

Positive and negative contact between Africans and native Italians: Importance for migrants' collective action in support of their and other groups' rights

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Abstract

This research investigates the positive and negative contact experiences of African migrants with native Italians and the association between contact and behavioural intentions to reduce social inequalities. Two studies examined the associations between intergroup contact of migrants and their collective action in support of their or other group members, by testing the mediating role of positive and negative emotions towards natives. Hypotheses were tested with two samples of first-generation, legal African migrants living in Italy for less than 3 years ($N_s = 242$ [118 males], 251 [154]). Negative contact was positively associated with collective action in support of one's group, especially among respondents with higher positive intergroup experiences, and anger towards native people mediated this association. The association of positive contact with collective action to foster a more egalitarian society in general was mediated by reduced fear towards native people, and the association between positive contact and collective action at large was stronger for migrants with lower negative intergroup contact. Overall, this research provides further evidence on the impact of intergroup contact on migrants, specifically

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on the role of affective factors in their association with migrants' willingness to engage in collective action to reduce societal inequality at large.

KEYWORDS

civic action, collective action, emotions, immigration, intergroup contact

1 | INTRODUCTION

The increasing phenomenon of migration leaves unattended many instances of social discrimination against and inequality faced by migrants in many European countries, including Italy. Those instances range from denying migrants a safe place to disembark, to their unfair treatment in multiple domains of life in the host societies, such as unequal pay, refusal to recognize their qualifications, to failing to grant them a place on the housing list, or the right to vote. Extensive research has shown that positive intergroup contact offers a potential strategy to reduce discrimination towards disadvantaged minorities, as migrants (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Moreover, intergroup contact promotes the involvement of majority group members in collective actions in support of minorities (e.g., attending protests, signing petitions; Selvanathan, Techakesari, Tropp, & Barlow, 2018) to achieve social equality among all citizens, independently of their ethnic origins. Nevertheless, given that intergroup contact involves both parties' experiences, the present research focused on the perspective of disadvantaged group members as migrants and their willingness to get involved in collective action aimed at fostering more egalitarian societies (Cakal, Hewstone, Schwär, & Heath, 2011; Dixon, Durrheim, & Tredoux, 2005). Specifically, we aim to go beyond previous research by assessing the link between intergroup contact with the majority group and not only collective action intentions of migrants, such as attention to struggles and needs of their own group (i.e., Van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009), but also active engagement to address societal issues of the host community at large, through participation in community activities as well as protests related to crucial problems, such as criminality and gender inequality. In this vein, we aimed to extend the literature on intergroup contact by examining the role of majority-minority group experiences in promoting or inhibiting different forms of active participation of migrant people in the host society at large.

Research on intergroup contact reported that positive contact with majority group members can have an 'ironic' effect on minority group members, reducing their collective action intentions (Hässler et al., 2020; Hayward, Tropp, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2018; Tausch & Becker, 2012), although a recent meta-analysis throws doubt on the claims for this ironic effect (Reimer & Sengupta, 2022). Negative contact, in contrast, as when migrants are confronted with discrimination, may have a paradoxical beneficial outcome, whereby it encourages migrants' collective action to challenge unequal treatment of their ingroup (Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014; Hayward et al., 2018; Reimer et al., 2017). Given the contrasting impact of differently valenced forms of contact, the central aim of this research is to examine in greater depth the associations between both positive and negative intergroup contact of migrants and their willingness to undertake collective action to challenge social inequalities faced by their own group as well as in favour of other groups and society as a whole (i.e., the desire to act to improve the quality of life of the host society). Moreover, recent research has yielded conflicting results on the interaction between positive and negative contact in affecting intergroup attitudes. For instance, among Polish immigrants living in Iceland who scored relatively higher on positive intergroup contact (compared with those who scored relatively lower), the effect of negative contact with the majority group in predicting an indirect measure of prejudice (perceived cultural differences; Árnadóttir, Lolliot, Brown, & Hewstone, 2018) was enhanced. In contrast, negative intergroup contact of ethnic minorities in Denmark (measured in terms of perceived personal discrimination) did not moderate the cross-group friendship-prejudice relationship, whereas perceived group discrimination even enhanced the effect of positive cross-group

friendship in reducing prejudice towards majority members (Rafiqi & Thomsen, 2021). Thus, to extend and provide further evidence to address the previous mixed evidence, the present research explored the interaction of valenced intergroup contact on behavioural intentions to reduce social inequalities.

In this vein, we first examined the links between valenced intergroup contact of migrant people, positive and negative emotions towards the majority group, and behavioural intentions to reduce social inequalities, measured as collective action (Study 1) and societal collective action intentions (Study 2). Second, we considered emotions as mediators in the relationships between contact and both types of collective action. Third, we explored the interaction between positive and negative contact to assess its association with both outcomes. To achieve these aims, we conducted two surveys with recent African migrants living in Italy. In doing so, we aimed to extend the literature on intergroup contact by conducting this investigation in a nation where a substantial increase in immigration is relatively recent and anti-immigration feelings are pervasive (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2017). Moreover, we focused our analysis on rarely studied samples of migrants, rather than the host population.

