Social Workers Registration Board

Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Annual Workforce Report

A high-level overview of the social worker workforce in 2021

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

01 Introduction

He ara pūkenga, he ara tauwhiro, hei whakamana mātā waka.

The many pathways of knowledge, the many pathways of social work, to uphold the dignity of all.

This Annual Workforce Report is a summary of the data collected from the 2021 Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) Annual Workforce Survey. The purpose of the survey is to gain insight into the current social work workforce. It provides an evidence base to support decision making.

In 2021, the survey was incorporated into the online practising certificate round for the first time. This was made possible by the introduction of the new SWRB database iMIS.

There were 4,458 survey responses received from registered social workers, a response rate of almost 50%. This is significantly higher than previous surveys (the total number of respondents in 2021 was more than the number of respondents from the preceding three years combined).

An additional benefit of the survey being made available through iMIS was that survey responses could be linked to demographic information held on the Register. This means the picture of the practising registered social worker workforce is broader and more accurate than ever before.

The four domains included in the survey are: workforce composition, workforce sustainability, knowledge and skills development, and employer support and supervision.

Analysis of this information alongside other data on workforce planning is building a picture of the challenges facing the social work and wider social services sector. It will also support the developing workforce strategy and action plan.

The participants in the survey who formed the population used in this report can be defined as registered social workers who hold a current practising certificate, are registered in the iMIS database and who chose to complete the survey.

02 Headlines

Workforce composition – Nearly 85% of the workforce identified as female. The average age of participants in the survey was 48 years old. The most common ethnic identities were New Zealand European, followed by Māori. On average, participants reported being registered as social workers for 6 years.

Workforce sustainability – Around 13% of the workforce indicated they were planning to leave the workforce or reduce their hours in some capacity. Salaries for social workers employed by non-government organisations were lower than those who worked in government organisations. The largest respondent group was aged 51-60 years old, which suggests an ageing social worker workforce.

Knowledge and skills development – The top three areas identified by participants for skills and/or knowledge development were: understanding of legislation and policy affecting social work, skills around trauma informed practice and working with Māori.

Employer support and supervision – Around 50% of participants reported that their employers provided them with support through supportive work environments, professional reflective supervision, and relevant training and skill development. Around 50% participants stated that their employers paid for their registration and practising certificate fees.

03 Workforce Composition

The demographic information provided by participants gives a picture of the current social work workforce, including age distribution, gender, ethnicity, qualification route, type of role, employer and number of years registered.

3.1 Age

The average age of participants in the workforce survey was 48 years old. Figure 1 shows the range of age groups across the survey. Of note, the largest age groups were 41–50 years old and 51–60 years old with 1131 and 1234 respondents in these age groups respectively.

Figure 1. *Age groups of participants in the workforce survey.*
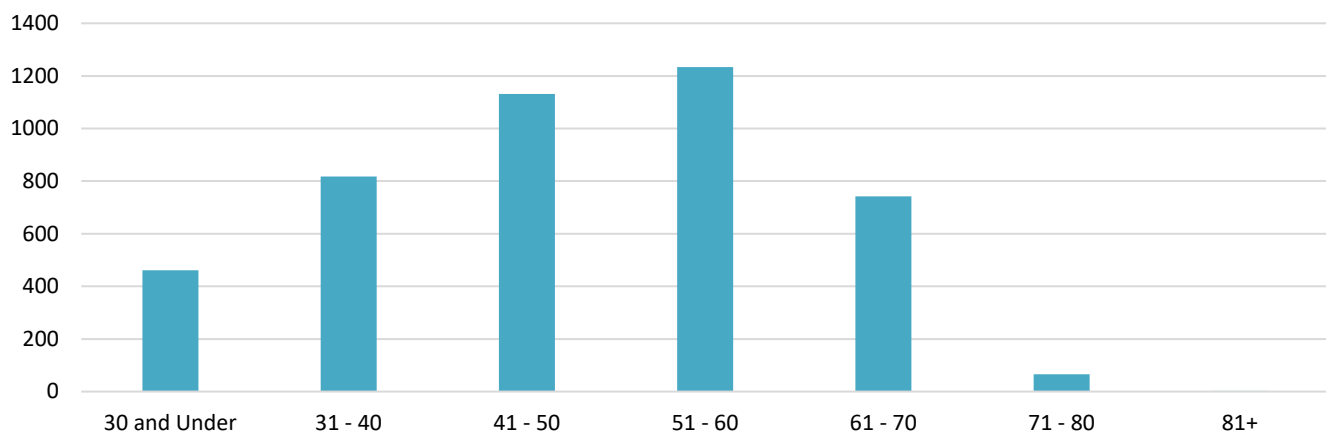
3.2 Gender

The majority of survey participants (84%) identified as female. This was followed by respondents identifying as male (15%) and gender diverse (0.1%). Some participants chose not to disclose their gender (0.2%). Table 1 displays the genders that participants identified with.

Table 1. *Gender identities of survey respondents*

Gender Identity	Number of Respondents
Female	3749
Male	696
Did not disclose	7
Gender diverse	6

3.3 Ethnicity

Survey respondents identified with a wide range of ethnicities and were able to identify with more than one ethnic group. The most common ethnic identity was New Zealand European, this was

followed by New Zealand Māori. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the ethnic identities of those who took part in the survey.

