



Social Workers Registration Board

Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

Annual Social Worker Workforce Report 2023

A high-level overview of the social worker workforce in 2023

Contents

List of figures and tables.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Summary of Key Findings.....	7
Section 1A – Workforce Composition – Demographics	10
1.1 Age.....	10
1.2 Gender	10
1.3 Ethnicity	11
1.4 Disabilities.....	12
1.5 Region	13
Section 1B – Workforce Composition – Qualifications, role, and employer	15
1.6 Pathway to registration and qualifications.....	15
1.7 Years since joining the SWRB register	15
1.8 Level of experience and responsibility	16
1.9 Employer type.....	17
1.10 Sector or setting of work	18
1.11 Current role – rural/urban and full-time/part-time	19
1.12 Field of practice.....	19
1.13 Primary client group.....	21
Section 2 – Workforce Sustainability	22
2.1 Reasons for joining the social work profession.....	22
2.2 Reasons for remaining in the social work profession.....	22
2.3 Barriers to entering the profession.....	23
2.4 Five-year plan for staying in the workforce	24
2.5 Reasons for leaving the profession – overall, and by employer type.....	27
2.6 Salary distribution – overall, by employer type, and by ethnicity	29
2.7 Social worker roles changed or removed.....	30
Section 3 – Knowledge and skills development	31
3.1 Continuing Professional Development needs	31
3.2 Area of development for employer types.....	32
Section 4 – Employer support	34
4.1 Employer support for social work practice	34
4.2 Employer support with fee payment	35
Section 5 – Standing of the profession	38
5.1 Impact of mandatory registration on profession	38
5.2 Impact of media on public trust and confidence in profession.....	39
5.3 Biggest challenges for the profession.....	39
Section 6 – Safety and conduct	42
6.1 Confidence in employer’s policies and processes for practice/conduct issues.....	42
6.2 Raising concerns with the SWRB.....	43

Closing comments	43
Appendix 1: Survey sample and data representativeness – comparing participants to the full practising register of social workers	45
Appendix 2: The SWRB’s role as Lead Agency for Workforce Planning for all social workers	51

List of figures and tables

List of figures

Figure 1. Age group distribution 2023.....	10
Figure 2. Gender distribution 2023	10
Figure 3. Ethnicity distribution 2023	11
Figure 4. Disability experience 2023.....	13
Figure 5. Geographic distribution 2023 – Practising social workers per 10,000 population.....	14
Figure 6. Years since joining the SWRB register 2023	16
Figure 7. Level of experience and responsibility 2023.....	16
Figure 8. Employer type 2023.....	17
Figure 9. Sector of work 2023.....	18
Figure 10. Population area of work 2023.....	19
Figure 11. Current work status 2023.....	19
Figure 12. Field of practice 2023.....	20
Figure 13. Field of practice 2023 – by gender.....	20
Figure 14. Primary client group 2023.....	21
Figure 15. Barriers to entering or re-entering social work profession 2023 – by top four employer types.....	24
Figure 16. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2023	24
Figure 17. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2023 – by age group	25
Figure 18. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2023 – by ethnicity	25
Figure 19. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2023 – by employer type	26
Figure 20. Reasons for leaving the profession in the next five years 2023.....	27
Figure 21. Reasons for leaving the profession in the next five years 2023 – by top four employer types.....	28
Figure 22. Salary distribution 2023 – comparing to 2022.....	29
Figure 23. Salary distribution 2023 – by employer type	29
Figure 24. Salary distribution 2023 – by ethnicity	30
Figure 25. Areas of CPD identified as most helpful 2023 – by top four employer types	32
Figure 26. Employer support for social work practice 2023 – by top four employer types	35
Figure 27. Employer support for registration and PC fees 2023	35
Figure 28. Employer support for registration fees 2023 – by employer type	36
Figure 29. Employer support for Practising Certificate (PC) fees 2023 – by employer type	37
Figure 30. Belief that profession is more respected since mandatory registration 2023	38

Figure 31. Beliefs about impact of media on public trust and confidence in social work profession 2023	39
Figure 32. Challenges for the social work profession now and in the future 2023 – by top four employer types.....	41
Figure 33. Confidence in employer to deal with serious practice/conduct issues – by employer type 2023.....	42
Figure 34. Raising concerns of practice and/or conduct with the SWRB 2023	43

List of tables

Table 1. Gender distribution 2023	11
Table 2. Ethnicity distribution 2023 – comparing survey to practising workforce and census	12
Table 3. Geographic distribution 2023.....	13
Table 4. Pathway to registration 2023.....	15
Table 5. Qualification level 2023.....	15
Table 6. Reasons for joining social work profession 2023.....	22
Table 7. Reasons for remaining in social work profession 2023	22
Table 8. Barriers to entering or re-entering social work profession 2023	23
Table 9. Plans to leave social work profession in next 5 years 2023.....	24
Table 10. Areas of CPD identified as most helpful 2023	31
Table 11. Areas of CPD identified as most helpful 2023 – by pathway to registration	33
Table 12. Employer support for social work practice 2023	34
Table 13. Employer support for registration and PC fees 2023	36
Table 14. Belief that profession is more respected since mandatory registration 2023	38
Table 15. Challenges for the social work profession now and in the future 2023	39

List of tables and figures in Appendix 1

Table A1. Age distribution of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023.....	45
Figure A1. Age distribution of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023	45
Table A2. Gender distribution of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023	46
Figure A2. Gender distribution of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023	46
Table A3. Ethnicity of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023	46
Figure A3. Ethnicity of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023.....	47
Table A4. Ethnicity of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023 and NZ Population (Census 2018)	47
Table A5. Geographic distribution of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023 and NZ Population (Census 2018).....	48
Figure A5. Geographic distribution of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023	48
Table A6. Geographic distribution of social workers per 10,000 population).....	49
Table A7. Employer type of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023.....	50
Table A8. Qualification level of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023	50
Table A9. Pathway to registration of survey sample compared to practising workforce 2023.	50

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 2023 Social Worker Workforce Survey conducted by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB). The purpose of the survey is to understand the composition of the current practising social worker workforce. Social workers are invited to share information about their role, experiences, opinions, and beliefs. The survey enables us to build an evidence base to support workforce planning and decision-making.

All social workers who renewed their annual Practising Certificates (PCs) from early May through to July 2023 were invited to participate in the voluntary online survey. Responses were received from 4,411 out of a total of 8,705 actively practising social workers on the SWRB's register, representing a 51% response rate.

The survey sample closely resembled the demographic profile of the 'active' workforce of social workers with a current practising certificate for the 2022/23 financial year. This gives us high confidence that the results of this survey are representative of the broader practising workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The 2023 survey followed the same four core domains of questioning as previous years:

- workforce composition
- workforce sustainability
- knowledge and skill development
- employer support.

An additional fifth domain 'standing of the profession' was added in 2022, and for 2023 a sixth domain covering safety and conduct was also included. Tailoring these extra domains each year allows for a deeper understanding of topical issues at the time of the survey. It helps the SWRB as an occupational regulator, to further our understanding of how registration supports public safety. Many of the survey questions invited social workers to give feedback or reasons for their answer. These comments are included in the relevant sections throughout the report to reflect the social worker voice alongside statistical findings.

This report is intended for use by decision makers across the health and social services sector, key government departments and policy makers, social work employers, members of the public and social workers themselves.

The report provides the overview of all findings from the workforce survey. It will be supplemented with a suite of spotlight reports about subsets of social workers working for our biggest social work employers, namely health, Oranga Tamariki, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), and iwi-based organisations, and looking into rurality issues.

The workforce survey dataset is a key part of the evidence base used by the SWRB in the role of Lead Agency for social worker workforce planning. This role was designated by the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee in 2020. More information about this role can be found in Appendix 2.

Summary of Key Findings

Our understanding of workforce composition is growing

- Representation of Māori, and Pacific Peoples in the social work profession is growing.
- Representation of males in the workforce is low (14%) and male social workers tend to work in criminal justice (29% male) and mental health (21% male).
- In 2023 the SWRB added a survey question about disability. 103 participants indicated that they have a permanent disability or long-term condition, the type of disabilities included hearing (33 participants), mobility or agility (30), vision (20), or learning (11).

Social workers work in a range of settings, and most hold a qualification

- Over a quarter of survey participants reported that they work for a non-government organisation (NGO) (28%). The proportion of social workers who report Oranga Tamariki as their employer has declined from 2022 (27%). The next most common employer category was health/hauora (Te Whatu Ora/DHB/PHOs, 23%).
- Most social workers register through the New Zealand qualification pathway, having completed a Bachelor's or Master's degree. A smaller proportion register through the Overseas Pathway (12%) or through the Experience Pathway (S:13, 2%).
- One third of social workers who gained registration through the Experience Pathway identify as Māori (32%) in both the survey sample and the full practising workforce.
- Over half of survey participants describe themselves as 'experienced practitioners' (58%), while 11% describe themselves as 'beginning practitioners'.
- A large proportion of social workers continue to practise in statutory environments. A third of participants say their main field of practice is care and protection (including child, youth and whānau support work; 32%), and 21% work in mental health.
- Consistent with 2022 findings, social workers report working in urban areas (43%), and smaller numbers work in rural areas (10%) and in national roles (11%).
- One in five participants reported that they work part-time (20%), up from 12% last year.
- The most common salary band in 2023 was \$80,001 – \$90,000 annually (19%), slightly higher than 2022. A combined total of 22% of social workers in the survey reported earning more than \$100,000 annually.
- A continuing trend from past workforce surveys, social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki have a higher peak in their salary distribution compared to social workers employed by other organisation types.

Knowledge and skill development opportunities are clearly identified

- Social workers continue to seek Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to enhance capability in working with Māori, Pacific Peoples, and other ethnic minorities.
- This year the third highest identified area for CPD has changed from learning about legislation and policy to developing skills for managing complexity, suggesting more complex problems are being faced in the work environment.

- Social workers employed by iwi-based organisations indicated higher levels of interest and need for a range of CPD areas than social workers from other employer types, except for CPD relating to practice with Māori and other ethnic/cultural groups.

