

# Measuring Social Capital

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## Abstract

This article on social capital is published as part as the ONS Measuring National Well-being (MNW) programme. It suggests a list of headline measures using a framework that covers four key aspects of social capital. A user consultation asks for feedback by the 26 September 2014.

## Introduction

This publication proposes a **framework** of social capital, based on a [report](#) by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2013 and earlier work by the ONS. The OECD [report](#) aims to provide an internationally comparable framework for measuring social capital over time. It is based around four broad aspects of social capital rather than a single definition. These are personal relationships, social network support, civic engagement and trust and cooperative norms.

Within this framework, ONS is proposing a set of **headline measures** for the UK, which cover the four aspects of social capital and supplement the existing information published by the ONS on human and natural capital. Once agreed, the measures will be used to provide an overall assessment of social capital in the UK and how it is changing over time. It will also provide further insight into the role of social capital in well-being. More detailed information will be needed for further in-depth analysis.

A suggested list of social capital measures is presented and the justification for their selection is described under the four aspects of social capital. **A set of specific questions addressed to users and experts**, regarding the social capital framework and the short-list of measures, is shown in the User Consultation section. An update of the social capital measures will be published in 2015, taking feedback from users and experts into account.

## What is Social Capital and Why Measure It?

### Definition of social capital

In general terms, social capital represents social connections and all the benefits they generate. The benefits for people having these social connections can occur either at an individual level (for example, through family support) or at a wider collective level (for example, through volunteering). Social capital is also associated with values such as tolerance, solidarity or trust. These are beneficial to society and are important for people to be able to cooperate.

### **Social capital and well-being**

Social capital is important because of its positive contribution to a range of well-being aspects relevant to policy makers and researchers, such as personal well-being (Helliwell and Putnam, 2004; Helliwell, 2003), health (Veenstra, 2002 and 2000) and crime rates (Sampson, 2012; Sampson et al., 1997). These benefits occur at every level: individual, community, regional, national or even international (Halpern, 2000).

### **Social capital and the economy**

Social capital has received such widespread attention by policy makers in recent years due to its link to the economy. Social capital has been recognised as a driver of economic growth, resulting in greater economic efficiency (Putnam, 2000 and 1993; Fukuyama, 1995). At a macro-level, it is likely that higher levels of trust and cooperative norms reduce transaction costs, thereby driving productivity (Putnam, 2000 and 1993). At an individual level, people with wider social networks are more likely to be employed (Aguilera, 2002), to progress in their career (Lin, 2001) and to be paid more (Goldthorpe et al., 1987). The importance of social capital was recently acknowledged by the Bank of England governor Mark Carney, who stated that 'prosperity requires not just investment in economic capital, but investment in social capital' (May 2014).

### **Social capital and sustainability**

Social capital is also an important aspect of sustainability. Sustainability is seen as 'what we leave to future generations; whether we leave enough resources, of all kinds, to provide them with the opportunities at least as large as the ones we have had ourselves' (UN, 2012). The capital approach states that economic, natural, human and social capitals are all resources that matter for the present and future well-being of individuals. This was highlighted in the [report](#) by the Commission of the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (Stiglitz et al., 2009).

At an international level, the capital approach to well-being has been proposed within the [OECD framework for measuring well-being](#) in 2011. It has also been recommended by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)/Eurostat/OECD Task Force for Measuring Sustainable Development (OECD, 2013). This aims to monitor whether these capital assets are sustained over time for future generations. Similarly, the [Inclusive Wealth Report \(IWR\)](#) presented for a United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 highlighted the importance of the wealth of nations by capital assets to encourage international action on sustainability.

At a national level, social capital measures are part of the Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs), which have been published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA, 2013) and recently updated by the ONS ([Sustainable Development Indicators, 2014](#)).

These headline indicators, which are closely related to the National Well-being measures, will be further developed and refined within the Measuring National Well-being programme.

## Approaches to Measuring Social Capital

There are two approaches to using social capital in policy evaluation and development which are:

### Monetary valuation of social capital stocks

The first approach is the monetary valuation of social capital stocks, which consists of producing estimates of the value of social capital assets. Monetary value estimates for [UK natural capital stocks](#) and [human capital stocks](#) have been produced within the [Measuring National Well-being programme](#). The [value of frequent voluntary activity](#), which represents one aspect of social capital, has been estimated at approximately 1.5 per cent of UK GDP in 2013. World Bank efforts to estimate the 'true wealth of nations' suggest that intangible capital, made up mainly of human and social capital, represents around 60 to 80 per cent of true wealth in most developing countries (World Bank, 2006). However, social capital stocks are not presented as monetary values in this article. Although some researchers have tried to estimate the value of social capital assets as a proportion of total wealth (Hamilton and Liu, 2013), social capital differs from natural and human capital as it is a broad concept which is based largely on relationships. It is therefore difficult to value overall.