2 | THE BENEFICIAL AND IRONIC EFFECTS OF POSITIVE INTERGROUP CONTACT ON DIFFERENT FORMS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Research has shown that there is a significant beneficial effect of positive contact on reducing outgroup prejudice for both majority and minority group members (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Among other social benefits, positive intergroup contact is associated with increased civic engagement of majority group members, such as community service to improve life conditions of different groups living in the same area (Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray, & Born, 2012) or support towards classmates that belong to different ethnic outgroups (Bowman, 2011). Civic engagement is a concept that is applied to a large variety of issues, yet its definitions vary widely (Phan & Kloos, 2023, pp. 55), but includes 'all individual and collective activities that address issues of public concern, and enhance the well-being of one's community and the society' (Chan, Ou, & Reynolds, 2014, pp. 1830). In this vein, activism, volunteerism and political participation are considered different forms of civic engagement (McBride, Sherraden, & Pritzker, 2006). The variety of ways in which people can be engaged in support of societal benefits allows for researchers to consider unidimensional or multidimensional approaches to conceptualizing and measuring civic engagement (Harris & Roose, 2014). A particular type of activism, namely, collective action, has been examined from the perspective of minority groups in the context of intergroup contact. Collective action is defined as 'acting as a representative of one group and where the action is directed at improving the conditions of the group as a whole' (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990, p. 995). In this vein, research has focused on migrants' engagement in activities such as protests and petitions in favour of their own group's rights, overlooking their active engagement with regard to other societal issues (Stepick, Stepick, & Labissiere, 2008). Specifically, research has highlighted the 'ironic effect of harmony' arguing that positive intergroup contact can lead to a reduction of the minority group members' willingness to engage in collective action aimed at decreasing societal inequalities faced by their own group (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009). A cross-sectional study showed that positive contact of ethnic minorities (i.e., African Americans, Hispanics) with Whites in the United States was associated with reduced anger towards the majority group and lower perceived discrimination that in turn led to reduced collective action intentions and behaviours of ethnic minorities (Hayward et al., 2018). Nevertheless, results of cross-sectional surveys across 22 European countries showed that in countries where majority group members report that their experiences with ethnic minorities are positive, members of minority groups were more likely to report that they engaged in actions to support their own rights (Kauff, Green, Schmid, Hewstone, & Christ, 2016). Up to now research on intergroup contact and social change suggests that other intervening factors can affect this relationship, and further research is needed to disentangle underlying processes (Di Bernardo et al., 2021). In this regard, given that the effects of intergroup contact, especially for minority group members, may not always be

positive but can apparently also be negative, the role of negative intergroup experiences on collective action intentions to support one's group has, albeit recently, also been examined.

3 | INTERGROUP CONTACT VALENCE AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Negative intergroup contact encountered by minority group members quite often takes the form of intolerance and discrimination (Stephan et al., 2002). This exposure elicits minority group members' anxiety, leading to less support for future intergroup interactions with the outgroup (Tropp, 2003). However, among minority groups, the consequences of negative contact are not only adverse. Negative intergroup contact facilitates minority group members' collective action. Research across different contexts and minority groups showed that negative contact with majority group members is associated with more support for social change (Bağcı Hemşinlioğlu & Türnüklü, 2019; Graf & Sczesny, 2019; Hayward et al., 2018). In one cross-sectional and one longitudinal study that considered both negative and positive intergroup experiences, Reimer et al. (2017) showed that when negative contact was included in the analysis, results did not support the ironic effect of positive contact, that is its negative relation with collective action. The results of a recent multinational cross-sectional study (Hässler et al., 2020) also supported the assumption that ethnic and sexual minorities show lower willingness to engage in collective action only when they report more positive but intimate contact (i.e., friendship) or lack negative contact experiences. Yet, positive contact was positively associated with one particular form of collective action: working in solidarity with the majority group towards social change. Finally, a recent meta-analysis by Reimer and Sengupta (2022) raised three serious doubts about the claims for an ironic effect of contact. First of all, they found stronger evidence of a positive association between negative contact and collective action than of a negative association between positive contact and collective action. Second, correlations between contact and relevant outcomes (perceived injustice, collective action and support for reparation policies) were variable and small; and third, as previous reported, positive contact was no longer associated with these outcomes after controlling for negative contact (Reimer & Sengupta, 2022), highlighting the importance of considering both types of contact simultaneously.

To our knowledge, no research has investigated the link between differently valenced intergroup contact and minority group members' collective action, in terms of activities to address unrelated issues of public concern in one's own context or neighbourhood. However, positive contact or having pleasant relations with the majority group, may sometimes activate the interest and willingness of minority group members to work with others in challenging more general problems faced by society as a whole (e.g., criminality). Thus, while negative intergroup contact with the majority group may facilitate collective action to improve the quality of life of one's own group, positive contact may elicit minority members' more general societal collective action, rather than disengage minority group members from active involvement in addressing community issues.

Overall, as Schäfer et al. (2021) have contended, positive forms of contact cannot and should not be viewed in isolation from negative contact experiences. Yet, the question of how these two forms of contact might interact to shape different forms of collective action tendencies and behaviours of minority groups is still relatively under-explored. Thus, more research is needed to understand the processes underlying the associations between intergroup contact valence and minorities' engagement to support social equality. Among other processes, emotions contribute to explain the effects of intergroup contact on attitudes towards outgroup members, and on intentions to engage in collective behaviour.

4 | EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES, INTERGROUP CONTACT AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Intergroup emotions theory (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000) suggests that in situations where individuals are categorized as group members (as would typically be the case in the context of intergroup contact; Brown & Hewstone, 2005),

group-related events become self-relevant and arouse emotions together with their associated action tendencies, as behavioural intentions to engage (or not to engage) in collective action supporting intergroup (in)equalities (Smith, 1993). In this regard, research has addressed the role of specific negative emotions in the relationship between intergroup contact and different types of collective action.

According to the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008), anger is a main predictor that drives collective support for reducing social inequalities among minority group members (e.g., Cakal et al., 2011; Eisner, Settersten, Turner-Zwinkels, & Hässler, 2021; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013) when they feel discriminated and relatively deprived (e.g., Mackie et al., 2000). Thus, anger should, at least partly, explain the relationship between negative intergroup contact and collective action (Tausch, Saguy, & Bryson, 2015).

