

Social Cohesion Radar

Measuring Common Ground

An international Comparison of Social Cohesion

Country Report: United Kingdom



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1 The Study

The *Social Cohesion Radar* offers an empirical, international comparison of social cohesion, defined as the overall quality of communal life, over the past 25 years across 34 countries (EU 27 plus seven western OECD countries – Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland and USA).

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. Modern societies are based not on solidarity rooted in similarity, but on solidarity rooted in diversity and mutual interdependence. 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.

Commissioned by the Bertelsmann Foundation and carried out by a research team of the Jacobs University Bremen, led by professors Klaus Boehnke and Jan Delhey, it breaks down the concept of social cohesion into three dimensions – social relationships, connectedness, and focus on the common good – each consisting of three individual, measurable components.

It is based on a broad set of indicators drawn from comparative international surveys and other scientific data.

2 Social Cohesion in the United Kingdom in Decline

Overall social cohesion in the United Kingdom (UK) has declined in the recent past, finds the study *Cohesion Radar: Measuring Common Ground*. After having been placed in the second highest scoring group of 34 EU and OECD countries consistently up until 2008, the study's most recent data point sees the UK drop into the just average group.

The main reasons for this, the study explains, are UK citizens' lower level of identification with their nation and a loss of trust in the country's political and societal institutions.

Solidarity and social relationships UK strengths

By contrast, a particular strength of the UK is the solidarity and helpfulness, which the study suggests has been increasing steadily from below-average scores in 1989-1995 to top-level scores ever since 2004. Interestingly, it is the only category in which the UK sits in the top group, ahead of all the otherwise dominant Scandinavian countries and equal to the USA.

Another area in which the UK has been consistently strong is that of social relations. On all three components of that dimension of enquiry – including social network, trust in fellow citizens, and acceptance of diversity – the UK has been above average over the whole time period covered.

On the whole the UK's profile is most similar to that of Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, all of which are above average in many categories but show a very low level of identification with the nation. While in the case of Germany this can still be explained with historical reasons relating to the Nazi era, the reasons for the UK's loss of positive identification need further analysis.

United Kingdom



Trends of social cohesion

Overall index of social cohesion

1. Social relations



1.1 Social networks

1.2 Trust in people

1.3 Acceptance of diversity

2. Connectedness



2.1 Identification

2.2 Trust in institutions

2.3 Perception of fairness

3. Focus on the common good



3.1 Solidarity and helpfulness


3.2 Respect for social rules

3.3 Civic participation

1989 – 1995 1996 – 2003 2004 – 2008 2009 – 2012

COMMENTS

The figure shows trends in social cohesion and its nine dimensions over time. The top row shows the overall index of social cohesion. The rest of the figure shows the partial dimensions, grouped into three domains. The color of the dots indicates the country's position in relation to the other 33 countries: dark blue stands for the top tier, blue for the second tier, light blue for the middle tier, yellow for the fourth tier and orange for the bottom tier.

White dots  indicate that estimated values were used because insufficient data were available for that time period. The relative position of the dots shows which group the country belongs to.

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3 Overall Results - Scandinavia top, South East Europe bottom

For the most recent data period, the study shows the countries of Scandinavia to be the overall leaders in social cohesion, followed by the Anglo-Saxon non-European countries and the small and relatively wealthy continental European countries plus the bigger Germany.

Only then follows a group with the UK, France, Spain, and Belgium. The below-average category includes most East European and some Mediterranean countries, while the bottom of the table consists of the Baltic states (with the exception of Estonia) and the South East European countries.

Three conditions that promote strong social cohesion: economic wealth, equitable income distribution and technological progress towards a knowledge society

Looking into the possible causes for and factors impacting on social cohesion, the study found a strong positive correlation between the wealth of a country, measured by GDP, and its social cohesion. In a similar vein, there exists a strong reverse relationship between a country's income distribution and its social cohesion. A higher level of income inequality, expressed as Gini coefficient, is associated with weaker social cohesion. Finally modernization does not diminish social cohesion. Instead the most innovative societies – with regard on educational level, economic innovations and technological infrastructure – show a higher level of social cohesion.

High levels of immigration and globalization have no effects on social cohesion

The study shows that neither immigration nor globalization undermine social cohesion. There is no statistical significant relation between the percentage of immigrants and the level of social cohesion. The current levels of immigration and diversity are not fundamentally detrimental to social cohesion. Globalization as well, measured in its economic, social and political dimensions, has no negative effects on social cohesion.

People in cohesive societies are more satisfied with their life

With view of the effects social cohesion may have on a population, the study confirms that citizens in societies with high levels of social cohesion enjoy much higher levels of perceived well-being, justifying the attention the concept has received in recent years.

