

Introduction

The Social Report 2010

The social report provides a picture of progress towards better social outcomes for New Zealanders. It uses a set of statistical indicators to monitor trends across key dimensions of people's lives at national, regional and territorial authority levels.

The Social Report 2010 builds on the social wellbeing framework established in *The Social Report 2001*. The report is updated and revised each year as new or better data becomes available. Counting the 2002 online update completed during a review of the first edition, this is the 10th edition.

This introduction outlines:

- the purpose of the social report
- what we mean by domains and social indicators
- our criteria for selecting indicators
- what's new in *The Social Report 2010*
- how we report outcomes for different groups of the population
- the timeliness of the data
- the structure of the report
- other indicator reports.

Purpose of the social report

The social report has four key aims:

- to report on social indicators that complement existing economic and environmental indicators
- to compare New Zealand with other countries on measures of wellbeing
- to contribute to better-informed public debate
- to aid planning and decision making and to help identify key areas for action.

The report shows us how people are faring in New Zealand, how this has changed over time, and how social outcomes vary for different groups in the population. It helps us to identify adverse trends at an early stage. While the report cannot always show what is driving these trends, it can point us to where there needs to be further analysis to help understand the changes and how to address them.

The trends identified in the social report are influenced by many factors. The economy, government policy, international factors, demographic changes and the decisions and choices of individuals, families, communities and businesses all affect social outcomes. The cross-cutting nature of many social issues means the social report is not a tool for evaluating the effectiveness of specific government policies.

Domains and social indicators

The Social Report 2010 presents 43 social wellbeing indicators in 10 outcome "domains" or areas of people's lives such as health, education, standard of living and safety. These are listed in Table IN1. The desired outcome statements for each domain are "ideal" outcomes, rather than specific targets.

The outcome domains are interconnected. Doing well or poorly in one domain is likely to affect performance in other domains. For example, poor educational outcomes are associated with higher levels of unemployment and lower incomes, which in turn are linked to housing affordability problems, poorer health and lower levels of life satisfaction.

Social indicators are statistical measures that can be repeated over time to illustrate changes in the quality of life or social wellbeing.

Some indicators measure change in the outcome of interest directly (eg median hourly earnings in the Paid Work domain). Others are known to be good predictors of later outcomes (eg cigarette smoking, in the Health domain, is a predictor of later health problems).

The social report indicators are a mixture of objective measures (eg obesity, assault mortality) and subjective measures that reflect how people feel about a situation (eg contact with family and friends, overall life satisfaction).

The key feature 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 other social statistics that cannot be interpreted this way. For example, while a rise in the median age of parents living with dependent children is a useful statistic for describing social change, the change itself cannot be said to be necessarily “good” or “bad”.

Criteria for selecting indicators

Our selection criteria help us to derive a balanced and manageable set of indicators from the mass of statistics available. Indicators for the social report have been selected against the following criteria:

- **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 (ie it should be valid)
- **based on broad support** – there should be wide support for the indicators chosen so they report on a broadly shared understanding of wellbeing
- **grounded in research** – there should be sound evidence on key influences and factors affecting outcomes
- **able to be disaggregated** – ideally, it should be possible to break the data down by age, sex, socio-economic status, ethnicity, family or household type and region, so we can compare outcomes for different population groups
- **consistent over time** – the indicator should be able to be defined and measured consistently over time to enable the accurate monitoring of trends
- **statistically sound** – the indicator uses high-quality data and the method used to construct it is statistically robust
- **timely** – data should be collected and reported regularly to ensure indicators are providing up-to-date information
- **nationally significant** – the indicator reflects progress at a national level and is not confined to particular areas
- **internationally comparable** – as well as reflecting the social goals of New Zealanders, indicators should be consistent with those used in international monitoring programmes so we can make comparisons.

Trade-offs between these criteria are sometimes required. For example, it may be necessary to choose an indicator where data is produced at long intervals to ensure a consistent time series is available.

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

What's new in *The Social Report 2010*

We introduce two new indicators in this report: voluntary work (in the Social Connectedness domain) and overall life satisfaction (in a new Life Satisfaction domain). A revised contact with family and friends indicator replaces the former indicator on regular contact with family and friends. These three new and revised indicators use data from the first New Zealand General Social Survey (NZGSS).

