantitatively combine the data from comparable individual studies that address the same topic in order to reach some general conclusions. In a meta-analysis research, studies are collected and data

from each individual study is coded and interpreted using statistical methods (Briner and Denyer, 2012, p115)

Rapid evidence review

Rapid reviews are a form of knowledge synthesis that follows a streamlined process to produce evidence summaries in a timely manner. They are designed to be more agile and responsive and completed in less time compared to conventional, full systematic reviews (Devane et al., 2024, p2)

Social cohesion

Social cohesion is a complex, multi-faceted concept and is described in more detail in the following section. For the purpose of this review, we have used the 2021 – 2026 Welsh Government definition: ‘Cohesion is the extent to which people in a community treat each other with respect, get along and participate to ensure everyone can access their human rights and fulfil their potential.’ (Welsh Government, 2026)

Systematic review

Systematic reviews are a type of literature review conducted using a structured, transparent, and rigorously planned approach. They involve the systematic identification, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant studies to address a clearly framed research question (UCL, n.d.)

Vertical cohesion

Cohesion with the state (Abrams et al., 2023a, p4)

Annex B: Methods

We adopted a pragmatic, rapid approach to reviewing the evidence in order to address our research questions. This approach reflected the need to balance two competing demands: conducting a thorough review of a large body of evidence whilst working within the compressed timescale of the EGSC’s timeline.

Following a suggestion from Welsh Government officials in 2025, we began by extracting all references to academic and grey literature from the written and oral evidence submissions to the ESJ Committee social cohesion inquiry. We supplemented this repository with references identified through the call for evidence shared with members of the Expert Group, as well as ‘the State of Us’ (SoU) evidence call issued by the British Future & Belong Network as part of their work on social cohesion (Puddle et al., 2025).

We also conducted a database search of the academic literature. Given the limited timeframe for completing the review, the search was restricted to a small number of databases (APA PsychINFO; Social Policy and Practice; and Social Science Premium Collection) and to studies published approximately within the past five years. The search focused specifically on review studies (including systematic reviews, literature reviews, and rapid evidence reviews) and meta-analyses.

After compiling the full pool of references, we conducted an initial screening of titles and abstracts, followed by full-text screening against our inclusion criteria.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

We used an adaptation of the PICOS framework (Participants, Interventions, Comparisons, Outcomes and Study Designs - see Snape et al. (2017)) to specify our eligibility and exclusion criteria (see Table 1).

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Domain	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Papers from high income countries	Papers from low- and middle-income countries
Intervention	Papers which examine interventions or actions to promote/ strengthen social cohesion	Papers which do not examine actions or interventions to promote/ strengthen social cohesion.
Outcome	Outcomes related to our pre-defined social cohesion subthemes	Outcomes that do not reflect our pre-defined social cohesion subthemes
Study design	Impact evaluation or assessment (qualitative, quantitative or mixed method) Review studies with a clear search strategy Grey literature in the form of research-informed online reports	Narrative reviews Comment or opinion pieces Theoretical articles Case studies Conference abstracts Letters