The negative emotions of anxiety and fear usually elicited by a sense of disadvantage and discriminatory treatment from majority group members, reflected in negative intergroup experiences, might also explain migrants' initial engagement in support of social justice for their own group and against other more general societal problems, in order to impede further harmful situations. Indeed, intergroup anxiety usually leads to outgroup avoidance, although that may be difficult for minority group members, given the high probability of encountering majority group members. In contrast, positive intergroup contact, by reducing anxiety, anger and fear towards the majority group, promotes interest and engagement in the host society in terms of civic participation to promote social equality. In this vein, research has shown intergroup anxiety to be one of the crucial affective factors that may explain the effects of both positive and negative intergroup contact on behavioural intentions towards outgroup members (Abersson, 2015; Hayward, Tropp, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2017; Tausch, Hewstone, & Roy, 2009; Turner, Hewstone, Voci, & Vonofakou, 2008).

Positive intergroup emotions have received less attention in the possible link between contact and collective action. Positive contact can also increase both perspective-taking and empathy of minority group members with respect to the majority group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), that can undermine their willingness to engage in collective activities to change their disadvantaged conditions. However, positive contact, through increased empathy towards the majority group, should also augment minority group members' engagement in addressing broader societal issues, such as gender inequality and criminality, that are also relevant for the majority group. In contrast, negative contact might increase the willingness to support only one's own group in challenging the system, by reducing empathy towards the majority group and its power. Moreover, hope is a positively valenced emotion and it is associated with the willingness to improve disadvantaged conditions of some groups, but it depends on the referent of hope. Across four cross-sectional studies, involving different intergroup contexts, Hasan-Aslih, Pliskin, van Zomeren, Halperin, and Saguy (2019) showed that hope for harmony, compared to hope for social equality, was negatively linked with minority group members' willingness to engage in collective action. Thus, a potential negative consequence of having positive intergroup contact is that it could increase the experience of harmony-focused emotions, leading to reduced motivation for social change towards equality. Nevertheless, most of the reported studies focused on the role of only one of these emotions in relation to positive or negative intergroup contact or collective action. In the present work, we investigated how multiple positive and negative emotions were related to support for social change in favour of one's own group and the society at large.

4.1 | Overview of the studies

The present research sought to investigate the role of positive and negative intergroup contact of ethnic minority migrant people with native Italians and the interactions between these two kinds of experiences in affecting intentions towards collective action (Study 1) and towards societal collective action (Study 2) as means to reduce societal inequalities. We also assess the mediating role of different positive (i.e., empathy, hope) and

negative (i.e., anger, anxiety, fear) emotions related to collective action in the relationships between intergroup contact and both collective action and societal collective action intentions. To achieve these goals, we conducted two cross-sectional studies with first-generation African migrant people living in Italy, a country that like other Southern European states has in the last decades received augmented immigration from countries (notably, African countries; Panebianco, 2019) that have suffered growing poverty and conflict. Due to its relatively recent history of large-scale immigration, Italy is still not prepared to handle the phenomenon, and the host population often responds to the newcomers with increased perceived threat, suspicion and opposition (Ambrosini, 2013). Migrants, consequently, are often victims of discrimination and social exclusion by native people of the host society (Weber, 2015).

In this context, in line with Reimer and Sengupta (2022) meta-analysis, we expect that negative intergroup contact of migrants with Italians will be positively associated with their collective action intentions to support their own group (Hypothesis 1a). Moreover, extending previous evidence on the association between positive intergroup contact and a specific form of collective action, namely acting in solidarity to achieve social change (Hässler et al., 2020), we test migrants' engagement in favour of the rights of other disadvantaged groups and against criminality in the host country. We hypothesize that positive contact of migrants with native Italians will be positively related to societal collective action intentions, promoting social equality at large (Hypothesis 2a).

In the light of Hayward et al. (2017) evidence on the mediating role of specific emotions in the associations between differently valenced contact and intergroup attitudes, we test which emotions can explain the links between intergroup contact and collective action as well as between intergroup contact and societal collective action. Anger experienced by minority group members is a predictor of collective action intentions in support of social change for one's group (Tausch et al., 2015), though anxiety elicited by negative experiences with the majority group may also enhance the desire to challenge the status quo at large. Moreover, empathy towards the majority group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) and hope for harmony (Hasan-Aslih et al., 2019) may inhibit those intentions to challenge the status quo and the privileges of the majority group. Therefore, we hypothesize that the association between negative intergroup contact and collective action intentions of migrants will be mediated by increased anger and anxiety (Hypothesis 1b), reduced empathy and hope for harmony (Hypothesis 1c). Considering that societal collective action involves activities to work together with majority group members to address issues that could improve the overall society, we hypothesize that the link between positive intergroup contact and societal collective action may be mediated by emotions of discomfort elicited by the current system, such as fear and anxiety, or support of it, such as empathy and hope for harmony. Specifically, we hypothesize that the association between positive contact and societal collective action intentions will be mediated by reduced fear and anxiety (Hypothesis 2b) and increased empathy towards the majority group and hope for harmony (Hypothesis 2c).

Given that previous research has shown associations between interaction effects of positive and negative contact of minority groups and attitudes towards the majority group (Árnadóttir et al., 2018; Rafiqi & Thomsen, 2021), we explored whether these interactions were associated with both types of collective action intentions. Positive contact may attenuate or enhance the link between negative contact and collective action. Moreover, negative contact may attenuate or enhance the link between positive contact and societal collective action.

