

# Introduction

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development defines social policy as ‘public policies and institutions that aim to protect citizens from social contingencies and poverty, and ultimately to enable them to strive for their own life goals’, a definition that serves well here. The agency also recognises that ‘during the past three decades, such a view has been marginalised by policy approaches that emphasise safety nets and the targeting of vulnerable groups’.<sup>1</sup> As this paper will document, concerns about social cohesion come at a time of ‘after neoliberalism’, when social policy is being rethought (Jenson, 2007). Social policy is once again seen as a key underpinning of economic performance by many jurisdictions, from the local to the supranational and international, but there is little chance there will be a return to the practices of the *trente glorieuses*, the three decades of growth after 1945. This is the context for the following discussion of social cohesion and its impact on social development.

The paper is organised into three main sections. Part 1 examines the literature on social cohesion, and identifies three different ‘families’ of usage and the empirical grounding of each. Part 2 presents a range of indicators that have been used to measure social cohesion. They vary significantly, according to the definition of social cohesion used. Part 3 discusses the lessons to be drawn and puts forward some possible indicators for measuring social cohesion. Following the literature review and the lessons drawn, these indicators focus on the definition of social cohesion as social inclusion.