Other restrictions	Papers published between 2010 and 2025	Papers published before 2010
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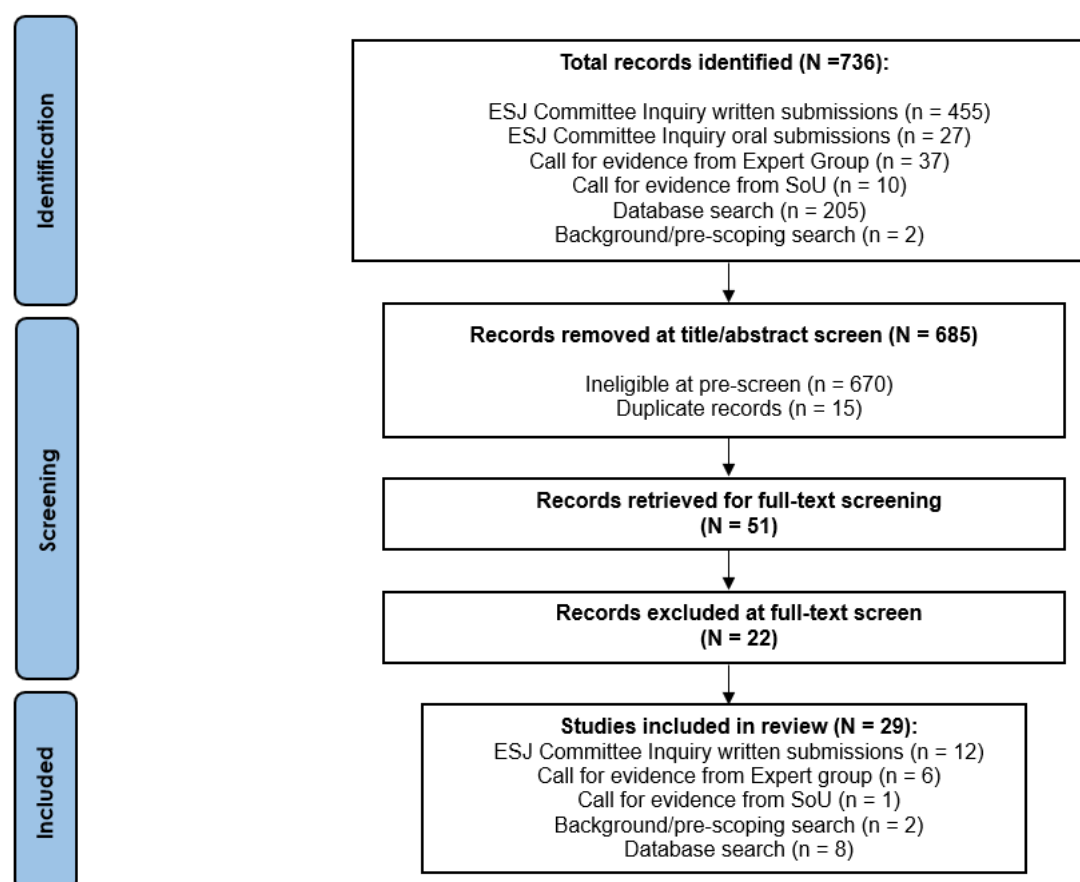
As noted in the ‘definitions of social cohesion’ section, social cohesion is a broad and multi-faceted concept for which there is no single accepted definition. For the purposes of this review, we drew on the Welsh Government’s working definition (see Welsh Government, 2026) and identified a set of sub-dimensions that we consider social cohesion to encompass when applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria:

- Community/ intergroup relations
- Community resilience to extremism
- Acceptance of diversity
- Civic participation
- Trust in institutions
- Trust in others
- Sense of belonging
- Orientation to the common good
- Shared values

Included studies were required to report outcomes relating to at least one of the sub-dimensions listed above and to examine the effects of interventions or actions aimed at promoting or strengthening social cohesion.

Across the existing repositories and the database search, we identified a total of 735 references. The PRISMA flowchart below (Figure 1) presents the process of identification, screening, and the final inclusion of 29 studies in the review.

Figure 1: PRISMA flowchart for study selection process



All references were screened by a single reviewer at each stage. Title and abstract screening were conducted by the lead reviewer, with a randomly selected 20% sample independently reviewed by two additional reviewers (10% each). Following title and abstract screening, full-text records were assessed for inclusion, and an initial data extraction was undertaken by a single reviewer. Any uncertainties were discussed by the team and resolved through consensus.

Once the final 29 studies were identified, a single reviewer extracted data from each study using a standardised Excel template. Information was organised according to population, social cohesion theme, outcomes, methods, results, discussion, recommendations, and limitations. Finally, the review findings were synthesised using a narrative synthesis approach (Popay et al., 2006), structured around the two research questions guiding this study.

Study details

Of the studies included in this review, the majority of studies are evidence syntheses (n=16), followed by quantitative studies (n=8) and finally grey literature (n=5). In terms of where these studies were carried out, eight were carried out in the UK specifically

and sixteen from multiple countries across the globe (i.e. the UK and other high-income countries, the UK and other European countries etc.). There was one study each from Germany and Poland and three studies were conducted online.

Included studies explored a range of different sub-themes related to community cohesion, many of which explored multiple sub-themes. For this reason, the final number does not total 29. The sub-themes explored were: acceptance of diversity (n=15); community/intergroup relations (n=14); sense of belonging (n=6); trust in others (n=6); community resilience to extremism (n=5); trust in institutions (n=3); orientation to the common good (n=2); and civic participation (n=1).