### Development of a set of measures for social capital

The second approach consists of choosing relevant, independent and comparable social capital measures based on existing survey questions. This is the approach proposed in this article, with the aim to develop an agreed set of measures of social capital in the UK, if possible with international comparability. There is a lack of widely accepted measures of social capital at a national or international level, largely caused by the wide range of approaches used to define social capital.

This work on developing a set of measures builds on existing work undertaken by the ONS in 2003 (Measuring Social Capital in the United Kingdom), where a standardised set of questions on social capital was developed. These questions built upon the OECD 2001 agreed definition of social capital (OECD, 2001) and were included in the General Household Survey in Great Britain in 2004/05.

The OECD has since undertaken further development work to further define social capital for better internationally comparative measures in the future (OECD, Scrivens and Smith, 2013). The conceptual framework used in this article builds on this updated definition.

The list of suggested measures for social capital in this article was created after applying a set of criteria, as described in Annex 1.

The suggested measures aim to be comprehensive enough to capture all the relevant aspects of social capital without overlap. The social capital measures which are already part of the [National](#)

[Well-being wheel of measures \(2.8 Mb Pdf\)](#) are included. The suggested measures are based on the data available and gaps in measurement are also identified. Some are subjective measures whereas others are related to people's behaviours.

## Framework for Measuring Social Capital

The framework adopted in this article and introduced by the OECD (OECD, Scrivens and Smith, 2013) aims to cover all the relevant dimensions of social capital. It is based on four different aspects of social capital, as described in Table 1.

**Table 1: The Four Different Aspects of Social Capital**

Aspect of social capital	Definition
Personal Relationships	This aspect of social capital refers to the “structure and nature of people’s personal relationships” (OECD, 2013), and is concerned with who people know and what they do to establish and maintain their personal relationships.
Social Network Support	This refers to “the level of resources or support that a person can draw from their personal relationships” (OECD, 2013), but also includes what people do for other individuals on a personal basis.
Civic Engagement	This refers to “the actions and behaviours that can be seen as contributing positively to the collective life of a community or society” (OECD, 2013). It includes activities such as volunteering, political participation and other forms of community actions.
Trust and Cooperative Norms	This refers to the trust and to the cooperative norms or shared values that shape the way people behave towards each other and as members of society. Trust and values that are beneficial for society as a whole (such as for example solidarity and equity) can determine how much people in a society are willing to cooperate with one another.

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

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More details on each of the four aspects of social capital can be found in Annex 2.

The following sections outline proposed measures as well as possible alternatives under the four aspects of social capital.

## Personal Relationships

**Table 2. Personal Relationships: Suggested Measures**

Suggested measures	Geography	Source
Meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least once a week	UK	European Social Survey, Core module
Have at least one close friend	UK	Understanding Society
Regularly stop and talk with people in neighbourhood	UK	Understanding Society
Belong to a social network website	UK	Understanding Society
Average rating of satisfaction with family life	UK	Eurofound, European Quality of Life survey
Average rating of satisfaction with social life	UK	Eurofound, European Quality of Life survey

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

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Measuring personal relationships and assessing their contribution to well-being is difficult, as an individual's range of social connections is usually complex and changes over time. The OECD has acknowledged the lack of robust, internationally comparable data for personal relationships (OECD, 2011).

The primary relationships of an individual are those maintained with family, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. 'Strong ties' (or 'bonding ties') describe the relationships of an individual with relatives and friends. Strong ties have been identified as very important for well-being in the [National Debate \(407.1 Kb Pdf\)](#) led by the ONS, and have shown to be strongly associated with personal well-being by data analysis ('[Measuring National Well-being – What matters most to Personal Well-being?](#)'). Connections with acquaintances such as colleagues at work or neighbours are referred to as 'weak ties' (or 'bridging ties').

People with a good range and frequency of social contact report higher levels of life satisfaction and happiness (Lelkes, 2010; Helliwell, 2008), but also better mental health (Williams et al., 1981). However, people with poorer health, particularly mental health, have been reported to have significantly smaller social networks (Halpern, 2005). Personal relationships are important for individual well-being, but can also have positive outcomes for firms and organisations, and at a community level (Halpern, 2005).