Figure 2. *Ethnic identities of survey respondents*
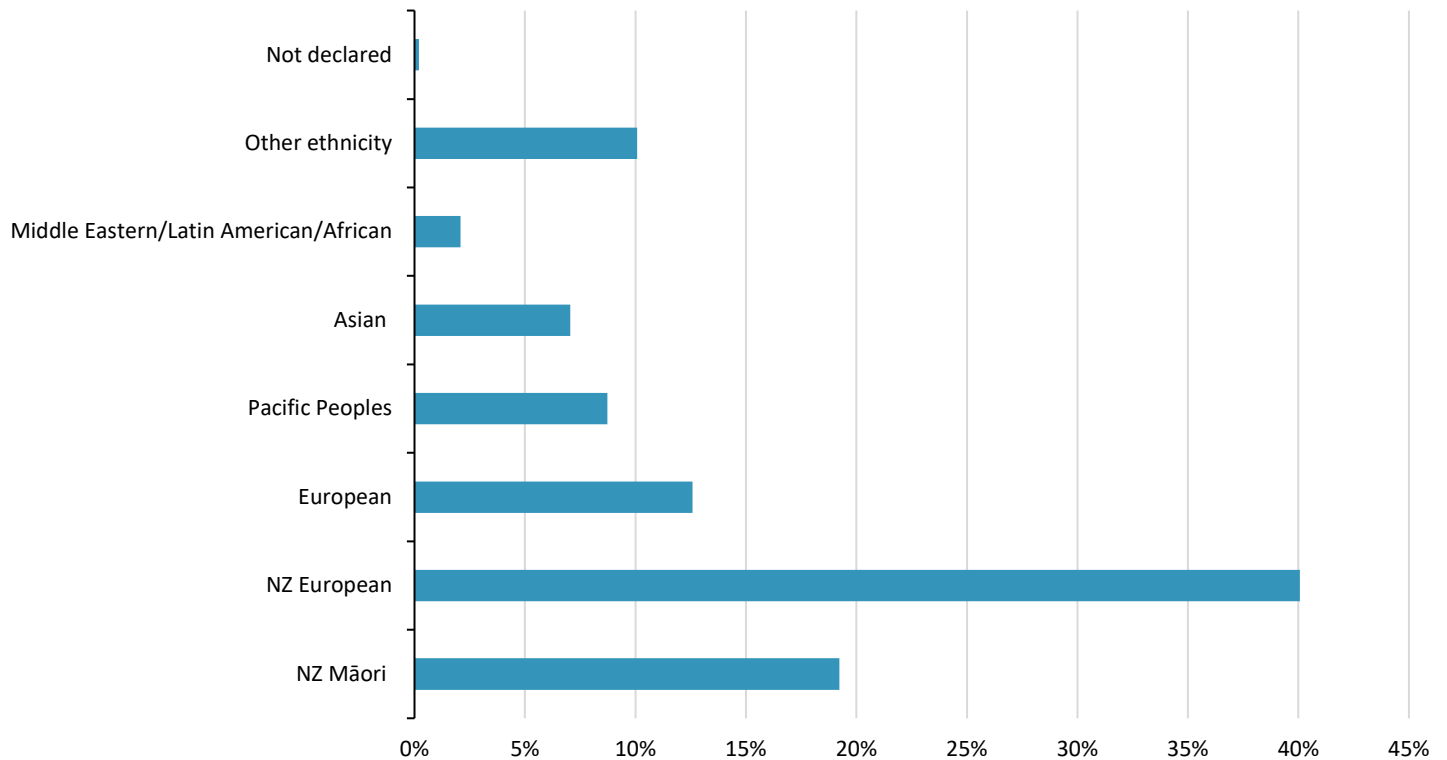
3.4 Qualifications

Around 97% of survey respondents held a qualification. The majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree as their primary qualification. This was followed by an undergraduate diploma/certificate. Around 3% of participants did not disclose a qualification.

Figure 3. *Respondents by primary qualification type*

- Bachelors degree/bachelors with honours
- Diploma/certificate
- Masters degree
- Postgraduate diploma
- Qualification not specifically social work
- No qualification
- PhD
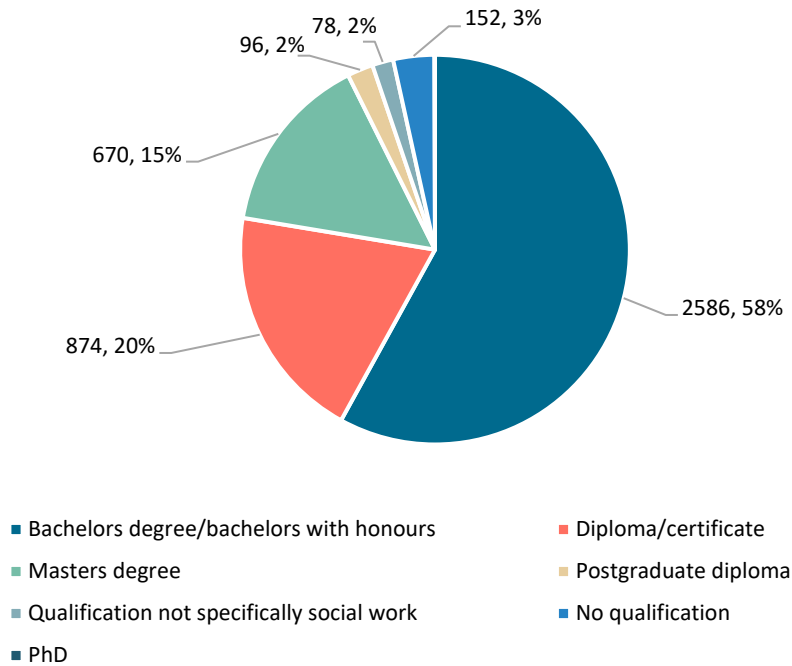
3.5 Years registered

The average length of time respondents had been registered for was 6 years. The majority (51%) of participants had been registered for less than 5 years. This is likely a reflection of the introduction of mandatory registration in 2021.

Figure 4. *Length of time registered*
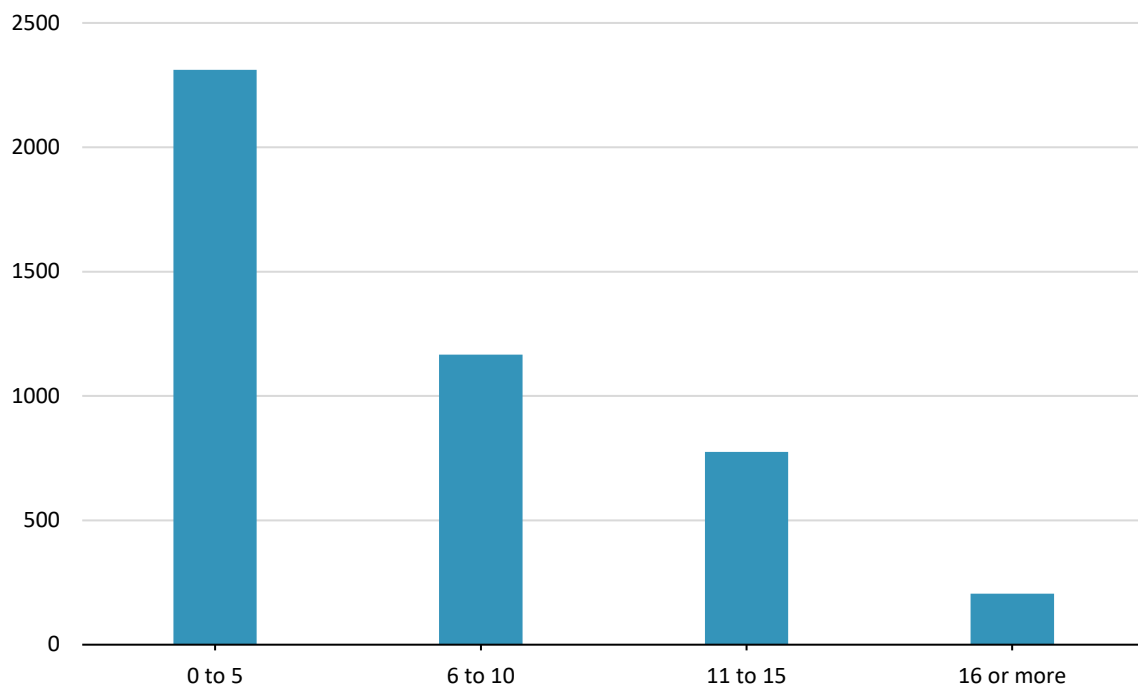
3.6 Current role description

Respondents most commonly described their current role as working directly with children, adults, families and/or communities. It is important to note that participants were able to choose more than one description if it was applicable. Those who responded with 'other' stated that they worked in a range of different roles. Some of these included being a counsellor, an advisor, or an educator.

