

# Group of Experts on Measuring Poverty and Inequality

Final report of the UNECE Task team on social cohesion

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# Background

- 2023 - The Bureau formed a Task Team (TT) on social cohesion. Canada is chairing the Task Team, with members from Eurostat, the OECD, the CES Bureau and the NSOs of Ireland, Poland, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Finland, and the United Kingdom.
- Social cohesion is broadly understood as **the strength of the social bonds between people**.
  - It is the social fabric that knits us together.
  - But there is good reason to be concerned about this fabric unweaving or fraying.
- Social cohesion matters. **Cohesive societies are generally healthier, more resilient and experience higher growth**.
  - Decreasing confidence in institutions across many countries and polarized views and values can threaten cohesion.
- Social cohesion is a complex multi-faceted concept.
  - Traditionally captured the ties **within social groups**.
  - There remain data gaps measuring unity – and conversely divisions – **between social groups**.
- Though there must be particular attention to remaining apolitical and the focus on social trends rather than public opinion polling, **NSOs play a key role in providing reliable and timely data on their country's society, including social cohesion.**

# Task team objectives

- Task Team elected to focus on between-group ties as a critical aspect of social cohesion, which distinguishes it from similar concepts such as social capital or social inclusion.
- An **inventory** of international survey content was developed. It provides valuable insights into between-group measures employed across NSOs:
- Between group measures were organised into two broad approaches by the TT:
  - Perceptions of societal unity and divisions
  - Personal distance to 'out-groups'
- Between-group measures were further organised into three broad categories by the TT:
  - fairness, discrimination, and grievances
  - affective ties and trust between groups and,
  - values and morality.

## Examples of inventory content, organised into themes

Categorisation of question types	Approaches	
	Perceptions of societal unity and divisions	Personal distance to 'out-groups'
Fairness, discrimination, and grievances	<p><i>Q:</i> In all countries there sometimes exists tension between social groups. In your opinion, how much tension is there between each of the following groups in this country?</p> <p><i>Groups:</i> poor and rich people; men and women; old people and young people; different racial and ethnic groups; people with different sexual orientations; managers and workers; other</p> <p><i>R:</i> A lot of tension; some tension; no tension</p> <p><i>Source:</i> European Quality of Life Survey</p>	<p><i>Q:</i> In the last 12 months have you been discriminated against?</p> <p><i>Q:</i> Why do you think you were discriminated against?</p> <p><i>R:</i> age; skin colour; way of dress or appearance; race or ethnic group; accent or language spoken; gender; sexual orientation; religious beliefs; disability or health issues; other; don't know</p> <p><i>Source:</i> General Social Survey (New Zealand)</p>
Affective ties and trust between groups	<p><i>Q:</i> Most people view those [in their 20s/ over 70] with [respect/envy/ pity/admiration/contempt] ...</p> <p><i>R:</i> 0 (not at all likely to be viewed that way) to 10 (very likely to be viewed that way)</p> <p><i>Source:</i> European Social Survey</p>	<p><i>Q:</i> I'd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all?</p> <p><i>Groups:</i> People of another religion; people of another nationality; people you meet for the first time</p> <p><i>Source:</i> World Values Survey</p>
Values and morality (with an emphasis on themes of diversity and integration)	<p><i>Q:</i> To what extent do you feel that Canadians share the following values?</p> <p><i>Groups:</i> Human rights; respect for the law; gender equality; English and French as Canada's official languages; ethnic and cultural diversity; respect for Indigenous (First Nations, Métis or Inuit) culture</p> <p><i>R:</i> To a great extent; to a moderate extent; to a small extent; not at all</p> <p><i>Source:</i> General Social Survey (Canada)</p>	<p><i>Q:</i> Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish.</p> <p><i>R:</i> 1 to 5, where 1 means agree strongly and 5 means disagree strongly; don't know</p> <p><i>Source:</i> European Social Survey</p>

# Inventory reveals a data gap in measuring differences between ideological groups

- The final report and the inventory also shed light on data gaps and the experiences in developing new survey content to address these gaps.
- One such data gap is the measurement of affective **distance between ideological groups**. Societal divisions because of differences in values, social or political views, and others, warrant further attention.

# Examples of between groups questions that have been tested or proposed

## Box 6 – Thermometer questions on Survey Series on People and their Communities (Wave 5 - Canada)

**Q:** ... how do you feel towards ...

1. ... **Canadians in general?**

2. ... people with **political views** that are [**different from/similar to**] your own?

*e.g., people with political opinions or vote differently than you*

3. ... people with **views on racism** that are [**different from/similar to**] your own?

*Racism refers to any individual action, or institutional practice which treats people differently because of their colour or ethnicity.*

4. ... people with **views on gender identity** that are [**different from/similar to**] your own?

*Gender refers to an individual's personal and social identity as a man or woman, that is, cisgender or transgender, or a person who is not exclusively a man or a woman, for example, non-binary, agender, gender fluid, queer, or Two-Spirit.*

**R:** Thermometer question responses range from feeling 'very cold' (i.e., 0 on a 10-point scale) to 'very warm' (i.e., 10 on a 10-point scale) towards a specific group. The middle of the range (i.e., 5 on a 10-point scale) represents neutral feelings towards that group.

## Box 7 – Proposed (Poland) new European Quality of Life Survey questions on inter-group tensions

**Q:** ... tension between ...

1. people with **different political/ideological orientations** *e.g., 'conservatists' (or 'rightists') versus 'liberals' ('leftists')*

2. groups with **different place of residency** *e.g., urban versus rural*

3. people with **different media preferences** *e.g., public ('national') versus commercial ('foreign') media*

4. people with **different orientations towards 'others'** *e.g., stranger versus community member ('countryman')*

5. people's **values within a community** *e.g., homogeneity versus heterogeneity of community ties/values*

# Methodological considerations

- NSOs rely extensively on household surveys for subjective social metrics as it is not possible to gather this information from administrative sources.
- Declining response rates of household surveys over time are of concern.
- Attention to methodology and survey design is critical.
- Alternative data sources are not a panacea to the limitations of survey data. Content analysis of social media and other internet use data comes with its own challenges.
- Disaggregation and capturing 'hard to reach' groups remain a challenge.

# Recommendations

NSOs should undertake the following four broad recommendations for future work related to social cohesion

- Developing new survey content and conducting pilot studies to address data gaps.
- Continuing analysis and research.
- Exploring methodological opportunities.
- Developing internationally comparable set of indicators on measuring social cohesion.
  - An internationally comparable measure of social cohesion involves the integration of nuanced perspectives from each country.