

Scandinavia is Global Leader in Social Cohesion

English-speaking countries rank above average; immigration levels statistically insignificant

Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland have the highest levels of social cohesion, followed by Canada, the US, Australia, and New Zealand, according to the Social Cohesion Radar, a study released today by the Bertelsmann Stiftung and Jacobs University in Bremen, Germany. The study, which examines 34 countries in the EU and the OECD, also concludes that Lithuania, Latvia and the southeast European countries of Bulgaria, Greece and Romania suffer from low social cohesion.

Most of Western Europe—Switzerland, Austria, Luxembourg, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Spain—feature above-average to average social cohesion.

Social cohesion is defined as the special quality how members of a community live and work together. A cohesive society is characterized by resilient social relationships, a positive emotional connectedness between its members and the community and a pronounced focus on the common good.

"Social cohesion is crucial for any society's future and has a profound impact on a person's perceived well-being. More cohesion equals more life satisfaction", said Liz Mohn, vice chairwoman of the Bertelsmann Foundation's executive board.

The report finds that the three most important socio-economic factors associated with social cohesion are national wealth as measured by gross domestic product (GDP), a country's income gap as measured by the Gini coefficient, and its level of development towards a modern information society as measured by the Knowledge Index.

First, greater national wealth has a correlation to greater social cohesion. Second, a country's income gap has a moderately strong and inverse correlation to social cohesion, indicating that less equal societies tend to be less cohesive. Few countries with a large income gap (e.g., the UK or Ireland) manage to avoid below-average scores on the social-cohesion index. Third, a country's level of development towards a modern information society has a

more profound effect on social cohesion than national wealth. The higher a country's ranking on the Knowledge Index, which measures the diffusion of modern communication technology, the more likely that country is to show high social cohesion.

The study dispels the popular belief that immigration is intrinsically harmful to social cohesion. The share of immigrants in a country's population shows no statistically significant effect on social cohesion.

"Modern societies are based not on solidarity rooted in similarity, but on solidarity rooted in diversity and mutual interdependence", said Stephan Vopel, Bertelsmann Stiftung programme director. "Therefore they need an inclusive form of social cohesion that not only accepts a multitude of lifestyles and identities, but views them as a strength."

The Social Cohesion Radar

With the Social Cohesion Radar the Bertelsmann Stiftung offers an empirical, international comparison of social cohesion over the past 25 years. The radar is based on a broad set of indicators drawn from comparative international surveys and other scientific data.

The countries included in the study are the 27 EU member states and seven OECD countries: Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and the US.

Carried out by a research team of Jacobs University Bremen, and led by professors Klaus Boehnke and Jan Delhey, the study breaks down the concept of social cohesion into three domains—social relations, connectedness and focus on the common good. Each of these domains comprises three measurable dimensions: social networks, trust in people, acceptance of diversity, identification, trust in institutions, perception of fairness, solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules, and civic participation.

Downloads

[Chart: An international comparison of social cohesion \(113 KB\)](#)

[Chart: Trends in social cohesion in Germany \(48 KB\)](#)

[Chart: Overall index of social cohesion relative to gross domestic product \(49 KB\)](#)

[Chart: Overall index of social cohesion relative to income distribution \(60 KB\)](#)

Links

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