Quality appraisal

The quality of the articles was appraised using two different quality appraisal tools. For review studies (systematic review, meta analysis, rapid review) we used the JBI Critical Appraisal checklist (JBI, n.d.) and for individual studies, we used the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (MMAT, 2018). However, we did not quality appraise grey literature articles as the JBI and MMAT tools did not accommodate for these study designs, and due to time constraints, we were unable to identify an additional suitable tool.

While guidance from both appraisal tools advises having at least two reviewers independently involved in the process, this was not possible due to time and capacity constraints. Whilst this is a limitation to our quality appraisal, the main reviewer resolved any uncertainties/queries regarding quality appraisal through discussion with the other members of the research team.

Limitations

Given the short time scale to synthesise and produce a final report to inform the work of the Expert Group, it cannot be expected to have identified every relevant study/piece of evidence. This may have implications for risk of bias, whereby studies that were not included may differ significantly/systematically in their findings from included studies.

There are additional potential sources of bias in this review. Firstly, we focused on existing repositories (ESJ committee inquiry submissions, calls for evidence) and a small number of databases focusing on review studies only. Secondly, we were only able to review studies published in English and publications from 2010 onwards, or in the past five years for our database search specifically. Altogether, these factors limit our ability to reflect and synthesise findings from publications (both academic and grey literature) that are not limited to our inclusion and exclusion criteria. Thirdly, due to having one reviewer and not having a specifically defined set of interventions and outcomes of interest, the likelihood of missing relevant studies during screening is also

increased. Additionally, while we primarily focused on papers from middle- and high-income countries, some review studies included papers from low-income countries. Lastly, due to time and capacity constraints we were not able to conduct a thorough extraction and synthesis of studies using software such as NVivo, but instead we had to be more pragmatic throughout this process. We were also not able to utilise additional methods to minimise errors in the data extraction and synthesis process (i.e. having two or more reviewers extracting, appraising and synthesising the data).

In regard to our database search, given the time constraints and difficulty in developing a search string that reflects the breadth of evidence on this topic, we adapted one from an already published systematic review (Hesketh et al., 2023). This has implications for potentially having had missed some relevant key words.

Annex C: Table of characteristics of included studies

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Abrams, D., Davies, B., Horsham, Z. (2023a)	Casual Connections: Secondary Data Analyses of the Links Between Volunteering and Social Cohesion in the UK	Quantitative (non- randomised)	UK	Sense of belonging; trust in others; trust in institutions; orientation to the common good	Four out of five appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Unclear if outcome data is complete
Abrams, D., Horsham, Z., Davies, B. (2023b).	Literature Review - Linking Volunteering and Social Cohesion: Causal Evidence in the UK and Beyond.	Grey literature	UK and USA	Community/intergroup relations; trust in others	N/A

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Bagnall, A.M, South, J., Di Martino, S., Southby, K., Pilkington, G., Mitchell, B., Pennington, A., Corcoran, R. (2018). (What Works Wellbeing)	A systematic review of interventions to boost social relations through improvements in community infrastructure (places and spaces)	Systematic review	UK and other high-income countries.	Community/intergroup relations	11 out of 11 appraised quality criteria met
Bagnall, A.M, Southby, K., Jones, R., Pennington, A., South, J., Corcoran, R. (2023). (What Works Wellbeing)	Systematic review of community infrastructure (place and space) to boost social relations and community wellbeing: Five year refresh	Systematic review	UK and other high-income countries.	Community/intergroup relations	11 out of 11 appraised quality criteria met

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Banas, J., Bessarabova, E., Massey, Z. (2020).	Meta Analysis on Mediated Contact and Prejudice.	Meta-analysis	Multiple countries across the globe	Acceptance of diversity	Five out of nine applicable appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Inadequate criteria for appraising studies Unclear if methods to minimize errors in data extraction were used Unclear if assessment of publication bias was conducted

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Bartos, S., Berger, I., Hegarty, P. (2014).	Interventions to Reduce Sexual Prejudice: A Study-Space Analysis and Meta-Analytic Review.	Meta-analysis	Multiple countries across the globe	Acceptance of diversity	Nine out of 10 applicable appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Review question not clearly and explicitly stated Unclear if methods to minimise errors in data extraction were used