The measures aim to monitor the way people behave in terms of building and maintaining their personal relationships, particularly when these patterns are relevant for well-being.

#### **Measure: Meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues at least once a week**

This suggested measure indicates the proportion of people who report socialising at least once a week. Meeting socially implies meeting by choice rather than for reasons of either work or duty. The OECD (2011) has highlighted the frequency of contact with others as an important factor in people's well-being, and that this is the best indicator available to highlight differences in frequencies of contact between countries. The frequency of socialising with friends, relatives or work colleagues has been suggested as a sustainable development indicator by the UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on Measuring Sustainable Development (OECD, 2013). Having a good range and frequency of social connections brings people pleasure but can also give people access to a wider range of possible support in times of need. Socialising regularly has also been reported to enhance cognitive abilities (Ybarre et al., 2008). However, the quality of relationships an individual has with friends, family or work colleagues may be very different. Someone who socialises principally with work colleagues may not have many very close, supportive relationships; someone who socialises principally with family may not have very extensive or diverse social networks.

#### **Measure: Have at least one close friend**

This suggested measure identifies people who have at least one close friend, which is usually one trusted individual to share good moments and exchange support with in times of need. The support offered by a close friend can provide a buffer against stress, and people who are socially isolated are more likely to suffer from depression under stress and remain depressed for longer (Sherbourne et al., 1995). The lack of social connections at any age in life increases the risks of an individual to experience low personal well-being, loneliness, low self-esteem and mental health difficulties (Helliwell and Putnam, 2004). Also more socially isolated people are more at risk of risky behaviours such as smoking, drinking, physical inactivity and poor diet (Berkman and Glass, 2000).

#### **Measure: Regularly stop and talk with people in neighbourhood**

This measure shows the proportion of people who have regular contact with people in their neighbourhood. Positive personal relationships with neighbours are thought to play an important role in improving social cohesion, levels of trust and feelings of belonging ([Measuring National Well-being- Our Relationships](#) ; Bacon et al., 2011; Hothi et al., 2008; Cattle, 2005). Research by the Young Foundation suggests that personal well-being is higher amongst individuals who know and regularly talk to their neighbours (Bacon et al., 2011). Another study has shown that people's satisfaction with where they live is more affected by getting on with neighbours than by actual physical quality of housing (Halpern, 1995). It has been suggested that policies that could help with developing social interactions between neighbours could enhance well-being.

### **Measure: Belong to a social network website**

This measure shows the proportion of people who belong to a social networking website. In recent years social media, where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about each other and their lives, has revolutionised the way people interact with each other. Social network websites could help build social capital, allowing people to maintain contact despite being geographically separated, and to widen existing social networks. However, research has also reported a reduced personal well-being amongst young adult users of online social networks (Kross et al., 2013). Online social network usage could lead people to compare themselves negatively to others (Haferkamp and Krämer, 2011). Further research is required to investigate the exact causal pathways leading from online social network usage to reduced personal well-being.

### **Measures: Satisfaction with social life and satisfaction with family life**

These subjective measures (satisfaction with social life and with family life) are both part of the [National Well-being wheel of measures \(2.8 Mb Pdf\)](#). They have been chosen as overall life satisfaction and satisfaction with relationships are related. These subjective measures can also reflect the quality of relationships an individual has with family and friends. It could be that low levels of relationships may lead an individual to be dissatisfied with their social life and family life. The satisfaction of an individual's relationships is often directly linked to the resources and support an individual has from these relationships in times of need. However, these measures are subjective and someone could be dissatisfied with their social and family lives even with strong support from family and friends, and vice versa.

### **Other possible measures**

The measures above reflect those which best meet the criteria in Annex 1. Other measures considered, and on which views on their inclusion are welcome, are summarised:

One alternative measure is related to the **frequency of use of social networks during week days** (available from Understanding Society), but data are not available for the frequency of use during the weekend.

None of the selected headline measures relate to the size of people's networks, as it is difficult for individuals to assess the exact number of people they know. It is also difficult to measure the exact composition and diversity of individuals' personal networks, as it is likely to vary over time. Relationships can be diverse in terms of age, income, education or ethnic background. The

Community Life Survey provides a measure of the **proportion of people who have some friends of different ethnic background than own**. Contact between people of different ethnicities can decrease prejudice and increase values of cooperation (Hewstone, 2006, 2000). [Data from the Community Life Survey](#) also suggest that those who have a more diverse social network in terms of ethnicity or age are more likely to volunteer than people who have no friends outside their own ethnic groups.