Table 2. *Current role descriptions of survey respondents*

Description of current role	Number of responses	Percentage of survey responders
Manager/Director/CE	250	5.6%
Other	265	5.9%
Practice lead/team leader/line manager	778	17.4%
Professional Supervisor	354	7.9%
Social work educator	254	5.7%
Working directly with children, adults, families and/or communities	3318	74.4%

3.7 Employer type

Non-governmental organisations and iwi providers were the most common employer type of survey respondents, employing about 47% of those who responded. The next biggest employer was Oranga Tamariki (OT), who employed 28% of respondents. Around 19% of respondents were employed by DHBs.

Table 3. *Employer types*

Employer	Number of Responses
NGO/Iwi provider	1924
OT	1261
DHB	862
Did not disclose	147
Education	146
Private practice	62
Government (other)	56
Total	**4458**

3.8 Region

The regional data for the survey respondents is displayed in Table 4 below. The largest number of survey respondents came from Auckland (28%), Canterbury (13%), and Wellington (11%) respectively.

Table 4. *Regions that survey respondents are from*

Region	Number of Respondents
Auckland	1256
Bay of Plenty	366
Canterbury	600
Gisborne	66
Hawke's Bay	203
Manawatū–Whanganui	236
Marlborough	33
Nelson	68
Otago	177
Southland	79
Taranaki	105
Tasman	27
Waikato	336
Wellington	473
West Coast	29
Northland	203
Did not disclose	201

3.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the participants that completed the survey predominantly identified as female, with an average age of 48 years old. The most common ethnicity identified with by participants was New Zealand European, followed by New Zealand Māori.

The largest number of respondents in the survey came from Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), who had over double the number of respondents than the next largest region, which was Canterbury.

Almost 50% of the survey respondents reported being employed by NGO and iwi organisations. The majority of participants stated that they worked directly with children, adults, families and/or communities.

Around 97% of participants reported having a qualification. The most common qualification participants reported having was a bachelor's degree. On average, participants reported having been registered for 6 years.

04 Workforce Sustainability

One goal of the survey is to gain insight into the sustainability of the current workforce. This is important as it gives us an indication of the numbers of social workers who are planning to leave the workforce over the next five years.

4.1 Salary

Figure 5 shows the annual salary rates for survey respondents. Most commonly participants in the survey were paid between $50,001 to $100,000 per year.

Figure 5. *Distribution of salary*
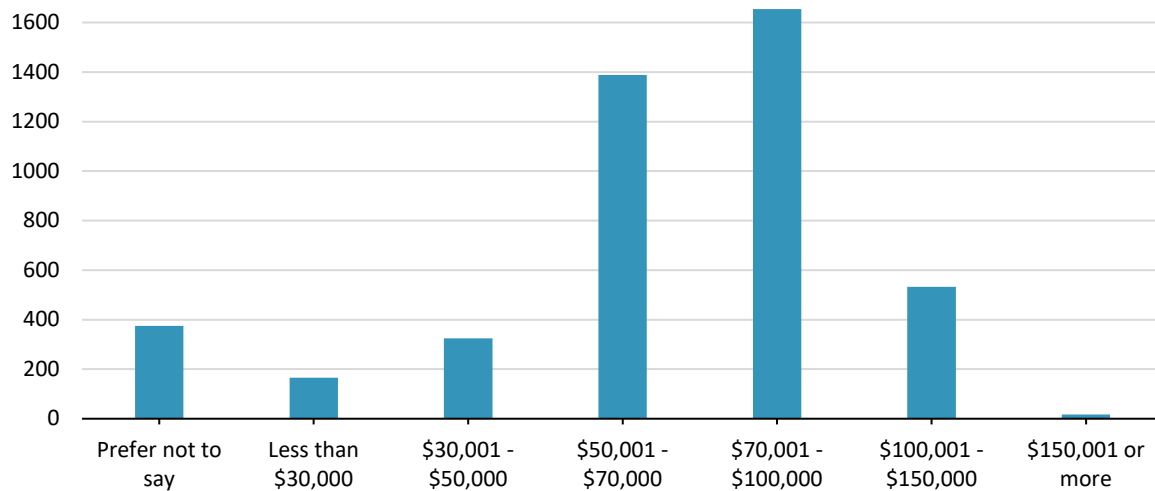
4.2 Part time/Full time breakdown

Around 97% of survey respondents reported being employed, with 85% of respondents being employed full time and 12% working part time (under 30 hours per week).

Figure 6. *Current work status*

■ Full time: 30+ hours per week   ■ Part time: under 30 hours per week   ■ Other (please specify)   ■ Did not respond
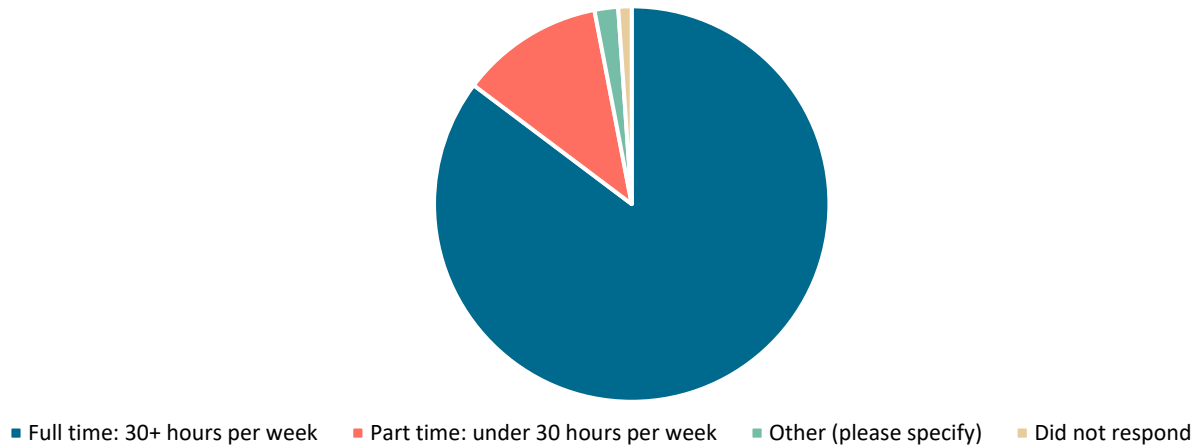
4.3 Salary differences

Differences were identified in annual salaries between employer types. A much higher proportion of Oranga Tamariki (OT) social workers earned above $100,000 per year than other social workers. Whereas social workers employed by NGO/iwi providers were on average paid the least, with a much higher proportion earning less than $70,000 per year compared to other employer types.