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Cairns, M., Maguire, R., Abdallah, S., Zeilder, L., Tipaldy-Startin, K. (2022). (Centre for Thriving Places)	What works to improve social capital? A rapid review of the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving social capital outcomes (neighbourhood belonging, social support network and community cohesion).	Systematic review	UK and other high-income countries	Community/intergroup relations; sense of belonging	11 out of 11 appraised quality criteria met

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Cameron, L., Rutland, A., Hossain, R., Petley, R. (2011)	When and why does extended contact work? The role of high quality direct contact and group norms in the development of positive ethnic intergroup attitudes amongst children.	Quantitative (non-randomised)	UK	Community/intergroup relations	Five out of five appraised quality criteria met
Davey, J., Birdwell, K., Skellett, R. (2018).	Counter-Conversations: A model for direct engagement with individuals showing signs of radicalisation online.	Quantitative (non-randomised)	Online	Community resilience to extremism.	Four out of five appraised criteria met Concerns identified: Unclear if confounders were accounted for in the design and analysis

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Davies, B., Abrams, D., Horsham, Z., Lalot, F. (2024).	The Causal Relationship Between Volunteering and Social Cohesion: A Large Scale Analysis of Secondary Longitudinal Data	Quantitative (non-randomised)	UK	sense of belonging; trust in others; orientation to the common good; trust in institutions	Five out of five appraised quality criteria met
Daykin, N., Mansfield, L., Meads, C., Gray, K., Golding, A., Tomlinson, A., Victor, C. (2020)	The role of social capital in participatory arts for wellbeing: findings from a qualitative systematic review.	Systematic review	Multiple countries	Sense of belonging; and acceptance of diversity	10 out of 10 applicable appraised quality criteria met

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Durán, R., Muller, K., Schwarz, C. (2022).	The Online and Offline Effects of Content Moderation: Evidence from Germany's NetzDG	Quantitative (non-randomised)	Germany	Community resilience to extremism	Five out of five appraised quality criteria met
Fatehrad, A., Natalini, D., Yohannes, H., Palombo, G. (2024).	Nature-based integration: connecting communities with/in nature.	Grey literature	UK	Community/ intergroup relations; trust in others; and acceptance of diversity	N/A

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Hangartner, D., Gennaro, G., Alasiri, S., Bahrich, N., Bornhoft, A., Boucher, J., Buse Demirci, B., Derksen, L., Hall, A., Jochum, M., Murias Munoz, M., Richter, M., Vogel, F., Wittwer S., Wüthrich, F., Gilardi, F., Donnay K. (2021).	Empathy-based counter speech can reduce racist hate speech in a social media field experiment.	Quantitative (randomised)	Online	Community resilience to extremism	Three out of five appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Missing details on how randomisation was performed Unclear if assessors were blinded to the intervention provided
Hatch, H., Warner, R., Grundy, M., Heck, K. (2025).	Effectiveness of Interventions for Transgender Prejudice Reduction: A Meta-Analysis.	Meta-analysis	USA and European Countries (e.g. Croatia, England, Germany)	Acceptance of diversity	10 out of 11 appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Review question not clearly and explicitly stated

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Hesketh, R., Lawson, G., Haggart, T., Norman, C., Ventura-Arrieta, M. (2023).	What works in social cohesion and overcoming tensions.	Rapid evidence assessment	UK, European Union countries, Canada, Australia, New Zealand	Sense of belonging; community/intergroup relations; trust in others; community resilience to extremism	Seven out of 10 applicable appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Inadequate criteria for appraising studies Likelihood of publication bias not assessed
Horsham, Z., Abrams, D., Davies, B., Lalot, F. (2024)	Social cohesion and volunteering: Correlates, causes, and challenges	Systematic review	UK and USA	Civic participation; community/ intergroup relations	Eight out of 11 appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Inadequate criteria for appraising studies Unclear if methods to minimize errors in data extraction were utilised Unclear if likelihood of publication bias was assessed

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Hsieh, W., Faulkner, N., Wickes, R. (2021).	What reduces prejudice in the real world? A meta-analysis of prejudice reduction field experiments.	Meta-analysis	Multiple countries across the globe (predominantly in Europe and the USA)	Acceptance of diversity	Nine out of 11 appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Inadequate criteria for appraising studies
Lalot, F., Abrams, D., Broadwood, J., Davies Hayon, K., Platts-Dunn, I. (2022)	The social cohesion investment: Communities that invested in integration programmes are showing greater social cohesion in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.	Quantitative (non-randomised)	UK (England)	Acceptance of diversity; trust in institutions	Five out of five appraised quality criteria met

