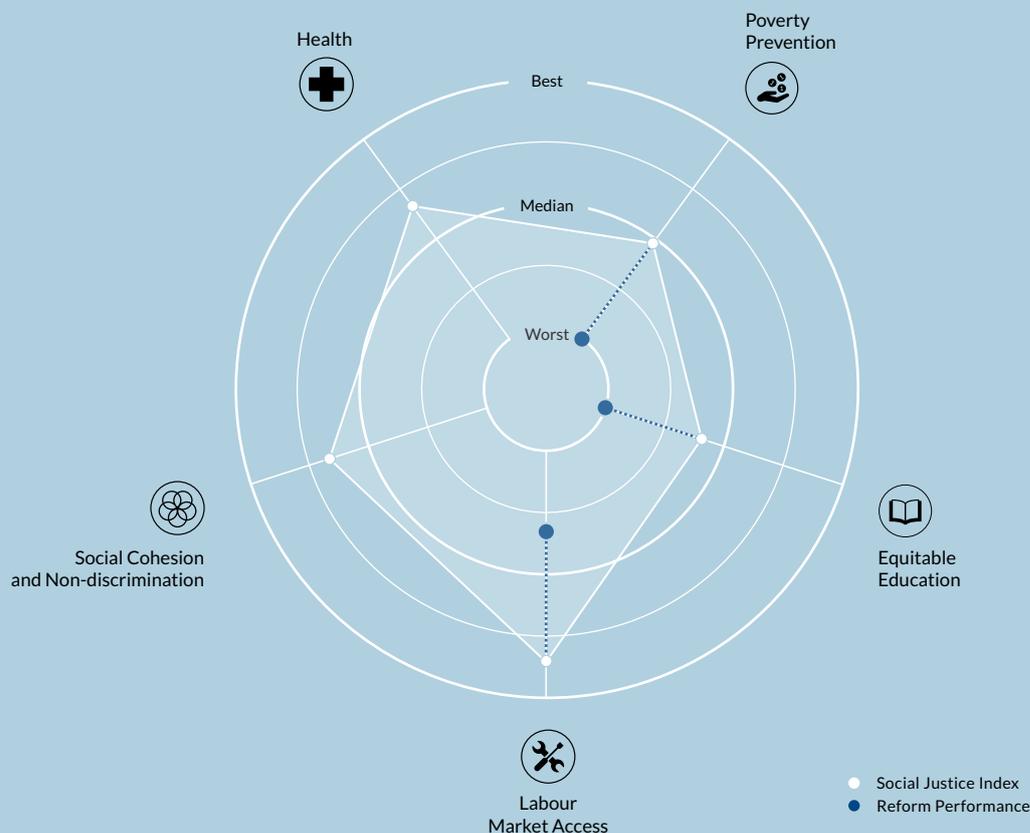


Findings by Country

United Kingdom

How does the country rank in the EU?



Overall Findings

Need Based on the experts' assessment, the need to reform is fairly high (2.28), ranking the United Kingdom (UK) 18th out of 23 EU member states. Moreover, the need is particularly high with regard to Poverty Prevention (2.34, rank 25/27), especially concerning children, as well as Labour Market Access, particularly in reducing in-work poverty (2.44, rank 15/19). The need to reform is assessed as being slightly lower for the dimensions of Equitable Education (2.17, rank 13/22) – though a person's learning success is still very dependent on his/her socioeconomic background – and Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination (2.18, rank 11/18) – though income and wealth inequality is a pressing issue.

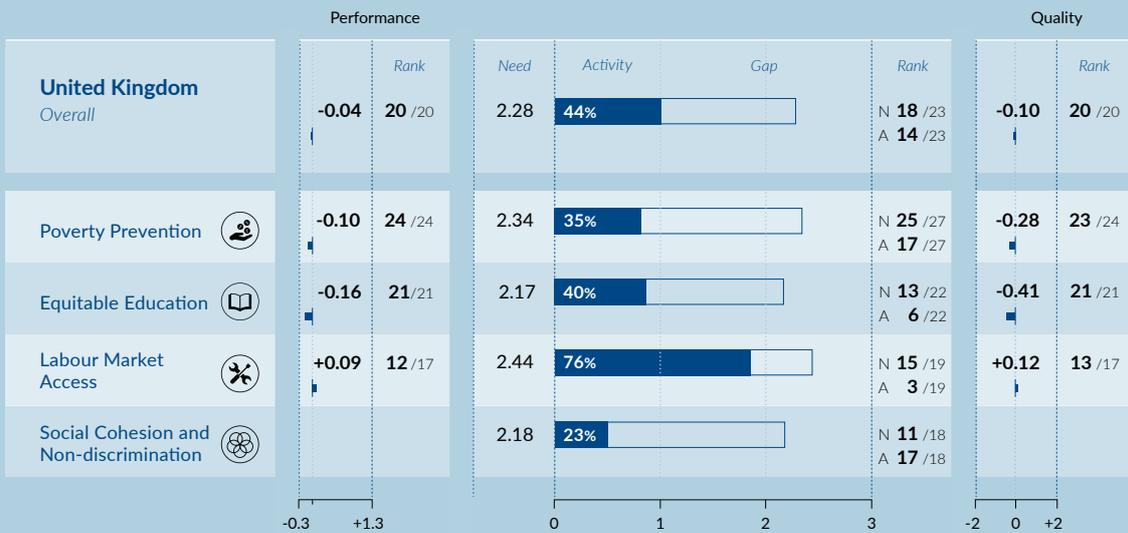
One of the UK's achievements includes the low need to advance gender equality. The experts rated the need at 1.25, ranking the country 1st out of 17 countries.