Figure 7. *Salary by employer type for those who worked more than 30 hours a week*

■ NGO / IWI Provider   ■ OT   ■ DHB
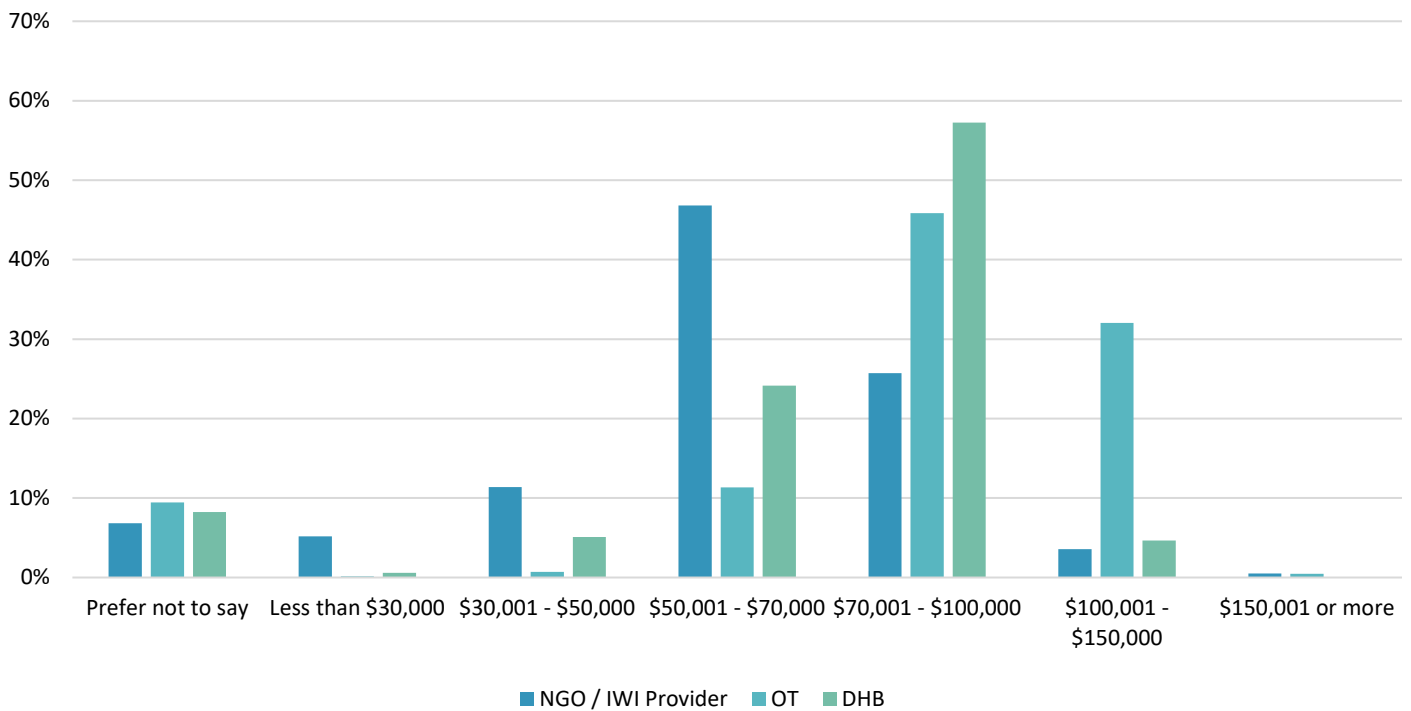
4.4 Five-year work plan

Respondents were asked what their work plan was for the next five years. Table 5 shows that 79% of respondents planned to continue practising social work, and 6% said they would start studying and continue to practise. Of note, 5% of the survey indicated they would be retiring in the next five years and 4% of responders stated that they were planning to reduce their hours. The text in bold in Table 5 indicate that overall, 9% of all respondents are planning to leave the social worker workforce over the next five years.

Table 5. *Survey respondents 5-year work plan*

5 Year Work Plan	Number of respondents	Percentage
I am planning to continue to practise social work	3524	79%
I am planning to study but remain working as a social worker	255	5.7%
I am planning to retire	239	5.4%
I am planning to reduce my hours of work	183	4.1%
I am planning to leave the social work profession but continue to work in a different role/capacity	120	2.7%
Did not respond	91	2.0%
I am planning to work overseas	34	0.8%
I am planning to study and will not be working as a social worker while studying	12	0.3%
Total	**4458**	**100%**

Table 6. *5-Year work plans by employer type*

5-Year Workplan	OT	NGO / IWI	DHB
I am planning to continue to practise social work	84.9%	78.4%	76.2%

As table 6 shows, individuals who worked for OT were more likely to report planning to continue to practise social work than those that were employed by NGO/iwi organisations or by DHBs.

4.5 Reasons for leaving the profession

A total of 588 (13.3% of the total respondents) survey respondents indicated they were planning to leave the profession or reduce their hours in the next 5 years. This percentage is made up of individuals who are moving profession or overseas, retiring, or studying and not continuing to work as a social worker. The survey asked those who indicated that they were going to leave the profession to give the reasons contributing to their decision to leave. Respondents were able to

nominate multiple reasons for leaving. The most common reason for leaving was retirement followed closely by pay and conditions and workload.

Figure 8. *Reason for leaving the profession*
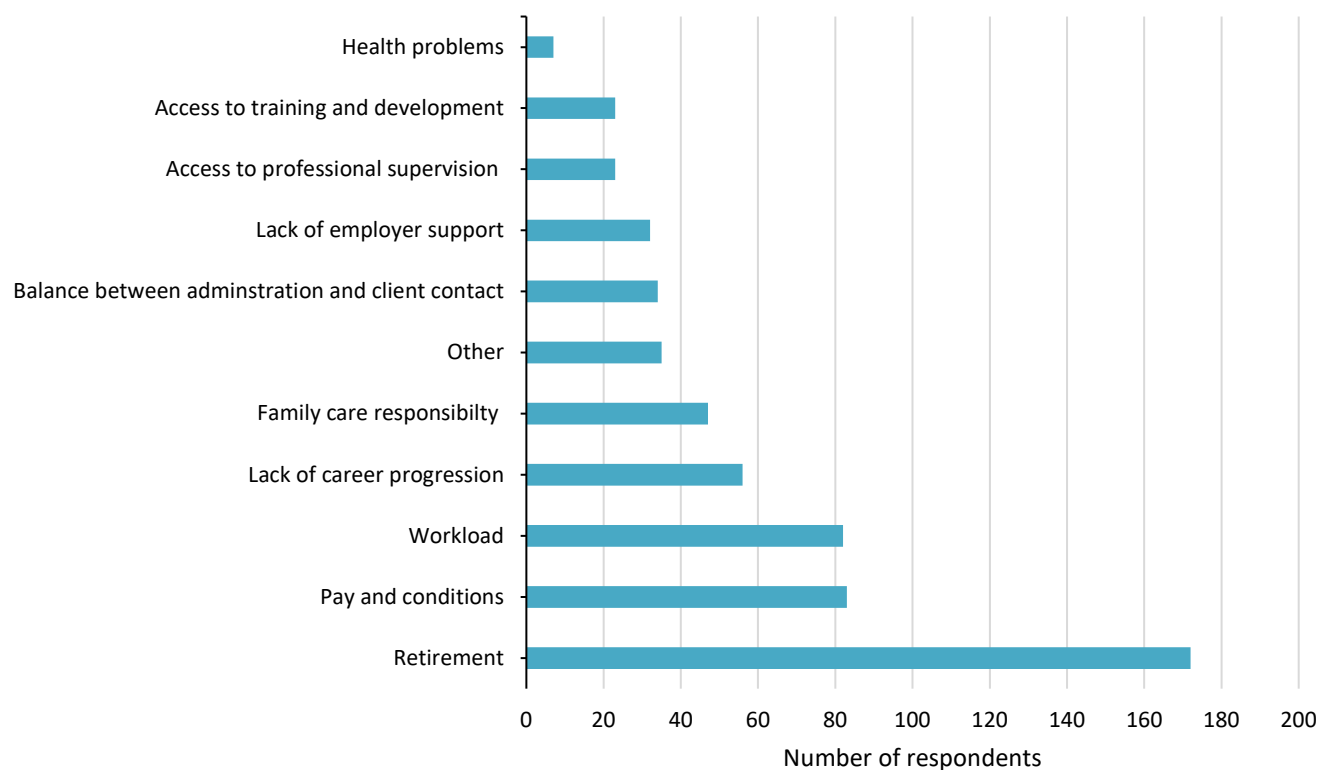
4.6 Reasons for leaving by employer type

