



Social Workers Registration Board

Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Aotearoa New Zealand's Lead Agency
for social worker workforce planning, supporting the system to
have the right social workers with the right skills, knowledge, and
competencies in the right place at the right time to support and
enhance the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

Annual Social Worker Workforce Report
A high-level overview of the social worker workforce in 2022

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

The many pathways of knowledge, the many pathways of social work, upholding the dignity of all

Introduction

This Annual Social Worker Workforce Report presents data collected from the 2022 Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) Annual Workforce Survey. The purpose of the survey is to gain insight into the current social worker workforce. It provides an evidence base to support decision making and builds trend information over time.

The Annual Workforce Survey was completed by social workers who were renewing their Practising Certificates (PCs) from early May until 7 July 2022. Responses were received from 3,544 social workers out of a total of 7,564 who renewed their PC during that period, representing a 47% response rate. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

This survey built on the evidence base established the previous year by keeping the same four domains of questioning: workforce composition, workforce sustainability, knowledge and skill development, and employer support. An additional fifth domain “standing of the profession” was included to expand the findings from the survey. This aimed to find out if social workers thought that the transition from voluntary to mandatory registration has benefited the profession.

In the domain of workforce sustainability, we asked about a number of issues that have been highlighted by those across the wider social system, including an increase in demand for social work services. Another issue which has been highlighted is an observation that within some organisations job titles have been changed to avoid being associated with the term “social work”, which may be so that the costs linked with a registered social worker were removed. The survey investigates the prevalence of changed roles to explore the impacts this may have on the profession.

These additions to the survey build upon the evidence base that has been gathered by the SWRB over past years. The extra information we are collecting will give us a deeper understanding of the profession and help us to support workforce planning for all social workers and help to protect public safety.

The survey report is also an important contribution to the evidence base we are establishing in our role as Lead Agency for social worker workforce planning. This is a role designated to us by the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee in 2020. You can read more about this role and our current workforce planning activity in the Appendix.

Headlines

Workforce composition

The composition of the workforce is consistent with last year's survey. Most commonly social workers were aged between 40–59 years old and identified as New Zealand European. Nearly 85% of participants identified as female, and 14% as male. Around 35% of survey participants reported that they worked for Oranga Tamariki and almost 30% worked for non-government organisations. Most commonly participants reported that they work in care and protection.

Workforce sustainability

Participants in the survey reported that they joined and stayed in the sector in order to make a difference in peoples' lives. Nearly 15% of the workforce stated that they were planning to leave the sector in the next 5 years, with the most common reason given being retirement, followed by burnout. Social workers most commonly reported earning around \$70,000 – \$80,000 dollars. Similar to previous years, social workers who worked in non-Government organisations (NGOs) reported being paid less than those who were employed by Oranga Tamariki.

Knowledge and skills development

The top development needs changed depending on the ethnic identity of the respondent. Overall, the most commonly identified skill development social workers desired was social work practise with Māori and ethnic minorities. However, social workers identifying as Māori, identified different development needs, with understanding legislation and policies affecting social work coming out top. They did not report a need for development around social work with Māori.

Employer support

Around half of all participants said that their employer provided them with professional reflective supervision, relevant training and skill development, and a supportive and safe working environment. Approximately 80% of participants stated that their employers paid for their SWRB registration and Practising Certificate fees. Nearly 90% of participants agreed that their employer had supported them during COVID-19 at least in part.

Standing of the profession

Almost 60% of the respondents stated that they thought the status and standing of the profession had improved with the shift to mandatory registration. Participants also highlighted that the biggest challenges for the sector were recruitment and retention of social workers and pay parity.

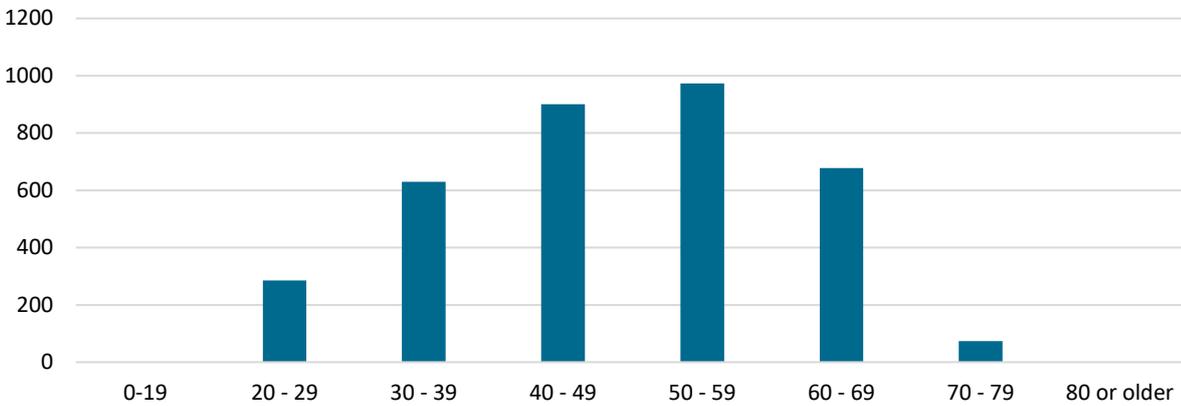
Section 1 – Workforce Composition

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

1.1 Age

The average age of participants who completed the survey was 47 years old. Figure 1 shows the range of age groups across the survey. Of note, the two largest age groups for social workers who completed the survey were 40–49 and 50–59 years old, with 900 (25%) and 973 (27%) respondents in these age groups respectively.

FIGURE 1. AGE GROUPS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE SOCIAL WORKER WORKFORCE SURVEY 2022



1.2 Gender

The majority of survey participants (85%) identified as female and 14% as male, similar to the results of last year’s survey where the largest majority of social workers identified as female.

TABLE 1. GENDER IDENTITIES OF PARTICIPANTS

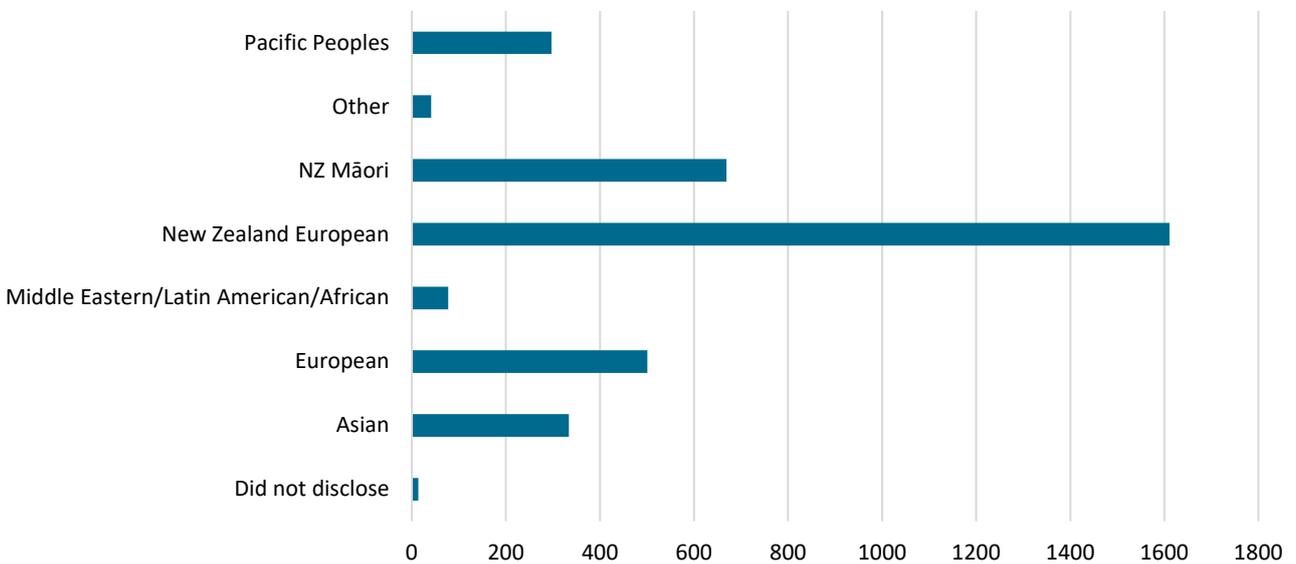
Gender Identity	Number of respondents
Female	3022
Male	510
Gender Diverse	7
Not disclosed	5
Total	3544

1.3 Ethnicity

The most common ethnic identity of survey respondents was European, followed by Māori. The ethnicity breakdown of survey participants was similar to that of our total register suggesting that we have a representative sample in terms of ethnicity.

In comparison to last year’s survey, we have a much smaller proportion of social workers that identified as “other” (10% in 2021 and only 1.1% in 2022). It is likely that the main reason for this difference is social workers had been asked to update their ethnicity details in our database, resulting in more accurate ethnicity data. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the ethnic identities of those who took part in the survey.

FIGURE 2. ETHNICITY OF SOCIAL WORKERS



The table below shows a comparison between the ethnic composition of the registered social worker workforce with that of the wider Aotearoa New Zealand population. This shows that unlike many other professions social work appears to be more ethnically representative of the wider population.

There is currently no data on the users of services provided by social workers, so we are unable to confirm if the current social worker workforce is representative of social work service users.

TABLE 2. ETHNICITY OF SOCIAL WORKERS AND GENERAL POPULATION

Ethnicity	Percent of Registered social workers	Percent of general population
Asian	9%	15%
European (includes European and NZ European)	60%	70%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	2%	2%
NZ Māori	19%	17%
Other	2%	1%
Pacific Peoples	8%	8%
Total	100%	113% ¹

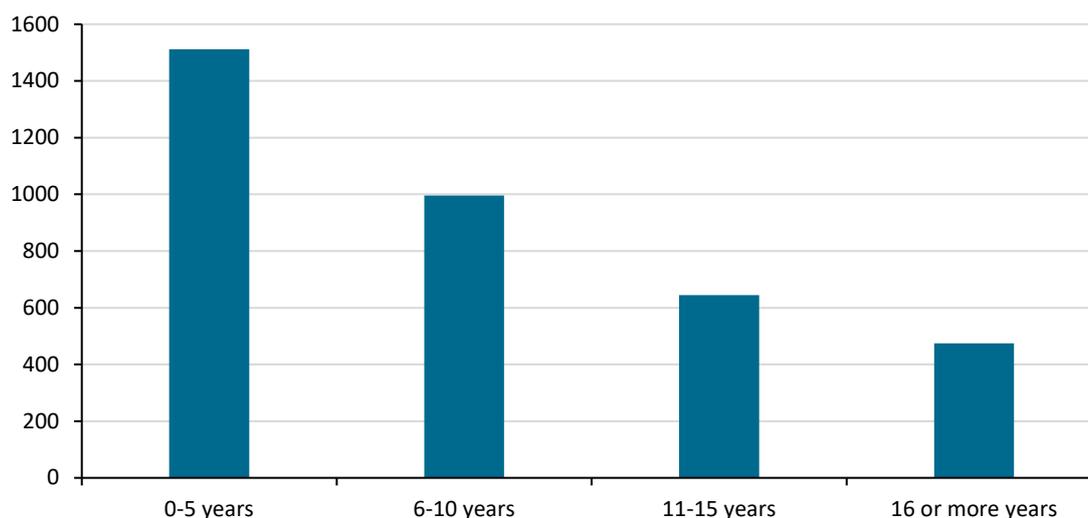
1.4 Qualifications

Around 95% of participants held a qualification with the majority of the respondents holding a bachelors degree.

1.5 Years registered

Around 60% of participants had been registered for more than six years suggesting that the social worker workforce is skilled and experienced. Although a large group of survey participants registered in the last five years, this may reflect the shift to mandatory registration in 2021. A number of these social workers may have been practising for some time before they became registered.