Workforce sustainability needs attention across the sector

- Making a positive difference to people's lives remains the highest ranked motivation for entering the profession. Closely followed by working with whānau and communities and having an interest in social justice, advocacy, and welfare.
- Salary is consistently the lowest ranked motivation for entering the profession, but one of the highest barriers to entering or remaining.
- Retirement and burnout/high workloads continue as key challenges the workforce, with more social workers leaving the profession than entering. Sixteen percent of survey participants plan to leave the profession in the next five years, which is a loss of over 700 social workers. If this proportion is extrapolated out to the full practising workforce at the time of the survey, it would indicate a loss of close to 1,400 social workers across New Zealand.
- Almost three-quarters of survey participants plan to remain in the social work profession over the next five years (74%).
- After retirement, burnout, high workload and poor pay were the top three reasons given for leaving the workforce.
- Oranga Tamariki social workers indicated lack of professional support and workplace morale as reasons for leaving the profession.
- Burnout and high workloads remain the highest concerns identified for social workers in the health sector. Health sector social workers were also more likely than those of other employer types to intend to leave due to lack of career progression.
- Social workers in iwi-based organisations were more likely to indicate whānau responsibilities as a reason to leave the profession than social workers employed by other types of organisation.
- A higher proportion of social workers who are self-employed or in private practice (32%) reported that they intend to leave the profession in the next five years.
- The costs of being a regulated professional were a barrier to entering or re-entering the social work profession, especially for NGO and iwi organisations (50%). The survey also showed however that employers meet the costs of registration and annual practising certificate renewal for over 80% of social workers.
- The increasing complexity of cases, financial and other pressures on families and communities were often mentioned as reasons for leaving, along with the negative coverage of social workers in the media and public domain.
- Many social workers described increased abuse from clients as a challenge, impacting on intention to remain in the profession and contributing to social workers feeling unsafe in their day-to-day work.
- Salary (42%) and balancing work and personal life (41%) are also reported as barriers to entering or re-entering the workforce.

Employers support practitioners in a variety of ways

- Professional reflective supervision (70%) and training and skills development (67%) are the most common categories of employer support received by social workers in the survey.
- Just over half report that their employer provides a supportive and safe working environment, which is up slightly since the 2022 survey.
- Over eight out of ten participants reported that their employer paid their registration fees (in full or in part). 92% reported that their employer pays their annual practising certificate renewal fees (in full or in part).
- A higher proportion of social workers have their practising certificate paid in full since 2022 (83% compared to 90% in 2023).

The standing of the profession has lifted but challenges remain

- The proportion of social workers who think the profession is more respected since mandatory registration is growing. Almost half of participants said that they thought the profession is more respected (46%), and a further third said it was 'in part' (36%).
- A high proportion of participants continue to regard media coverage as having a negative impact on public trust and confidence in social workers.
- Recruitment and retention of social workers were noted as the biggest challenge facing the profession currently.
- Oranga Tamariki social workers were more likely to identify the recruitment and retention of social workers, public perception and not enough time spent with people using the services as the biggest challenges currently faced by the profession.
- Social workers employed by NGOs, health/hauora and iwi-based organisations were more likely than those from Oranga Tamariki to identify pay parity as a challenge for the profession.
- The deepening of social inequity was identified for social workers across all employer types.

A growing focus on safe and accountable conduct

- When asked if they were confident that their employer has adequate policies and procedures in place to deal with serious issues with a social worker's practice and/or conduct appropriately and safely, 91% of participants said yes.
- When asked if they would raise concerns about another social worker's practice and/or conduct with SWRB, almost all participants said yes (96%).

The SWRB wishes to thank all social workers who took part in the 2023 survey. We appreciate the time and effort taken by social workers to share their experience and support our understanding of their mahi and the workforce as a whole.

Section 1A – Workforce Composition – Demographics

The demographic information provided by survey participants gives a picture of the current social worker workforce. This includes age distribution, gender, ethnicity, and geographic region. In 2023, questions about experience of disability were added to the survey.

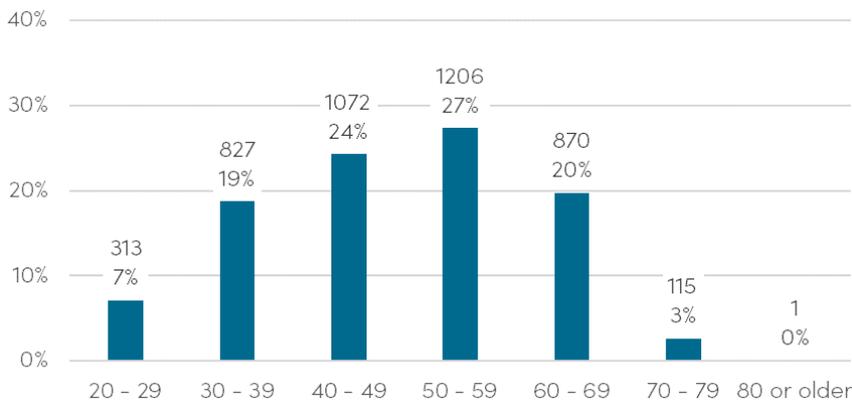
The survey sample closely resembled the demographic profile of the ‘active’ workforce of social workers with a current practising certificate for the 2022/23 financial year, as shown in Appendix 1. This gives confidence that the results of this survey are representative of the broader practising workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand.

More work is needed to determine how representative the practising social worker workforce is of the client populations social workers serve.

1.1 Age

The average age of survey participants was 49 years old. Figure 1 shows the distribution across age groups. This age distribution has not changed since last year’s survey, with the peak age group being 50–59 years (1206 participants, or 27% of the sample). Both the survey sample and the practising register data show that one in five social workers are aged 60 or above. This age profile signals that loss to retirement may continue to be an issue for workforce sustainability in the coming years.

FIGURE 1. AGE GROUP DISTRIBUTION 2023



1.2 Gender

The majority of social workers in the survey identified as female (85%). This gender distribution is consistent with past results and the register of practising social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

FIGURE 2. GENDER DISTRIBUTION 2023

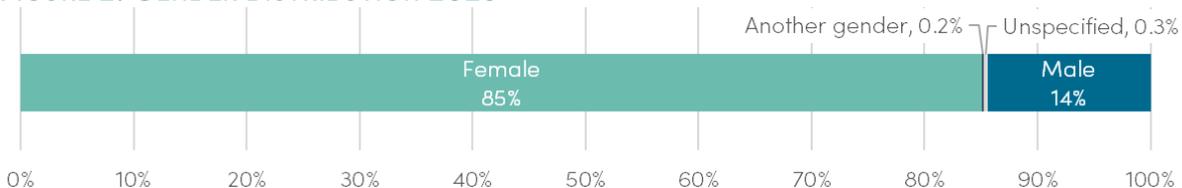


TABLE 1. GENDER DISTRIBUTION 2023

Gender	Number of survey participants	Survey %
Female	3752	85%
Male	637	14%
Another gender	8	0.2%
Unspecified	14	0.3%
Total	4411	100%

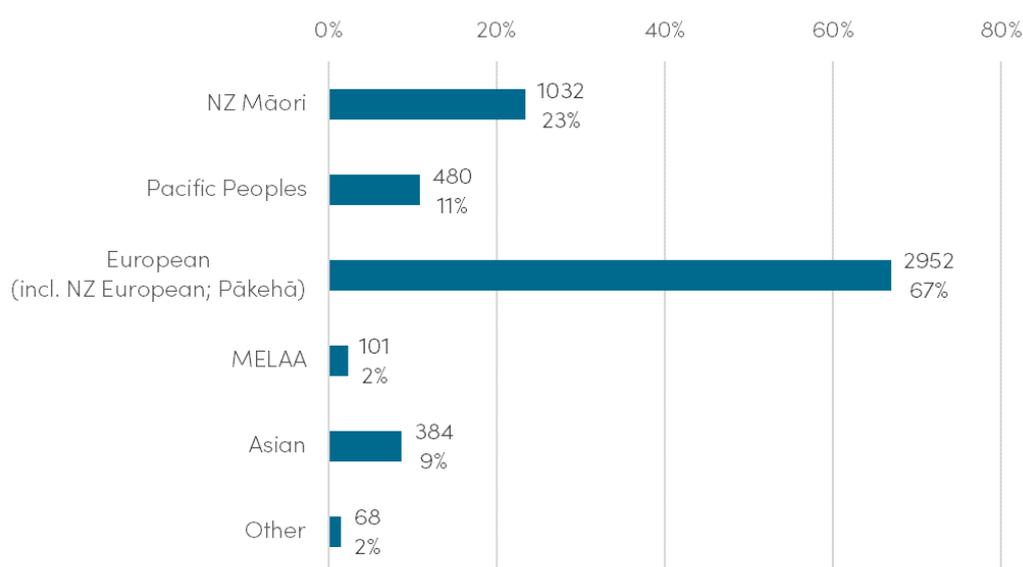
1.3 Ethnicity

For the 2023 survey and information reported from the register, the SWRB moved to a ‘total ethnicity’ approach. This allows social workers to identify with more than one ethnic group which better recognises and reflects the diversity of our workforce. The total ethnicity approach aligns with reporting by Statistics NZ and other Government agencies. A social worker may appear more than once across ethnic group categories, so totals will add to more than 100% of the sample. This change in approach may also affect comparisons with past workforce survey data.

The largest ethnic group for workforce survey participants was European (67%), which includes NZ European/Pākehā (52%) and other European (17%). Almost one quarter of participants identify as Māori (23%), which is an increase from 19% in 2022. Eleven percent of social workers identify as Pacific Peoples, which has also increased from 8% in 2022.

The distribution of survey participants by ethnicity reflects that of all practising social workers, which gives us confidence in the representativeness of our survey (see Appendix 1 for a full description of survey data representativeness).

FIGURE 3. ETHNICITY DISTRIBUTION 2023



*Survey allows participants to identify with more than one ethnic group, so totals exceed the sample of 4411

The table below shows the survey and practising workforce distribution by ethnicity compared to the most recent census of the NZ population (2018). This comparison shows that the 2023

survey sample and practising social worker workforce have a higher proportion of Māori and Pacific peoples than the general population.

This comparison table reflects the five ethnicity groupings used by Statistics NZ, where European is a single category (compared to the chart above where NZ European/Pākehā is reported separately from Other European).

TABLE 2. ETHNICITY DISTRIBUTION 2023 – COMPARING SURVEY TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE AND CENSUS

Ethnicity	2023 workforce survey %	2023 full practising workforce %	2018 Census ¹ %
Māori	23%	24%	17%
Pacific Peoples	11%	12%	8%
European (incl. NZ European/Pākehā)	67%	64%	70%
Middle Eastern / Latin American / African	2%	3%	2%
Asian	9%	10%	15%
Other ethnicity	2%	1%	1%

* Both Census and workforce survey use 'total response' ethnicity calculations, allowing participants to identify more than one ethnic group. Totals will add to more than 100%.

1.4 Disabilities

In 2023, to better align with Government target populations, the SWRB added a survey question about disability. This builds an understanding of how the workforce reflects the general population, and how those with specific needs might be better supported. The SWRB understands that some participants may have hesitated to disclose disabilities that could affect the perceived ability to fulfil their role. The question included a preamble as follows:

We do not currently hold information about disabilities or long-term conditions as part of MySWRB profiles. The answer you give here is not connected in any way to your PC declaration about your mental or physical health. We ask the questions below to understand how the social worker workforce compares with the general population.