For individuals who were employed by District Health Boards or NGO/Iwi organisations, apart from retirement, the most common reason for planning to leave the workforce was pay and conditions. Among those who were employed by Oranga Tamariki workload (rather than pay and conditions) was the most common reason for wanting to leave the workforce[1].

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[1] Participants were able to give more than one reason for wanting to leave the sector.

Figure 9. *Reasons for leaving by employer type*
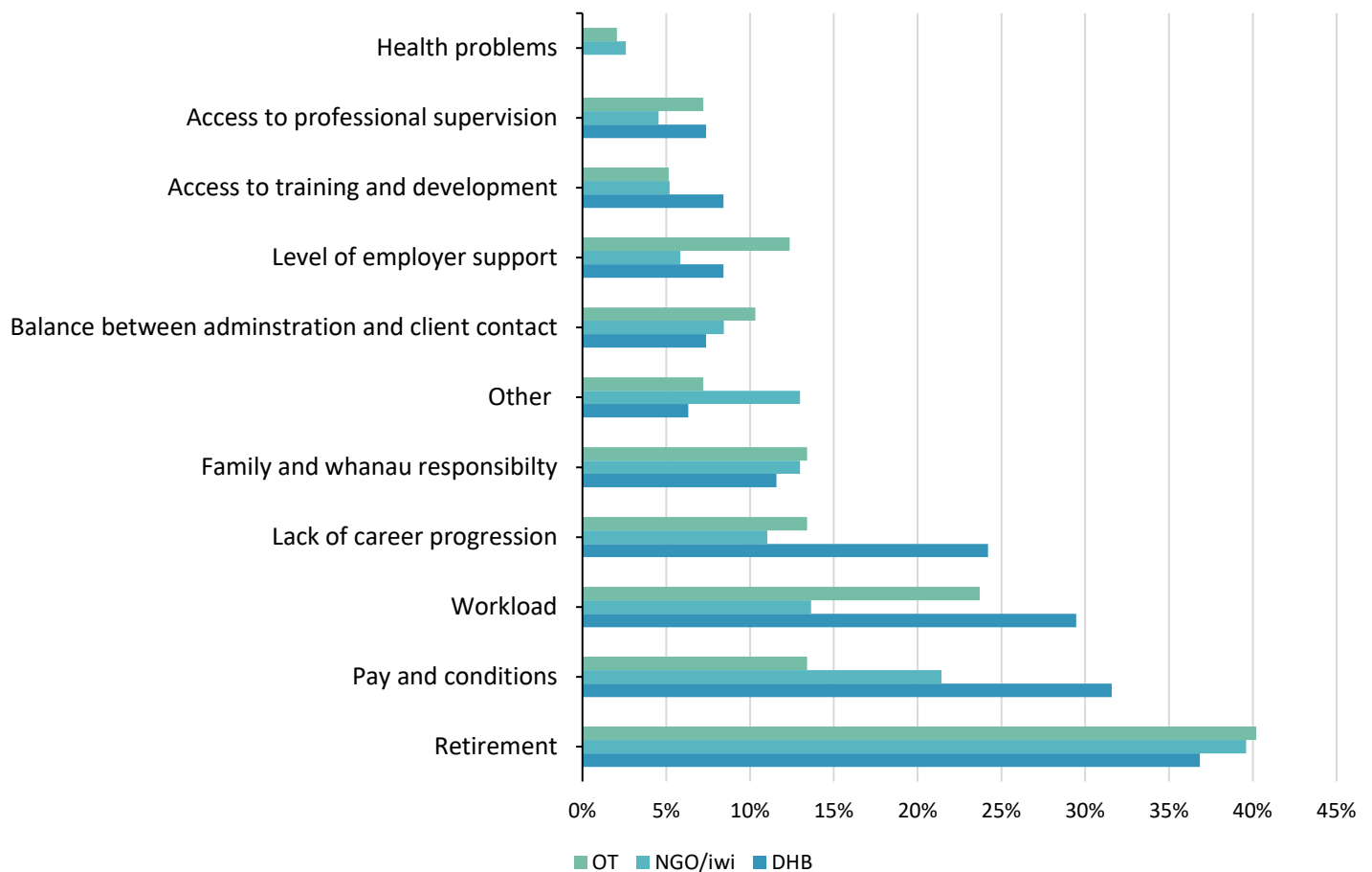
4.7 Conclusion

There are some key takeaways from the responses to questions on workforce sustainability. Firstly, there is a large disparity in pay rates between different employer types. Of note, respondents who worked for NGO and iwi organisations were paid significantly less than those who worked for District Health Boards or Oranga Tamariki.

Specifically, the majority of NGO and iwi employees reported that they were paid less than $70,000 per year whereas the majority of DHB and OT employees reported that they earned over $70,001 per year.

Around 85% of respondents reported that they are going to continue practising social work over the next five years. However, about 13% of participants stated they are planning to leave social work over the next five years.

For those that worked in NGO/iwi providers or DHBs pay, and conditions was the most common reason for leaving the workforce. However, for those who worked for Oranga Tamariki workload

was the most reported reason for leaving the workforce. Leaving the workforce due to retirement was reported at a similar level across all three employer types.

05 Knowledge and Skills Development

The purpose of these questions was to highlight areas of development identified by social workers.