Activity The activity rate is 44 percent, which is within the middle range (14/23). Furthermore, the rate is rather low for the dimensions of Poverty

Overall Reform Performance Ranking



Overview of Reform Barometer Scores



Prevention (35%, rank 17/27) and Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination (23%, rank 17/18). In contrast, much of the need to reform has been addressed regarding Equitable Education (40%, rank 6/22), especially independence of learning success from a person’s socioeconomic background, and to an even greater extent regarding Labour Market Access (76%, rank 3/19).

Quality The experts are very critical of the quality of newly introduced reforms (-0.10), ranking the country last out of 20 EU member states. They even expect an undesirable effect on Poverty Prevention (-0.28, rank 23/24) and Equitable Education (-0.41, rank 21/21).

Dimension Findings

Poverty Prevention

Need As stated in the 2015 Social Justice Index (SJI), children are especially at risk of poverty in the UK, while senior citizens are less at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This gap between the generations is also reflected in the ex-

perts' assessment: While the need to introduce new poverty-alleviation programmes targeting children received the highest need score (2.74), the need for policies directed at elderly people is the lowest (1.96). Moreover, more needs to be done regarding the poverty risk of refugees (2.68). Overall, the need within this dimension is assessed as being the third highest (2.34, rank 25/27).

Regarding child and youth poverty, one expert comments: "For young people, more needs to be done in reducing unemployment, providing jobs at a decent living wage that is sustainable over a long period of time. Children and young people are affected by the adverse circumstances their parents experience, and cuts to benefits and services have impacted on families. These need to be reviewed. More support is needed for lower-income families. There are also concerns in the UK around fuel poverty, which can be experienced by families and by older people, and more government intervention is needed to ensure that pricing and tariffs are fairer. Food poverty is also a concern, alongside the increased use of food banks, but this relates to government cuts in benefits and lower wages. The agenda of austerity politics has impacted harshly on the most disadvantaged in society."¹

Activity While the activity rate for this dimension is rather mediocre (35%, rank 17), it is significantly higher for the total population (54%) as well as for the at-risk group of children (57%). Although the experts also evaluate the need to reform as being high for refugees, their assessment is that only 20 percent of this need is being addressed.

Quality Based on the experts' assessment, newly introduced policies are not likely to improve the situation for people who already are or are at risk of becoming poor and socially excluded (-0.28, rank 23/24), mainly because they consist of austerity measures and benefit cuts. The current gap between generations is expected to widen. While initiatives directed at elderly people receive a positive quality score (0.36), programmes directed at children receive a negative quality score (-0.73). The situation for single parents is also expected to deteriorate (-1.00). One expert comments on this low quality, stating: "The policy reforms instituted by the government – in particular, reforms to the benefit system – are alleged to reduce poverty, but by all independent measures (including the government's own statistics), they have increased poverty (e.g. child poverty, child health, child mortality, inadequate housing, food bank use etc). The latest budget controversy is a case in point, with tax concessions for higher earners and proposed cuts to benefits for disabled people."² Another expert adds: "The reforms all tended to increase poverty (e.g. freeze on benefits, cuts to tax credits) [...] Reversing recent policies would help. The raising of the national minimum wage also won't help these groups due to benefit cuts."³

Equitable Education

Need The greatest challenge within the dimension of Equitable Education is ensuring the independence of learning success from a person's socioeco-

¹ Sandra Shaw, University of Salford

² Stephanie Petrie, School of Law and Social Justice, University of Liverpool

³ Jill Rubery, University of Manchester

conomic background. This policy objective receives the highest need score possible (3.00). Moreover, the need to reform is comparatively high with regard to equal opportunities in education (2.23, rank 20/25), especially in tertiary education (2.40). In contrast, the need is relatively low (1.47) for improving the structural conditions regarding financial and human resources in education, ranking the country 4th out of 23.