4.2 | Study 1

In Study 1, we investigated whether, and if so how, negative intergroup contact between ethnic minority African migrants living in Italy and Italian host-nation natives was associated with collective action intentions in favour of their ingroup. We expected that negative contact of migrants would be positively associated with collective action intentions. We also hypothesized that the association between negative intergroup contact and collective

action intentions would be mediated positively by anger, anxiety and negatively by empathy towards native Italians and hope for harmony. We also explored the interaction between positive and negative contact and collective action intentions of migrants.

5 | METHOD

5.1 | Participants

The sample was composed of 242 African first-generation legal migrants living in the North-East of Italy ($N = 118$ men, $M_{\text{age}} = 32.90$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 8.65$). On average, respondents had been living in Italy for 1 year ($SD = 0.51$) and they came from different African countries (34.2%, Nigeria, 31.3% Senegal, 16.1% Ivory Coast, 9.6%; Morocco, 8.8% Cameroon). With regard to the socio-economic situation and education level of the sample: 5% perceived their economic situation as good, 62.4% as mediocre, 21.1% as worse than most, 2.5% as poor and 9.1% as better than most; 13.2% had an elementary school diploma, 45% a high school diploma, 21.9% a university degree and 19% some other education certification.

5.2 | Procedure

All respondents were legal newcomer African migrants who attended different activities at a multicultural city centre in the North-East of Italy. They were contacted and met by the third author, who is from Cameroon. She asked them to complete, on a voluntary basis, a paper-pencil questionnaire in French, English or Italian, according to each respondent's choice, based on their linguistic competence. The questionnaire was formulated in English and then translated and back-translated from French and Italian. Respondents chose the language they preferred to fill in the questionnaire. English or French are the main languages in all the African countries involved in this study. Before completing the survey, they were first presented the study goals and then asked to sign a consent form. The study was previously approved by the University of Bologna Ethic Research Committee.

6 | MEASURES

6.1 | Positive and negative intergroup contact

We measured positive and negative contact using, respectively, six and five items adapted from Hayward et al. (2017) and rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *very often*). Respondents rated how often they had 'positive', 'friendly', 'pleasant' and 'collaborative' experiences with native Italians, and how often they 'feel respected' and 'treated as equals'. To assess negative contact, respondents rated how often they had 'negative', 'unfriendly', 'unpleasant' and 'conflictual' experiences with native Italians, and how often they felt that they were treated differently. Items formed reliable indices of positive ($\alpha = .87$) and negative ($\alpha = .91$) contact.

6.2 | Collective action intentions

This measure was assessed using the following two items adapted from Van Zomeren et al. (2008): 'I will participate in meetings to improve migrant people's rights in Italy'; 'I will take part in protests to support migrants' rights in Italy'. Both items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *very much*) and were significantly positively correlated, $r(251) = .665$, $p < .001$.

6.3 | Intergroup emotions

Emotions were assessed by asking respondents to what extent they felt each emotion towards Italian people. All items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *very much*). The two items each for anger (i.e., anger, rage; $r [243] = .919, p < .001$), anxiety (i.e., anxious, stressed; $r [242] = .687, p < .001$) and empathy (i.e., sympathy, kindness; $r [248] = .776, p < .001$) were significantly positively correlated. Fear towards the majority group and hope for harmony were assessed using one item each. The survey included other measures that were not considered in the present study.

7 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Means, standard deviations and correlations among the study variables are reported in Table 1. Using the macro PROCESS (Model 5; Hayes, 2013) in SPSS, we tested a moderated mediation model of the association between negative intergroup contact with the majority group and collective action intentions, examining the moderation by positive intergroup contact and the mediation by anger, anxiety, fear, empathy and hope for harmony. In the model we controlled for age, gender, socio-economic situation and education level of respondents. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $R^2 = 0.27, F(12, 215) = 6.59, p \leq .001$. As expected, negative contact was positively associated with anger, and fear, and it was negatively associated with empathy (see Table 2). There was no significant association between negative contact and hope for harmony as well as anxiety. Findings showed that anger, positively and anxiety, negatively, were significantly associated with collective action (see Table 3). No other emotion was significantly associated with collective action. There was no significant association between positive contact and collective action. Anger, $\beta = 0.30, SE = 0.05, 95\% CI [0.20, 0.40]$ mediated the relationship between negative contact and collective action. This indicates a full mediation as the direct effect of negative contact became non-significant after including the mediators. Furthermore, anxiety remained significantly associated with collective action, $\beta = -0.17, SE = 0.06, 95\% CI [-0.29, -0.05]$, but given that it was not associated with negative intergroup contact, thus it cannot be considered a mediator. The relationship between negative contact and collective action intentions was also moderated by positive contact. As shown in Figure 1, for respondents with high positive contact, negative contact was positively associated with collective action, $\beta = 0.31, SE = 0.10, 95\% CI [0.10, 0.51]$, whereas for those with low positive contact, there was no significant association, $\beta = -0.01, SE = 0.09, 95\% CI [-0.20, 0.17]$.¹

To summarize, results showed that migrants' negative intergroup contact with native Italians was positively associated with collective action intentions (supporting Hypothesis 1a), and increased anger with reference to Italian natives mediated this relationship (supporting Hypothesis 1b), whereas lower anxiety was associated with increased

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations and correlations among variables (Study 1).