Do you have a permanent disability or long-term condition that impacts your ability to carry out everyday activities? [Yes/No/Prefer not to say] If yes, please indicate the type of impairment.

In 2023, two percent of survey participants indicated that they have a permanent disability or long-term condition that affects their ability to carry out everyday activities. This corresponds to a total of 103 participants.

¹ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/ethnic-group-summaries-reveal-new-zealands-multicultural-make-up/>

FIGURE 4. DISABILITY EXPERIENCE 2023



Of the 103 participants who indicated that they have a permanent disability or long-term condition, the type of disabilities included hearing (33 participants), mobility or agility (30), vision (20), or learning (11).

1.5 Region

The geographic distribution of survey participants is shown in Table 3 below. As shown in Appendix 1, these closely align with the geographic distribution of all practising social workers on the SWRB’s register. The geographic distribution of social workers in the survey sample closely aligns with the NZ population, except for Auckland which has a lower proportion in the survey sample.

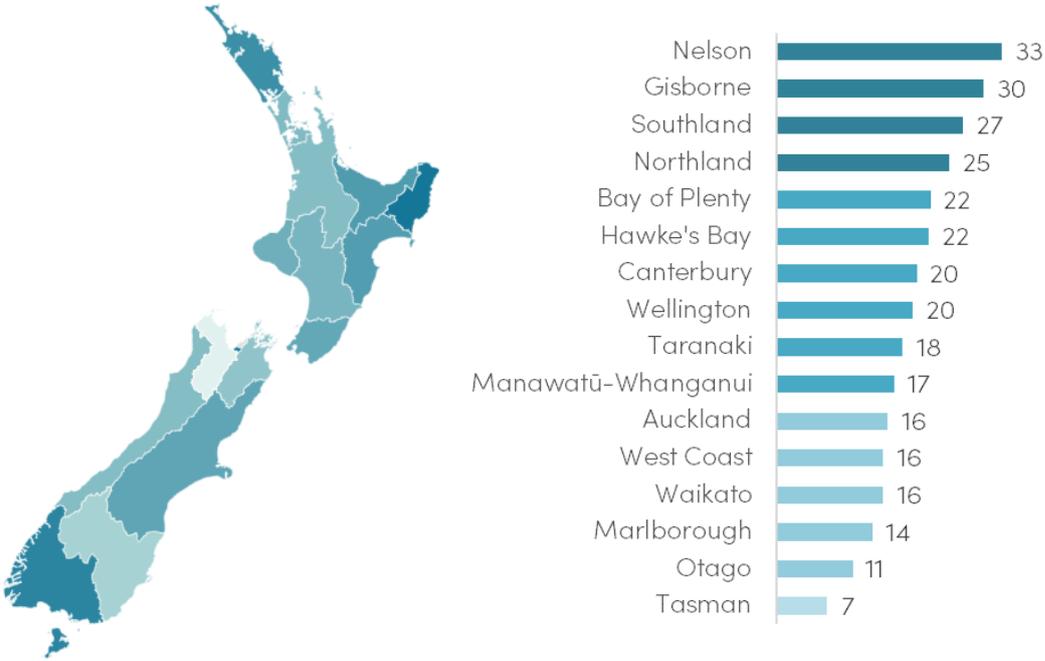
TABLE 3. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION 2023

Region	Number of survey participants	Survey %	Population (2018 Census) %
Northland	227	5%	4%
Auckland	1251	28%	34%
Waikato	363	8%	10%
Bay of Plenty	336	8%	7%
Gisborne	64	2%	1%
Hawkes Bay	192	4%	4%
Taranaki	118	3%	2%
Manawatū–Wanganui	237	5%	5%
Wellington	498	11%	11%
Tasman	26	1%	1%
Nelson	91	2%	1%
Marlborough	42	1%	1%
West Coast	23	1%	1%
Canterbury	656	15%	13%
Otago	191	4%	5%
Southland	93	2%	2%
Unspecified/International	3	0%	n/a
Total	4411	100%	

Figure 5 shows the geographic distribution of practising social workers in New Zealand, using a calculation of practising social workers per 10,000 population. This highlights the regions where there is a higher number of social workers per capita (Northland; Gisborne; Nelson; Southland) and areas where there are a lower number of social workers per capita (Tasman; Otago; Marlborough; West Coast; Waikato).

Please note, this geographic distribution is based on social workers' residential addresses as recorded in the SWRB's register. This may not always reflect the full coverage of area(s) where social workers work.

FIGURE 5. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION 2023 – PRACTISING SOCIAL WORKERS PER 10,000 POPULATION



Section 1B – Workforce Composition – Qualifications, role, and employer

This section describes the composition of the social work workforce by registration pathway, and time since registration. It includes information about social workers' current role and employment situation, their primary client group and field of practice.

1.6 Pathway to registration and qualifications

Most social workers who participated in the survey were registered through the NZ social work qualification pathway (86%), and 12% were registered through the overseas social work qualification pathway. Two percent of survey participants gained registration through the SWRB's Experience pathway: S13. The proportions match those of the full workforce. One third of social workers who gained registration through the Experience pathway identify as Māori (32% in both the survey sample and the full practising workforce).

TABLE 4. PATHWAY TO REGISTRATION 2023

Pathway to registration	Number of survey participants	Survey %
NZ social work qualification	3792	86%
Experience pathway: S13	99	2%
Overseas social work qualification	510	12%
Australian social work qualification	10	0.2%
Total	4,411	

Almost all participants held a qualification in 2023 (97%), with four out of five of participants achieving a level 7 tertiary qualification or above (81%).

TABLE 5. QUALIFICATION LEVEL 2023

Tertiary qualification level	Number of survey participants	Survey %
1-6 Certificates/diplomas ²	717	16%
7 Grad certificates/diplomas/Bachelor's	2452	56%
8 PG Cert/Dip/Bachelor's (Hons)	454	10%
9 Master's	666	15%
10 Doctoral	1	0%
Unspecified/None	121	3%
Total	4,411	

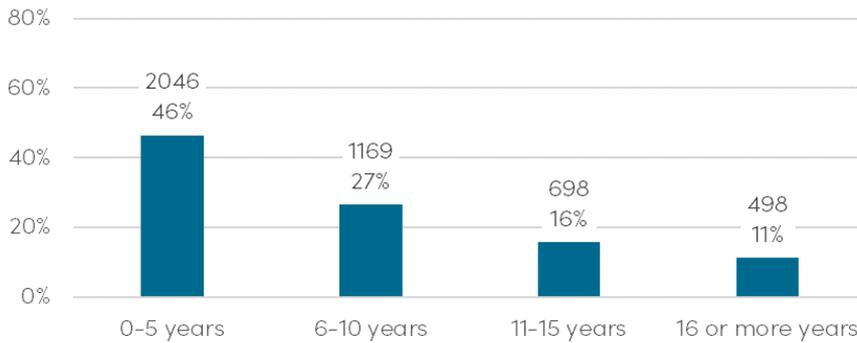
1.7 Years since joining the SWRB register

Over half of participants have been registered with the SWRB for six or more years (54%). The remainder (46%) have been registered for five years or fewer. Of those who registered within

² The SWRB's register includes a number of specific historic certificates and diplomas which were recognised in the time before registration became mandatory in February 2021.

the last five years, a significant number registered when it became mandatory in February 2021. They may have been practising for some time beforehand.

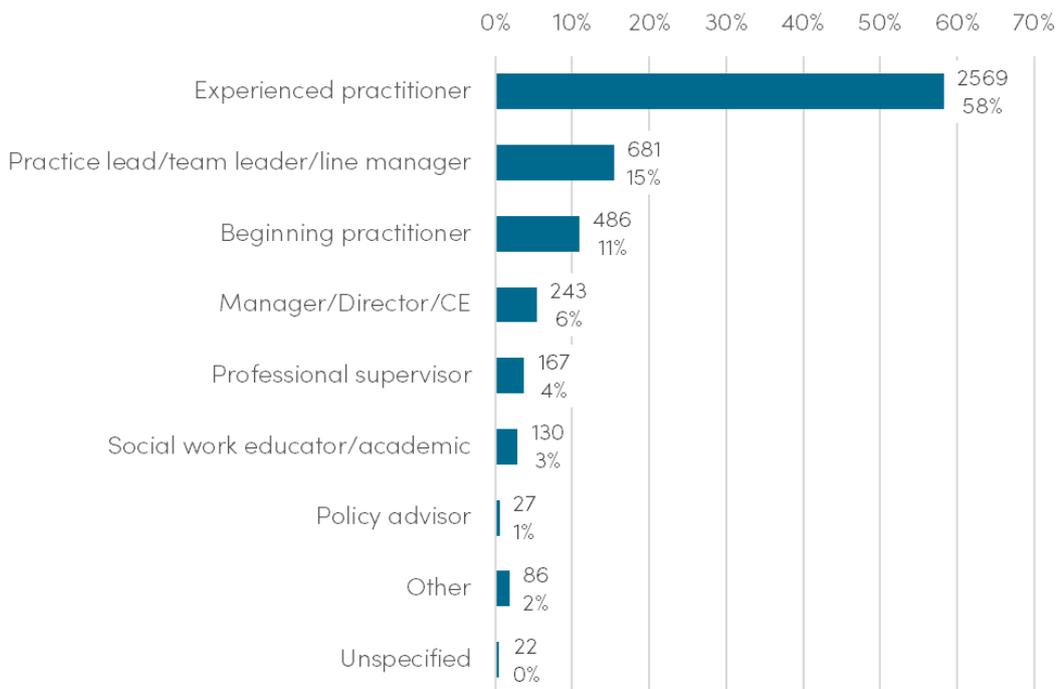
FIGURE 6. YEARS SINCE JOINING THE SWRB REGISTER 2023



1.8 Level of experience and responsibility

Social workers were asked which category in the chart below best described their level of experience/responsibility. Over half of survey participants described themselves as ‘experienced practitioners’ (58%). One in ten described themselves as ‘beginning practitioners’ (11%). Fifteen percent of participants described themselves as practice lead/team leader/line managers. The proportion of participants across each group is consistent with past survey findings.