FIGURE 3. LENGTH OF TIME REGISTERED

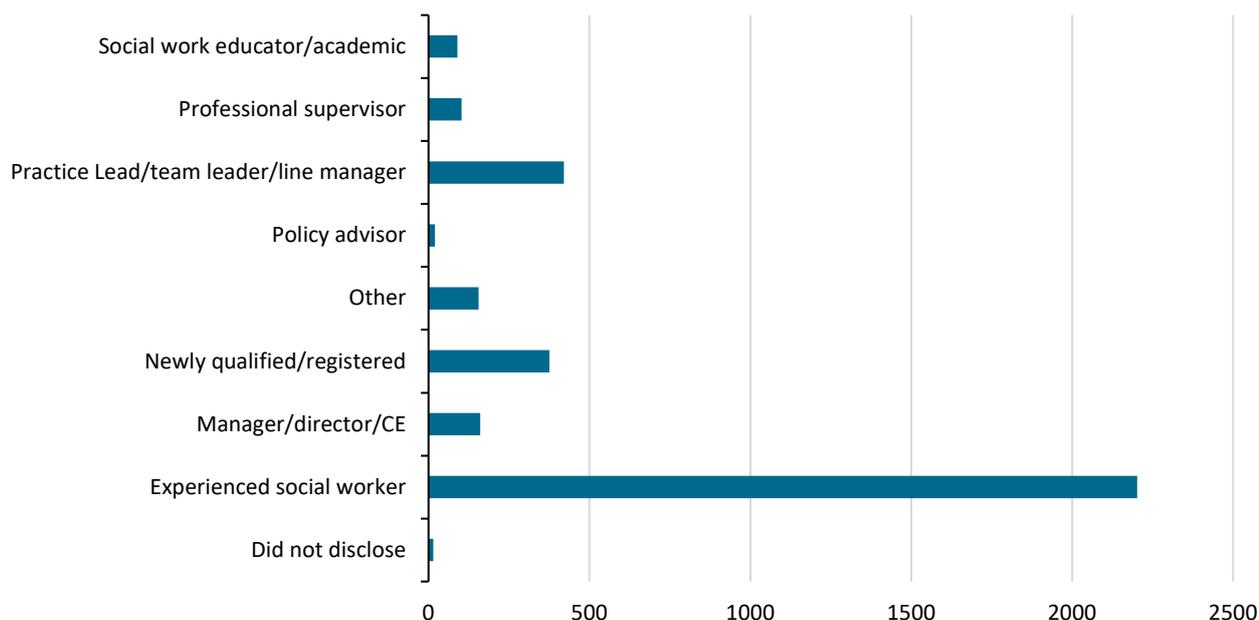


¹ The total adds to more than 100% as secondary ethnic identities were used in this calculation

1.6 Current role description

The majority of social workers reported that they were experienced social workers. Only 161 participants stated that they were managers/directors or chief executives. There were 421 social workers who indicated they were practice leads, team leaders or line managers. There were 376 social workers that indicated they were newly registered or qualified.

FIGURE 4. CURRENT ROLE DESCRIPTIONS



1.7 Employer type

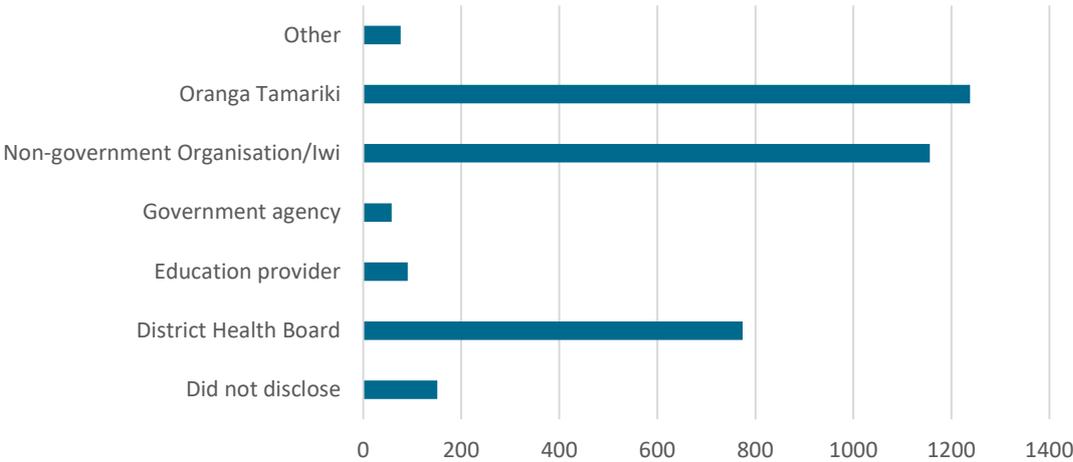
Nearly 35% of participants reported that they worked for Oranga Tamariki; this was the largest employer of the social workers who completed the survey and was slightly higher than the number of Oranga Tamariki employees in last year's survey. This was closely followed by social workers employed by NGOs who made up almost 33% of survey participants. The next largest social work employer was District Health Boards (DHBs), where nearly 22% of survey participants reported working in a DHB². The number of social workers who were employed by DHBs was slightly higher this year than last year (22% vs 19% respectively).

The other category was made up of social workers who were in private practice, self-employed or other areas. Government agencies included all government agencies that are not DHBs or Oranga Tamariki. These may include Police, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development, Corrections or Ministry of Justice.

² It is important to note that given the changes to the structure of DHBs to a unified health approach our classification will change next year for the Health category to reflect these structural changes.

Although Oranga Tamariki was the largest employer of the social workers who completed the survey, Oranga Tamariki is the second largest employer of social workers on our register. When looking at the register as a whole, social workers most commonly work for NGOs. Comparatively, our full register indicates around 27% of social workers are employed by Oranga Tamariki, whereas NGOs employ around 44%. This means that social workers who worked for Oranga Tamariki were slightly overrepresented and NGO employees were slightly underrepresented in the 2022 survey. Impacts of this variation will be discussed in areas where it is deemed relevant.

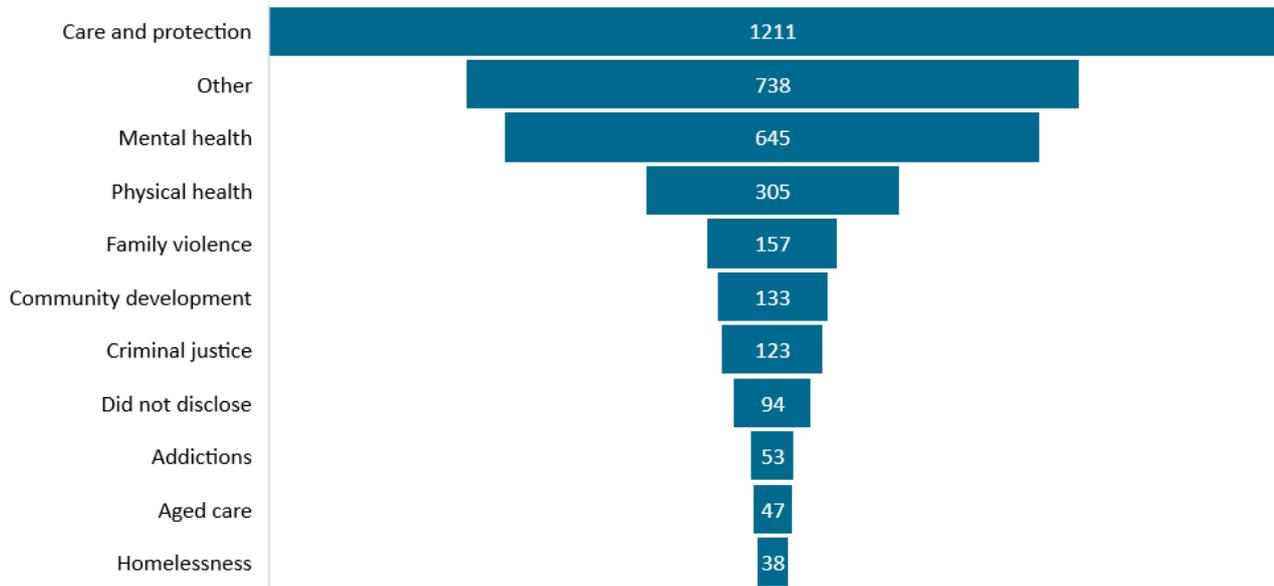
FIGURE 5. EMPLOYER TYPE



1.8 Field of practice

The most commonly reported field of practice by social workers was care and protection. It is likely that care and protection roles are most common as this is the main function of Oranga Tamariki social workers. Oranga Tamariki is the largest single employer of social workers who completed this survey so this may explain the large number of social workers working in the care and protection field. The next most selected field of practice was ‘other’ which allowed for open text responses. These open text responses had a wide scope ranging from being an educator, an advisor or working to deliver disability services and many more. This shows the wide scope of work social workers do in the community.

FIGURE 6. FIELD OF PRACTICE



1.9 Region

The regional location of the survey respondents is displayed in Table 3 below. The largest number of survey respondents came from Auckland (29%), Canterbury (13%), and Wellington (11%) respectively.

TABLE 3. REGIONS THAT SURVEY RESPONDENTS ARE FROM

Region	Participants	Percentage
Auckland	1035	29%
Canterbury	462	13%
Wellington	389	11%
Waikato	301	8%
Bay of Plenty	261	7%
Northland	191	5%
Manawatū-Whanganui	182	5%
Otago	166	5%
Hawke's Bay	161	5%
Taranaki	107	3%
Southland	78	2%
Nelson	66	2%
Gisborne	50	1%
Marlborough	37	1%
West Coast	21	1%
Tasman	19	1%
Did not disclose	18	1%

The table below depicts the number of social workers that are available per capita for each region³. On average, each region had around 9 social workers per 10,000 residents. Nelson and Northland had the highest number of social workers per capita, with 14 and 13 social workers per 10,000 citizens respectively. Conversely, Tasman and the West Coast reported the lowest number of social workers per capita, with Tasman only having 4 social workers per 10,000 citizens and the West Coast having 6 social workers per 10,000 citizens.

TABLE 4. SOCIAL WORKERS PER CAPITA

Region	Regional Population	Social workers per 10,000 population
Auckland	1,415,550	7.3
Canterbury	539,433	8.6
Wellington	471,315	8.2
Waikato	403,638	7.5
Bay of Plenty	267,444	9.8
Northland	151,689	12.6
Manawatū-Whanganui	222,672	8.2
Otago	202,470	8.2
Hawke's Bay	151,179	10.6
Taranaki	109,608	9.8
Southland	93,342	8.4
Nelson	46,437	14.2
Gisborne	43,653	11.4
Marlborough	43,416	8.5
West Coast	32,148	6.5
Tasman	47,154	4.0
Did not disclose	N/A	N/A

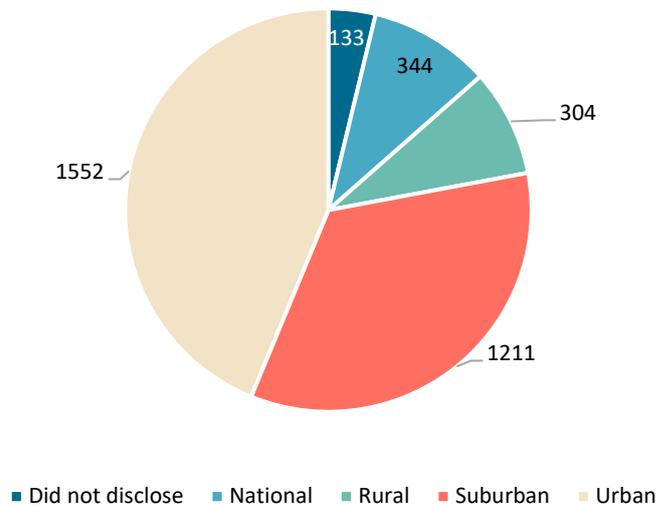
1.10 Urban versus Rural

Most commonly, social workers reported working in urban areas (44%). Only 9% of social workers reported working in a rural setting, this is lower than the 13% of the New Zealand public that live in the rural areas of Aotearoa⁴.

³ Retrieved from: [New Zealand population by region - Figure.NZ](#)

⁴ Retrieved from [New Zealand Rural Population 1960-2022 | MacroTrends](#)

FIGURE 7. SETTING PARTICIPANTS ARE WORKING IN



1.11 Conclusion – workforce composition

In conclusion the respondents who completed the survey predominantly identified as female and were aged around 40–60 years old. Nearly half of the participants identified as New Zealand European and only 1 in 5 social workers identified as New Zealand Māori.