	M	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Positive contact	3.59	0.80	-.321**	-.110	-.198**	-.175**	-.078	.157*	.130*
2. Negative contact	2.36	0.98		.302**	.364**	-.034	.182**	-.378**	.153*
3. Collective action	2.74	1.01			.417**	-.163*	.133*	-.086	.119
4. Anger	2.81	1.25				.068	.233**	-.090	-.016
5. Anxiety	2.46	1.04					.228**	-.044	-.170**
6. Fear	2.69	1.05						-.047	-.004
7. Empathy	3.08	0.90							.006
8. Hope for harmony	2.65	1.03							

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Results for estimated coefficients of the first step of the mediation model of negative contact (Study 1).

DV (mediators)	Anger			Anxiety			Fear			Empathy			Hope for harmony		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Negative contact	0.42	0.08	4.91***	-0.15	0.07	-2.02*	0.15	0.07	1.96*	-0.32	0.06	-5.08***	0.20	0.07	2.76
Positive contact	-0.14	0.10	-1.39	-0.30	0.08	-3.37**	-0.06	0.09	-0.73	0.04	0.07	0.56	0.27	0.08	3.03
Age	0.00	0.01	0.63	0.00	0.01	0.35	0.00	0.01	0.07	0.00	0.01	0.22	0.00	0.01	0.19
Gender	0.06	0.16	0.41	0.38	0.14	2.70*	0.15	0.14	1.05	0.07	0.12	0.60	-0.01	0.14	-0.08
Socio-economic status	0.10	0.09	1.03	0.17	0.08	2.05*	0.02	0.08	0.23	-0.03	0.07	-0.52	0.01	0.08	0.24
Education	-0.04	0.08	-0.49	0.08	0.07	1.14	0.10	0.07	1.35	0.03	0.06	0.51	0.05	0.07	0.67

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 3 Results for estimated coefficients of the moderated mediation model of negative Contact (Study 1).

	B	SE B	t	R ²	F
DV: Collective action					
Step 1					
Constant	2.70	0.57	3.63***	0.23	4.14
Negative contact	0.30	0.06	4.38***		
Age	-0.00	0.00	-0.44		
Gender	-0.04	0.12	-0.29		
Socio-economic status	0.06	0.07	0.90		
Education	-0.01	0.06	-0.10		
Step 2					
Constant	1.83	0.53	3.42***	0.26	6.59
Negative contact	0.13	0.07	1.78		
Positive contact	-0.05	0.08	-0.61		
Anger	0.30	0.05	5.86***		
Anxiety	-0.17	0.06	-2.86**		
Fear	0.07	0.05	1.20		
Empathy	0.02	0.07	0.36		
Hope for harmony	0.06	0.06	1.01		
Negative contact × positive contact	0.19	0.08	2.42**		

p < .01; *p < .001.

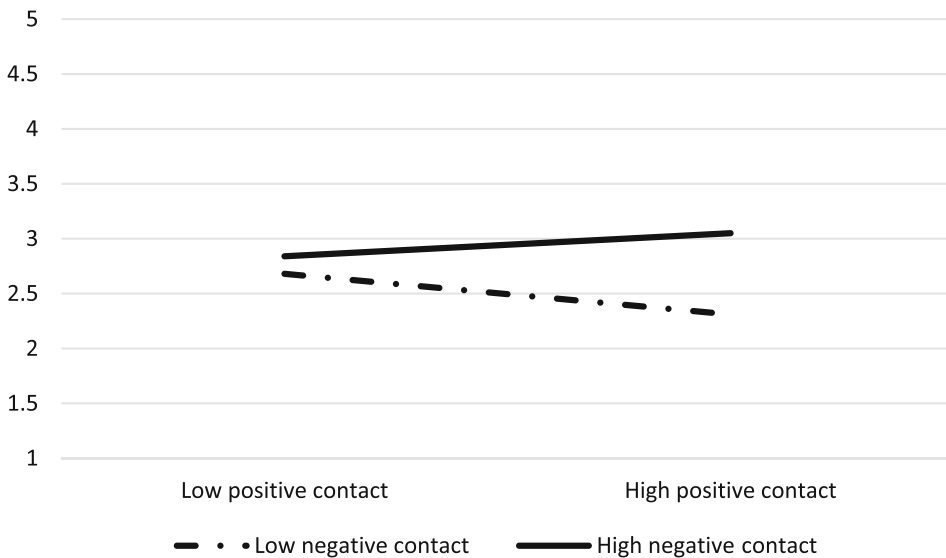


FIGURE 1 Collective action as a function of negative contact and positive contact (Study 1). Adjusted R² = 0.015, F(1,178) = 3.96, p = .04.

collective action. Results did not support Hypothesis 1c on the mediating role of positive emotions. Moreover, migrants who reported high positive intergroup contact showed a stronger positive relationship between negative contact and collective action intentions. This evidence shows that, in this context, positive contact between majority

and ethnic minority groups does not inhibit but facilitates migrants' willingness to engage in actions supporting social change when they also have negative intergroup experiences.

7.1 | Study 2

To extend the results of Study 1 on the link between intergroup contact and activities fostering more egalitarian societies, in Study 2 we focused on a different and understudied type of engagement of migrants, namely, willingness to take part in community activities to reduce social disparities among different outgroups. We investigated whether, and if so how, positive contact of African migrants with native Italians was associated with collective action to address issues that face society as a whole, such as gender inequality and criminality. We expected a positive association between migrants' positive intergroup contact and societal collective action intentions. Furthermore, we hypothesized that the association between positive contact and this type of collective action would be mediated negatively by anxiety and fear, and positively by empathy and hope for harmony. We also explored the interaction between positive and negative intergroup contact of migrants on their collective action intentions in favour of societal improvement broadly conceived.