All respondents were asked which areas they needed further knowledge and skill development in. Respondents were able to indicate as many areas as they felt were applicable to them. Most individuals responded that they needed development in at least one area. Around 210 respondents indicated that they did not need any further knowledge and development. Participants that marked other, indicated they needed development in a wide range of areas, including leadership skills, therapeutic techniques and te reo Māori development.

Table 7. *Areas of skill/knowledge development*

Areas of Development	Number of Respondents	Percentage of respondents
Legislation and policies affecting social work practise	1822	40.9%
Trauma informed practice	1637	36.7%
Social work practise with Māori	1238	27.8%
Working with addictions, for example alcohol, drugs, and gambling	1228	27.6%
Professional supervisor training	1221	27.4%
Skills for managing complexity	1202	27.0%
Social work practise with ethnic and cultural groups	1076	24.1%
Skills for conflict management	1026	23.0%
Ethical practice/dilemmas	993	22.3%
Critical thinking	895	20.1%
Case management	585	13.1%
Supporting students on field placements	561	12.5%
Report writing	551	12.4%
Working in partnerships	466	10.5%
I do not need further knowledge and development	212	4.8%
Professional boundaries	189	4.2%
Other (please specify)	137	3.1%

5.1 Area of development by employer type[2]

Table 8 depicts areas of development needed by different employer types. Of note, 34% of OT respondents stated that they needed development around social work practise with Māori. In comparison, 25% of DHB and NGO/iwi employees stated that they needed the same development.

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[2] This was calculated by working out the percentage of each employer type that identified a specific area of need.

Around 33% of NGO/iwi employees stated that they needed development in their skills around working with addictions. Also, of note 37% of individuals that work in education stated that they needed improvement around social work practise with ethnic and cultural groups.

Table 8. *Area of development by employer type*

Area of Development	DHB	NGO/iwi	OT	Education	Other Government	Private practice
Legislation and policies affecting social work practise	38.3%	42.7%	40.1%	36.3%	32.1%	41.9%
Trauma informed practice	36.2%	38.6%	35.2%	28.8%	26.8%	33.9%
Social work practise with Māori	25.6%	24.1%	**34.3%**	30.8%	26.8%	32.3%
Working with addictions, for example alcohol, drugs, and gambling	24.9%	**32.5%**	23.7%	21.9%	14.3%	22.6%
Professional supervisor training	24.2%	27.2%	29.5%	27.4%	33.9%	32.3%
Skills for managing complexity	29.8%	28.0%	25.9%	15.8%	17.9%	22.6%
Social work practise with ethnic and cultural groups	24.6%	23.4%	23.2%	**37.0%**	21.4%	25.8%
Skills for conflict management	24.7%	24.1%	23.0%	11.6%	19.6%	9.7%
Ethical practice/dilemmas	25.9%	22.2%	20.1%	18.5%	17.9%	22.6%
Critical thinking	19.3%	19.6%	22.5%	13.7%	10.7%	12.9%
Case management	10.4%	14.8%	14.0%	4.8%	8.9%	8.1%
Supporting students on field placements	15.4%	12.8%	10.9%	16.4%	5.4%	6.5%
Report writing	9.5%	14.3%	12.8%	5.5%	5.4%	3.2%
Working in partnerships	8.6%	9.5%	12.8%	11.6%	16.1%	6.5%
I do not need further knowledge and development	4.5%	4.8%	4.0%	5.5%	8.9%	11.3%
Professional boundaries	3.6%	5.0%	3.6%	3.4%	1.8%	8.1%
Other (please specify)	3.2%	3.1%	2.2%	8.2%	3.6%	6.5%

5.2 Working with Māori

It is also important to note here that around 28% of survey respondents indicated that they needed further development in knowledge and skills around working with Māori. This is significant because competence to work with Māori is a core competency listed in the social workers core competency standards.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, participants indicated that they needed improvement around understanding legislation and policies affecting social work. Further, others indicated a need for skill development in relation to trauma informed practise and working with Māori. This is significant as working with Māori is one of the core competencies needed for social work.

06 Employer Support and Supervision

This section reflects the support social workers report receiving from their employers.

Respondents were asked to indicate which forms of support their employers provided. The figure below breaks down the supports that were provided to survey responders by their employers[3]. The most common form of support provided was training and skills development, followed closely by professional reflective supervision.

**Figure 10.** *Support provided by employers*
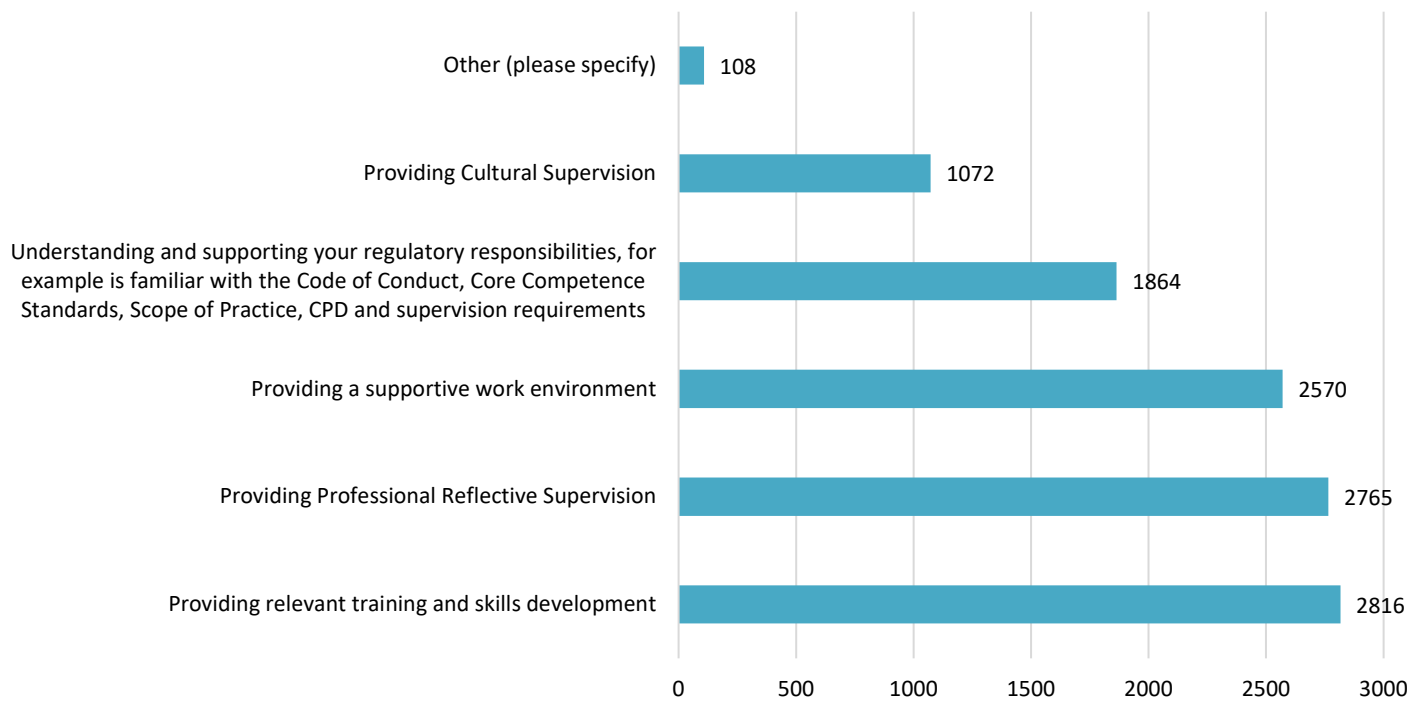
6.1 Support provided by employer type

Figure 11 shows the support provided to participants that worked for each of the top three employers. Interestingly, NGO and iwi-based employers were reported to provide more support across all areas than Oranga Tamariki and District Health Boards.