## Social Network Support

**Table 3. Social Network Support: Suggested Measures**

Suggested measures	Geography	Source
Has a spouse, family member or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem	UK	Understanding Society
Give special help to at least one sick, disabled or elderly person living or not living with them	UK	Understanding Society
Borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours	UK	Understanding Society

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

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Family and friends can be vital sources of emotional, practical or financial support in times of need, and help individuals to cope with difficult times.

These measures aim to monitor whether people feel supported by their personal relationships (such as family, friends or neighbours). The measures also capture the support given to others as unpaid care, which is an important issue for policy makers. Reciprocity in support exchanges is thought to be beneficial to well-being (Li et al., 2011; Antonucci, 1990).

### Measure: has a spouse, family member or friend to rely on if they have a serious problem

This indicator measures the proportion of people who think they have relatives or friends they can count on in times of need. It has been selected both as an OECD headline indicator for social connections (OECD, 2011), as part of the [National Well-being wheel of measures \(2.8 Mb Pdf\)](#) and is one of the [UK Sustainable Development Indicators](#) (SDIs).



Although this subjective measure does not provide details about the types of support offered, it indicates whether people feel they can get support when they need to. The support actually received in times of need is likely to be highly related to this measure.

Research has shown an age-related 'U-shaped' pattern in the proportion of people reporting having someone to count on in times of need (OECD, 2011), where the young and old are more likely to have someone to count on than those in the middle age groups. This could be because of the support given by parents to young adults (such as help with paying bills; help with decorating; childcare) and the support given by children to elderly parents (such as help with shopping; help with personal needs such as dressing).

### **Measure: Give special help to at least one sick, disabled or elderly person living or not living with them**

This measure indicates the proportion of people who give informal care to others inside and outside the household. Informal carers have been defined in the 2011 Census as 'people who look after and support family members, friends, or neighbours in need of help because of long-term physical or mental ill health or disability or problems related to old age'.

[Analysis from the 2011 Census](#) show that approximately 5.8 million people provide unpaid care in England and Wales in 2011, representing just over one tenth of the population. The social capital of these carers is likely to be affected in terms of social and leisure activities, as well as employment opportunities.

The UK care system is currently dependent on the informal care provided by family and friends (Pickard, 2013). Research shows that demand for such care is likely to more than double over the next 30 years (Pickard, 2013; Pickard, 2008). Yet, it has been questioned whether the unpaid care is sustainable over time, because of changes in society such as children living far away from their parents or women participating more in the workforce (Pickard, 2013; Pickard, 2007). Also, it has been identified that some groups such as mid-life men living alone who have not had children and are socio-economically disadvantaged are more at risk of not being able to benefit from informal care provided by family or friends (Demey et al., 2013).

### **Measure: Borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours**

The suggested measure quantifies the proportion of people who are exchanging favours with their neighbours. This is one of a range of behaviours that are important indicators of neighbourhood social cohesion, such as mutual trust or willingness to pull together for the common good. Neighbourhood social cohesion has been shown to be correlated to a wide range of outcomes such as health (Fone et al., 2007; McCulloch, 2003) and crime (Fletcher and Allan, 2003; Sampson et al., 1997).

The [Giving Green and White papers](#) (Cabinet Office, 2011) seek to encourage people to give more time, skills and money to others. Several government actions, such as those described in the [Giving Green and White papers](#), have been aiming to get people more involved in their communities. This 'community spirit' is likely to be higher in cohesive communities where people have individual

relationships with their neighbours, such as regularly stopping to talk and exchanging favours with them.

### Other possible measures

The suggested measures do not include any information on the percentage of people who do get regular support from their family or friends. Indeed, people might feel they have others to rely on in times of help, but they might not actively benefit from others support on a regular basis. There is a measure available from the Understanding Society survey, which captures the **proportion of people who regularly receive either practical or financial help from a parent or from a child aged 16 or over, not living with them**. However, this measure has not been included as a main headline indicator for social capital as it is only applicable for the population sub-group which has either a parent or a child.