8 | METHOD

8.1 | Participants

The sample was composed of 251 first-generation, legal migrants ($N = 154$ men) coming from different African countries (i.e., 56% Cameroon, 33% Senegal, 11% Ivorian Coast). Among the respondents included in the sample, the majority (89%) declared they had been living in the North-East of Italy for more than 1 year, but less than 3 years. With regard to the socio-economic situation and education level of the sample: 31.1% perceived their economic situation as good, 29.9% as mediocre, 10.4% as worse than most, 21.5% as poor and 4.5% as wealthy or better than most; 4.4% had no school education; 22.3% had an elementary school diploma, 36.3% a high school diploma, 29.5% a university degree and 6.4% some other education certification.

8.2 | Procedure

All respondents were legal African immigrants and were recruited at different recreational associations and cultural centres dedicated to ethnic minority activities (from dance classes to religion teaching) in the North-East of Italy. We followed the same procedure as in Study 1. The study was previously approved by the University of Bologna Ethic Research Committee.

8.3 | Measures

8.3.1 | Positive and negative intergroup contact

We measured positive and negative contact using three items each, adapted from Hayward et al. (2017). Participants were asked to rate how often in the last month their experiences with Italian people were positive (i.e., 'positive', 'friendly', 'polite') and how often they were negative (i.e., 'negative', 'unfriendly', 'rude'). Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *never*; 5 = *a lot*) and formed reliable indices of positive ($\alpha = .80$), and negative ($\alpha = .81$) contact.

8.3.2 | Societal collective action intentions

We measured this type of collective action using two items to assess potential involvement of respondents in distinct community activities: 'I would be willing to' (a) 'participate in peaceful demonstrations to support gender equality in Italy', (b) 'support neighbourhood activities to reduce criminality'. Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) and formed a reliable index, $r(246) = .58, p < .001$.

8.3.3 | Intergroup emotions

We assessed emotions by asking respondents to what extent they felt each of eight emotions. Items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *very much*). As in Study 1, anger was assessed using two items (i.e., anger, rage) that were significantly positively correlated, $r(250) = .89, p < .001$, as was anxiety (i.e., anxious, stressed), $r(250) = .79, p < .001$ and empathy (i.e., sympathy, kindness), $r(250) = .84, p < .001$. Fear was also assessed using two items (i.e., fear, worried) that were significantly positively correlated, $r(249) = .65, p < .001$. We also assessed hope for harmony, using only one item. The survey included other measures that were not considered in the present study.

9 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Means, standard deviations and correlations between the study variables are reported in Table 4. As in Study 1, we tested two moderated mediation models using PROCESS (Model 5; Hayes, 2013). First, we assessed the model with positive contact with the majority group as predictor, controlling for respondents' age, gender, socio-economic situation and education level. The overall regression model was statistically significant, $R^2 = 0.23, F(12, 214) = 5.51, p \leq .001$. Positive contact was negatively associated with anger, anxiety and fear, and positively associated with empathy, and hope for harmony (see Table 5). Fear was the only emotion (negatively) associated with societal collective action. The association between positive contact and societal collective action intentions was mediated by fear, $\beta = 0.16, SE = 0.04, 95\% CI [0.08, 0.26]$ as the direct effect of positive contact became non-significant after including the emotions in the model (see Table 6). Moreover, this association was moderated by negative contact. As shown in Figure 2, for respondents with low negative contact, positive contact was positively associated with societal collective action intentions, $\beta = 0.30, SE = 0.11, 95\% CI [0.10, 0.51]$, whereas for those with high negative contact, there was no significant association, $\beta = 0.07, SE = 0.11, 95\% CI [-0.15, 0.29]$.²

To summarize, results showed that positive contact with native Italians was positively associated with African migrants' societal collective action intentions (supporting Hypothesis 2a), and this relation was explained by reduced fear towards the majority group (partially supporting Hypothesis 2b). As in Study 1, results did not support Hypothesis 2c on the mediating role of positive emotions. Moreover, for migrants reporting relatively fewer negative intergroup experiences, positive intergroup contact was significantly associated with societal collective action intentions.

10 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The model proposed in this research offers an insight into the relationship between intergroup contact valence (positive vs. negative contact) and collective support for social change, to shed some light on this important topic (Cakal et al., 2011; Dixon et al., 2005) specifically considering the perspective of African migrants in Italy. We investigated the roles of affective mediators and the interplay between positive and negative contact on collective action (Study 1) and societal collective action (Study 2) intentions. Study 1 findings showed that negative intergroup contact

TABLE 4 Means, standard deviations and correlations among variables (Study 2).

	M	SD	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Positive contact	4.00	0.66	-.452**	.222**	-.177**	-.229**	-.418**	.182**	.241**
2. Negative contact	2.04	0.63		.066	.315**	.182**	.151*	-.200**	.142*
3. Societal collective action	4.00	0.79			.068	-.131*	-.336**	-.025	.188**
4. Anger	3.58	0.96				.219**	.128*	-.165*	.102
5. Anxiety	2.71	0.95					.039	.171*	-.074
6. Fear	2.07	0.65						-.164**	-.118
7. Empathy	3.55	1.03							-.065
8. Hope for harmony	3.34	1.06							

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

of migrants with Italian natives was positively associated with their collective action intentions, and anger mediated this relationship (supporting Hypotheses 1a and 1b). Exploring the interaction between differently valenced intergroup contact of migrants (Árnadóttir et al., 2018; Rafiqi & Thomsen, 2021), we found that the strength of the association between negative contact and collective action intentions was stronger under higher, compared with lower positive contact. Study 2 showed that positive contact with native Italians was positively associated with collective action intentions to address societal issues within one's community (supporting Hypothesis 2a). Fear mediated the relationship between positive contact with societal collective action (partially supporting Hypothesis 2b). Moreover, the relationship between positive contact and societal collective action intentions was enhanced under lower than higher levels of negative contact. Overall, this research highlighted the distinct and intertwined roles of positive and negative experiences between migrants and the majority group in shaping migrants' willingness to support social change in favour of reducing social inequalities and lowering the crime rate. Furthermore, the research expanded previous research addressing the role of specific emotions in explaining the links between intergroup experiences and willingness to actively participate in societal improvement (Hasan-Aslih et al., 2019; Hayward et al., 2017).