FIGURE 7. LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY 2023

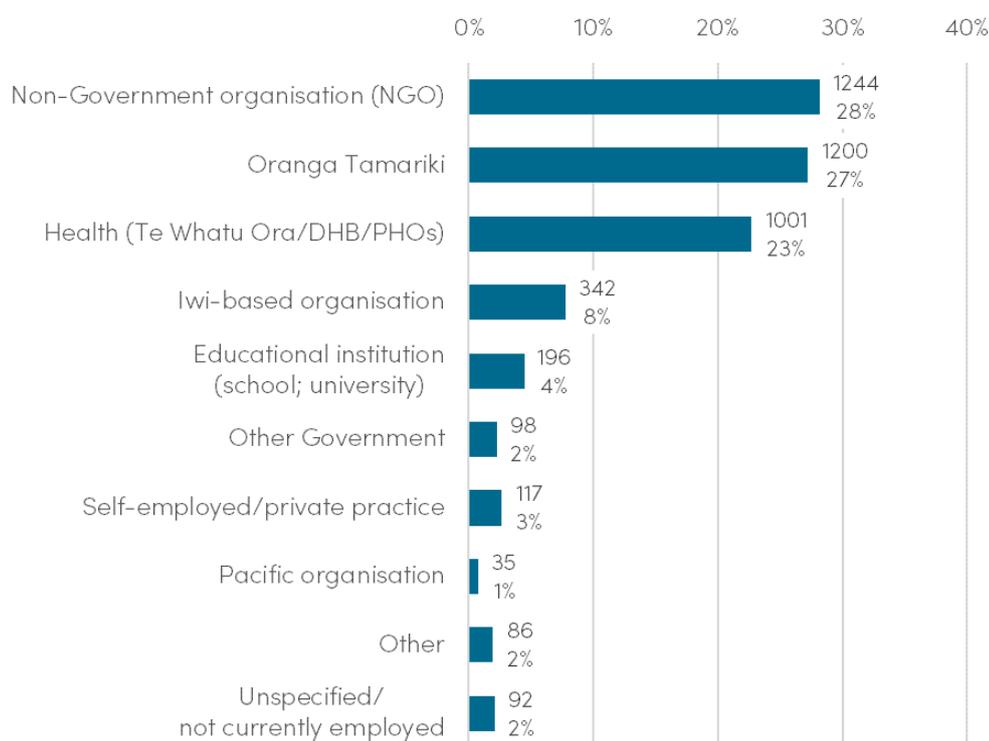


1.9 Employer type

In 2023, over a quarter of survey participants reported that they work for a non-government organisation or NGO (28%)³. A similar proportion work for Oranga Tamariki (27%) and the next most common employer type was health (Te Whatu Ora/DHB/PHO) at 23%⁴. Eight percent of participants reported that they work for an iwi-based organisation.

In 2022, nearly 35% of survey participants reported that they worked for Oranga Tamariki, and this has dropped to 27% in 2023. In comparing the survey with the full practising register of social workers, the sample closely resembles the distribution by employer type (see Table A7 in Appendix 1).

FIGURE 8. EMPLOYER TYPE 2023



In reporting by employer type, the SWRB acknowledges the ‘real world’ overlap between employer categories. Many employer types (particularly those delivering community-based, iwi-based and services for Pacific Peoples) often deliver both social and health services. For

³ In past workforce survey reports, NGO and iwi-based organisation employer types have been reported as a single category. For the 2023 report, NGO, iwi-based and Pasifika organisation categories are reported separately to allow for more detailed analysis and reporting for social workers employed by services for priority population groups.

⁴ In 2022/23, the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) restructure of the New Zealand health system merged the functions of 20 DHBs into Te Whatu Ora, which leads the day-to-day running of the health system for the whole country. In the past, we have reported ‘DHB’ as an employer category. For 2023, we use a collective ‘health’ employer category that includes Te Whatu Ora, Te Aka Whai Ora, DHBs (which are still used as interim employment entities during this transition phase), and PHOs.

The purposes of this analysis, employers are reported as a single category which means a social worker’s place of employment is assigned to a single category which is the best fit, for example NGO or health/hauora.

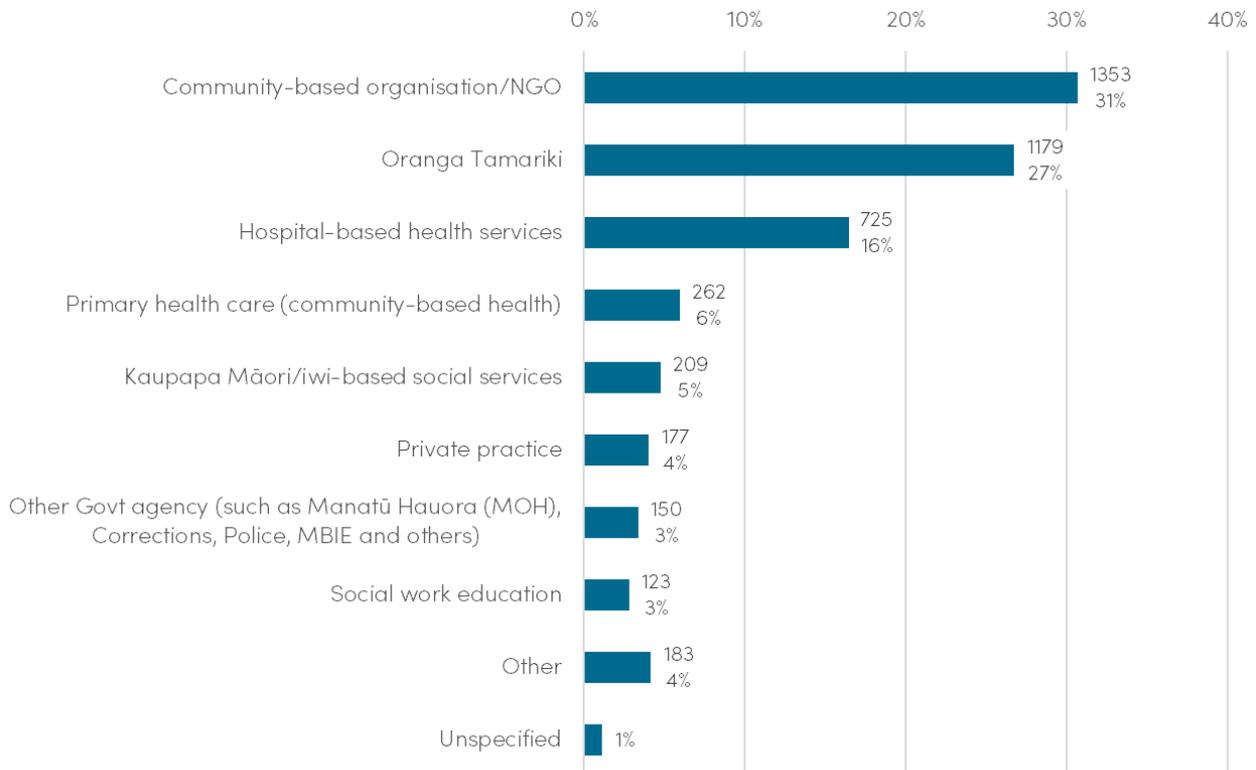
This year we have looked more closely at certain categories of employer to learn more about their workforce. The SWRB is preparing several snapshot reports for employers, policy advisors, educators and other across the sector, to use when thinking about future workforce planning and development. Initially, we are focussing on the three largest categories of employers of social workers for these reports (Health; Oranga Tamariki; NGO and iwi-based services).

1.10 Sector or setting of work

Along with employer type, the survey also asked about the sector in which social workers mainly work (the site/setting where they work). There is close alignment with results by employer type above, as seen in the highest numbers of social workers who report working in community-based/NGOs and Oranga Tamariki. However, many social work roles span different categories – for example, a social worker may be employed by a non-government organisation such as the Salvation Army but their day-to-day work is in hospital-based services.

Community-based/NGOs and Oranga Tamariki were the most commonly selected sector categories (31% and 27%, respectively), followed by hospital-based health services (16% of participants). A further six percent reported working in primary health care.

FIGURE 9. SECTOR OF WORK 2023

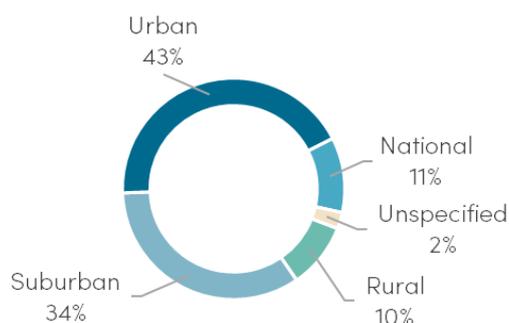


1.11 Current role – rural/urban and full-time/part-time

In 2023, most survey participants reported working in urban (43%) or suburban areas (34%). One in ten reported working in rural areas (10%) and across the whole country (11%).

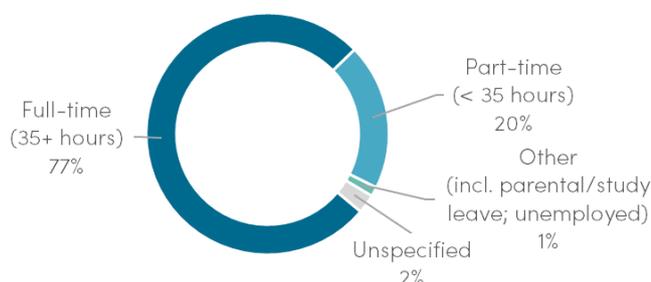
This distribution mirrors results from 2022, continuing the trend of a risk of a lower workforce compared to the New Zealand population who live in rural areas.

FIGURE 10. POPULATION AREA OF WORK 2023



In 2023, three-quarters of social workers in this survey report that they work full-time, that is over 35 hours a week (77%). This is down from 85% in 2022. One in five reports that they work part-time (20%), up from 12% last year.