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[3] Participants in the survey were able to give as many responses as were relevant to their personal situation about the support they received from their employer.

Figure 11. *Support provided by different employers*
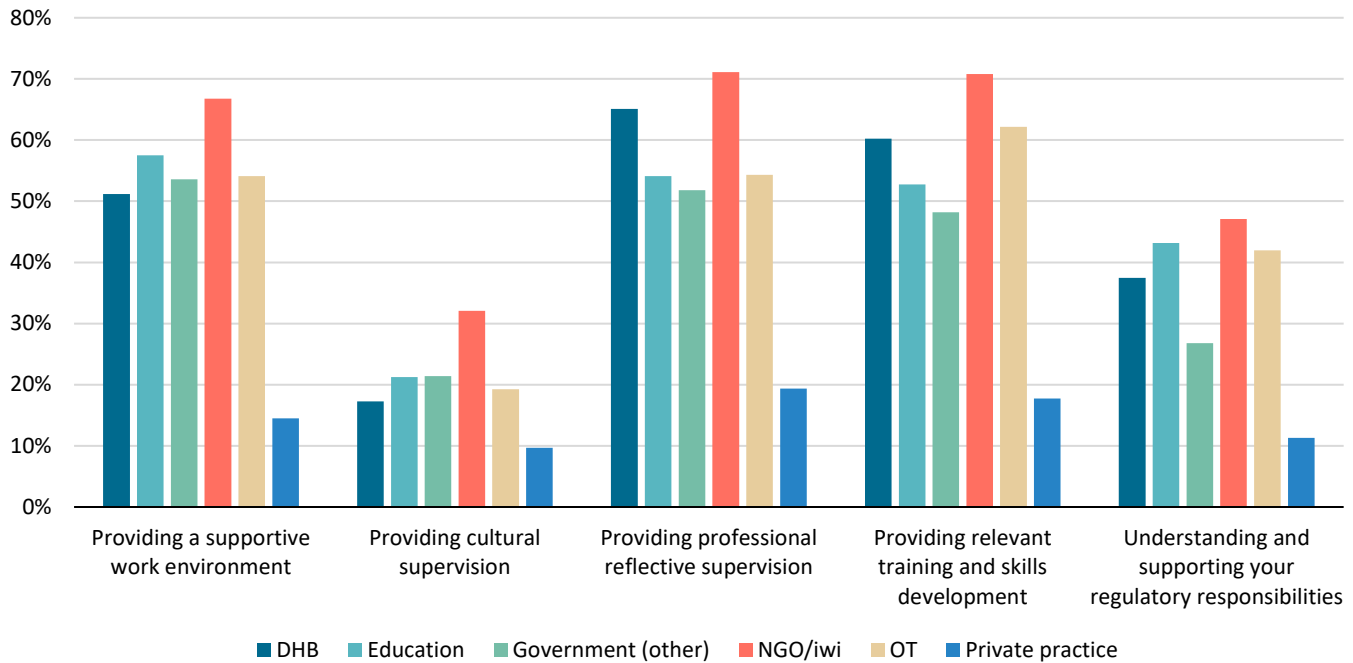
6.2 Employer support for registration fees [4]

Table 9 outlines the number of participants that indicated their employers paid for a part or all of their registration and practising certificate fees. Around 50–55% of survey respondents indicated that their employers paid for their professional registration fees.

Table 9. *Fee support by employers*

Fees paid by employer	Number of participants	Percentage of total participants
Paying for SWRB Registration in full	2481	56%
Paying for SWRB Practising Certificate in full	2363	53%
Paying for SWRB Registration in part	88	2%
Paying for SWRB Practising Certificate in part	87	2%

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[4] There may be a reporting bias in this data as fee payment was included in a drop-down box with all other types of support provided by employers. If this was given its own question and response (e.g., Does your employer pay for your SWRB fees) we may have seen a higher percentage of responses from participants.

Table 10. *Fee support by employers for different ethnic identities*

Fees paid by employer type	Māori	Pacific Peoples	New Zealand European
Paying for SWRB Registration in full	58%	62%	58%
Paying for SWRB Practising Certificate in full	54%	57%	55%

Table 11. *Fee support by employer type*

Fees paid by employer type	OT	DHB	NGO/iwi
Paying for SWRB Registration in full	66%	51%	57%
Paying for SWRB Practising Certificate in full	57%	51%	56%

Responders who worked for Oranga Tamariki were most likely to report having their fees paid by their employer. Interestingly, other organisation types reported that their employers paid for their registration fees at a similar level.

6.3 Conclusion

Survey responders indicated that their employers paid for around 50% of registration and practising certificate fees.

Over 50% of participants indicated that their employers provided a supportive work environment, relevant training and skills development, and professional reflective supervision.

Appendix – Data representativeness

The following data is provided to demonstrate that the cohort of social workers who completed the survey are representative of the wider SWRB register of social workers.

For the representation comparisons below, when referring to survey data we are referring to the data obtained from 2021 workforce survey respondents. When referring to the register data we are referring to the data within the SWRB online database register.

Gender

As displayed in figure 12, the distribution of respondents identifying with each gender group in the survey was almost identical to the SWRB register data. This means that the survey data is a good representation of the total population of registered social workers.

