

Lessons and a Proposed Set of Indicators

From this overview of the definition and measurement of social cohesion, we see clearly that it has served as a quasi-concept, one with academic credentials certainly (and surrounded by much academic debate), but also one which serves an important function in policy discourse. As such, it is not different from other concepts in the development and other literatures, such as that on social capital.²⁵

Reviewing the attention that has been paid to the quasi-concept provides a number of lessons.

One is that in many countries the focus on social cohesion emerged from a recognition that classic neoliberalism had hit a political and ideational wall and was generating negative outcomes such as high levels of poverty. Social cohesion, as a macro-goal to be maintained or fostered, appeared as a consensual substitute across a range of policy communities.

There is abundant empirical evidence that more egalitarian societies and settings, in part sustained by equality-seeking social policies, are correlated with positive outcomes such as good health, child development and labour market adjustments in the face of structural challenges. Therefore, social cohesion has been mobilised as a quasi-concept by those who seek to protect and advance social inclusion.

There is also a whole intellectual ‘industry’ in which social cohesion is defined as social capital, thereby generating another quasi-concept. Here there are ongoing debates about causality (do high-performing social settings generate social capital rather than depend on it?); about forms of social capital (what are the effects of bonding, bridging or linking?); and about whether policies can generate social activity (are there successful mechanisms for fostering networks and active participation?).

The greatest difficulty in using this notion of social cohesion for the UNRISD-Commonwealth Secretariat project seems to be one of measurement, as well as the focus on individual-level outcomes. If there is consensus across the literature, it is that social capital depends on trust in some form. Measurements of trust come from survey rather than behavioural data and therefore their availability is limited. In addition, when networks and participation are defined as the key component of social capital, there are difficulties in obtaining data. Empirical analysis has already fallen prey to these limits for cross-national comparisons

Following this review of the literature on social cohesion and its indicators, I propose the adoption of three types of indicators. With the exception of some of the later measures, they should all be available from World Bank or International Labour Organization (ILO) databases.

A first set of indicators, 1 to 5, seeks basic measures of social disparities. Gaps are indicated by inequality in access to economic resources, as well as basic social services.

1. *Social cohesion as social inclusion – indicated by access to financial resources, measured in three ways:*

- The *Gini coefficient*, which is a measure of inequality of income distribution or inequality of wealth distribution.
- Measures of income shares, including
 - the share of middle 60 per cent of the population
 - income share held by highest 10 per cent
 - income share held by highest 20 per cent
 - income share held by lowest 10 per cent
 - income share held by lowest 20 per cent.
- Measures of poverty:
 - percentage of population meeting the poverty headcount ratio at \$1 a day
 - percentage of population meeting the poverty headcount ratio at \$2 a day
 - percentage of population at national poverty line.

These poverty measures should be provided for minorities and immigrant groups, as appropriate to each small state.

2. *Social cohesion as social inclusion – indicated by access to economic activity*

- Unemployment rate (percentage of total labour force)
 - youth unemployment (percentage of total labour force aged 15–24)
 - female unemployment (percentage of total female labour force)
 - minority (minorities) unemployment rate. This measure may not be appropriate to all small states. It should also, if possible, be analysed by sex and for youth
 - immigrant unemployment rate. This measure may not be appropriate to all small states. It should also, if possible, be analysed by sex and for youth.
- Employment in the informal economy, as a percentage of total employment – the ratio between the number of persons employed in the informal economy and the total number of employed persons.

3. *Social cohesion as social inclusion – indicated by access to education and human capital*

- Literacy rate, adult total (percentage of people aged 15 and above)
 - adult female (percentage of females aged 15 and above)
 - adult male (percentage of males aged 15 and above).
- Percentage of population over 15 who have not completed primary education.
 - male and female as well as total rates.

- Percentage of population over 20 who have not completed secondary education.
 - male and female as well as total rates.
- Percentage of children of secondary school age enrolled in secondary education.
- Percentage of population aged 18–24 in tertiary education.

The measures should be provided for minorities and immigrant groups, as appropriate to each small state.

4. *Social cohesion as social inclusion – indicated by access to health*

- Life expectancy at birth, in years
 - total
 - for males and females
 - for minorities.
- Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)
 - total
 - for minorities.
- Mortality rate, under fives (per 1,000)
 - total
 - for minorities.
- Births attended by skilled health staff (percentage of total)
 - total
 - for minorities.

5. *Social cohesion as social inclusion – indicated by access to technology*

- Percentage of households with access to broadband internet.

A second type of indicator measures cultural and ethnic homogeneity, relating to the diversity dimension of social cohesion important for some analysts. More diversity is taken to be an indicator of less social cohesion.

6. *Social cohesion as cultural and ethnic homogeneity*

- Percentage of foreign born in the population.
- Ethnic fractionalisation – an index measuring the probability that two randomly selected people will not belong to the same ethno-linguistic group.
- Country is officially bi- or multilingual (0 or 1).

A third set of indicators of social cohesion, 7 and 8, focuses on participation and belonging. While measures of electoral participation can be obtained, the other indicators are unlikely to be available.

7. *Social cohesion as trust*

- Questions about trust from public opinion surveys. The usual source is the World Values Survey, which provides comparable questions and data management. No small states are included. See <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

8. *Social cohesion as participation and solidarity*

- Electoral participation – percentage of eligible voters participating in national elections.
- Rate of participation in voluntary associations – percentage of people who are members of a voluntary association. For comparative analysis these data are usually found in the World Values Survey (and therefore once again do not include small states).
- Charitable giving – percentage of population making a charitable gift.