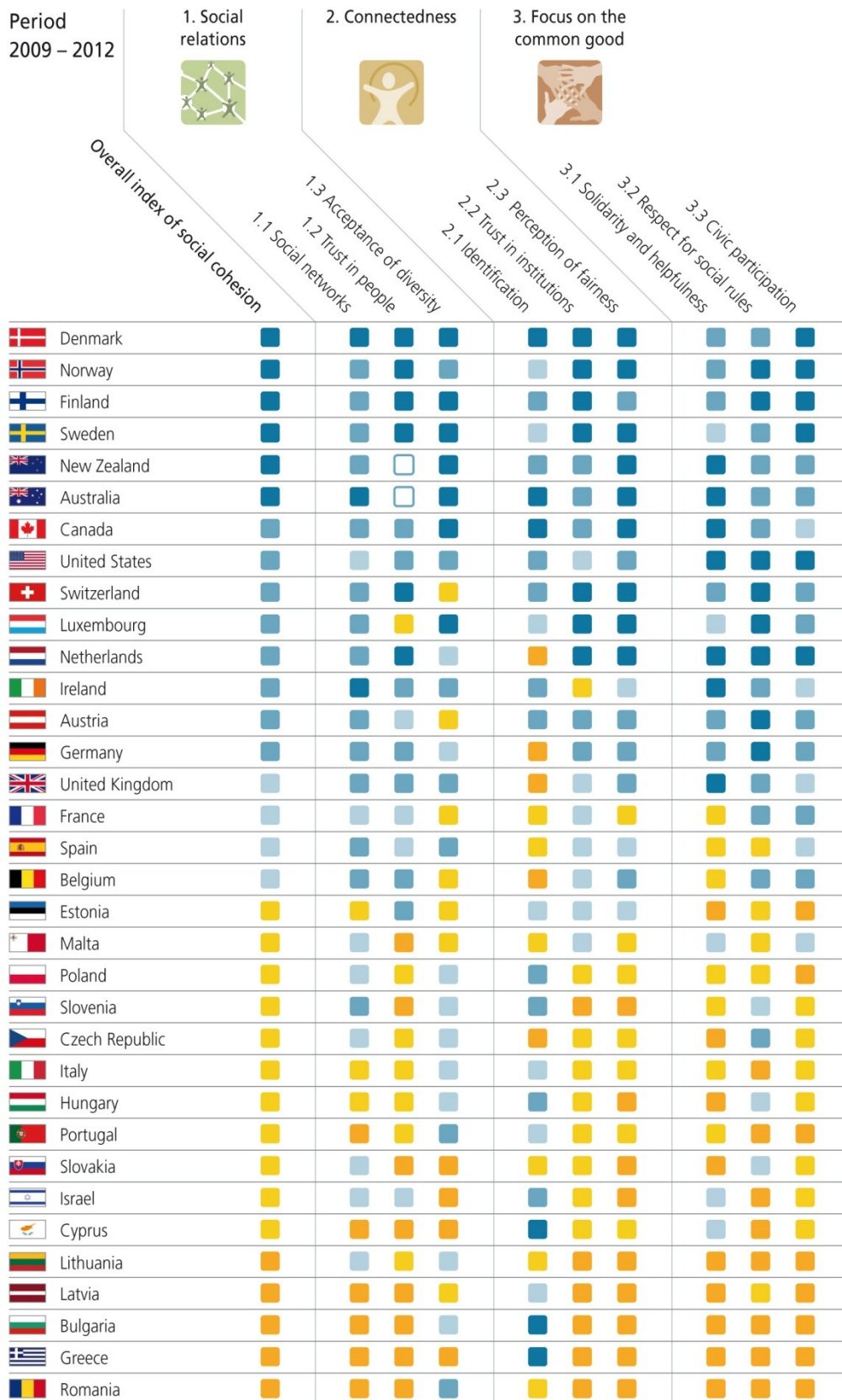
4 Conclusion

Although the UK's overall score of social cohesion has decreased slightly, in an international comparison it is still placed comfortably in the midfield section. The UK's most noteworthy strengths include the persistently powerful social relationships between UK citizens and the exceptionally high levels of solidarity.

With its long history as a destination country for immigrants the UK can serve as a good example for the study's finding that a high level of ethnic and religious diversity is not necessarily detrimental to social cohesion.

The study's conclusion that social cohesion is in fact connected with a population's well-being may be particularly interesting in the light of the current UK government's initiative to introduce a General Wellbeing index (GWB) to sit alongside GDP as a measure of political performance.

An international comparison of social cohesion (2009 – 2012)



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