Most commonly, social workers were located in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), Ōtautahi (Canterbury) and Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington) respectively. This is unsurprising as these are the three most populous regions in Aotearoa and reflects the fact that the majority of social workers work in urban areas. Tasman and the West Coast had the lowest number of social workers per 10,000 people, whereas Nelson had the highest. The survey did not explore the delivery of services across regional boundaries.

Social workers commonly reported that they worked for Oranga Tamariki in care and protection and were experienced social workers. There is likely an overlap here as Oranga Tamariki’s primary function is care and protection. Moreover, there was considerable variability in the roles that social workers reported they were in, reflecting the diverse nature of ‘social work’ roles.

Overall, the social work workforce is an aging workforce who work in a wide range of roles helping to serve those in the community who need them.

Section 2 - Workforce Sustainability

This section looks at factors that give insight into the sustainability of the social worker workforce. This includes a breakdown of salaries, why people are joining and staying in the sector, five-year work plans and reasons for people leaving the sector.

2.1 Salary

The majority of social workers reported earning between \$50,001 and \$90,000 annually (62% of those who disclosed their salaries). Only 238 participants in the survey reported earning less than \$50,000 per year. For social workers who worked full time, only 76 reported earnings below \$50,000 per year (2.5% of those working full-time) and 587 social workers reported earning over \$100,001 dollars per year.

FIGURE 8. DISTRIBUTION OF SALARY

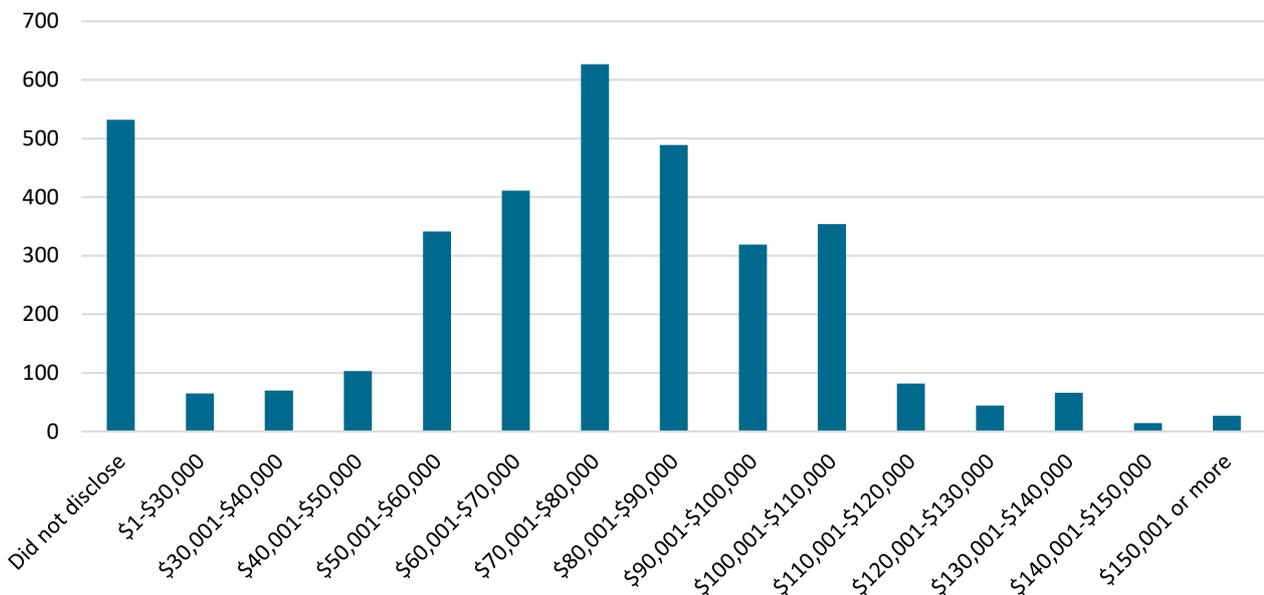
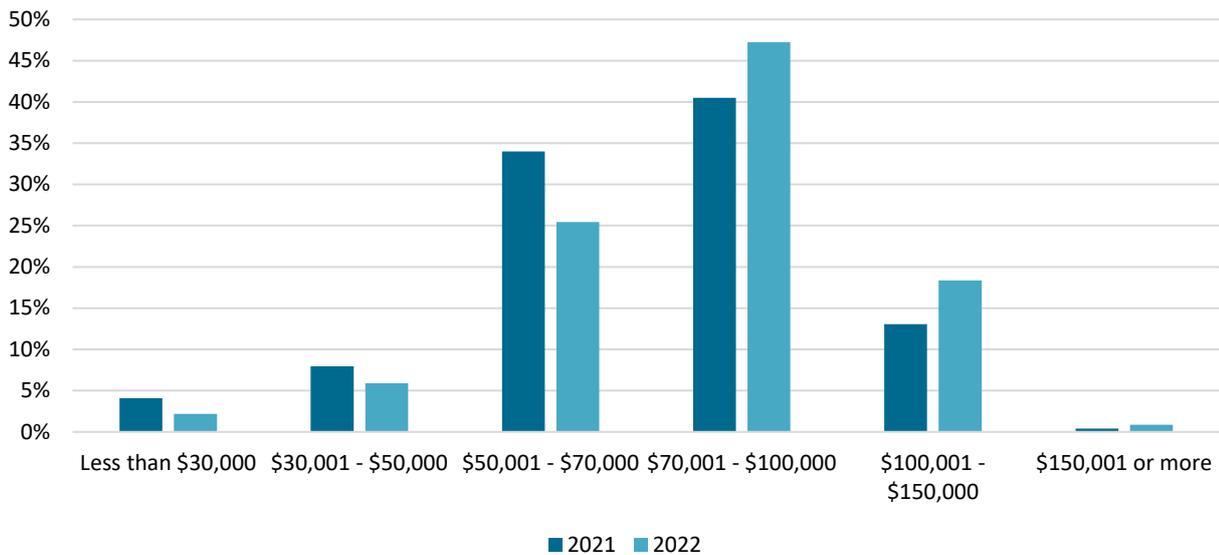


Figure 9 below shows the differences in the reported salaries between the 2021 Workforce Survey and the 2022 survey. There appears to have been an increase in annual salaries from last year to this year. However, this change could reflect the differences in where social workers were employed. Last year, 47% of the survey respondents reported being employed by an NGO, whereas this year only 33% of survey respondents worked for NGOs. Additionally, this year's survey had a larger proportion of social workers who were employed at Oranga Tamariki (who are known to pay social workers more than NGOs) in comparison to the 2021 survey. Given that there were more social workers working for Oranga Tamariki than for NGOs in the survey group, this is likely to result in higher reported salaries for the current survey.

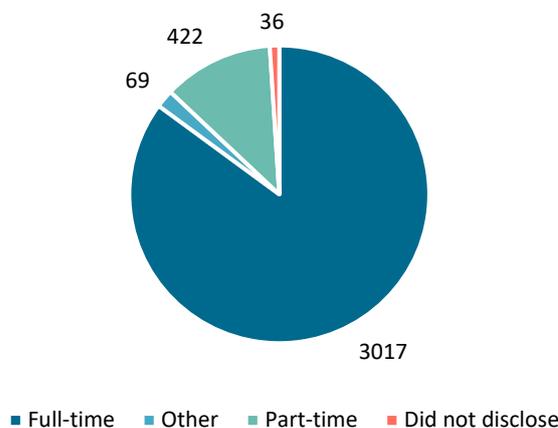
FIGURE 9. SALARY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN 2021 AND 2022



2.2 Full-time/part-time breakdown

Around 85% of social workers reported that they worked full-time (over 35 hours a week), and 12% stated they worked part-time (less than 35 hours a week). The remainder in the “other” category consisted of people who were retired, unemployed, on parental/carer leave, self-employed or doing contract work.

FIGURE 10. CURRENT WORK STATUS



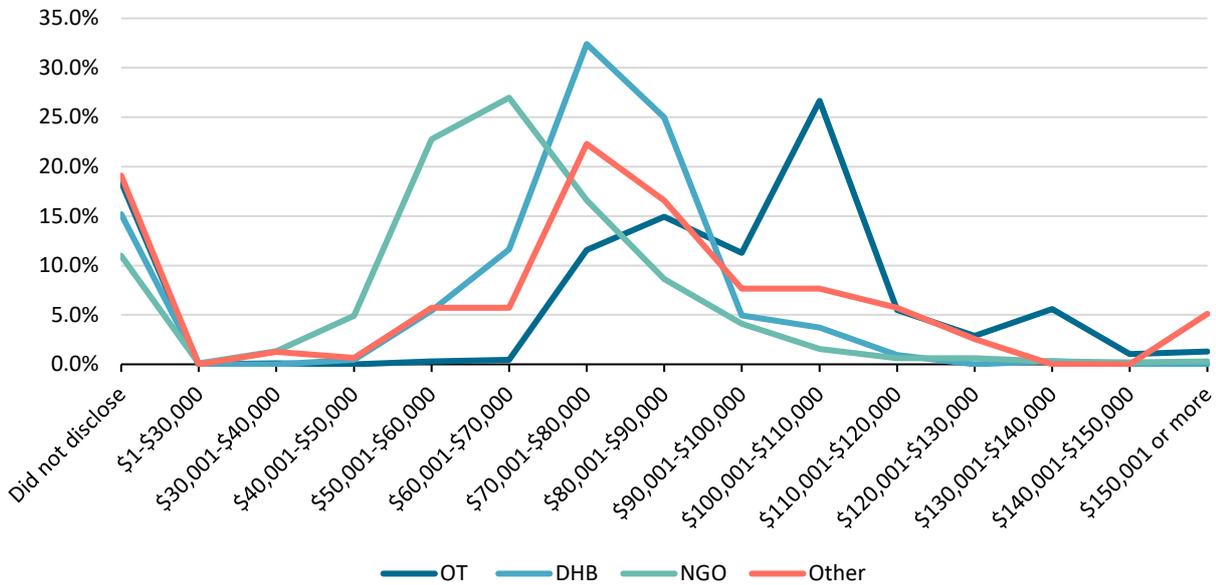
2.3 Salary differences

Figure 11 below shows the differences in salary between four biggest employer types. Namely Oranga Tamariki, DHBs, NGOs and ‘others’ (consisting of social workers in private practice, government agencies and education). This other group has been combined due to the low numbers in each of these groups individually.

Social workers who were employed by Oranga Tamariki most commonly reported being paid \$100,001 - \$110,000. This was followed by social workers employed by DHBs and those in the other category who most commonly reported a salary of \$70,001 - \$80,000. Salaries were

lowest for social workers employed by NGOs, where 27% reported earning between \$60,001 – \$70,000. This shows that social workers who are employed by NGOs earn significantly less than those who are employed by Oranga Tamariki. The salary difference between the employer types can be seen in the figure below⁵.

