

Introduction

THE SOCIAL REPORT 2009

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 at a national, regional and territorial authority level.

The Social Report 2009 is the latest in an 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.

This introduction outlines:

- the purpose of the social report
- what are social indicators
- how we report outcomes for age, sex, region or other characteristics
- the domains and indicators used for *The Social Report 2009*
- the structure of the report.

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
- to contribute to better-informed public debate
- to help identify key issues and help with planning and decision making.

The report enables us to examine how people are faring in New Zealand, how this has changed over time, and varies for different groups in the population. 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.

The trends identified in the social report are influenced by many factors. The economy, policy, international factors, demographic change and the decisions and choices of individuals, families, communities and businesses all affect social indicators. 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 2009 identifies 10 discrete outcome domains. These are listed in Table IN1. 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 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 five indicators to represent the 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”.

Indicators 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
- **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** – 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 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.

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, in particular Physical Environment and Cultural Identity, there is less good-quality, relevant data available, resulting in fewer indicators in these domains.

REPORTING OUTCOMES FOR AGE, SEX, REGION OR OTHER CHARACTERISTICS

Ideally, it would be desirable to break down each indicator by population characteristics of interest, such as age, sex, ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability status and by regional council and territorial authority areas. Most indicators can be broken down 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 type of information, or the sample sizes are too small to allow this type of breakdown.

For some indicators (for example, unemployment and employment) additional disaggregations are possible. However, to make the report as direct and accessible as possible, we limit reporting by population breakdowns to the most pertinent characteristics for each indicator.

Additional breakdowns for regions and territorial authority boundaries are available in a regional social report section of this website. The regional section provides data for the same indicators as the national report, where possible, or for aligned indicators where different data sources can provide subnational results. Time series for this information is provided where historical data is available.

DOMAINS AND INDICATORS FOR THE SOCIAL REPORT 2009

The indicators for The Social Report 2009 are set out in Table IN1, with the updated indicators highlighted in bold.

There have been no changes to the outcome domains in this year's report, but there have been changes to some indicators. In this edition, the reporting period for the market income per person, unemployment and employment indicators has changed from December years to March years to better reflect the ongoing recession. The adult literacy skills in English indicator, last published in the 2006 report, is included again this year, with new data from a 10-yearly survey. We also have a new indicator on the representation of ethnic groups in government. A full summary of these changes is provided in Appendix 1. Technical details about indicator construction are in Appendix 2.

Thirty-four of the 43 indicators have new information this year. This includes the two new indicators. 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.

Table IN1 **The Social Report 2009 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 (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
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
Representation of ethnic groups 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 (international comparison for internet access updated)
Regular contact with family/friends
Trust in others
Loneliness
Contact between young people and their parents

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 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. Within each domain, information is presented for several indicators showing how well New Zealanders are doing.

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

Information at the regional and territorial authority levels 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 bi-annually by the Ministry of Economic Development, The Treasury and Statistics New Zealand, this report provides a picture of New Zealand's economic performance.
- Environment New Zealand 2007.² 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: 2008.³ 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.

FEEDBACK

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

Comments can be made to:

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