## Civic Engagement

**Table 4. Civic Engagement: Suggested Measures**

Suggested measures	Geography	Source
Volunteered <sup>(1)</sup> in the last 12 months	UK	Understanding Society
Have been involved in at least one social action project <sup>(2)</sup> in their local area in the previous 12 months	England	Community Life Survey
Voted in UK General Elections <sup>(3)</sup>	UK	The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
Have been involved in at least one political action <sup>(4)</sup> in the previous 12 months	UK	Eurofound, European Quality of Life Survey
Those who are definitely, very or quite interested in politics	UK	European Social Survey

**Table source:** Office for National Statistics

**Table notes:**

1. Have given any unpaid help or worked as a volunteer for any type of local, national or international organisation or charity more than once in the last 12 months.
2. Giving unpaid help to support a community event, campaign or project: organising a community event such as street party; trying to stop something happening in local area; trying to stop closure of local service or amenity; getting involved in running local services (e.g. childcare, libraries) on a voluntary basis; setting up a new service or

amenity; taking part in decisions about how the council spends its money; getting involved in another issue affecting local area.

3. Percentage of electorate voting in General Election as a proportion of those registered to vote and those of voting age.
4. Attended a meeting of a trade union, a political party or political action group; attended a protest or demonstration; signed a petition, including an e-mail or on-line petition; contacted a politician or public official (other than routine contact arising from use of public services).

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The proposed indicators aim to capture the engagement of people in the range of civic and political activities, which enable them to shape the society they live in. It has been suggested that higher levels of civic engagement encourage more efficient and less corrupt public governance institutions (Putnam, 1993) and help individuals to develop their skills and social values (such as trust in others) (Putnam, 1993). As reported by the OECD (2011) 'civically engaged people tend to be happier (Morrow-Howell et al., 2003), report better health status (Borgonovi, 2008) and have a greater sense of purpose in life (Greenfield and Marks, 2004)'. [Analysis from the Community Life Survey](#) also suggest that those who give time or money to others are also more likely than those who do not to have high levels of interaction with neighbours, to trust people in the community and to have a diverse circle of friends.

This aspect of social capital has also been set out as a government priority by the [Giving Green and White papers](#) (Cabinet Office, 2011). In particular, [policies to increase social actions](#) in communities have been adopted (Cabinet Office, 2014).

### Measure: Volunteered in the last 12 months

This measure captures the proportion of people who have volunteered more than once in the last 12 months, in activities such as running events, participation in recreational groups or help with children's schools. It has been shown that people who volunteer tend to have a better personal well-being than those who do not. Also, volunteering has an important economic value ('[Household Satellite Accounts – Valuing Voluntary Activity in the UK](#)'; OECD, 2011) and benefits the society as whole, by improving the lives of others, the community or the environment. The measure has been chosen as an important indicator of well-being by both the OECD (2011) and as part of the [National Well-being wheel of measures \(2.8 Mb Pdf\)](#). It is also one of the [UK Sustainable Development Indicators](#) (SDIs) and has been suggested as an SDI by the UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on Measuring Sustainable Development (OECD, 2013).

### Measure: Have been involved in at least one social action project in their local area in the previous 12 months.

This measure indicates the proportion of people who have been involved in at least one social action in their community in the previous 12 months. The source of this measure is The Community Life Survey, which publishes information in relation to encouraging social action and empowering communities.

Social action, as defined by the Cabinet Office (Cabinet Office, 2013) is ‘a community project, event, or activity which local people proactively get together to initiate or support on an unpaid basis. It is distinct from other forms of giving time in that it is driven and led by local people rather than through an existing group (as in formal volunteering) and tends to focus on a community need rather than the needs of an individual (as in informal volunteering). Examples could include organising a street party, preventing the closure of a local post office, helping to run a local playgroup, or improving local road safety’.

Community empowerment, which includes giving more power to local councils and neighbourhoods to take decisions and shape their local area, has been forwarded as a key element of the government [Giving Green Paper](#) (Cabinet Office, 2011).

### **Measure: Voted in UK General Elections**

The proportion of people voting in UK General Election as a proportion of those registered to vote, and those of voting age, represents an important indicator of the vitality of a democracy and the degree of civic engagement. Voter turnout has been chosen as a headline measure both by the OECD (2011) and as part of the [National Well-being wheel of measures \(2.8 Mb Pdf\)](#). It has been suggested as a sustainable development indicator by the UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on Measuring Sustainable Development (OECD, 2013).

However, this measure is based on the number of people listed to vote and not the voting-age population. Therefore, it does not capture the proportion of people who lack political voice in national elections, such as non-citizens who are residents (migrants) of a country.

### **Measure: involvement in at least one political action in the previous 12 months (Eurofound, European Quality of Life Survey).**

Another important measure of political engagement is indicating the proportion of people who have been involved in at least one political action in the previous 12 months. Examples of such political actions include attending a demonstration, contacting a public official or signing a petition.