FIGURE 11. SALARIES BROKEN DOWN BY EMPLOYER



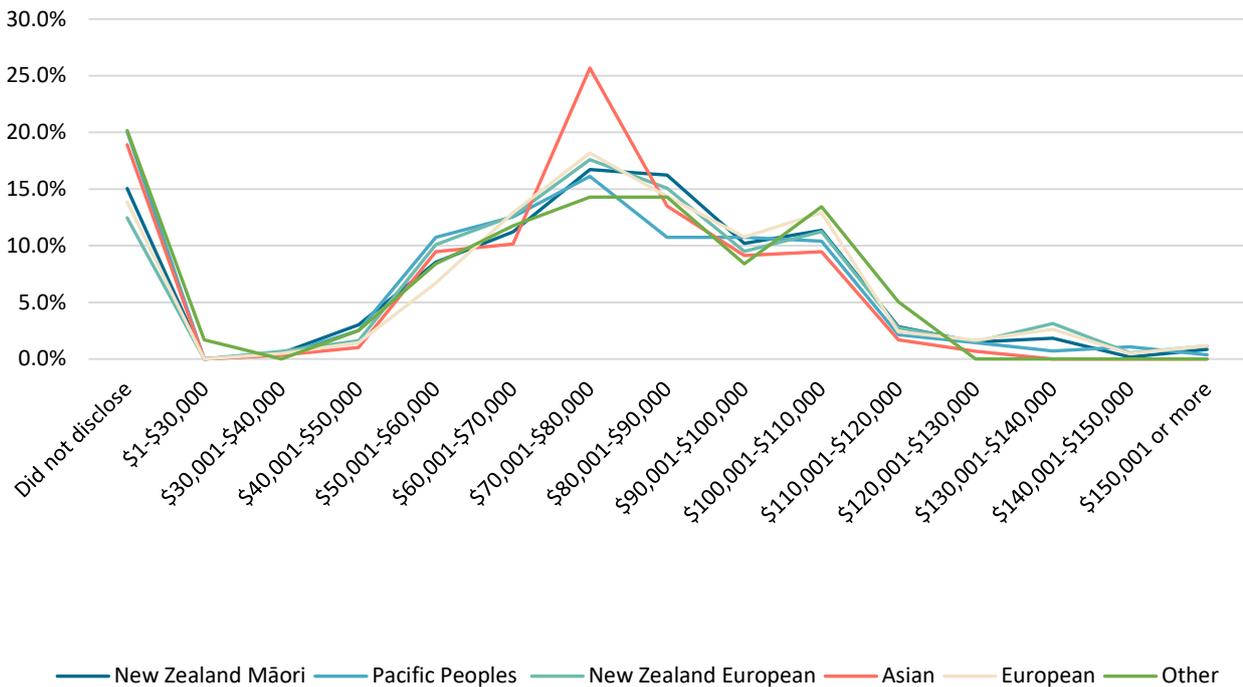
2.4 Salary by ethnicity breakdown

There were very few differences between the salaries reported by different ethnic groups. The difference that stands out in this visual is that those who identified as Asian were more likely to report earning between \$70,001 to \$80,000 a year⁶.

⁵ This visual only displays salaries for social workers who reported working full-time.

⁶ This visual only displays salaries for social workers who reported working full-time.

FIGURE 12. SALARIES BROKEN DOWN BY ETHNICITY



2.5 Factors for joining the profession

The survey asked social workers to indicate what motivated them to join the profession. The highest rated reason for starting social work was to make a positive difference to peoples’ lives. This was followed closely by working with whānau and their communities and having an interest in social justice, advocacy, and welfare.

Social workers had the opportunity to fill in a free text box to expand on their reasons for joining the sector. These responses varied greatly and included reasons such as falling into the profession, feeling a calling to help others, or being inspired by role models in their lives. One social worker stated that they started social work to help *“those that feel they don’t have a voice or are not heard and/or acknowledged”*.

Another social worker stated that they started social work to *“be part of the change towards equity and equality in care and protection social work delivery. To support more Māori centred practices and theories which will improve relationships between statutory social work and Tangata Whenua Māori”*.

The participants of the survey largely reported that they joined the social work sector to help those in need. Ultimately, this shows the caring nature of the social work profession.

TABLE 5. REASONS FOR STARTING SOCIAL WORK

Starting social work	Participants	Percentage of respondents
Making a positive difference to peoples' lives	2915	82%
Serving/working with/for whānau and my community	2669	75%
An interest in social justice, advocacy, and welfare	2533	71%
Sense of purpose	1622	46%
Using my own personal/lived experiences to help others	1542	44%
To become part of a recognised profession	726	20%
Career opportunities	540	15%
A known need for social workers	446	13%
Work flexibilities	345	10%
Salary	283	8%
Other	40	1%

2.6 Barriers to entering the profession

The table below displays the factors that were identified by social workers as the largest barriers for people wanting to enter or re-enter the profession. The highest rated barrier to entering the profession was salary. This was followed by balancing work and personal life, and the costs associated with being in a regulated profession.

The ongoing work on pay equity for social workers should contribute to removing the barrier of low salaries and the costs associated with being part of a regulated profession.

A number of survey participants wrote additional text, which suggests a range of barriers to entering or re-entering the profession. The stress associated with social work roles was identified as a barrier by a number of social workers. For example, one social worker stated that social work is “generally seen as a stressful profession” and this may put people off joining or returning to the profession.

Others suggested students having to complete a four-year degree was a large barrier to those who want to enter the workforce. For example, one person stated that:

“It (a social work qualification) has become a 4-year degree without a significant increase in the income able to be earned. The salary for an NGO (social worker) is not commensurate with the time and cost of the degree. I think this will be a factor when people are considering their study and career options”.

Again, this example highlights the monetary barriers for the profession, where individuals may not see the benefits of doing a four-year degree outweighing the costs of such a lengthy educative process.

Other participants suggested that the negative media representation, vaccine mandates and social work being a female dominated profession were also barriers to encouraging people to join the profession.

There were some participants who stated that a re-entry programme for social workers who have been away from the profession would help comfort levels of those returning to work. For example, one participant stated:

“I have been out of social work for a while. The biggest barrier for me has been that there is no re-entry programme. Teachers and nurses do but not social work. When you have been out for a while you can lose confidence. I would have gone back earlier feeling better equipped if there was a re-entry programme”.

The barriers to entering or re-entering the profession should be the focus of future work, aiming to reduce the negative impact they have on increasing the number of social workers.

TABLE 6. IDENTIFIED BARRIERS TO ENTERING/RE-ENTERING THE PROFESSION

Barriers to entry	Participants	Percentage
Salary	1518	43%
Balancing work and personal life	1341	38%
Costs of being in a regulated profession	1346	38%
Perception of social work as a career	1134	32%
Lack of career progression	746	21%
Hours of work	616	17%
Concerns about meeting entry requirements	321	9%
Other	144	4%

2.7 Factors for remaining in the sector

Social workers were asked about the reasons they chose to stay in the profession. The most commonly cited reason was making a difference in peoples’ lives followed by serving/working with/for whānau and my community. The three lowest rated reasons for staying in the sector were culturally safe environment, salary, and career growth opportunities.

For the participants that responded “other” there were a variety of responses, some of these included working with good colleagues and working with Māori. For example, one social worker said that they stay in social work to “work with Māori, connecting with the local community and sharing my knowledge with Tau Iwi”.

Others stated that they were staying in their role because they have to due to personal circumstances including debt, limited opportunities, and age. This shows the variability in the reasons that social workers are staying in the sector, some of which were positive and some not so positive.

TABLE 7. REASONS FOR STAYING IN SOCIAL WORK

Staying in social work	Participants	Percentage
Making a difference to peoples’ lives	2814	79%
Serving/working with/for whānau and my community	2488	70%
Positive client relationships	2285	64%
Varied nature of the role	2103	59%
Continuous learning/professional development	1484	42%
Being a part of a profession	1341	38%
Positive working environment	1148	32%
Peer support	1077	30%
Career growth opportunities	686	19%
Salary	629	18%
Culturally safe environment	611	17%
Other	37	1%

2.8 Five-year work plan

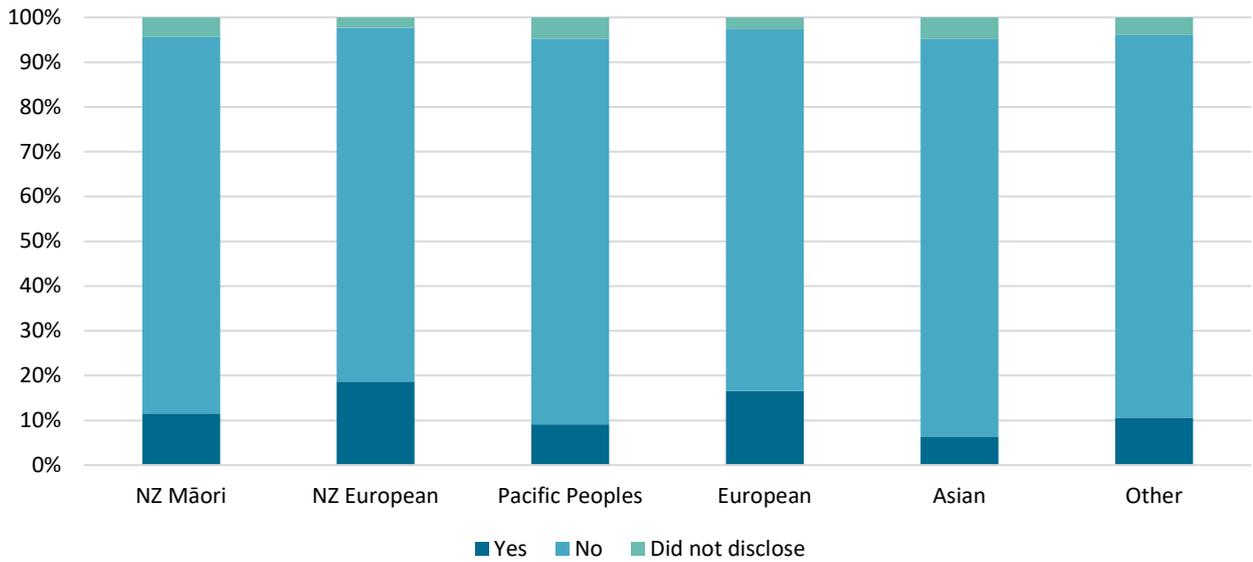
The survey asked participants to state if they planned to leave the sector in the next five years. Nearly 15% stated that they planned to leave in the next five years. Around 82% of participants indicated that they would not be leaving the sector during that period, and 3% did not respond to the question.

FIGURE 13. LEAVING THE PROFESSION IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS



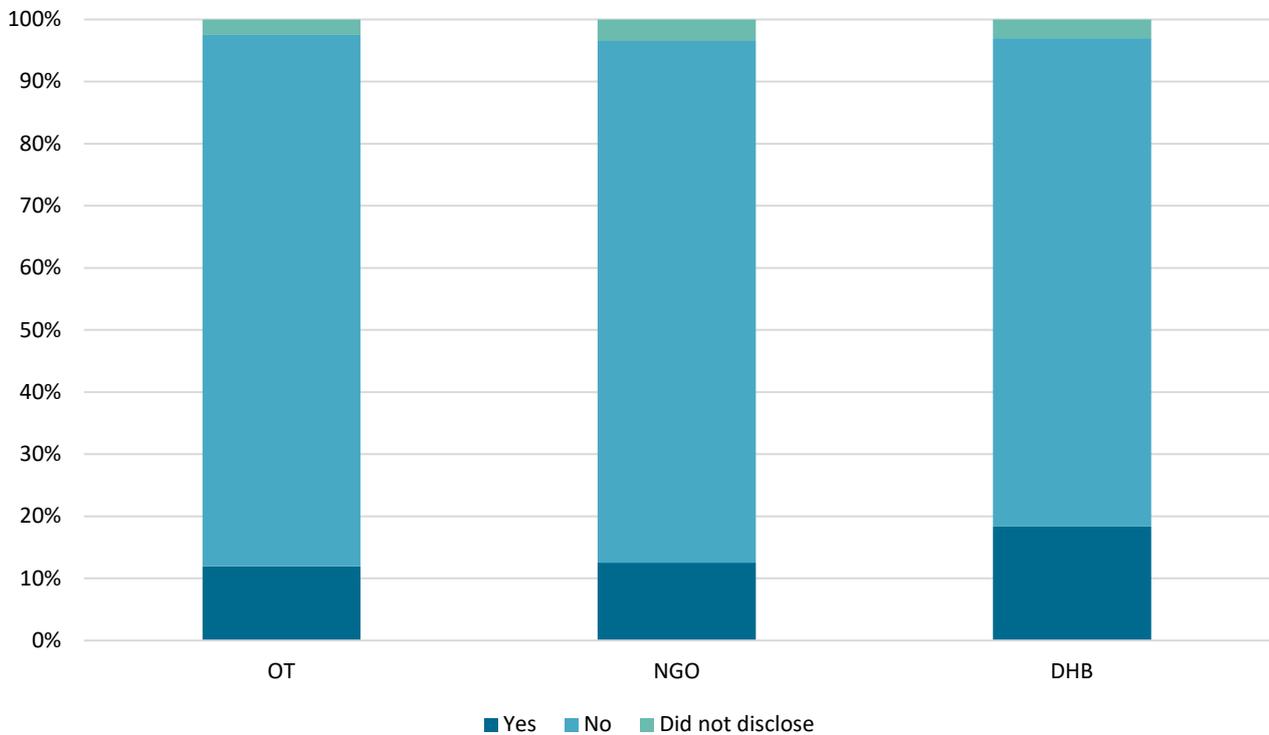
The figure below displays an ethnicity breakdown of social workers who are planning to leave the profession in the next five years. Of note, those who identified as New Zealand European or European were most likely to report planning to leave the sector.