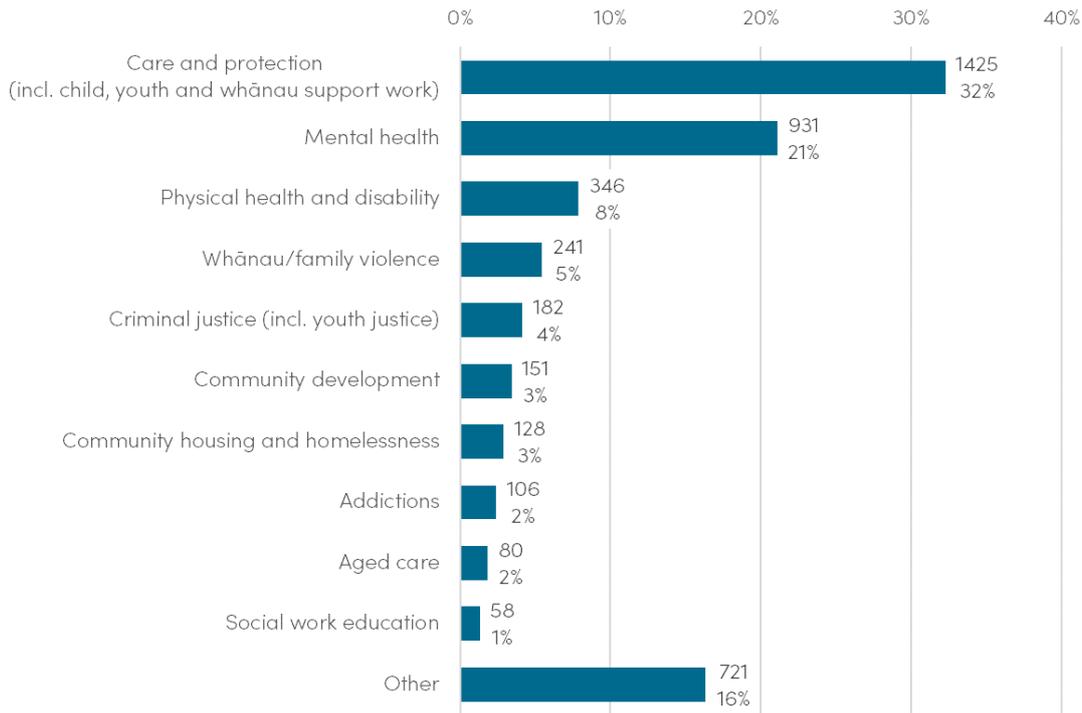
FIGURE 11. CURRENT WORK STATUS 2023



1.12 Field of practice

Survey participants were asked about the main focus or field of practice of their work. A third of participants say they focus on care and protection (including child, youth and whānau support work, 32%). Mental health was the next most common focus (21%). Sixteen percent of participants indicated ‘other’ for their main field of practice, and text analysis shows that these participants work in areas such as adoption and fertility; palliative care; sexual harm and trauma. Another subset of participants considered their work to be too broad in scope to fit any one of the categories provided. The SWRB continues to refine its survey questions and will use this year’s findings to review and update these categories for future surveys.

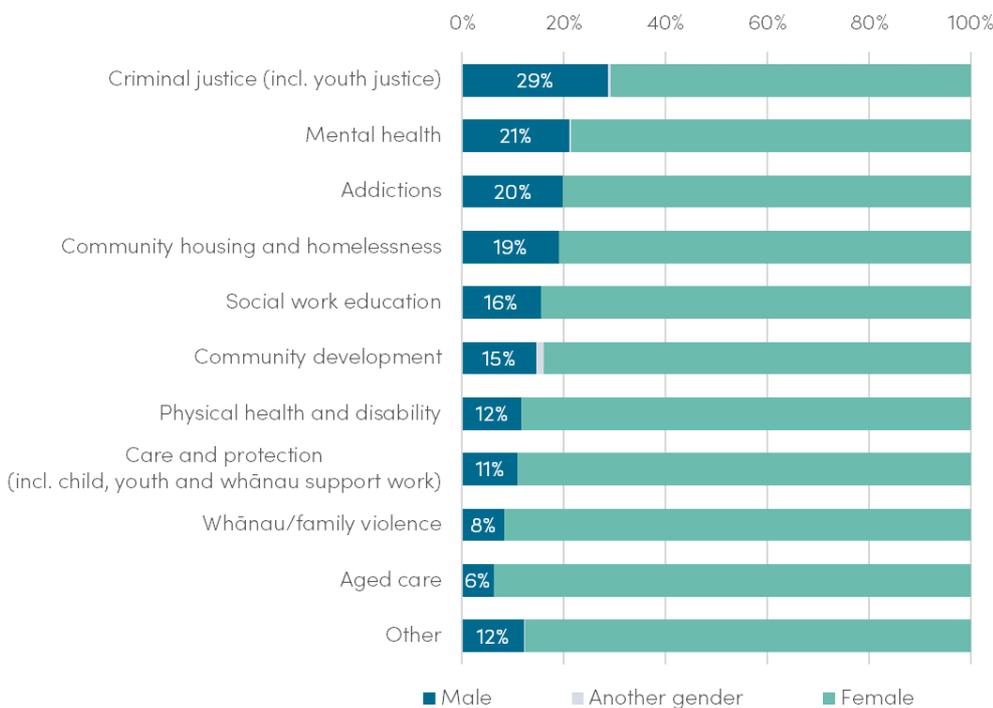
FIGURE 12. FIELD OF PRACTICE 2023



Field of practice – by gender, level of experience

Social work is a profession with a relatively low proportion of male representation (14% in the 2023 survey). The chart below shows fields of practice where male social workers tend to work, namely criminal justice (29% of the workforce is male) and mental health (21% male). The small number of social workers who identify as another gender have also been included on the chart.

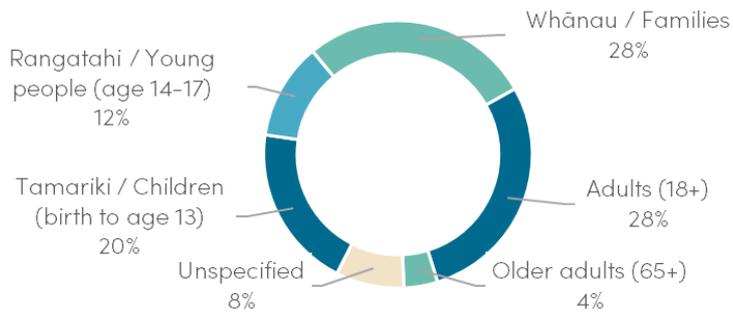
FIGURE 13. FIELD OF PRACTICE 2023 – BY GENDER



1.13 Primary client group

When asked about their primary client group or focus of their practice, the most common groups were whānau/families (28%) and adults (age 18 and over, 28%). One in five survey participants' primary client group is tamariki/children (20%).

FIGURE 14. PRIMARY CLIENT GROUP 2023



Section 2 – Workforce Sustainability

This section explores factors related to the sustainability of the social worker workforce, including why people join, and remain in, the social work profession. The survey asks social workers about their plans for the next five years, and reasons for planning to leave the workforce. Salary levels and distribution are also included as possible determinants of workforce sustainability.

2.1 Reasons for joining the social work profession

The three most selected reasons attracting survey participants into the social work profession were making a positive difference to people’s lives (79%); an interest in social justice, advocacy and welfare (71%); and serving/working with /supporting whānau and community (71%).

“Being the social worker I never had, but needed.” (wahine Māori)

TABLE 6. REASONS FOR JOINING SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION 2023

Reason	Number of survey participants	Survey %*
Making a positive difference to people’s lives	3495	79%
An interest in social justice, advocacy, and welfare	3128	71%
Serving/working with/supporting whānau and my community	3116	71%
Sense of purpose	1900	43%
Using my own personal/lived experience to help others	1737	39%
To become part of a recognised profession	814	19%
Career opportunities	565	13%
A known need for social workers	497	11%
Work flexibilities	414	9%
Salary	296	7%
Other	52	1%

*Participants can select more than one reason for joining the profession, so totals exceed the sample of 4411

2.2 Reasons for remaining in the social work profession

The most selected reason for remaining in the profession is the same reason most participants initially join the profession – making a difference to people’s lives (80%).

TABLE 7. REASONS FOR REMAINING IN SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION 2023

Reason	Number of survey participants	Survey %*
Making a difference to people’s lives	3508	80%
Serving/working with/supporting whānau and my community	2949	67%
Positive client relationships	2786	63%
Varied nature of the role	2648	60%
Continuous learning/professional development	1878	43%
Being part of a profession	1575	36%

Positive working environment	1408	32%
Peer support	1095	25%
Career growth opportunities	994	23%
Culturally safe environment	815	19%
Salary	746	17%
Other	49	80%

* Participants can select more than one rewarding factor, so totals exceed the sample of 4411

2.3 Barriers to entering the profession

The most commonly experienced barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession were the costs of being a regulated professional (50%), salary (42%) and balancing work and personal life (41%). These results should be considered alongside the findings about employer support for registration and practising certificate fees (paid by employer for 82% and 90% of participants, respectively; see section 4.2).

TABLE 8. BARRIERS TO ENTERING OR RE-ENTERING SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION 2023

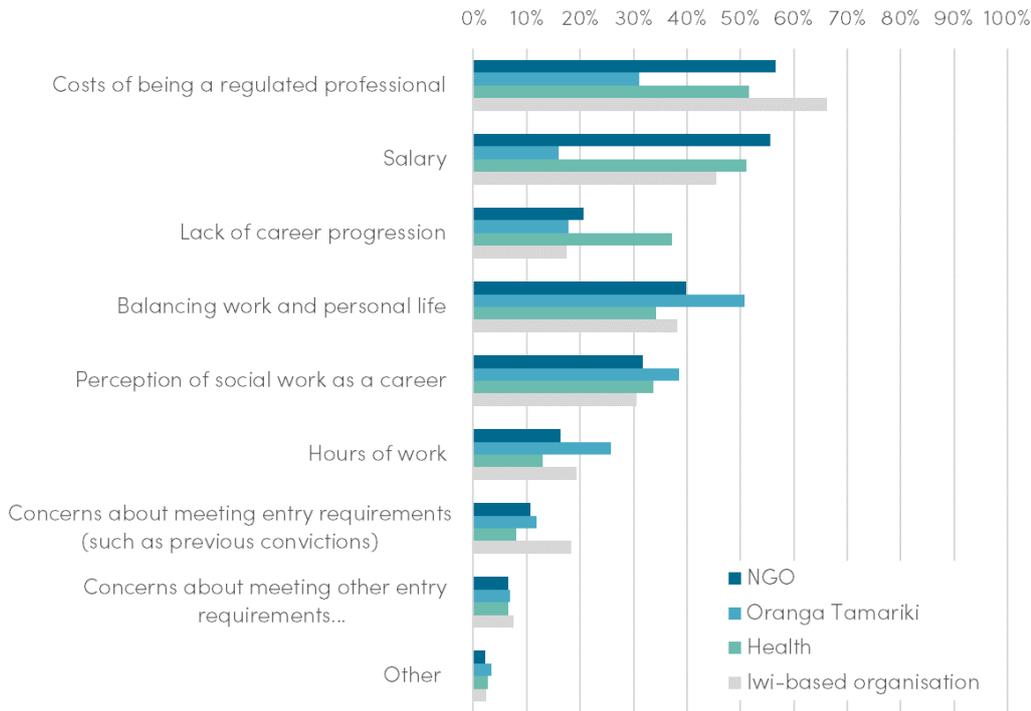
Barriers to entering or re-entering profession	Number of survey participants	Survey %*
Costs of being a regulated professional	2224	50%
Salary	1861	42%
Balancing work and personal life	1804	41%
Perception of social work as a career	1538	35%
Lack of career progression	1029	23%
Hours of work	821	19%
Concerns about meeting entry requirements (such as previous convictions)	482	11%
Concerns about meeting other entry requirements (such as for overseas-qualified social workers)	293	7%
Other	131	3%

* Participants can select more than one barrier, so totals exceed the sample of 4411

“Increasing workloads and pressures that are becoming impossible to manage and have impact on personal life / health. Increasing lack of resources, more demands and expectations of front-line social workers, and ‘broken systems’ that are beyond scope of front-line social workers to solve.”
(European female)

Social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki were less likely to highlight the financial barriers (cost of being regulated and salary) to entering the profession than social workers employed by another employer type. This aligns with higher level of employer support received by Oranga Tamariki social workers for paying fees and higher salary levels. Lack of career progression was seen as a barrier for more social workers employed in health/hauora.