These political actions are another way for people to express their view and needs to politicians making decisions on their behalf. This can influence public policies (Stiglitz et al., 2009), and also to make social connections and socialise with others. Participation in political activities and voter turnout are not necessarily correlated (OECD, 2011), suggesting that measures of involvement in political actions provide useful additional information to that of voting. The OECD (2011) has chosen an indicator related to political action as a secondary indicator for civic engagement.

### **Measure: Those who are definitely, very or quite interested in politics**

The proportion of people who are very or quite interested in politics is a subjective measure, showing people’s engagement with the democratic system. Lack of interest in politics is not directly correlated to political engagement (White et al., 2000), as people, in particular young adults, can be disillusioned by traditional politics but concerned by issues covering a broad political agenda. They can also be involved in political actions, such as boycotting environmentally unfriendly products. This measure could be of interest to policy makers who wish to make traditional politics more engaging to members of the general public.

## Other possible measures

There is a membership measure available from Understanding Society, which captures the **proportion of people which are members of organisations, whether political, voluntary, professional or recreational**. This is an important measure of national social fabric, such as unions, faith groups, sports organisations etc. People also form social connections through being members of organisations. A European study (Special Eurobarometer 223, 2005) has shown a correlation between memberships of associations and life satisfaction, as well as levels of trust in others. However, whether active membership is more important to encourage civic attitudes than passive membership remains unclear (Putnam and Feldstein, 2003; Wollebæk and Selle, 2002). Consequently, this measure has not been included as a headline indicator for social capital.

A measure from the Understanding Society survey indicates the **proportion of people who have donated any money to charities or other organisations at least once a month in the last 12 months**. Policies have been introduced by the government to incentivise people to give more money in the [Giving White Paper](#) (Cabinet Office, 2011), as another important aspect of civic engagement. This measure has not been included as a headline measure as it relates to a positive attitude, rather than an active engagement.

Another possible measure for civic attitudes and beliefs, available from the Community Life Survey, is the **proportion of people who tend to agree or definitely agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area**. This measure indicates how much people feel empowered to make a difference in their local area.

The Community Life Survey distinguishes between three measures of political action: civic participation, civic consultation and civic activism. Civic participation is one of the [UK Sustainable Development Indicators](#) (SDIs) and represents the **proportion of people engaged in actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern at least once a year**. Examples of civic participation include contacting an elected representative or attending a public demonstration. Civic consultation is a community measure capturing the **proportion of people taking part in consultation about local services** (such as completing questionnaires, or attending public meetings). Civic activism is another community measure indicating the **proportion of people involved in decision-making about local services or in the provision of these services** (such as being a school governor). However, these measures are available for England only, whereas the selected headline measure for political action is internationally comparable (source: Eurofound, European Quality of Life Survey) and available for the United Kingdom.

## Trust and Cooperative Norms

**Table 5. Trust and Cooperative Norms: Suggested Measures**

Suggested measures	Geography	Source
Those who have trust in national Government	UK	Eurobarometer
Those who would say that most people can be trusted	UK	Understanding Society
Those who would say that most people in their neighbourhood can be trusted	UK	Understanding Society
Those who agree or strongly agree that people around where they live are willing to help their neighbours	UK	Understanding Society
Feel fairly safe or very safe to walk alone in their local area after dark	England and Wales	British Crime Survey

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This aspect of social capital and the measures proposed encompass trust (in institutions and in others) and cooperative norms such as willingness to help each other, tolerance and respect for neighbours. It has been shown that personal well-being is higher in countries with higher levels of institutional trust (Hudson, 2006) and higher levels of trust in others (Helliwell and Putnam, 2004).

Political trust is a key element for social stability, the functioning of democracy (OECD, Morrone et al., 2009) and economic growth (Glaeser et al., 2004). Research has shown that indicators of institutional trust and measures of political participation other than voting are strongly correlated (OECD, 2011). This suggests a strong link between civic engagement and trust in institutions. Trust in institutions has been highlighted as a possible sustainable development indicator by the UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on Measuring Sustainable Development (OECD, 2013).

Trust in others, in particular strangers (also often termed ‘generalised’ trust or ‘social’ trust), is necessary for people to be able to cooperate with each other. Measures on generalised trust are not based on knowledge of the degree of honesty and integrity of others, but are subjective assessments of others. Trust in strangers is likely to be higher when values such as honesty, tolerance and solidarity are fundamental norms in the society. Trust in others and those ‘shared values that underpin societal functioning and enable mutually beneficial cooperation’ have been suggested as headline indicators for measuring the sustainability of well-being over time (OECD, 2013).