Activity The overall activity rate is 40 percent, ranking the UK 6th out of 22 countries. Most policy initiatives have been directed at the objectives in greatest need of them: improving equal opportunities, especially in secondary (63%) and tertiary education (65%); and reducing the dependence of learning success from a person's socioeconomic background (67%, rank 2/21).

Quality The quality of educational reforms is assessed as being the lowest in the EU (-0.41, rank 21/21). A negative effect is also expected on equality of opportunities in education (-0.29, rank 18/18), in particular on the level of tertiary education (-1.47). Some experts state that the introduction of tuition fees for university would discourage students from a poor socioeconomic background from applying for higher education. One expert criticises: "All recently introduced changes affect adversely parents on low incomes and BME [black and minority ethnic] families disproportionately. They embed a market-based hierarchy across all levels of education, they reduce social mobility opportunities, and they deny poorer kids educational opportunities."⁴

Labour Market Access

Need One of the main pressing issues for the UK is improving Labour Market Access. The experts assess the need to reform at 2.44, ranking the country 15th out of 19 EU member states. The need is even higher for the policy objectives of reducing temporary contracts on involuntary basis (2.60, rank 12/16) and in-work poverty (2.75, rank 15/18). Contrarily, the UK has the fifth-lowest need for increasing employment (1.97, rank 5/22). These differences in need between the three policy objectives also emerged in the 2015 SJI: While the UK has a well-functioning labour market characterized by a low unemployment rate, real wages fell after the 2008 financial crisis, and so-called zero-hour contracts have been introduced.

With regard to the low need to increase employment, it has to be pointed out that – similar to the dimension of Poverty Prevention – an age gap exists: While the need to increase job opportunities for senior citizens is assessed as being fairly low (1.25), it was quite the opposite for the youth (2.67).

Addressing the nexus of unemployment and education, one expert states: "The UK has so far not managed to raise the attainment level at school or the labour markets of a substantial proportion of the population. The middle ranking of the UK in the PISA study hides the fact that there are actually two large groups of students: one doing exceptionally well and one doing exceptionally poorly. There is not much provision for the latter group once they leave school, often without any or very poor qualifications, and this group will then re-appear in various ways in statistics, either as youth unemployment,

⁴ Spyros Themelis, University of East Anglia, Norwich

long-term unemployment or lone parents not in work. Thus, I would argue that the biggest challenge that will address a number of these issues in the longer term is to tackle the poor performance in education, which for a number of reasons particular to the UK is strongly linked to income inequality.”⁵

Activity The UK’s activity rate in the dimension of Labour Market Access (76%) is the third highest among 19 EU member states assessed. The rate is even higher for reducing temporary contracts on involuntary basis (77%, rank 2/16) and in-work poverty (100%, rank 1/18). One specific decision to this end reported by the experts is the ban on exclusivity clauses in zero-hour contracts, which prevented employees from working for two or more employers.

As for increasing employment, the activity rate is significantly lower (41%, rank 17/22). However, 85 percent of the need to decrease youth unemployment has been addressed. One instrument reported by the experts is the introduction of a new apprenticeship programme, which aims to create 3 million apprenticeships by 2020.

Quality The experts are very critical of the newly introduced reforms (0.12, rank 13/17). On the one hand, they expect them to have a desirable impact on the reduction of temporary contracts on involuntary basis (0.79, rank 7/12) and a slightly positive effect on youth employment rates (0.36). On the other hand, precarious employment, in-work poverty and the number of low-wage earners are all expected to increase (-0.36).

One expert states that the reforms will not be successful “because they are not intended to be supportive (child care cuts), because they are only supply-side focused (raising of retirement age), and because the apprenticeships are not being properly developed (expanded too fast, so not real training).”⁶

Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination

Need The need to reform Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination policies is assessed at 2.18, ranking the UK 11th out of 18 EU member states. The main pressing issue in this dimension is income and wealth inequality (2.80), ranking the country second to last out of 22 EU member states. The experts already addressed this issue across multiple dimensions. With income and wealth gaps wide and educational success highly dependent on a person’s socioeconomic background, chances of social mobility are slim.

Furthermore, the experts see a high need to improve integration policies (2.50, rank 15/17), particularly with regard to the foreign-born population (2.67). In contrast, the UK performs very well concerning gender equality. The experts assess the need at 1.25, ranking the country 1st out of 17 EU member states.

Activity The activity rate for the dimension of Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination is comparatively low (23%, rank 17/18), especially with regard to the most pressing issues of income and wealth inequality (21%, rank 20/22) and integration policies (13%, rank 13/17).

⁵ Tina Haux, University of Kent

⁶ Jill Rubery, University of Manchester