FIGURE 15. BARRIERS TO ENTERING OR RE-ENTERING SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION 2023 – BY TOP FOUR EMPLOYER TYPES



2.4 Five-year plan for staying in the workforce

Almost three-quarters of survey participants plan to remain in the social work profession over the next five years (74%). Sixteen percent of participants plan to leave in the next five years, which is a loss of over 700 social workers from the profession. If this proportion is extrapolated out to the full practising workforce (a total of 8,705 at the time of the survey closing), that would indicate a loss of close to 1,400 social workers across New Zealand.

FIGURE 16. PLANS TO LEAVE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS 2023

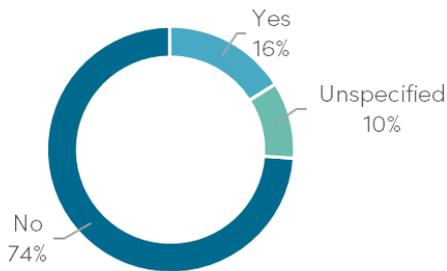
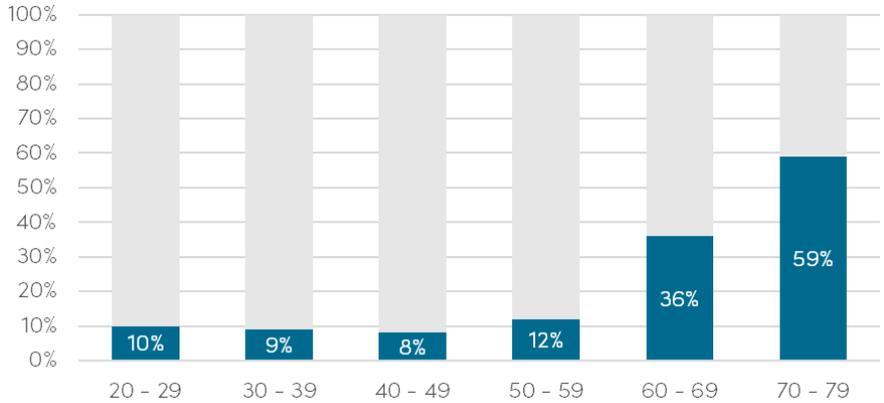


TABLE 9. PLANS TO LEAVE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS 2023

Are you planning to leave the social work profession in the next five years?	Number of survey participants	Survey %*
No	3254	74%
Yes	714	16%
Unspecified	443	10%
Total	4411	100%

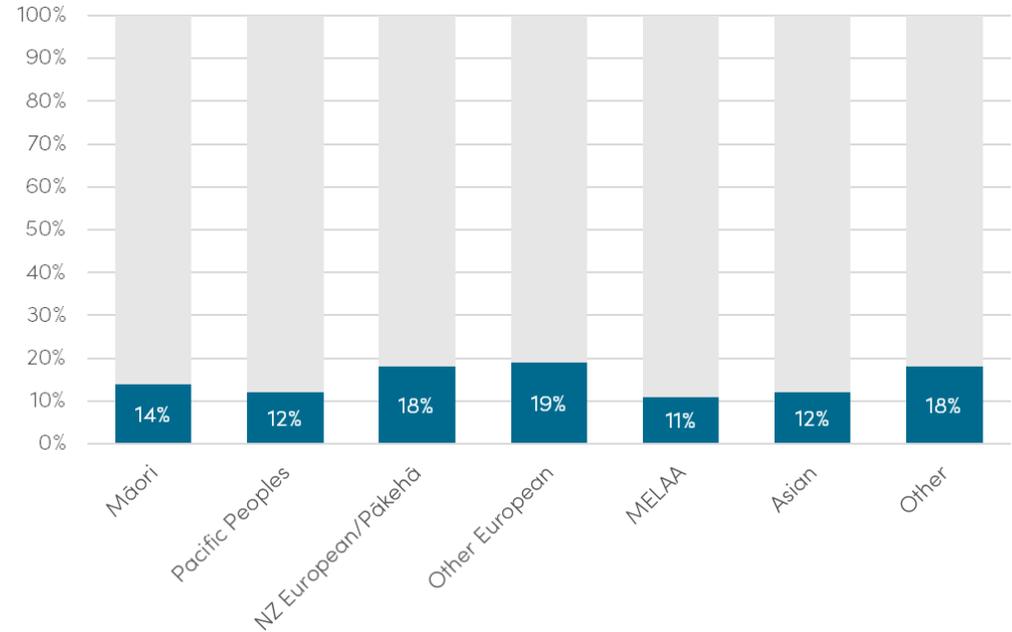
The chart below shows the proportion of each age group planning to leave the social work workforce in the next five years. The peak in the older age groups is consistent with retirement as the highest reported reason for leaving the profession in section 2.5 below.

FIGURE 17. PLANS TO LEAVE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS 2023 – BY AGE GROUP



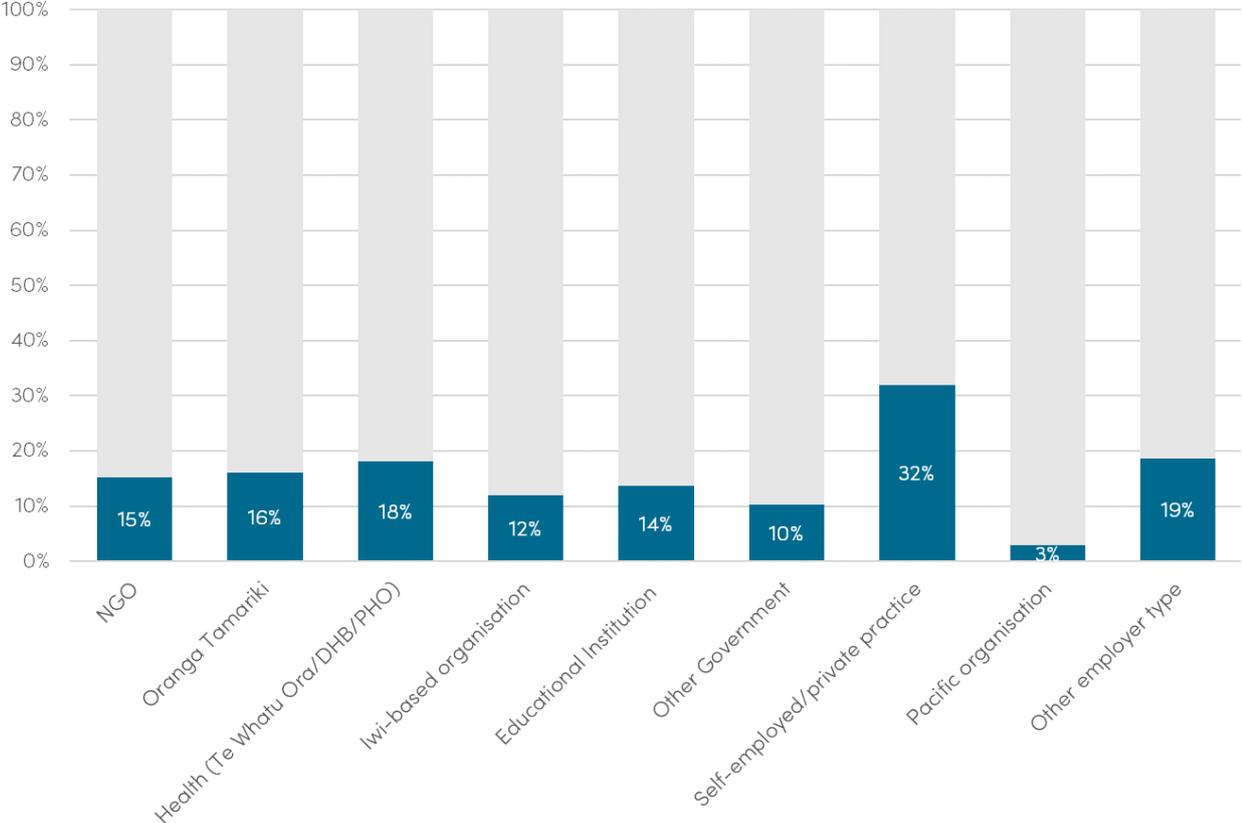
Within each ethnic group, the proportion of social workers who say they plan to leave the profession in the next five years ranges between 11% and 19%, similar to last year’s survey results. Social workers who identify as NZ European/Pākehā, Other European and/or Other Ethnicity were at the higher end of the range in planning to leave the profession in the next five years.

FIGURE 18. PLANS TO LEAVE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS 2023 – BY ETHNICITY



For the largest employer types (NGO, Oranga Tamariki and Health), the proportion of social workers who intend to leave in the next five years is very similar (between 15% and 18%). A higher proportion of social workers who are self-employed or in private practice (32%) reported that they intend to leave the profession in the next five years.

