

## Growing-up in post-conflict community: Lessons learned from Croatia

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### Characteristics of the post-conflict community

1. Communities have been fundamentally changed by the experience of war.
2. System of social support is seriously disrupted and inadequate.
3. A high degree of mistrust between formerly belligerent parties living together.
4. The post-conflict community is in a kind of "survival mode", so that the formerly hostile sides continue to see each other as a constant threat.
5. There is no time period after which a community ceases to be a "post-conflict".

### Our research program

#### Two general objectives:

1. To monitor avoiding behavior (social distancing and tendencies to discriminate) and approaching intergroup behaviors (frequency and quality of intergroup contact and prosocial behavior) of children and adults in a post-conflict community.
2. To further illustrate the specificities of growing up in post-conflict communities, we compare these findings with those of other multi-ethnic communities in which ethnic minorities are also very present, but which are no longer considered post-conflict communities.

### Major findings

1. Time does not truly heal wounds.
2. Intergroup orientations of adults recover faster than those of children.
3. Post-conflict circumstances are precisely the reason for the general slow recovery of interethnic relations.
4. The typical differences in behaviors between the majority and minority groups become crucial in post-conflict communities. Specifically, the social functions of avoiding and approaching behaviors differ for these groups, and this effect is amplified by the social context (e.g., whether it is post-conflict or not).

### Take home messages

- Children are not responsible for bringing about change, adults are. But children can and must be supported in their efforts to make contact with peers from the other group.
- The rights of minorities must be reconciled with the rights of children to grow up in an integrated community.
- School should be used as a space for social integration to help children overcome community division (e. g. in extracurricular activities if the same classes are not possible).
- Intergroup contact is not a panacea, but it is essential for post-conflict recovery and (re)building a functioning community.