FIGURE 14. ETHNIC BREAKDOWN OF THOSE LEAVING THE SECTOR



Of the three major organisation types, social workers in DHBs were more likely than those working for Oranga Tamariki or an NGO to report that they were planning to leave the sector. Oranga Tamariki had the lowest rates of social workers planning to leave the sector.

FIGURE 15. EMPLOYER BREAKDOWN OF THOSE PLANNING TO LEAVE THE SECTOR



2.9 Ages of people planning to leave

Unsurprisingly, we see that a much higher proportion of people who are aged 60 or older are planning to leave the workforce than that of their younger counterparts. Of note, around 13% of

those in the age group 20-29 are planning to leave. Retaining this younger age group will be important for the sustainability of the workforce.

TABLE 8. AGE GROUPS 5-YEAR WORK PLAN

Age group	Percentage planning to leave
20 - 29	13%
30 - 39	9%
40 - 49	7%
50 - 59	8%
60 - 69	35%
70 - 79	56%
80 or older	50%

2.10 Reasons for leaving the profession

Social workers who stated they were planning to leave the sector over the next five years were asked to give their reasons for leaving. Around half of those planning to leave the sector are expecting to retire. This was consistent with last year’s survey; the high rates of retirement likely reflect the ageing nature of the workforce. The next most commonly given reason for leaving was burnout, followed by high workload and poor pay. Burnout was not included as a selection option in last year’s survey so for this category it is not possible to compare this year’s findings with last year.

TABLE 9. REASONS FOR PLANNING TO LEAVE THE PROFESSION

Reasons for leaving	Participants	Percentage
Retirement	262	50%
Burnout	157	30%
High workload	106	20%
Poor pay	98	19%
Workplace morale	92	18%
Cost of being a registered social worker	84	16%
Lack of professional support	85	16%
Lack of career progression	77	15%
Imbalance of administrative duties and contact time with clients	63	12%
Bullying, discrimination, and harassment in the workplace	51	10%
Whānau responsibilities	35	7%
Other	34	7%
To complete further study	29	6%
Contract conditions	21	4%

Reasons for leaving the profession have been broken down by age groups below, showing the factors having the biggest impact on each age group. For example, retirement is largely only relevant for those social workers aged over 50 years old. Similarly, poor pay is reported most commonly as a reason for leaving by younger social workers in the 20-29 age group. This figure gives an insight into the factors that are causing social workers of various ages to leave the workforce.

FIGURE 16. REASONS FOR LEAVING BROKEN DOWN BY AGE BANDS

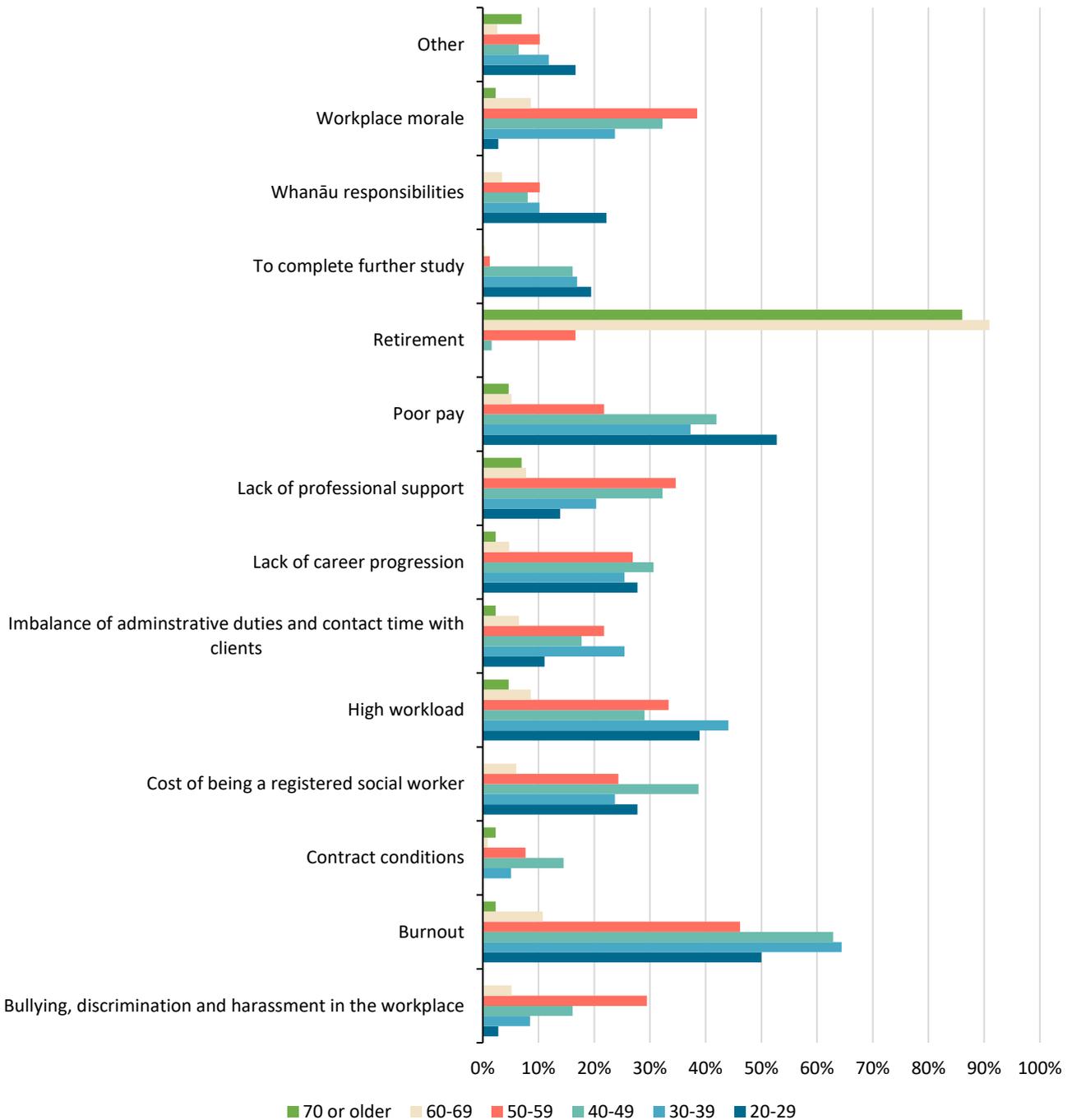
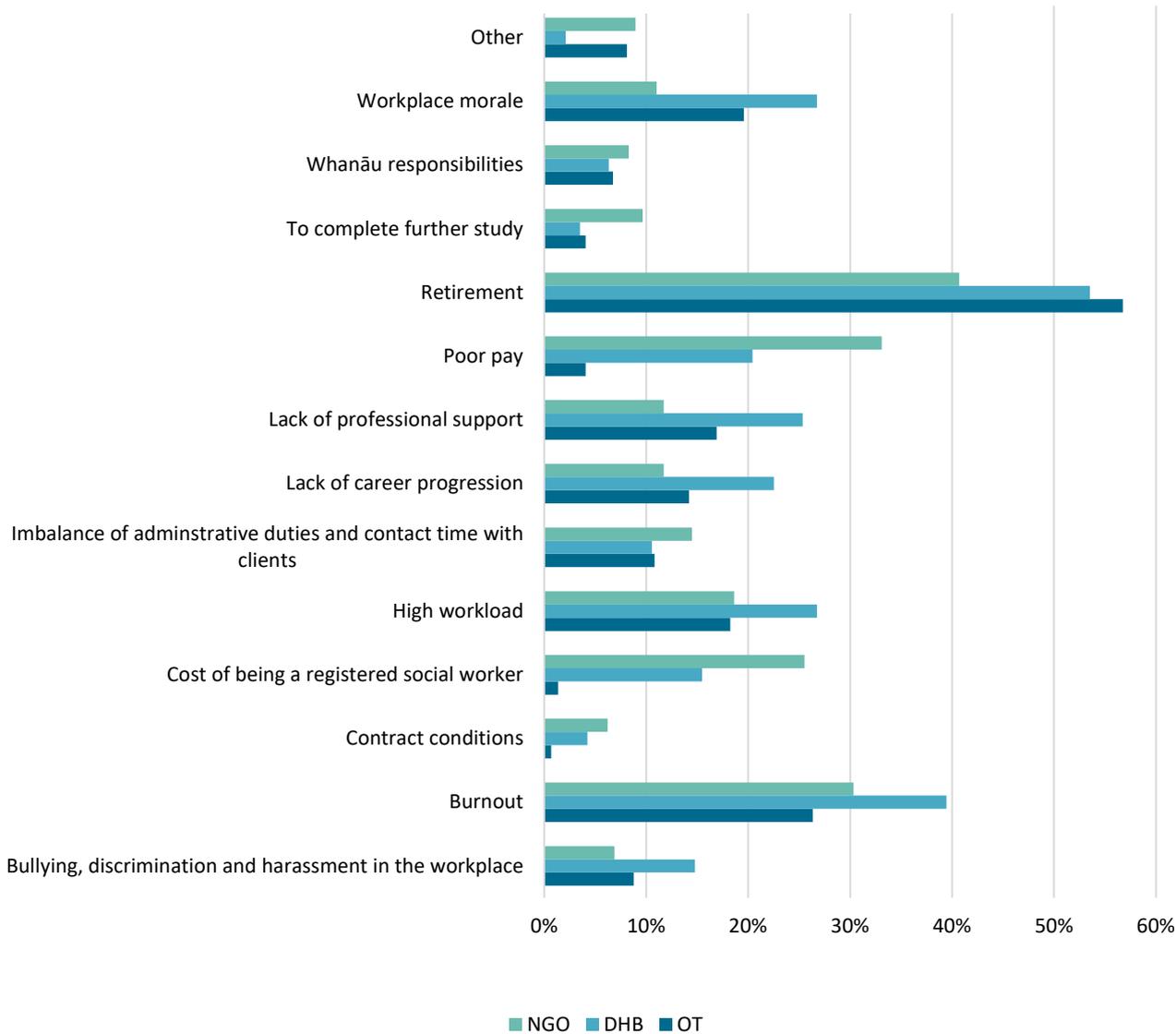


Figure 17 displays the top reasons that employees from each of the three major employer types gave about leaving the sector. For all three, the top reason given was retirement. Social workers who worked in DHBs were more likely than NGO and Oranga Tamariki employees to report that they were planning to leave the sector due to workloads, burnout, workplace morale, lack of professional support, lack of career progression, and bullying, harassment, and discrimination in the workplace.

Social workers who worked for NGOs were more likely than Oranga Tamariki and DHB social workers to associate their reasons for leaving the profession to monetary concerns. For example, NGO workers stated they were planning to leave the sector due to poor pay and the cost of being a registered social worker at a higher rate than those who worked for Oranga Tamariki or DHBs. For Oranga Tamariki social workers, after retirement the next highest reason for leaving the profession was burnout and workplace morale. However, these were not rated higher than the proportion of social workers at DHBs or NGOs.

FIGURE 17. REASONS FOR LEAVING BROKEN DOWN BY EMPLOYER TYPE

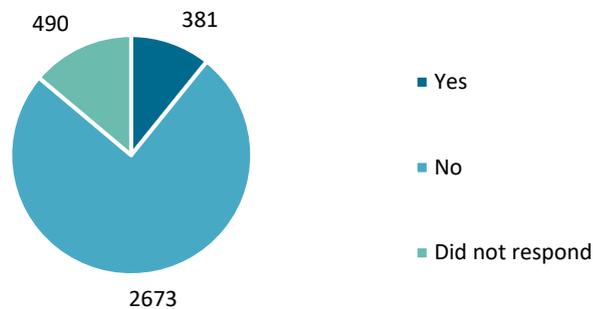


2.11 Social workers roles removed

Survey participants were asked if they had experienced job titles that mentioned or referenced 'social work' being changed to other titles. This issue was brought to light in late 2021 during the public consultation around the increase in fees and levies proposed by the SWRB. Many suggested that title changes were a risk associated with the increased cost of practising certificates, where it would lead employers to change 'social work' roles to other titles such as whānau navigator in order to avoid the increased costs.