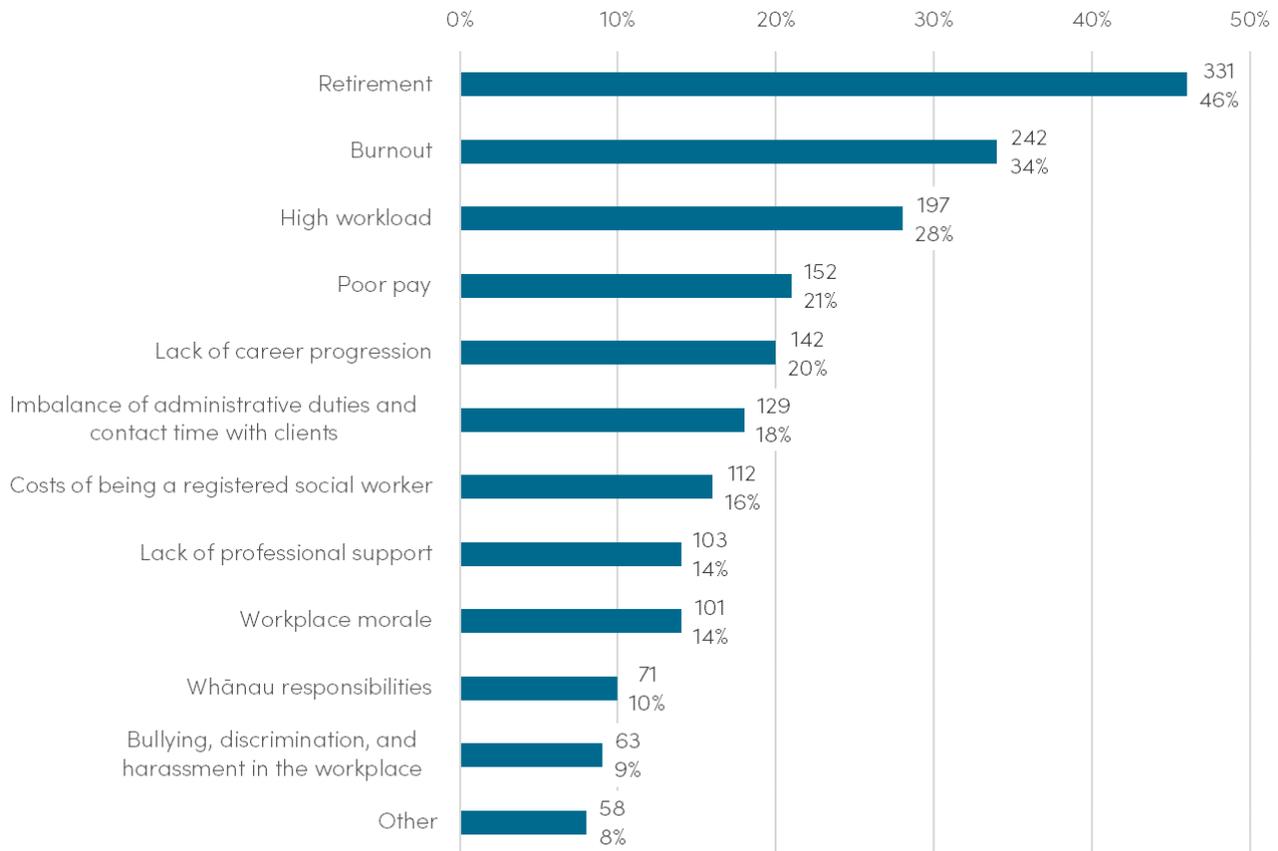
FIGURE 19. PLANS TO LEAVE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS 2023 – BY EMPLOYER TYPE



2.5 Reasons for leaving the profession – overall, and by employer type

Of the 16% (or 714) survey participants who indicated that they plan to leave the social work profession in the next five years, the main reason for leaving was retirement (46%). One third of this subset of participants cited burnout as a reason for leaving the profession (34%), and over a quarter said high workload was their reason for leaving (28%).

FIGURE 20. REASONS FOR LEAVING THE PROFESSION IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS 2023

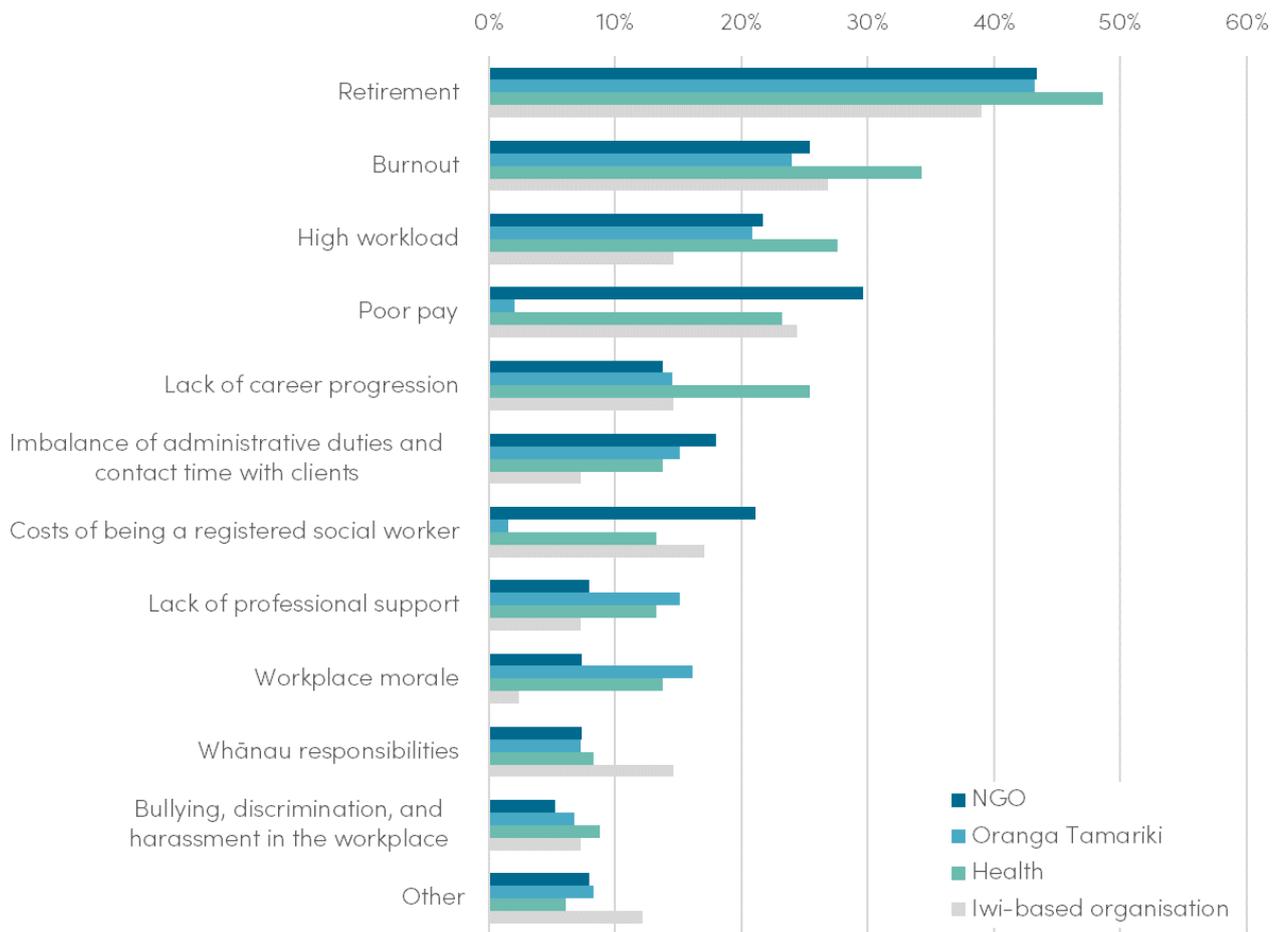


*This chart is based on the number of participants who indicated they were planning to leave the profession in the next five years (714). As participants could give more than one reason for leaving, the totals exceed 714.

Figure 21 below shows the reasons for leaving the profession grouped by the top four employer types (NGO; Oranga Tamariki; health/hauora; iwi-based organisation). For all employer types, retirement was the most selected reason for leaving the workforce. Social workers in the health sector were more likely than other employer types to intend to leave due to burnout and high workload, which was also seen in 2022 results. Health sector social workers were also more likely than those of other employer types to leave due to lack of career progression.

Oranga Tamariki social workers were far less likely to indicate poor pay or the costs of being a registered social worker as a reason to leave the profession. This is in keeping with the higher salaries and employer support for practising certificate payments for Oranga Tamariki social workers (Section 2.6 and Section 4.2 below). More Oranga Tamariki social workers indicated lack of professional support and workplace morale were their reasons for leaving the profession. Social workers in iwi-based organisations were more likely to indicate whānau responsibilities than social workers employed by other types of organisation.

FIGURE 21. REASONS FOR LEAVING THE PROFESSION IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS 2023 – BY TOP FOUR EMPLOYER TYPES

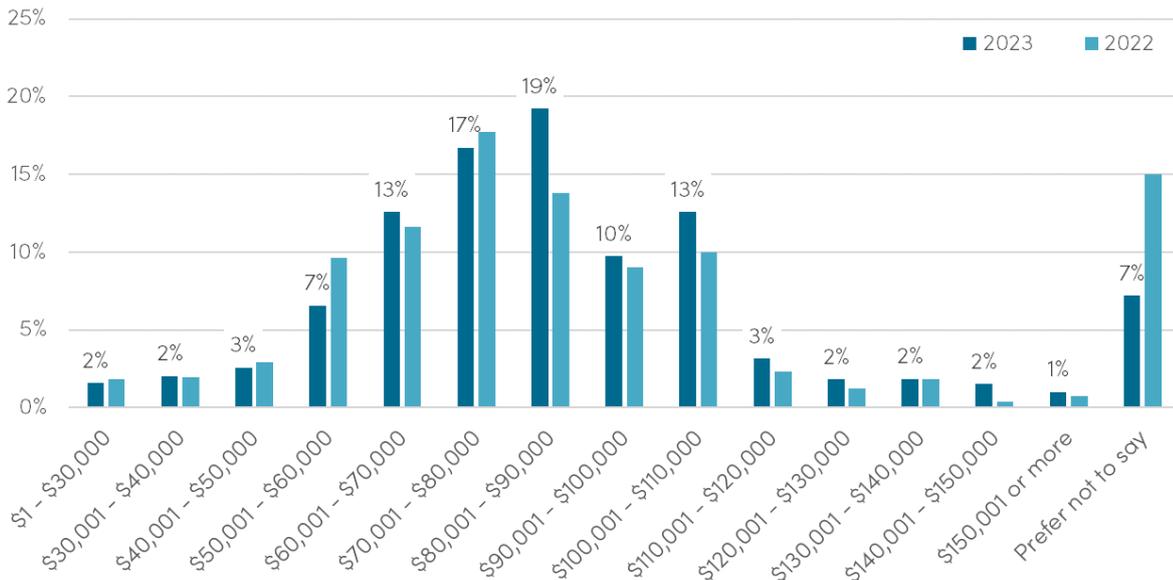


2.6 Salary distribution – overall, by employer type, and by ethnicity

The most common salary category selected by survey participants was \$80,001 – \$90,000 annually (19%). A combined total of 22% of social workers in the survey reported earning more than \$100,000 annually. The distribution of salaries has shifted slightly higher than last year, when the ‘peak’ category was \$70,001 – \$80,000 annually.