Figure 12. *Comparison of gender identities between register and survey data*

Age
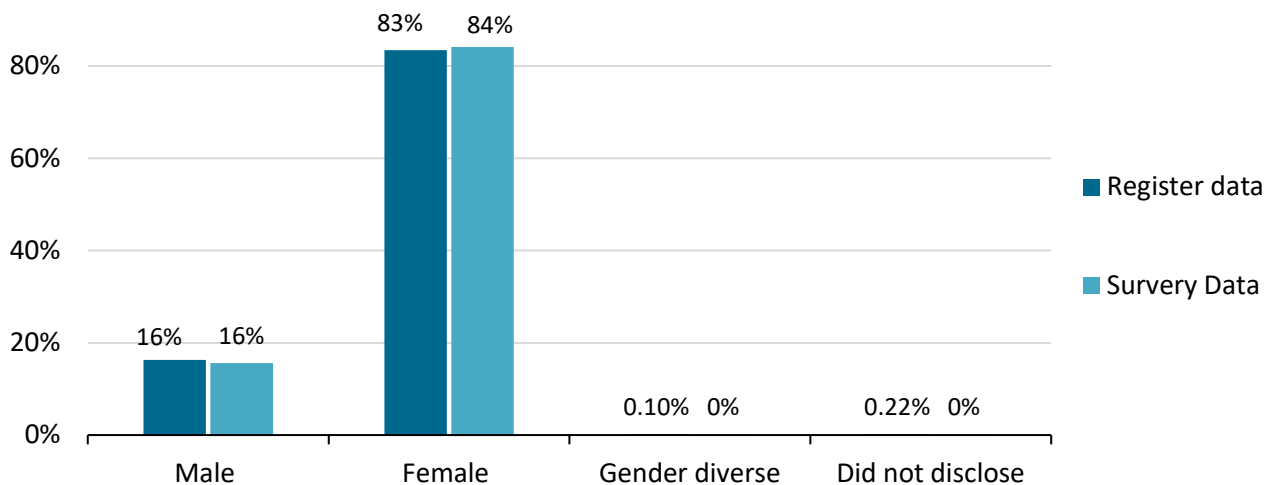
The average age of workforce survey respondents was 48 years old. In comparison, the average age of all registered social workers was 49 years old. Figure 13 shows a breakdown of age groups and how the register data compares to the survey data. The figure shows that there is a good representation of registered social workers across age groups as the register data and survey data are relatively similar in each age group.

Figure 13. *An age comparison across registered social workers and survey respondents*
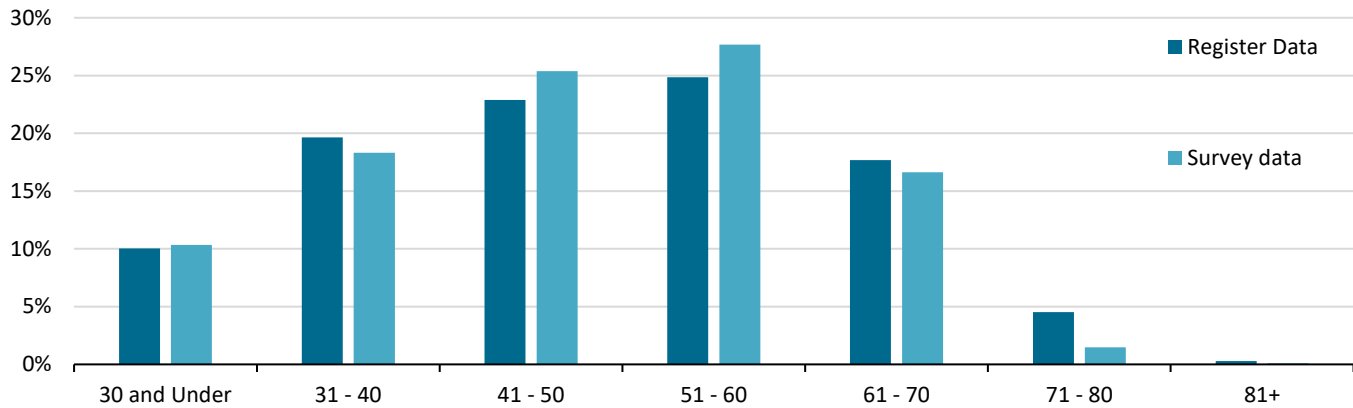

Ethnicity

The ethnic identities of those that completed the survey data varied from that of the register data. There is a slight overrepresentation of New Zealand European in the survey data. The register data also had a larger proportion of social workers that identified under 'other ethnicity'. Figure 14 gives a visual depiction of the proportion of individuals that identified with each ethnic group from both the survey and the register data.

Work is currently being done to improve the way that the SWRB collects and stores data around the ethnic identities of registered social workers.

Figure 14. *Distribution of ethnic identities in the survey and register data*
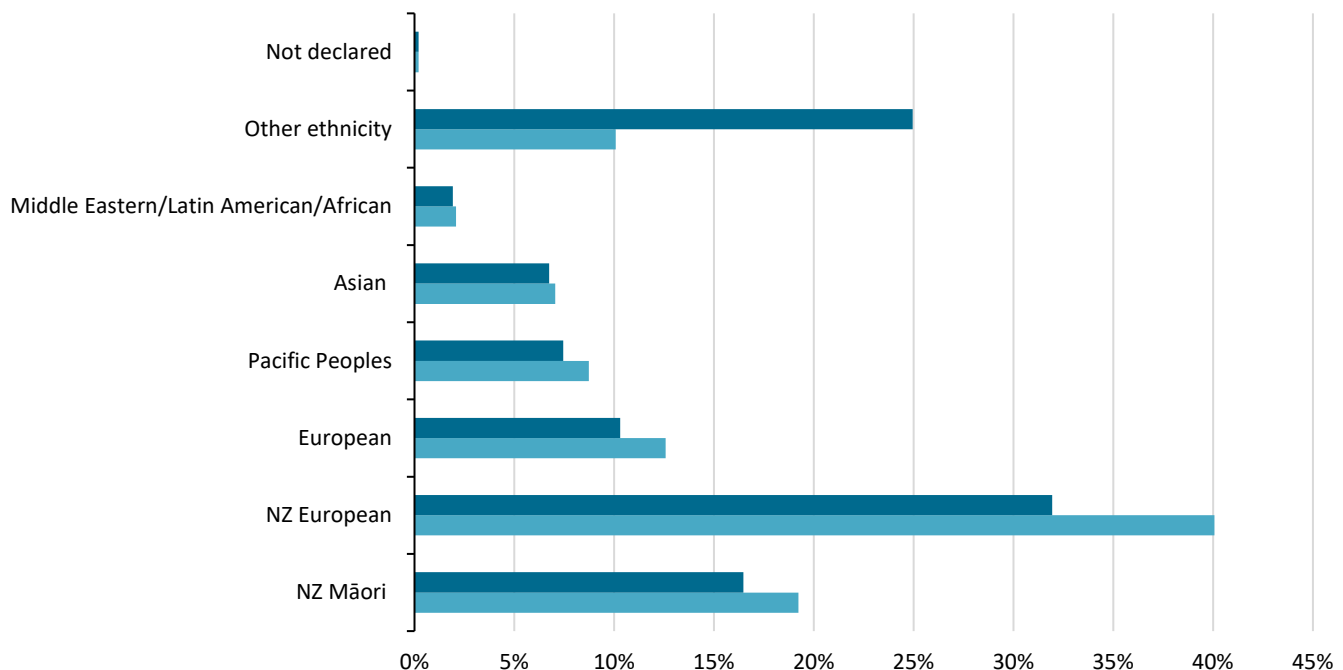
Regional representation

Survey and register data were compared to see if there were differences in the proportion of social workers in each region. Figure 15 shows there is a similar distribution of social workers in each region between the survey and the register.

Figure 15 *Distribution of regions between register and survey data*