

Introduction

The Social Report 2008

The social report is an annual publication that monitors the wellbeing of New Zealanders

The social report uses a set of statistical indicators to monitor trends across 10 “domains”, or areas of people’s lives. Together these domains provide a picture of wellbeing and quality of life in New Zealand.

The Social Report 2008 is the seventh in the annual series. It builds on the social monitoring framework first established by *The Social Report 2001* and uses the same domains as those used last year.

The regional and territorial authority information, provided for the first time in 2005, has been updated on the social report website (www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz). The regional information is also published in companion books to *The Social Report 2008* (*The Social Report 2008 Regional Indicators*). As well as providing the most recent data for regions and territorial authorities, we include time series information where it is available. This allows councils and others working locally to assess progress over time and to compare themselves with other regions. The regional information is a core part of the social report and we will continue to update it.

Purpose of the social report

The social report has four key aims:

- to provide and monitor over time measures of wellbeing and quality of life that complement existing economic and environmental indicators
- to compare New Zealand with other countries on measures of wellbeing
- to provide greater transparency in government and to contribute to better-informed public debate
- to help identify key issues and areas where we need to take action, which can in turn help with planning and decision making.

The report enables us to examine the current level of wellbeing in New Zealand, how this has changed over time, and how different groups in the population are faring. It helps us to identify adverse trends in social outcomes at an early stage. While the report cannot always illuminate what is driving these trends, it can point to the need for further research to understand what is happening and what actions need to be taken to address them.

Government policy, as well as individuals, families, communities, businesses and international factors, influence the outcomes we report on. The cross-cutting nature of many social issues means the social report is not a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of specific government policies.

Social wellbeing

Social wellbeing comprises those aspects of life we care about as a society

To get a sense of the level of wellbeing in New Zealand and how it has changed over time, we first need to identify what is meant by the notion of wellbeing.

In the context of this report, “wellbeing” means those aspects of life that society collectively agrees are important for a person’s happiness, quality of life and welfare.

Many of the constituent components of wellbeing will be common to all New Zealanders. For example, Professor Mason Durie, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Māori) and Professor of Māori Research and Development, Massey University, has noted that important outcomes for Māori are likely to include outcomes relevant to the rest of society such as good health and a high standard of living.¹ However, the needs and aspirations of different people and different communities will also vary in important ways. For example, for people who get comfort and strength from their religion, an important outcome could be spiritual wellbeing, and this might mean having access to a place of worship. The social report focuses on those aspects of wellbeing most people hold in common.

The New Zealand Royal Commission on Social Policy (1988) is a useful source of research on what New Zealanders agree constitutes wellbeing and a decent quality of life. The Commission concluded that:

[New Zealanders] have said that they need a sound base of material support including housing, health, education and worthwhile work. A good society is one which allows people to be heard, to have a say in their future, and choices in life ... [they] value an atmosphere of community responsibility and an environment of security. For them, social wellbeing includes that sense of belonging that affirms their dignity and identity and allows them to function in their everyday roles.²

The Social Report 2008 identifies 10 discrete components of wellbeing. We refer to these components as “desired social outcomes”, and they are listed in Table IN1 on pages 8 and 9. Nine of these domains were used in the prototype *The Social Report 2001*. We made a number of changes to these domains in subsequent reports as a result of stakeholder consultation on the content of the report in 2002. The most significant amendment was the addition of a new Leisure and Recreation domain in the 2004 report. We have not made any changes to the outcomes framework this year.

The outcome domains are interconnected. Doing well or poorly in one domain is often likely to impact on performance in another outcome domain. For example, participation in leisure and recreation is a good thing in itself, but it may also lead to improved physical and mental health, and better social networks.

Social indicators

Progress towards the desired outcomes within each domain is measured using a set of social indicators

Social indicators are signposts that help measure progress towards a desired outcome. Indicators are chosen because they measure the outcome of interest directly (for example, the unemployment rate in the Paid Work domain) or because they are known to be a good predictor of, or are associated with, that outcome (for example, cigarette smoking in the Health domain).

The use of social indicators means we can measure trends over time by compressing the sizeable body of statistical information in an outcome domain to a few high-level measures. For example, we use four indicators to represent the desired outcomes in the Knowledge and Skills domain. Though the indicators do not describe the state of knowledge and skill acquisition in New Zealand in detail, they provide important summary information on outcomes in that domain (for example, educational attainment of the adult population) or they act as key predictors of future outcomes (for example, participation in early childhood education).