10.1 | Theoretical and practical implications

The present findings expand the emerging literature on intergroup contact valence (Bağcı Hemşinlioğlu & Türnüklü, 2019; Hässler et al., 2020) by addressing crucial questions about when and how the distinct and reciprocal influence of positive and negative contact may contribute to building more inclusive societies. Moreover, focusing on the neglected perspective of African migrants' contact with Italian natives, we found novel evidence contributing to our understanding of these interethnic dynamics. Findings supported and extended previous research (Reimer & Sengupta, 2022) showing that positive contact does not reduce collective action intentions of ethnic minority groups. However, evidence did show that migrants who reported higher negative contact were more willing to engage in collective activities when they also had positive experiences with the majority group. Positive intergroup contact of migrants also supported their collective action intentions in favour of social equality and justice at large, thereby contributing to ameliorate the host society. Overall, results reveal the role of positive intergroup contact of ethnic minorities with majority members in promoting their willingness to engage in social change.

Extending evidence on the role of emotions in intergroup contact outcomes (Hayward et al., 2017), we examined five distinct emotions related to support for social change. Intergroup contact was linked with collective action via anger (Tausch et al., 2015). However, contrary to our expectations, anxiety was negatively associated with collective action intentions, working as an inhibiting instead of a facilitating factor. Moreover, if negative contact was

TABLE 5 Results for estimated coefficients of the first step of the mediation model of positive contact (Study 2).

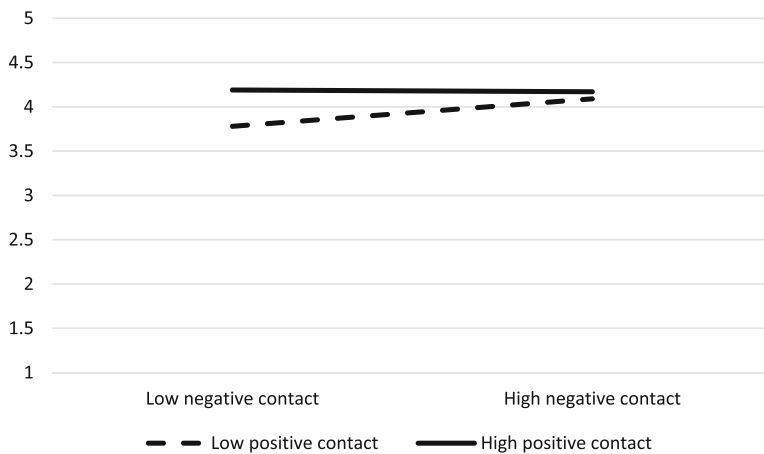
DV (mediators)	Anger			Anxiety			Fear			Empathy			Hope for harmony		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Positive contact	-0.10	0.09	-1.08	-0.27	0.10	-2.59**	-0.42	0.06	-6.23***	0.10	0.10	0.95	0.63	0.10	5.81***
Negative contact	0.51	0.10	4.76***	0.15	0.11	1.33	0.00	0.07	0.03	-0.34	0.12	-2.80**	0.39**	0.12	3.26**
Age	0.00	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.13	-0.00	0.02	-0.03	-0.01	0.03	-0.37	-0.05	0.03	-1.28
Gender	0.13	0.12	1.13	0.24	0.12	1.83	0.05	0.08	0.58	0.37	0.13	2.74*	-0.17	0.13	-1.28
Socio-economic status	0.06	0.04	1.29	0.05	0.05	1.01	-0.01	0.03	-0.37	-0.05	0.05	-1.07	0.18	0.05	3.47**
Education	0.15	0.06	2.55*	0.15	0.06	2.39	-0.01	0.04	-0.32	0.08	0.06	1.23	-0.09	0.06	-1.48

p* < .05; *p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

TABLE 6 Results for estimated coefficients of the moderated mediation model of positive contact (Study 2).

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>
DV: Societal collective action					
Step 1					
Constant	3.44	0.36	9.45***	0.10	4.88
Positive contact	0.26	0.07	3.67**		
Age	-0.02	0.03	-0.74		
Gender	-0.26	0.10	-2.59*		
Socio-economic status	0.04	0.04	1.07		
Education	-0.06	0.05	-1.20		
Step 2					
Constant	4.42	0.35	12.29***	0.18	6.65
Positive contact	0.14	0.09	1.61		
Negative contact	0.12	0.09	1.34		
Anger	0.07	0.05	1.35		
Anxiety	-0.07	0.05	1.46		
Fear	-0.33	0.07	-4.39***		
Empathy	-0.01	0.05	0.36		
Hope for harmony	0.06	0.05	1.35		
Positive contact × negative contact	-0.23	0.09	-2.45*		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

**FIGURE 2** Support for collective action as a function of positive contact and negative contact (Study 2). Adjusted $R^2 = 0.015$, $F(1,216) = 4.02$, $p = .04$.

associated with collective action of migrants via their increased anger, they were also willing to act for the improvement of the host society when their fear towards the majority group decreased through positive intergroup experiences with them. This evidence supports the crucial role of intergroup experiences in shaping reciprocal evaluations of the groups whose contribution is essential in challenging social status and improving societal equality (Cakal et al., 2011; Dixon et al., 2005). Taken together, the results of the present studies highlight that both types of

contact support migrants' motivation to be active participants in improving their host societies in terms of promoting egalitarianism and reducing intergroup injustice. These findings provide a starting point for research on the role of affective factors in facilitating or inhibiting migrants' active engagement to challenge the status quo on broader societal issues, as a further indicator of their adaptation and active participation to the host society.