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Litvak, S., Kivivouri, J., Kaakinen, M. (2024).	Preventing Religion-Based Hate Crime Victimization Among Youth: A Systematic Review of Personal, Collective, and Policy Responses.	Systematic review	Multiple countries across the globe (predominantly the USA and UK)	Acceptance of diversity	Seven out of 10 applicable appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Review question not clearly and explicitly stated Unclear if critical appraisal was conducted by two or more reviewers independently Unclear if likelihood of publication bias was assessed

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Munger, K. (2017).	Tweetment Effects on the Tweeted: Experimentally Reducing Racist Harassment.	Quantitative (randomised)	Online	Community resilience to extremism	Three out of five appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Missing details on how randomisation was performed Outcome assessors not blinded to intervention provided

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Orzani, N., Reynolds, K., Osborne, H. (2023)	What works and why in interventions to strengthen social cohesion	Systematic review	Multiple countries across the globe	Acceptance of diversity; community/intergroup relations; trust in others; sense of belonging	Seven out of 11 appraised quality criteria met
					Concerns identified: Review question not clearly and explicitly stated
					Unclear appropriateness of inclusion criteria
					Unclear if critical appraisal was conducted by two or more reviewers independently
					Unclear if likelihood of publication bias was assessed

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Paluck, E., Porat, R., Clark, C., Green, D. (2020)	Prejudice Reduction: Progress and Challenges	Meta-analysis	Predominantly the USA	Acceptance of diversity	Seven out of 10 applicable appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Review question not clearly and explicitly stated Unclear if criteria for appraising studies were adequate Unclear if critical appraisal was conducted by two or more reviewers independently
Pride House International (2014)	Glasgow Pride House Evaluation Report	Grey literature	UK (Scotland)	Acceptance of diversity; community/intergroup relations	N/A

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Robinson, D., Reeve, K., Platts- Fowler, D., Green, S., Walshaw, A., Batty, E., Bashir, N., Pearce, S., Eadson, W. (2013). (Welsh Government)	An Evaluation of Getting on Together: The Community Cohesion Strategy for Wales	Grey literature	UK (Wales)	Community/intergroup relations	N/A

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Slobodin, O., Noufi, T., Caspi, Y. (2023).	Interventions to reduce racial bias and prejudice in preschool children: A systematic review of the literature since 2010	Systematic review	Multiple countries across the globe	Community/intergroup relations; acceptance of diversity	Six out of 10 applicable appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Review question not clearly and explicitly stated Inadequate criteria for appraising studies Unclear how likelihood of publication bias was assessed
Social Value Cymru (2025).	The Social Impact of the Northeast Wales Multicultural Hub: A Full Evaluation Report	Grey literature	UK (Wales)	Acceptance of diversity; and community/intergroup relations	N/A

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Stefaniak, A., Wohl, M. J. A., Bilewicz, M., Petelwicz, J. (2022).	Leveraging knowledge about historical diversity: A meta-analysis of findings from the school of dialogue intergroup intervention	Meta-analysis	Poland	Acceptance of diversity	Two out of five applicable appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Review question not clearly and explicitly stated Unclear if there were methods to minimize errors in data extraction Unclear if the likelihood of publication bias was assessed

Author	Title	Study design	Country	Social cohesion theme	Quality appraisal
Vrodolijak, A., Jelic, M., Biruski, D., Stankovic, N. (2024).	Efficacy of imagined contact intervention with children and adolescents in reducing negative intergroup outcomes: A systematic review.	Systematic review	Western European countries	Community/intergroup relations; acceptance of diversity	Seven out of 11 appraised quality criteria met Concerns identified: Review question not clearly and explicitly stated Unclear if critical appraisal was adequate and if it was conducted by two or more reviewers independently Unclear if likelihood of publication bias was assessed

Annex D: Search string for all database searches

("social cohesion" OR "social capital" OR "social solidarity" OR "community resilience" OR "prejudice reduction" OR "misinformation" OR "disinformation" OR "malinformation") AND ("intervention" OR "initiative" OR "program*" OR "scheme") AND ("rapid review" OR "rapid evidence review" OR "rapid evidence appraisal" OR "systematic review" OR "scoping review" OR "meta-analysis")

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