11% of participants reported that they had seen social work roles changed in their organisation. This raises concerns that if people filling social worker like roles are not registered as social workers there will be no mechanism for ensuring the accountability and on-going professional development for these individuals.

FIGURE 18. PARTICIPANTS REPORTING THAT SOCIAL WORK ROLES HAVE BEEN REMOVED/CHANGED



Social workers were asked whether they had suggestions as to why these roles were being changed. A range of explanations were given, with a common theme being the under resourcing of the sector, especially in NGOs. Some participants stated that roles were changed to avoid needing to pay for SWRB annual fees. Others stated that by changing the job titles, employers did not have to pay as much in wages to unregistered staff. As such, an element of changing job titles appears to be connected to the cost associated with employing a registered social worker.

Another suggestion was that job titles were being changed because of the inability to recruit and/or retain registered social workers. Participants have pointed to a shortage of social workers in the country and to the inability of NGO organisations to compete with the salaries currently offered to social workers by Oranga Tamariki. By changing the title of these roles, organisations can now employ unregistered individuals to fill these positions. This is a risk to Aotearoa, as it undermines the public safety purpose of a regulated workforce. For the SWRB, it undermines our goal to promote public safety by holding social workers accountable.

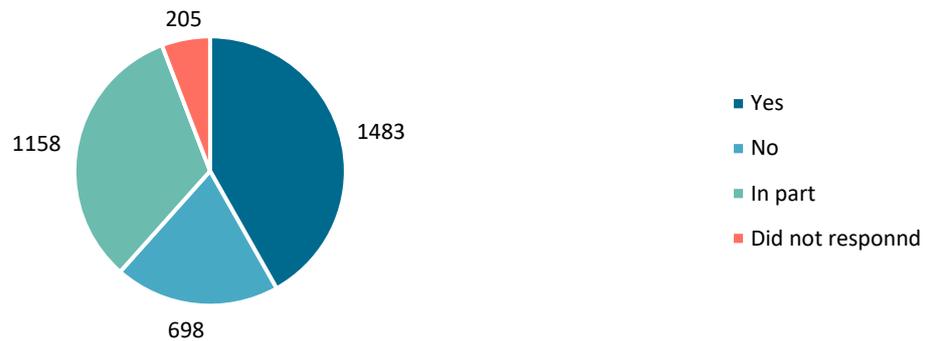
Another concern noted that changing job titles devalued social work. Survey participants stated that they had seen social work roles changed to be titled 'youth worker' and felt as though this discredited the importance of having registered social workers in these positions. Participants suggested that it gave the impression anyone could do the roles that were previously held by social workers. Some social workers identified this as a risk as the people

filling youth work positions were not as qualified as social workers and did not have the same skills to manage and care for complex clients.

2.12 Increased demand for services during the COVID-19 pandemic

The figure below displays the responses to the question “has COVID-19 increased the demand for the services that you provide?”. Around 42% of participants agreed that COVID-19 had increased demand and 33% stated that demand had increased in part. Only 20% of participants stated that COVID-19 had not increased demand for the service they provided. There were 205 (6%) that did not respond to the question.

FIGURE 19. HAS COVID-19 INCREASED DEMAND?



2.13 Conclusion – workforce sustainability

Overall, there appears to have been an increase in the reported salaries when compared to last year. Similar to the findings from previous years, the salaries reported by social workers working in NGOs were considerably lower than that of social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki. This evidence is important for future work aiming to increase the pay parity between these employer types.

The most commonly cited reason social workers gave for joining and remaining in the social work sector was to make a positive difference to people’s lives. As such, this aspect of social work could be highlighted to encourage social workers to join and stay in the profession.

There were a number of barriers to entering the profession that were identified by social workers, in particular monetary issues such as low salaries and the cost of being a registered professional. A focus on increasing funding to the sector could help overcome these issues.

Around 15% of those who completed the survey stated that they were planning to leave the sector in the next 5 years. The most commonly cited reason for leaving the workforce was retirement, likely reflecting the aging nature of the workforce. Of note, 13% of social workers aged 20-29 stated they were planning to leave the workforce due to poor pay and burnout. As the social workers in this age range are the future of the profession, this will be an area to keep in focus, given that should this trend continue, it would have long term consequences for social work numbers.

Around 75% of survey participants agreed that COVID-19 had increased the demand for social work services at least in part. This reflects the essential role of social workers in helping those in the community and contributes to the increasing demand for social work services.

Through responses to our Demand for Social Work Services Survey (reported in 2022) the SWRB has learned that social work roles have been changed to no longer include social worker in the title. This survey has confirmed the occurrence of this with 11% of participants saying that they have seen titles being changed. This is concerning as these roles are now unregulated positions, and the SWRB can no longer ensure accountability, safe practice, and public safety.

Section 3 – Knowledge and skills development

Social workers were asked to identify the areas they needed further knowledge and skill development in. The top two areas of development recognised by social workers were social work practice with Māori and ethnic and cultural groups. This was followed by the need for training around legislation and policies affecting social work practise. It is important to note here that although people identify wanting further knowledge in an area it does not necessarily mean that they are lacking knowledge in that area. Rather, it may mean that they want to build upon their existing knowledge base in said area.

For those who selected the other option and left a comment the majority stated that they would be happy with learning about any of the listed development areas. More specifically some social workers stated that they would like to have development around working with those with disabilities, leadership, tikanga and working with older people.

The results in table 10 provide insight into where targeted training could be focused in order to match the needs of social workers.

TABLE 10. AREA OF DEVELOPMENT IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

Description	Participants	Percentage
Social work practise with Māori	1427	40%
Social work practise with ethnic and cultural groups	1394	39%
Legislation and policies affecting social work practise	1192	34%
Skills for managing complexity	1122	32%
Trauma informed practice	1150	32%
Working with addictions, for example alcohol, drugs, and gambling	1057	30%
Skills for conflict management	950	27%
Professional supervisor training	925	26%
Ethical practice/dilemmas	824	23%
Critical thinking	543	15%
Supporting students on field placements	537	15%
Report writing	451	13%
Working in partnerships	375	11%
Professional boundaries	348	10%
Case management	316	9%
I do not need further knowledge and development	112	3%
Other (please specify)	103	3%

3.1 Area of development for employer types

The figure below displays areas of development identified for each of the major employer types. Of note, employees of Oranga Tamariki had a higher proportion of social workers that reported wanting development around social work practise with Māori and ethnic and cultural groups. There was a higher proportion of social workers who worked in the NGO sector that reported needing development around working with addictions. This information could be used to inform targeted training for these groups to address different developmental needs and strengthen the workforce.

FIGURE 20. DEVELOPMENT NEEDS BROKEN DOWN BY EMPLOYER TYPE

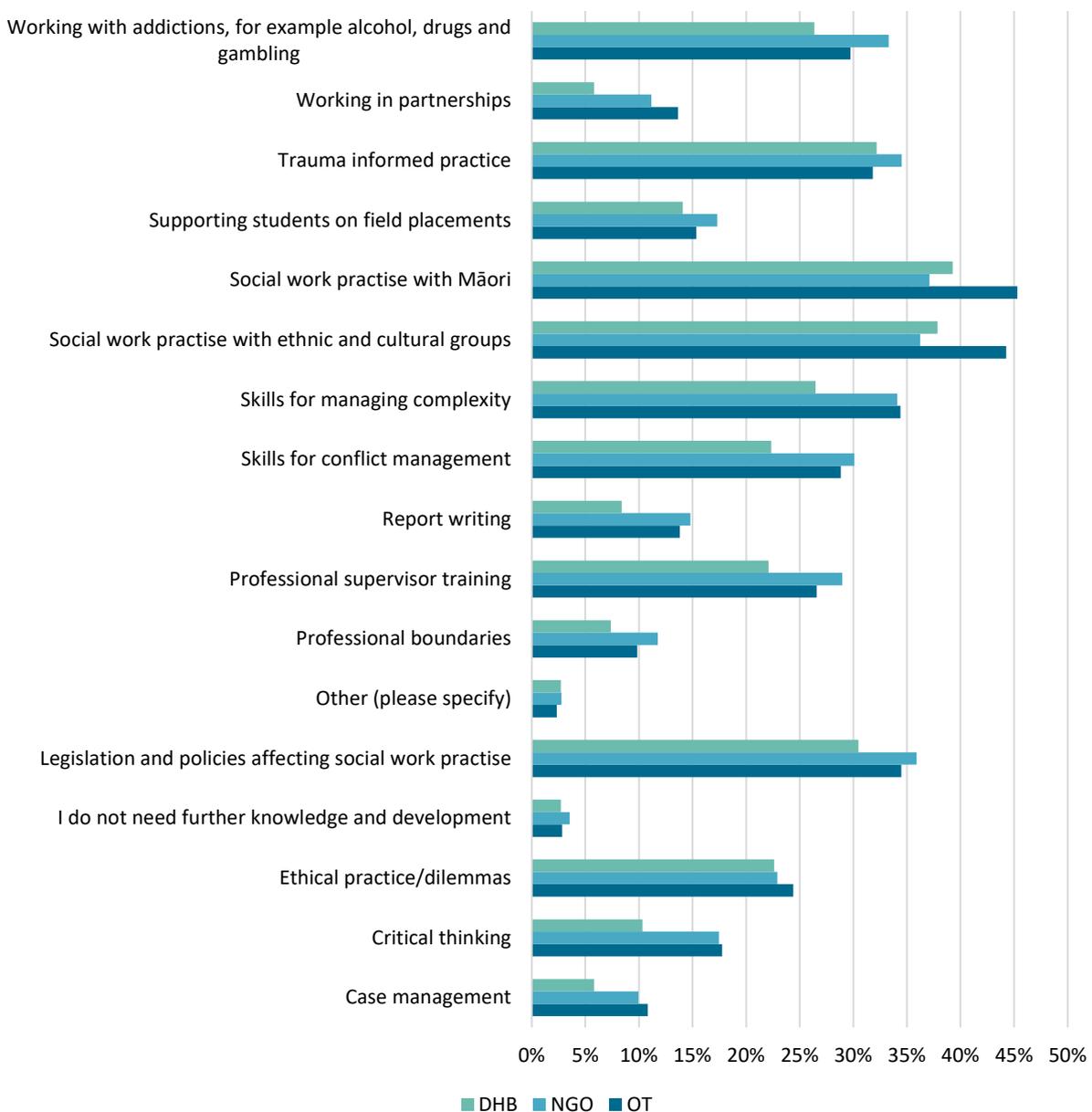
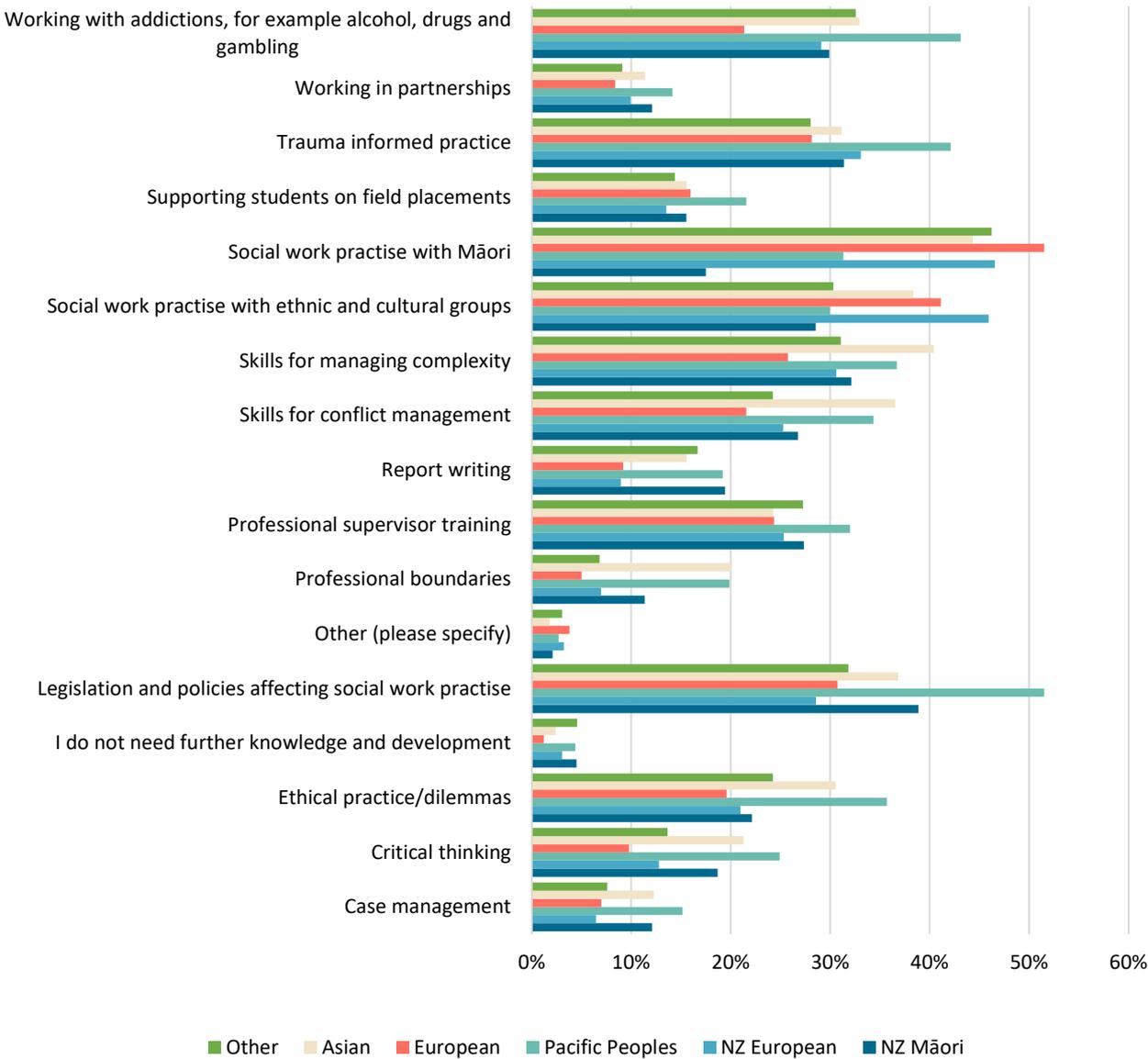