### **Measure: Those who have trust in national Government**

This subjective measure, which captures the proportion of people who feel they can trust their national Government, is one of ONS's measures within the [National Well-being wheel of measures \(2.8 Mb Pdf\)](#). Trust in national government and Parliament was reported as key concerns during the National Debate and is essential for credible and healthy governance. Trust in national Government is likely to be positively affected by efficient and effective policies, competence, honesty and lack of corruption, accountability for its action, good communication with people, and respect for the public (Halpern, 2005).

### **Measure: Those who would say that most people can be trusted**

The measure is based on the standard question: 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?'. This question and variants of it are widely used in surveys across the world. It is one of the possible sustainable development indicators chosen by the UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on Measuring Sustainable Development (OECD, 2013). Several studies have shown that trust in others is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes in areas such as personal well-being (Helliwell and Wang, 2010), mental and physical health (Hamano et al., 2010; Stafford et al., 2004), crime rates and even mortality rates (Lochner et al., 2003). Also, the ability to cooperate has been ascribed to levels of trust in others.

### **Measure: Those who would say that most people in their neighbourhood can be trusted**

The measures on trust can also be specific for particular groups of the population. This measure is specifically focusing on people in the neighbourhood and is one of the [UK Sustainable Development Indicators \(SDIs\)](#). Neighbourhood trust is another important indicator of social cohesion at a community level. Neighbours who trust one another are likely to work more effectively together for their collective advantage (such as helping to improve their local schools). Trust in neighbours is also correlated with higher life satisfaction (Helliwell and Wang, 2010). [Research from the Community Life Survey](#) (Cabinet Office, 2013) suggests that charitable giving is more prevalent amongst people who feel that many people in their neighbourhood can be trusted.

### **Measure: Those who agree or strongly agree that people around where they live are willing to help their neighbours**

This subjective measure captures the proportion of people who think that people around the area where they live are willing to help each other and is an indicator of neighbourhood social cohesion.

Indeed, research has shown that in areas where people tend to 'go their own way' rather than help one other, crime rates and feelings of lack of safety to walk alone after dark are much higher (Fletcher and Allen, 2003). People who are not willing to help their neighbours are likely to mistrust them, and are very unlikely to want to undertake any social action in their local communities.

### **Measure: Feel fairly safe or very safe to walk alone in their local area after dark**

This subjective measure indicates the proportion of people who feel fairly safe or very safe to walk alone in their local area after dark, and is part of the [National Well-being wheel of measures \(2.8 Mb Pdf\)](#). The perception of safety is not necessarily directly correlated to crime rates. However, it

has a direct causal link to the measure of trust in others: if people trust others (particularly in their neighbourhood), they are more likely to think they are safe or very safe to walk alone in their local area after dark.

### Other possible measures

In some surveys (for example, the European Social Survey), trust in others and in institutions is measured on a **scale of 0 to 10**. On such scale, 0 indicates that people think that you have to be careful in dealing with people, or that they do not trust the institution at all, whereas 10 shows that they think most people can be trusted or they have complete trust in institutions. This could offer an alternative way of measuring trust in people and institutions.

Another measure from the Community Life Survey (England only) highlights the **proportion of those who trust their local council a fair amount or a lot**, as a way of assessing healthy democratic functioning at a local level.

Another possible measure is one showing the **proportion of people who agree or strongly agree that residents in their local area respect ethnic differences between people** (Understanding Society). Respect of ethnic differences is another social norm important for social cohesion.

Another measure from the British Crime Survey (England and Wales) report the **proportion of people who think there is at least one fairly big or very big problem in their local area** (within 15 minutes walk from their home). Problems can include noisy neighbours or loud parties, teenagers hanging around on the streets, rubbish or litter lying around, vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles, people being attacked or harassed because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion, people using or dealing drugs, people being drunk or rowdy in public places, abandoned or burnt out cars, people being harassed or intimidated, and speeding traffic. These anti-social behaviours are likely to play an important role in limiting social cohesion and the building of social capital in local communities.

### User Consultation: How to Respond

This is the first draft of proposed headline measures for social capital, which are important for the well-being of people, communities and the UK. ONS would like your input into the development of these measures, please reply to: [nationalwell-being@ons.gov.uk](mailto:nationalwell-being@ons.gov.uk) by the 26 September 2014.