One of the key features of a social indicator is that any change can be interpreted as progress towards, or a movement away from, the desired outcome. This distinguishes social indicators from some social statistics that cannot be interpreted in this way. For example, while a change in the average age at which New Zealand women give birth to their first child is an important social statistic, it cannot be said to be necessarily “good” or “bad” for social wellbeing.

Indicators have been selected against the following criteria, first established in *The Social Report 2001*:

- **relevant to the social outcome of interest** – the indicator should be the most accurate statistic for measuring both the level and extent of change in the social outcome of interest, and it should adequately reflect what it is intended to measure
- **based on broad support** – ideally there should be wide support for the indicators chosen so they will not be changed regularly
- **grounded in research** – there should be sound evidence on key influences and factors affecting outcomes
- **able to be disaggregated** – it should be possible to break the data down by age, sex, socio-economic status, ethnicity, region and, where possible, to the individual (or smallest group possible), so we can compare outcomes for different groups
- **consistent over time** – the usefulness of indicators is related directly to the ability to track trends over time, so indicators should be consistent over time
- **statistically sound** – the measurement of indicators needs to be methodologically rigorous
- **timely** – data needs to be collected and reported regularly and frequently to ensure indicators are providing up-to-date information
- **enable international comparisons** – as well as reflecting the social goals of New Zealanders, indicators need to be consistent with those used in international programmes so we can make comparisons.

As some indicators perform well against some criteria and poorly against others, trade-offs are necessary. For example, we base most of the Economic Standard of Living indicators on Household Economic Survey data, rather than on data from the New Zealand Income Survey attached to the Household Labour Force Survey. We do this because it provides a more accurate measure of annual income and hence is a more relevant indicator to the outcome of interest. The trade-off is we are only able to update these indicators every three years, rather than every year, and the sample size is smaller.

In some outcome domains, such as Health, there is an abundance of good data from which to draw appropriate indicators. In other outcome domains, in particular Physical Environment and Cultural Identity, there is less good-quality, relevant data available, resulting in fewer indicators in these domains.

We use the most recently published data available. This has the advantage of accuracy, as the numbers have been verified, but it means some of the data is two or three years old. Outcomes may have changed in the intervening time due to the impact of policy changes or for other reasons. We provide references to the original sources of all information used.

Disaggregation of social report indicators

Data limitations restrict the extent of disaggregation

Ideally, it would be possible to break down each indicator by sub-populations of interest, such as age, sex, ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability status and by regional and local authority. Most indicators can be broken down by age, sex and ethnicity.³ For the majority of indicators, disaggregation by socio-economic status or disability status is not possible because the indicators rely on data sources that do not collect this type of information, or the sample sizes are too small to allow this type of breakdown.

For some indicators (for example, unemployment and employment) detailed disaggregations are possible. However, the social report's two-page format means we cannot include more information than we currently provide.

There is an increasing demand for information on social wellbeing at a regional and local authority level. This largely results from the introduction of the Local Government Act 2002, which requires regional and local authorities to monitor community outcomes. In response to this demand, since 2005, we have disaggregated those social report indicators for which there is subnational data to regional and territorial authority boundaries. This information is intended to help local authorities identify areas of comparative strength and weakness within their communities, as well as to assist central government agencies in their work at a local level.

This year, we have updated those indicators where more recent data is available. Time series information is provided where historical data is available. The regional and territorial authority indicators are in the regional section of the social report website (www.socialreport.msd.govt.nz). Information for the 16 regions only is published in companion books to the social report.

Domains and indicators for *The Social Report 2008*

There are 41 indicators in this year's report

There have been no changes to the outcome domains in this year's report, but there have been changes to some indicators. An indicator on potentially hazardous drinking has been included in the Health domain. The reporting period for the market income per person indicator has changed from March years to December years. The indicator on the proportion of the population with low incomes no longer includes a breakdown by ethnicity. The participation in physical activity indicator is now based on the Ministry of Health's Health Survey. The telephone and internet access in the home indicator is now based on the census. The drinking water quality indicator has had a change in the reporting period for data collected after 2005. Drinking water quality is now assessed for compliance with one of two standards. A full summary of these changes is provided in Appendix 1.

Thirty of the 41 indicators in the report have been updated this year. Those that have not been updated are either based on surveys that are not repeated annually or new data was not available in time for it to be included in this report.

The indicators for *The Social Report 2008* are set out on the following pages, with the updated indicators highlighted in bold. Technical details about indicator construction are in Appendix 2.

Table IN1 **The Social Report 2008 outcome domains and indicators** (updated indicators in bold)

Health

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

Everybody has the opportunity to enjoy a long and healthy life. Avoidable deaths, disease and injuries are prevented. Everybody has the ability to function, participate and live independently or appropriately supported in society.