The NZGSS is the source of new information for another two indicators: perceived discrimination (personal discrimination), and voter turnout (age, ethnic group and other characteristics of voters). The telephone and internet access in the home indicator has been updated using the 2009 Household Use of Information and Communication Technology survey, while the participation in arts and cultural activities indicator is now based on a 2009 survey commissioned by Creative New Zealand.

We have deleted two indicators from this year's report: air quality and drinking-water quality. We consider they have limitations which reduce their usefulness as social indicators. Both are available in environmental indicator reports (see Other indicator reports and Appendix 1 for details). Because these were the only indicators in the Physical Environment domain, this domain is not included in the report. We will review options for environmental indicators for future reports.

A full summary of the changes to this report is provided in Appendix 1. Technical details about indicator construction and data sources are in Appendix 2.

The 43 indicators for *The Social Report 2010* are set out in Table IN1. Twenty-nine of them have new information this year and these indicators are shown in **bold** type. They include the two new indicators. For those indicators that have not been updated, it is either because they are based on surveys that are not repeated annually, or because new data was not available in time to be included in this year's report.

Table IN1 ***The Social Report 2010* 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 (partial update)
Obesity (international comparison updated)
Potentially hazardous drinking (international comparison updated)

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
 Adult literacy skills in English

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
Work-related 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 (voter characteristics, international comparison updated)
Representation of women in government (international comparison updated)
Representation of ethnic groups in government
Perceived discrimination (now includes personal discrimination with international comparison)
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 arts and cultural activities (revised with new data source)

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 and communities 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
Contact with family and friends (revised with new data source)
Contact between young people and their parents
Trust in others
Loneliness
Voluntary work (new indicator)

Life satisfaction

(New domain)

Indicator

Overall life satisfaction (new indicator)

Reporting outcomes for different groups of the population

Ideally, each indicator should be able to be broken down by population characteristics such as age, sex, ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability status and by regional council and territorial authority areas. Most indicators include information by age, sex and ethnicity.

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 information, or the sample sizes are too small to allow such a breakdown. The way we present data for ethnic groups is constrained by the way it has been collected. Definitions of ethnicity are inconsistent across data sources and change over time.

Population and indicator data for regions and territorial authority boundaries is available in a regional social report section of the social report website. The regional section uses the same indicators as the national report, or aligned indicators where equivalent data is not available. Time series data is provided where possible.

Timeliness of the data

The report uses the most recent data available at the time of production. For indicators based on annual data, this is generally the most recent year. For indicators based on mortality data (suicide and assault mortality) there can be a considerable lag between the year of occurrence and the release of data because of the time it takes to establish the cause of death. A number of indicators rely on data from the five-yearly population census, either directly (eg household crowding) or indirectly (eg life expectancy for the Māori population).

Structure of the report

The social report is organised into three sections.

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

The second section is the core of the report. It is organised around the 10 outcome domains listed in Table IN1. Within each outcome domain, a set of indicators shows how well New Zealanders are doing in that area of life.

The final section, the Summary, looks across the report and reviews how social outcomes have changed since the mid-to-late 1990s, how New Zealand compares with other OECD countries, and how different population groups are faring.

Population information and indicators at the regional and territorial authority level is available separately on the website.

Other indicator reports

Government agencies publish indicator reports on a wide range of different outcomes. Many of these reports are useful complements to the social report:

Economic Development Indicators report.¹ Published jointly by the Ministry of Economic Development, The Treasury and Statistics New Zealand, this report provides a picture of New Zealand's economic performance. The fourth edition is scheduled for release in late 2010.

Environmental Health Indicators for New Zealand 2008.² Published annually by the Ministry of Health since 2004, this report focuses on air quality, water quality and border health protection, and highlights environmental health trends.

Environment New Zealand 2007.³ Published by the Ministry for the Environment for the first time in January 2008, it reports on a core set of national environmental indicators.

Measuring New Zealand's Progress Using a Sustainable Development Approach: 2008.⁴ Published by Statistics New Zealand in July 2009, this report focuses on New Zealand's environmental, economic and social progress within a sustainable development framework.

In addition to the social report, which covers the whole population, the Ministry of Social Development has published indicator reports about New Zealand's youngest and oldest populations: *Children and Young People: Indicators of wellbeing in New Zealand 2008* and *Positive Ageing Indicators 2007*.⁵ These reports rely more heavily on data from the five-yearly population census and can be updated less frequently. The next census will be held in 2011.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback and suggestions about how you think the report can best be refined.

Comments can be made to:

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