LGIU & The Housing Agency

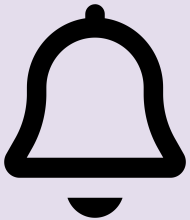
Measuring Social Cohesion Through Housing Interventions

An international comparative study

June 2025

Multiple pressures

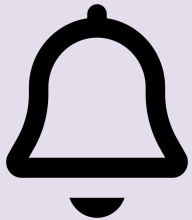
Integration



Rise in anti-immigration protests, many centred on asylum seeker accommodation.

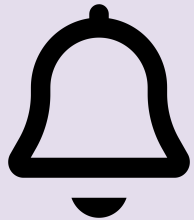
Also wider integration challenges.

Housing



A housing deficit of up to 256,000 homes, with only 30,330 new dwellings completed in 2024 against a need of 52,000

Impact



No systematic way to measure whether housing interventions are actually building community cohesion

RESEARCH QUESTION

Do local and municipal authorities in different jurisdictions measure and evaluate housing-based interventions intended to increase social cohesion?

If so, how?

Case studies across five countries

Utrecht, Netherlands

Plan Einstein: co-housing asylum seekers and local young people

Delft, Netherlands

Kuiperwijk Noord: neighbourhood regeneration and cohesion measurement

Tower Hamlets, England

Leaside Area Action Plan: systematic cohesion measurement in planning

Vienna, Austria

Wohnpartner: embedded conflict mediation across 220,000 units

Vienna, Austria

Gregorygasse: cohesion monitoring during major housing retrofit

Hamburg, Germany

Refugee integration: multi-framework measurement during crisis

Aarhus, Denmark

Gellerup: participatory and longitudinal regeneration programme

Copenhagen, Denmark

Mjølnerparken: Integration Barometer and neighbourhood data

What interviews with Irish local authorities told us

Housing and community functions sit in separate departments, mirrored by separate national departments for housing and community affairs

Local Authority Integration Teams are still very new: some major city teams were only established in early 2025

Measurement is mostly activity based: events held, people contacted, beds filled, participation numbers

No shared definitions of social cohesion makes comparison challenging

A resource problem: hard to show impact without research capacity; hard to justify spending money to boost capacity without impact data

"The targets have to be met, that's the bottom line" — other outcomes seen as desirable but a potential risk to delivery speed

KEY FINDINGS

The measurement gap is real, and Ireland is not alone

- Most measurement happens during special funding periods and rarely continues with the same rigour afterwards.
- Partnerships are key to measurement.
- Simplicity, sustainability and replicability

Inputs vs impact

Most authorities count inputs, not impact

Delivery vs cohesion

Housing delivery targets crowd out social cohesion work.

Resources and capacity

Resource and capacity constraints hinder long-term, scalable measurement

Five models of measurement in practice

1

Embedded Model

Vienna — Wohnpartner

Measurement built into permanent service delivery; conflict mediation logs and participation data generated as routine outputs

2

Partnership Model

Utrecht, Aarhus, Delft

Academic-municipal collaboration with mixed-methods evaluation and community participation in defining indicators

3

Municipal Data Infrastructure

Copenhagen, Aarhus, Hamburg

City-wide systems integrating existing data, standardised indicators, and dashboards enabling neighbourhood comparison over time

4

Pragmatic Integration

Tower Hamlets

Cohesion questions added to existing surveys and planning processes; links measurement directly to spatial decisions

5

Cooperative Governance

Marmalade Lane, Cambridge

Resident-led governance generates participation and satisfaction data; strong sustainability but limited to self-selected communities

Common themes

Measurement matches context

Methods and indicators should be appropriate, so locally tailored.

Time frame matters

Meaningful evaluation requires a longer term look at sustainable impact.

Mixed methods outperform single metrics

Administrative data, surveys, and qualitative engagement each capture something the others miss. Use in combination.

Honest about gaps

Acknowledge the limits of measurement and evaluation.

Housing and community services together

Housing delivery and community development often sit in separate departments - needs to be managed

Baseline data is essential

You need a starting point.

A proposed social cohesion measurement framework

Quantitative indicators

Trust

Neighbour trust levels eg willingness to seek help from people nearby

Social connections

Frequency of cross-community contact, participation in shared activities, anti-social behavior measures

Tenancy stability

Turnover rates, length of tenancy as a proxy for rootedness

Service use

Uptake of community programmes

Qualitative measures

Belonging and identity

Sense of place, whether residents feel this is their community

Physical environment

Whether shared spaces feel safe and welcoming to all groups

Conflict and repair

Nature of disputes, whether mediation is accessible and used

Narrative and voice

Whether all communities have a way to shape how places develop

What Irish councils and central government can do

1

Adopt a shared definition

National agreement on what social cohesion means in a housing context.

2

Pilot evaluation in selected councils

Select authorities with active integration programmes and fund a two-year evaluation using the pragmatic integration model.

3

Align housing and community functions

The structural separation between housing delivery and community development is a barrier

4

Invest in dedicated research capacity

Without evaluation resources separate from direct service budgets, the circular problem of proving impact to justify capacity will persist.

5

Build shared infrastructure

Shared measurement tools, comparable benchmarks, and a national data platform would provide analytical capacity

6

Start with proxy measures now

Tenancy stability, mediation referrals, anti-social behaviour complaints, and programme attendance are imperfect but trackable. Use them while more robust frameworks are built.

Thank you

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