In particular, the questions we would like feedback on include:

- Is the framework a useful way of approaching measuring social capital?
- Does the list of measures cover effectively the different aspects of social capital as described in the framework?
- Are the sources of measures the best that could be used?
- How useful are the set of social capital measures for policy makers and researchers?



The ONS would like to thank in advance those who contribute to this consultation. Further publications on social capital are planned for 2014/15. An update of social capital measures will be published, taking account of feedback received. ONS will also undertake further analysis to provide insights into what the measures tell us about social capital and well-being in the UK.

## Annex 1: Criteria Used for the Development of a Set of Social Capital Measures

The headline measures for social capital should be:

- Robust and meet the standard statistical requirements of accuracy, reliability and validity.
- Relevant, easy to interpret and monitor by policy makers and members of the public.
- Considered acceptable by specialists in the area and draw on existing well-recognised research work.
- Based on accessible and consistent information available over time (past and future).
- Available for the UK, whenever possible.

Other important aspects include:

- The measures should be internationally comparable, whenever possible.
- Certain questions have become well established and have been harmonised cross-nationally and cross-culturally. Where possible, these harmonised questions should be used for the measures.
- The measures should be relevant for sustainability of well-being, so that social capital will be at least maintained, or enhanced for future generations.
- The measures should be capable of disaggregation for specific groups of people and geographical areas.
- The measures should take account of the existing ONS research work that led to the development and establishment of a set of harmonised questions to measure social capital in 2003.
- The measures should be considered as very important for well-being.
- The measures should be relevant for stakeholders' endorsement.

## Annex 2: More Detail About the Four Different Aspects of Social Capital

1) Personal relationships are characterised by:

- Their **sources**, which are the places and context in which people meet each other, such as through voluntary/sports activities or through social networking websites.
- Their **composition**: 'Strong ties' (or 'bonding ties') describe the relationships of an individual with their closest circle of relatives and friends. 'Weak ties' (or 'bridging ties') relate to the connections of someone with acquaintances such as colleagues at work or neighbours. 'Linking ties' are the connections of a person with others of greater status, resources and power.
- The **size** of people's networks for the various types of relationships, for example, the number of close friends.
- Their **diversity**: Examples of diversity in relationships include the proportion of friends that are of different age, sex, religion, ethnic group, level of education or income than own.
- The **type of contact**: People can have face to face, telephone, letter or email contact. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter are important new ways for people to be in contact.

- The **frequency of contact**: How often people have contact with their relatives, friends or acquaintances, etc.
- The **quality** (or strength) of people's personal relationships and people's feelings about it.

2) Social network support is characterised by the following:

- The **perceived support**, which is the support that people think they can draw from their relationships.
- The **support received**, which are the different types of resources an individual can receive from others, including emotional, practical or financial support, advice and guidance, and socialising.
- The **support provided**, including unpaid work (or informal volunteering), which is the help given by an individual to another individual on a personal basis. Examples include the help of grandparents for childcare, or care given to elderly parents.
- The **frequency of support received or provided**. Support can be available on a day-to-day basis or in times of crisis.

3) Civic engagement is characterised by:

- **Formal volunteering**, which is defined as giving time, skills or service to a club, organisation or association. Examples include participation in political parties or trade unions, professional associations, religious organisations, recreational groups such as sports activity clubs, cultural or hobby-related organisations or social clubs for the young or the retired.
- **Political engagement**, which relates to active political engagement (such as taking part to a demonstration, attending a political meeting and signing a petition or voting in elections).
- **Frequency of formal volunteering and political engagement**: how often people volunteer and are politically engaged.
- **Other civic-minded activities**: they include donating money or other goods (food or clothes) to charities or non-profit organisations; donating blood; taking part in jury duty; participation to community events such as fetes, shows etc.
- **Civic attitudes and beliefs**: Interest in national or local affairs aside from direct action, for example, through reading newspapers. This also includes people's perception of civic engagement, for example, whether people feel voting is important.

4) Trust and cooperative norms are characterised by:

- **Trust in institutions**, such as the national or local government, parliament, police force, justice system, press, etc.
- **Trust in others**: whether people think that generally speaking, most people (including strangers) can be trusted.
- **Social values of cooperation**: examples of such values include solidarity, helpfulness, honesty, generosity, politeness, equity, tolerance and non-discrimination towards people with differences based on ethnicity, language, culture, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, age or other characteristics. These are the fundamental norms that are beneficial for society as a whole, linked to fairness and inclusiveness, and which encourage people to cooperate.

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## Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html) or from the Media Relations Office email: [media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk)

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