INDICATORS

Health expectancy
Life expectancy
Suicide
Cigarette smoking
Obesity
Potentially hazardous drinking

Knowledge and Skills

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

Everybody has the knowledge and skills needed to participate fully in society. Lifelong learning and education are valued and supported.

INDICATORS

Participation in early childhood education
School leavers with higher qualifications
Participation in tertiary education
Educational attainment of the adult population

Paid Work

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

Everybody has access to meaningful, rewarding and safe employment. An appropriate balance is maintained between paid work and other aspects of life.

INDICATORS

Unemployment
Employment
Median hourly earnings
Workplace injury claims
 Satisfaction with work-life balance

Economic Standard of Living

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

New Zealand is a prosperous society, reflecting the value of both paid and unpaid work. Everybody has access to an adequate income and decent, affordable housing that meets their needs. With an adequate standard of living, people are well-placed to participate fully in society and to exercise choice about how to live their lives.

INDICATORS

Market income per person
Income inequality
Population with low incomes
Housing affordability
 Household crowding

Civil and Political Rights

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

Everybody enjoys civil and political rights. Mechanisms to regulate and arbitrate people's rights in respect of each other are trustworthy.

INDICATORS

Voter turnout
Representation of women in government
Perceived discrimination
Perceived corruption

Cultural Identity

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

New Zealanders share a strong national identity, have a sense of belonging and value cultural diversity. Everybody is able to pass their cultural traditions on to future generations. Māori culture is valued and protected.

INDICATORS

Local content programming on New Zealand television

Māori language speakers

Language retention

Leisure and Recreation

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

Everybody is satisfied with their participation in leisure and recreation activities. They have sufficient time to do what they want to do and can access an adequate range of opportunities for leisure and recreation.

INDICATORS

Satisfaction with leisure time

Participation in physical activity

Participation in cultural and arts activities

Physical Environment

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

The natural and built environment in which people live is clean, healthy and beautiful. Everybody is able to access natural areas and public spaces.

INDICATORS

Air quality

Drinking water quality

Safety

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

Everybody enjoys physical safety and feels secure. People are free from victimisation, abuse, violence and avoidable injury.

INDICATORS

Assault mortality

Criminal victimisation

Fear of crime

Road casualties

Social Connectedness

DESIRED OUTCOME STATEMENT

People enjoy constructive relationships with others in their families, whānau, communities, iwi and workplaces. Families support and nurture those in need of care. New Zealand is an inclusive society where people are able to access information and support.

INDICATORS

Telephone and internet access in the home

Regular contact with family/friends

Trust in others

Loneliness

Contact between young people and their parents

Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is divided into three sections

The first, the People section, provides background and contextual information on the size and composition of the New Zealand population.

The second section is the core of the report and is organised around the 10 outcome domains listed earlier. The outcome domains contain a two-page summary of how well New Zealanders are doing in each of the indicators.

The final section, the Conclusion, looks across the report and summarises how social wellbeing has changed since the mid-1990s and how different population subgroups are faring.

Other indicator reports

Many government agencies publish indicator reports on a wide range of different outcomes, which are useful complements to the social report. One such report is the Economic Development Indicators report. This report is published by the Ministry of Economic Development, The Treasury and Statistics New Zealand. This bi-annual publication, the most recent of which was published in 2007, provides a picture of New Zealand's economic performance. A core set of national environmental indicators was agreed in 2006. These were reported on for the first time in the Ministry for the Environment's recent state of the environment report launched in January 2008. *Environment New Zealand 2007* reports on key aspects of the New Zealand environment and tracks how these have changed over time.

The future

A comprehensive programme of social statistics will enable us to develop new indicators and to update more of the current indicators on a more regular basis

Statistics New Zealand has led a major review of its official social statistics that, in the long term, should lead to the more regular collection of a wider set of social statistics. Statistics New Zealand is also leading the Linked Indicators project, one of the aims of which is to identify a common set of indicators across the social, economic, environmental and cultural domains. Progress on this work can be found on the Statistics New Zealand website www.stats.govt.nz. As well, Statistics New Zealand is developing a complementary set of more detailed indicators targeted at community outcomes. These will also be available on the website.

The Ministry of Social Development is continuing to look at ways to make the social report more useful at a subnational level. As well as providing subnational disaggregations of indicators on the social report website, we are working with the Big Cities group to improve the alignment of outcomes and indicators of social wellbeing at a national and subnational level.⁴

As previously noted, we produce the social report on an annual basis. We will continue to refine the desired social outcomes and indicators, and we welcome your feedback and suggestions as to how you think this might be done.

Comments can be made to:

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