Figure 21 breaks down development needs by ethnic identities. For social workers who identified as Māori or Pacific Peoples a much lower proportion stated that social work with Māori or cultural and ethnic groups was a development need than all other ethnic groups. A higher proportion of social workers that identified as Pacific Peoples than other ethnicities stated that they needed development around understanding legislation and working with addictions.

FIGURE 21. DEVELOPMENT NEEDS BROKEN DOWN BY ETHNICITY



3.2 Conclusion – Knowledge and skill development

The main area that social workers identified for development was working with Māori and other ethnic minorities. It is important to note that this does not necessarily mean that there is a gap in social workers’ current skill in these areas. It may just indicate that they would like further learning in these areas. In contrast, social workers who identify as Māori or Pasifika did not state a need for further development in working with Māori or ethnic minorities.

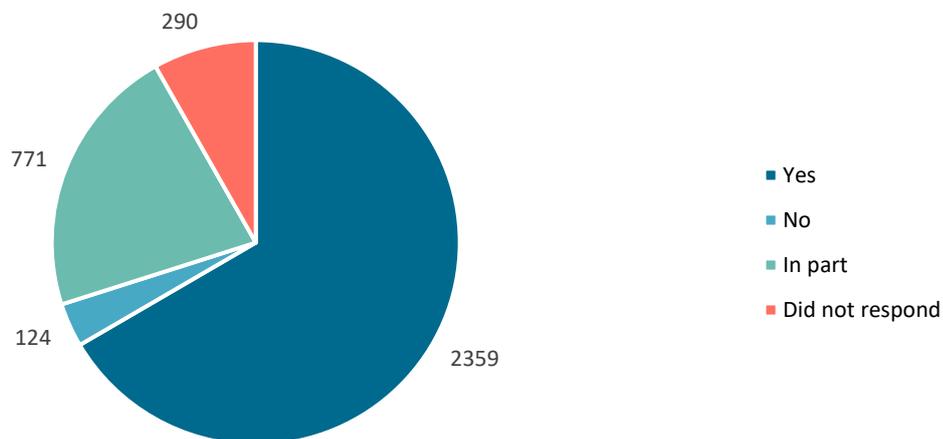
Section 4 – Employer support

This section investigates the support provided by employers for social workers to be able to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities.

4.1 Provide COVID-19 support

Most social workers indicated that their employers supported them to continue to deliver their services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Around 89% of participants either agreed or agreed in part that their employer had provided them with the support they needed. Only 3% of participants indicated that their employer did not support them during the course of the pandemic. This suggests most social work employers were providing the necessary support to their staff during the pandemic, at a time where the demand for social work services had reportedly increased.

FIGURE 22. EMPLOYER SUPPORT DURING COVID-19



Survey participants were asked to state the ways their employers had supported them during the pandemic. Most commonly participants stated that their employers made arrangements for them to work from home. This could have been through giving employees equipment to work from home or setting up zoom sessions to interact with clients. Many participants stated that this helped during the various lockdowns that occurred. Another theme was that social workers felt supported by their employers through the provision of COVID-19 updates, guidelines, welfare checks and packages and PPE.

Some social workers reported that their employers had given them time off or extra sick leave for the period that they had COVID-19. For those who were working in DHBs they reported that there was not much change, only an increase in workload. It appears that most social workers that completed the survey were supported well by their employers at a time of great stress and increased demand for social work services.

4.2 Professional support provided by employers

Social workers were asked to indicate the types of support that their employers provide. The most commonly reported support that employers provided was professional supervision with

58% of the survey respondents agreeing that they received support in this area. Professional supervision was closely followed by employers providing relevant training and skill development, where 56% of social workers reported they were supported. Of the types of employer support listed, the area that employers gave the least support was in the provision of cultural supervision.

TABLE 11. EMPLOYER SUPPORT PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS

Description	Participants	Percentage
Providing professional reflective supervision	2060	58%
Providing relevant training and skills development	1990	56%
Providing a supportive and safe working environment	1674	47%
Enabling space and time for reflective practice	1537	43%
Providing support to understand your regulatory obligations	1208	34%
Providing cultural supervision	763	22%
Other (please specify)	119	3%

4.3 Practising Certificate fees paid by employer

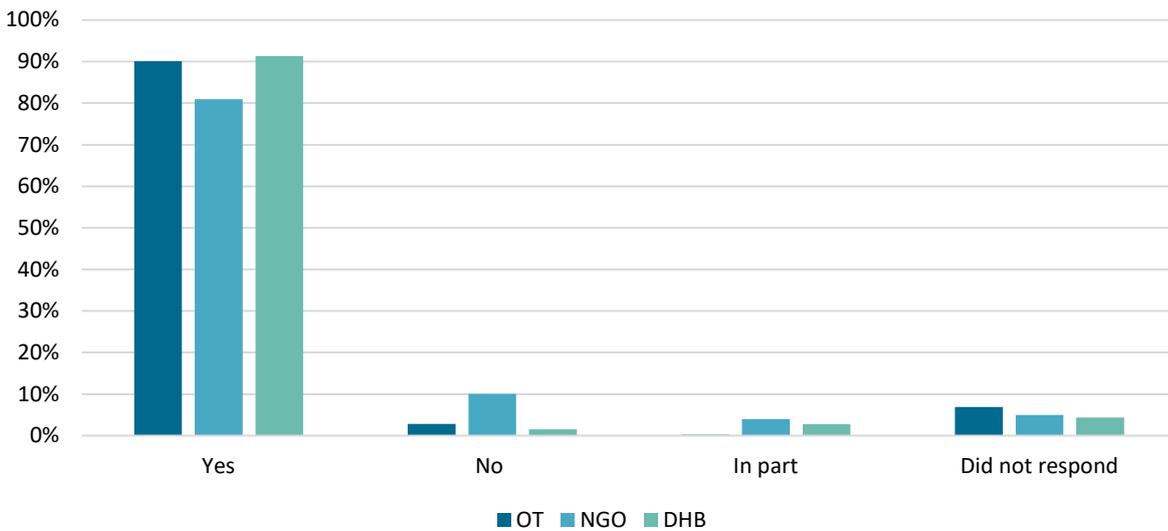
Around 83% of participants stated that their employers paid for their Practising Certificate (PC) in full. There were 2% of social workers that stated their employers paid their PCs in part. Only 8% of the social workers who completed the survey reported that their employers did not pay for their PCs. The rate of employers paying for PCs for social workers is a lot higher than what was reported last year. This may be due to the question being asked in a different format. This year the question was presented as a stand-alone question rather than hidden amongst a list of options. As such, 83% of respondents in the current survey indicated that they had their PC fees paid for by their employers.

FIGURE 23. EMPLOYER PAYS FOR PC



Social workers that worked for NGOs were least likely to report that their employers paid for their PCs, which is around 10% lower than that reported by social workers who worked for Oranga Tamariki or DHBs. NGO social workers reported the highest rates of having their PCs paid in part and not having their PCs paid for at all. As such, NGO social workers appear to be less supported by their employers in terms of having their Practising Certificates paid for. This is likely due to the limited resources that NGOs have to work with, and the extension of the pay equity settlement should enable NGOs to pay for their social worker’s practising certificate fees in future years.

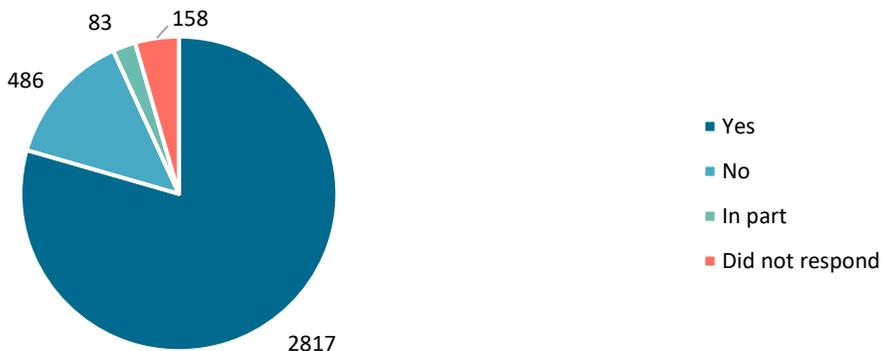
FIGURE 24. PRACTISING CERTIFICATE FEES PAID FOR BROKEN DOWN BY EMPLOYER TYPE



4.4 Registration fees paid by employer

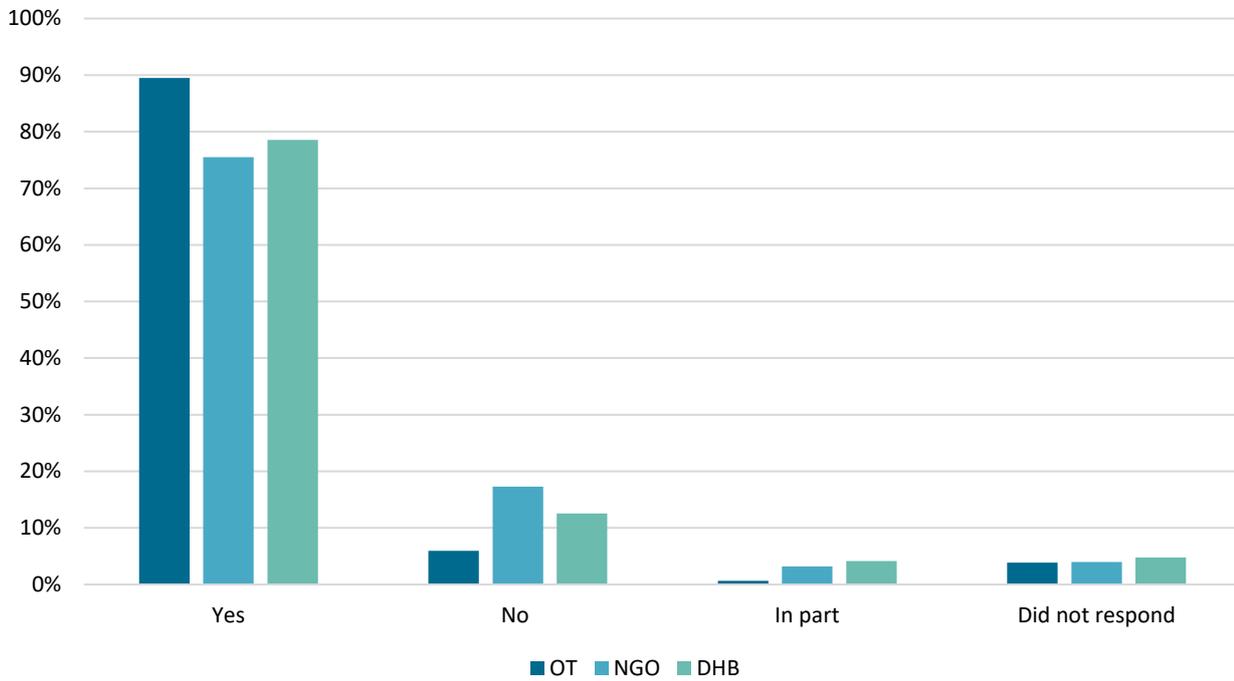
A slightly lower proportion of social workers reported that their employers paid for their registration fees in full when they first registered with the SWRB in comparison with those who stated they had their PCs paid in full (79% versus 83%). Nearly 14% of respondents stated that they did not have their registration paid for by their employers. Only 2% of social workers said that their employer had paid for their registration fees in part.