In addition, exploratory analysis of interactions involving both forms of valenced contact showed a buffering effect of negative contact in the relationship of positive contact with collective action to address societal issues. This effect suggests that only for migrants with low negative experiences is positive contact associated with a willingness to participate in societal improvements not related to one's ingroup. This evidence should, however, be considered as preliminary, and future research needs to adduce additional data to provide stronger tests of the key hypotheses; conducting such research in different countries and/or using different minority group samples would increase the reliability and generalizability of our findings. Nonetheless, our findings suggest a novel benefit of positive intergroup contact in the process of migrants' adaptation, such as their reduced fear towards majority members and their willingness to work with them on societal issues, when they have not previously experienced negative contact with the majority group. This moderating role of negative contact is in line with the literature suggesting a desire to avoid the outgroup, potentially leading to segregation of minority group members as a consequence of their perception that their group is treated in an unfair or prejudicial way. Moreover, our evidence extends previous research on the association between intergroup contact and collective action; it reveals, specifically, that when both positive and negative intergroup contact are measured, positive intergroup experiences of migrant people may sometimes even enhance their willingness to engage in collective action to support their group, if they have also had negative intergroup experiences.

Therefore, even in a country like Italy, characterized by a recent history of large-scale migration and struggling to achieve social integration, our evidence shows that intergroup contact contributes to motivate minority group members to play a role in building more integrated and inclusive societies. In this vein, evidence highlights the importance of policy-makers and practitioners continuing to establish interventions to enhance contact between groups, because both types of valenced experiences can raise awareness of ethnic minority members' potential active role in promoting social equality in regard to different societal issues. Our evidence implies that the way in which immigrants feel that they are treated by the majority in their intergroup encounters contributes to shape their motivation to engage in activities to improve the quality of life in their society at large. In this regard, intergroup interactions, independently of their valence, may, via specific emotions, facilitate group members' willingness to be active participants in ameliorating conditions in their society. With the rise of nationalist movements in Europe that undermine social integration of migrant residents, this evidence sheds light on the key role of different intergroup experiences between host-majority and migrant-minority groups in promoting social equality for one's own and for others' groups and the development of cooperative relations between these groups.

10.2 | Limitations and directions for future research

We acknowledge some limitations of the present research. The evidence collected is based on convenience samples of migrants in both studies, hence conclusions should be drawn carefully, although our findings still help to shed light on the complexity of this phenomenon. Moreover, the employed measure of societal collective action involved too few items related to distinct aspects of public concern (i.e., gender inequality, criminality) to capture the multiple issues that can be addressed by taking part in collective actions to promote equality across society (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013). Thus, future research is needed to extend and validate these preliminary findings. Similarly, our emotion measures were composed of few items (with single-item measures in two cases), and future research should use specific validated measures to assess the role of affective processes in intergroup relationships. Most important, the cross-sectional design of both studies does not allow any inferences about causality between measured variables, and thus we are careful to talk about associations, not effects and interpretation of mediation

results in this design should be considered preliminary. Future studies should investigate the role of positive and negative contact in supporting social change in both longitudinal and experimental studies.

11 | CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the present research advances our knowledge on the role of intergroup contact valence in building egalitarian societies from the rather overlooked perspective of migrants. The complementary roles of positive and negative intergroup experiences in promoting different forms of migrants' engagement in ameliorating the societies in which they have come to live highlights that, independently of its valence, contact can help to promote equality in multicultural societies.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTES

¹ To provide further support for our hypothesized models, we tested alternative mediational models. A test of the mediating role of negative contact in the relationship between collective action and anger showed no significant indirect effect, $\beta = .11$, $SE = .07$, 95% CI $[-0.03, 0.26]$, nor did a test of the mediating role of collective action in the relationship between anger and negative contact, $\beta = .09$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI $[-0.03, 0.21]$. Thus, additional analyses supported the proposed order of the mediators.

² As in Study 1, we tested alternative mediational models. The mediating role of positive contact in the relationship between societal collective action intentions and fear showed a significant indirect effect, $\beta = -.49$, $SE = .22$, 95% CI $[-0.92, -0.05]$, as did the mediating role of societal collective action in the relationship between positive contact and fear, $B = -.20$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI $[-0.30, -0.10]$. Thus, additional analyses revealed that these reverse models are also plausible. Moreover, to replicate results of Study 1 we ran the moderated-mediation model considering the single item (i.e. 'I would be willing to attend events in support of refugees and new migrants' needs in Italy') as outcome variable. Results supported those of Study 1. In the model, results showed no positive association between positive contact and collective action intentions, $\beta = 0.09$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI $[-0.05, 0.32]$. Among all the emotions, fear was negatively associated with collective action, $\beta = -0.18$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI $[-0.46, -0.08]$. No other significant relationship between emotions and collective action was found. The association between positive contact and collective action intentions was mediated by fear, $\beta = -0.25$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI $[-0.44, -0.05]$. Moreover, this association was moderated by negative contact, $\beta = -0.27$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI $[-0.52, -0.02]$. For respondents with low negative contact, positive contact was positively associated with collective action intentions, $\beta = 0.24$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.50]$, whereas for those with high negative contact, there was no significant association, $\beta = -0.09$, $SE = 0.15$, 95% CI $[-0.39, 0.20]$.

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