FIGURE 25. REGISTRATION FEES PAID FOR BY EMPLOYER



Similar to the PC fees, NGO employees reported the lowest rates of having their registration fees paid for by their employer, and the highest rates of not having the fee paid at all.

FIGURE 26. REGISTRATION FEES BROKEN DOWN BY EMPLOYER TYPE



4.5 Conclusion – Employer support

The majority of participants in the survey indicated that they were supported by their employers. Nearly 90% of social workers agreed at least in part that their employer had provided them with support to work throughout the pandemic period. Social workers stated that their employers assisted them in setting up online appointments, gave them extra sick leave and kept them up to date with the last COVID-19 updates.

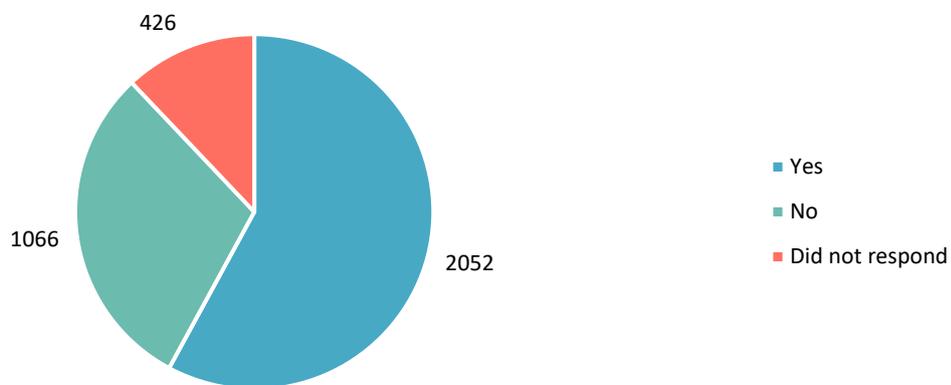
Almost 60% of survey respondents stated that their employers provided them with reflective supervision. The next most common types of support provided to social workers was being provided relevant training and development, followed by a supportive and safe working environment.

A much larger proportion (83%) of social workers indicated that their employers paid for their PC and registration fees in the current survey when compared to last year’s survey. Part of this increase is likely to be due to a change in the way the question was asked. Around 80% of social workers indicated that they had their registration fees paid for by an employer. Social workers who were employed by NGOs were less likely than other employer types to have their SWRB fees paid for by their employers.

Section 5 – Standing and status of the profession

The survey asked participants if they thought the shift to mandatory registration had improved the standing and status of the social work profession. Although the majority of social workers (58%) that completed the survey agreed that the shift to mandatory had improved the standing and status of social work there none-the-less were a significant proportion of social workers who disagreed (30%). This raises the question about the numbers of social workers who are agnostic as to whether mandatory registration has been beneficial to the profession in improving the standing or status of social work. The survey results do not provide sufficient data so this is an area which would be valuable to explore further.

FIGURE 27. HAS MANDATORY REGISTRATION IMPROVED THE STANDING AND STATUS OF SOCIAL WORK



5.1 Challenges for the profession

The biggest challenges for the profession reported by social workers completing the survey were recruitment and retention of social workers, followed closely by pay parity. This is in line with other research completed by the SWRB that has highlighted issues in the sector around recruitment and retention of social workers. This may also be tied to pay parity where social workers working in NGOs have reported that they are struggling to compete with the salaries that are offered by Oranga Tamariki.

There were a wide range of comments from social workers to this question, displaying a variety of opinions on what the biggest challenges are for the profession. Some thought that the biggest challenge was the cost of registration and Practicing Certificate. Others stated that there are not enough resources in the sector to pay social workers well, cover fees and attract new workers to the sector.

TABLE 12. BIGGEST CHALLENGES THAT THE SECTOR FACES

Challenges	Participants	Percentage
Recruitment and retention of social workers	2346	66%
Pay parity	2232	63%
Deepening of social inequity	1871	53%
Public perception of social workers	1644	46%
Not enough time spent with people using the service	1554	44%
Other	208	6%

Conclusion

One key message that has been highlighted in the current survey is the low funding, in particular for portions of the sector. Survey participants consistently highlighted the inequity in the funding for NGOs in comparison to organisations such as Oranga Tamariki. For example, funding was noted as one of the top challenges faced by the sector. Others stated that a lack of funding for the NGO sector was contributing to the changing of job titles in order to avoid the costs associated with registered social workers. The salaries that social workers declared are lower in the NGO sector, and a number of employees planning to leave the sector gave financial reasons for doing so. The future supply of social workers will require this issue to be addressed.

The number of social workers who are planning to leave the profession over the next five years is also an area which will require attention. Nearly 15% of social workers that completed the survey indicated that they were planning to leave the sector for a range of reasons. The most common reason given was retirement. It would be beneficial to explore what are other reasons for leaving the sector, including in the context of the wider social work system, health, and related workforce in order to develop a system wide response.

It is a concern that some social workers report that roles are being altered so that a registered social worker is no longer required to complete them. There is a lack of information on the causes of this and is an area that could be investigated. Not only is there an issue in terms of lack of accountability for professional practice it will create uncertainty for the consumers of services and potentially undermine trust in the system and overall public safety. The SWRB does not have a role in ensuring accountability and safe practice for unregulated staff.

Workforce pressures within the health sector are well documented and this appears consistent for social workers within Te Whata Ora (previously known as District Health Boards). These

social workers reported the highest rates of planning to leave the workforce. The reasons they gave were also more likely than other employer groups to relate to the working environment. For example, DHB social workers reported planning to leave the workforce due to burnout, lack of career progression and support, bullying, workplace morale and workloads at higher rates than NGO and Oranga Tamariki social workers. Addressing these workplace issues will be important for supporting social workers working in health.

It has been a welcome development to see that there is a higher proportion of social workers this year who reported having their Practising Certificate and registration fees paid for by their employers. This shift from last year may be due to a change in the formatting of the question. Support from the employers of this nature is positive for the profession and implies that employers are seeing the employment of a registered social worker as valuable and an investment for the organisation. When the cost of registration is borne by the employer it takes away any financial pressure for the individual social worker, allowing them to focus on their work.

Finally, we thank all of the social workers that participated in the survey. The findings from the survey are immensely valuable to us and the profession. They help highlight areas where development and growth are needed to support social workers in their work. The findings also help the SWRB to inform on policies that help reduce the workforce pressures identified through the results of this survey.

Data representativeness

The social workers who completed the workforce survey were compared to the statistics we can pull from the SWRB database to check for the representativeness of the sample. All demographic data from the participants was representative of the register. The only area where there was a notable difference was around employer type, where a higher proportion of survey participants reported working for Oranga Tamariki than our database suggests. Conversely, a lower proportion of survey respondents reported working for NGOs than our database suggests.

It is important to note that with any research using a sample of the total population there will be sampling bias. However, by comparing the sample with the population we are able to find areas of variability between the two and acknowledge or infer the impacts this might have on the results we get. However, given the sample size of this report we can be confident in the results of this report and that it will extrapolate to the population of social workers on the SWRB register.

Appendix

SWRB is the designated Lead Agency for workforce planning for all social workers

The SWRB was designated as the Lead Agency for workforce planning for all social workers by the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee on 29 July 2020. (Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee Minute of Decision SWC-20-MIN-0111 refers.)

The role was publicly announced in March 2021, by the Minister for Social Development and Employment, Minister Sepuloni.

Why was the SWRB assigned this role over other agencies?

Our role as the regulator of social workers is set out in our establishment legislation, the Social Worker's Registration Act 2003 (the Act - administered by the Ministry of Social Development).

The purpose of the Act is to:

- protect the safety of members of the public, by prescribing or providing for mechanisms to ensure that social workers are competent to practise and
- create a framework for the registration of social workers in New Zealand and determine their scopes of practice for the purposes of ensuring public safety, social worker competence and accountability
- establish a board to register social workers, and provide for its powers
- establish a tribunal to consider complaints about social workers
- enhance the professionalism of social workers.

The Lead Agency role aligns with the stated purpose of the Act to enhance the professionalism of social workers and enables us to report through our existing accountability relationship with the Minister for Social Development and Employment and the Ministry of Social Development, to Government.

What internal work have we been undertaking in this role to date?

We have developed a vision for our Lead Agency work, and the high-level outcome we are seeking to achieve.

Our vision is to:

- ensure a safe, professional, knowledgeable, competent, and accountable social worker workforce, based on insight into where and when social workers are required to meet demand for services, to support wellbeing outcomes for New Zealanders.

Our high-level outcome is to:

- ensure we have the right social workers, with the right skills, knowledge, and competencies in the right place, at the right time to support and enhance wellbeing.

We have developed an internal approach to articulate what the Lead Agency role means within the SWRB, focusing on three components or stages of work – KNOW, GROW, DEVELOP.

Activities to date: KNOW, GROW, DEVELOP

Stage One – KNOW – we have been undertaking knowledge building activities including data analysis, providing information and insights into the opportunities and challenges facing the social worker workforce. For example, through our Annual Social Worker Survey, Demand for Social Work Services Survey, Educator’s Survey, Social Worker Vacancy Count and ensuring these are shared with Ministers, agencies, and stakeholders to support a joined up social work system.

We responded to requests for our data and insights and provided bespoke reports to a variety of agencies that requested them.

Stage Two – GROW – We are now building on our initial knowledge base by developing further insight through additional surveys and enhancing those we already have in train. Activities include developing an annual Employers Survey, reviewing our Annual Education Providers Survey, and Report enhancing our Annual Social Worker Workforce Survey and Report, and undertaking baseline market research into public trust and confidence in the social work profession.

We have been working across government agencies, with colleagues in the Ministry of Education and Tertiary Education Commission on social work education programme funding, working with Health and Immigration colleagues on the policy settings to enable more overseas social workers to enter the country, and with data colleagues within Health Workforce on data modelling for the social worker workforce.

In this second stage of developing our approach to social worker workforce planning we have shifted our focus from being responsive to being actively proactive. Actively looking for dissemination opportunities in collaboration with our Communications and Sector Engagement Teams to share the insights we draw through our work.

At the same time as we have been growing and building on our internal capability to provide meaningful workforce data and insights, we have also benefitted from the learning gained through the SWRB approach to its Education Standards Review, and the development of He Arapaki, our Māori Development Strategy and Action Plan. Our Te Ao Māori approach embedded through He Arapaki has enable us to move into planning for the third stage of our internal approach to this work, **DEVELOP**.

Stage Three – DEVELOP – The third stage of this work is where we build from our knowledge base and existing relationships to shift into the wider co-ordination/conduit role envisaged for the Lead Agency and provide support for the cross-sector development of a Social Worker Workforce Strategy and Action Plan.