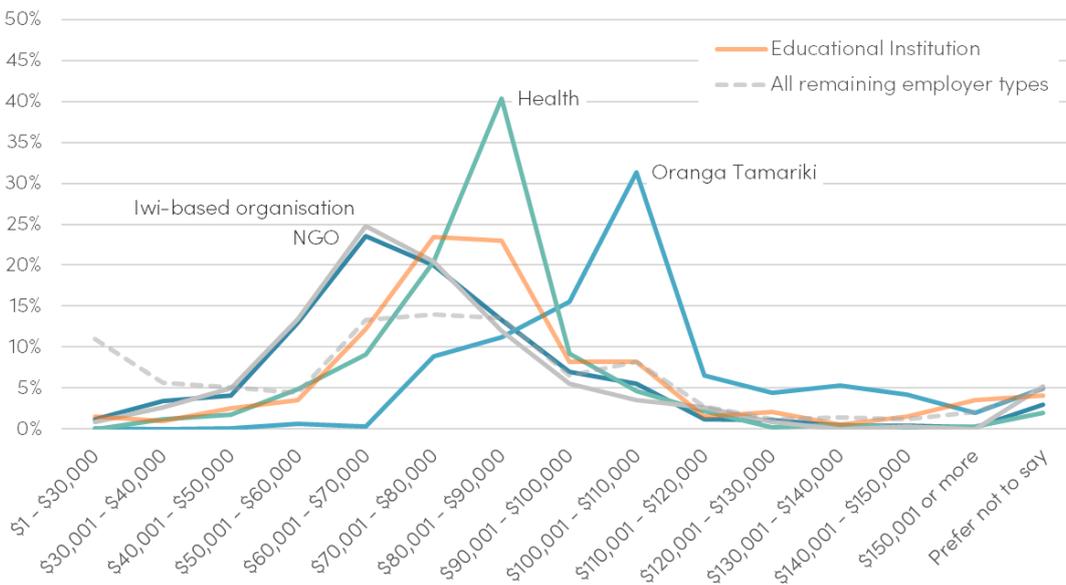
It should be noted that the shape of the curve (and peak at \$80,001 – \$90,000 annually) does not change when analysed by full-time and part-time status, implying that participants gave their full-time equivalent (FTE) salary when answering this survey question.

FIGURE 22. SALARY DISTRIBUTION 2023 – COMPARING TO 2022



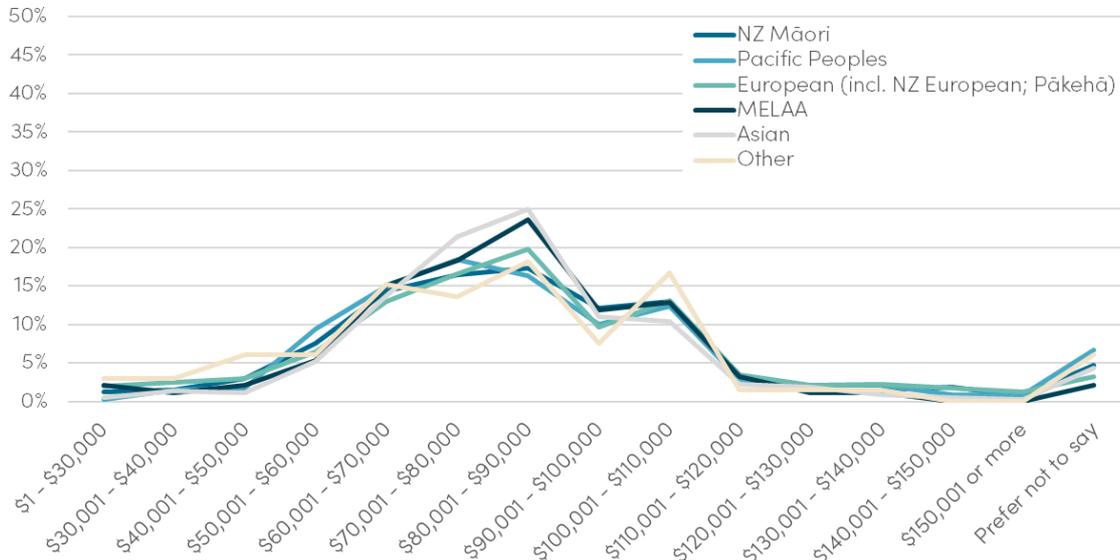
In a continuing trend from past workforce surveys, social workers employed by Oranga Tamariki have a peak in salary distribution that is higher than other employers at \$100,001 – \$110,000 (compared to the overall sample peak at \$80,001 – \$90,000).

FIGURE 23. SALARY DISTRIBUTION 2023 – BY EMPLOYER TYPE



When analysed by ethnic group, the salary distribution is very similar across subgroups (Figure 24 below) – all groups have a peak around \$80,001 – \$90,000 annually, aside from Pacific Peoples participants whose peak is \$70,001 – \$80,000 annually.

FIGURE 24. SALARY DISTRIBUTION 2023 – BY ETHNICITY



2.7 Social worker roles changed or removed

In late 2021, the SWRB consulted with the sector about the fees and levies it charges. Feedback during the consultation suggested that an increase in costs to become a registered social worker would increase the risk that ‘social work’ roles would be changed to other titles to avoid those increased costs. This was explored in the workforce surveys in 2022 and 2023. Social workers were asked if they were aware of roles in their organisation being changed to not require a registered social worker (for example, a social worker’s role now being called something else, or job descriptions being changed and no longer requiring a registered social worker to fill them). In 2023, twelve percent of social workers surveyed said they were aware of roles in their organisation that had changed in this way, which was similar to the results from 2022 (11%).

Section 3 – Knowledge and skills development

This section includes survey results about social workers’ knowledge and skill development, to better understand areas where social workers need additional support and continuing professional development (CPD). It is not the SWRB’s role to deliver CPD for social workers. However, it is important to support and understand the needs of the workforce as part of the SWRB’s guidance for professional standards and regulatory expectations.

3.1 Continuing Professional Development needs

Survey participants were asked which CPD areas would be most helpful for furthering their knowledge and skills development. They were able to select as many options as applied to them. Half of all participants said that CPD in social work practice with Māori would be most helpful (50%), up from 40% in 2022. Close to half said that CPD in social work practice with ethnic and cultural groups would be helpful (48%), also up from 39% in 2022. Shaded boxes in the table below indicate where the proportion of social workers identifying an area of CPD as helpful has increased by 10% or more since 2022.

TABLE 10. AREAS OF CPD IDENTIFIED AS MOST HELPFUL 2023

CPD area	Number of survey participants	Survey %*
Social work practice with Māori	2215	50%
Social work practice with ethnic and cultural groups	2110	48%
Skills for managing complexity	1829	42%
Ethical practice/dilemmas	1747	40%
Legislation and policies affecting social work practice	1562	35%
Skills for conflict management	1311	30%
Professional supervisor training	1257	29%
Working with whānau living with addiction and substance misuse	1207	27%
Working with whānau who have experienced family harm	1097	25%
Decolonisation and te Tiriti o Waitangi	1096	25%
Critical thinking	1089	25%
Professional boundaries	940	21%
Working in partnerships	718	16%
Supporting students on field placements	717	16%
Report writing	676	15%
Case management	619	14%
Other	126	3%

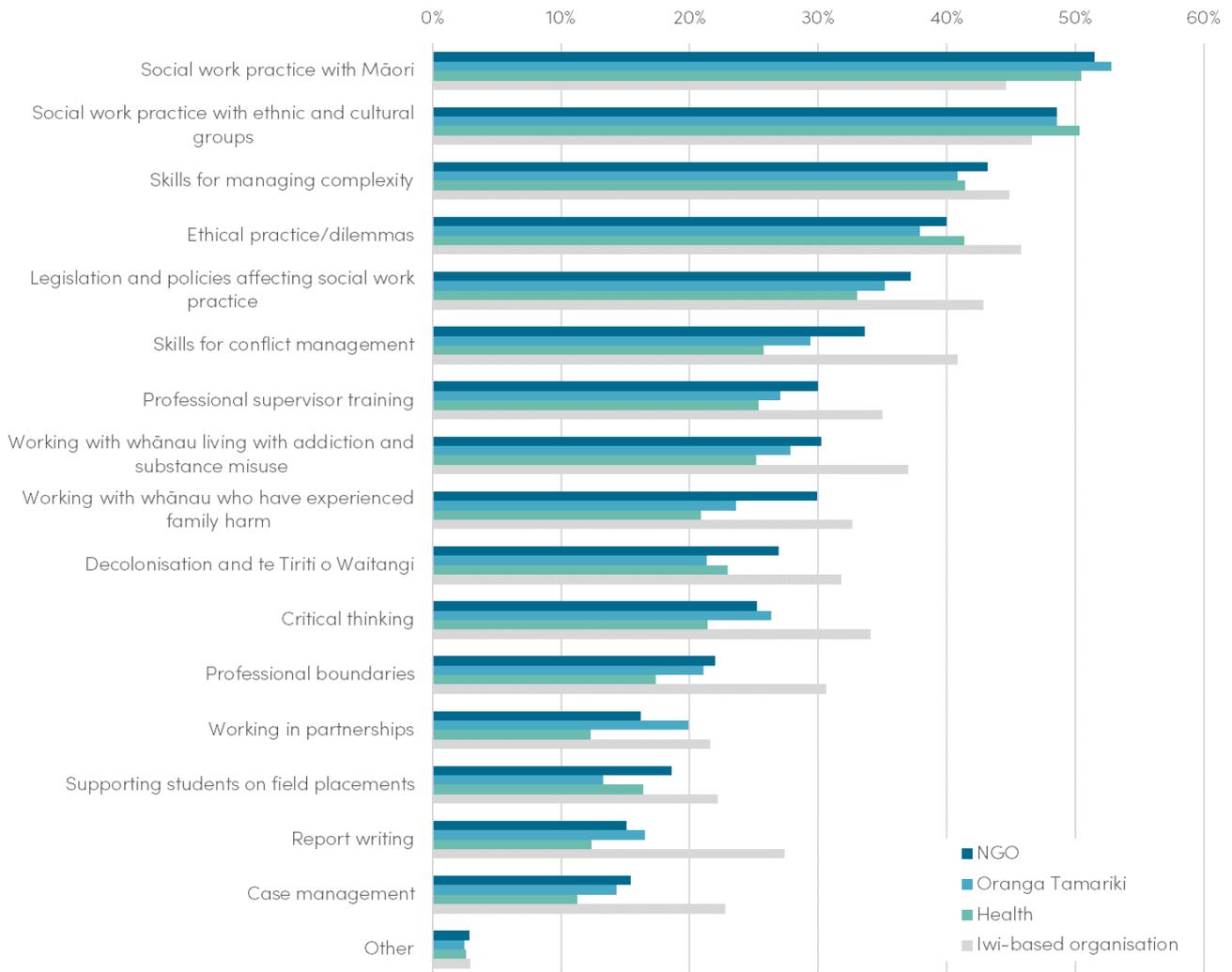
* Participants can select more than one CPD area, so totals exceed the sample of 4411

Shaded boxes indicate where the proportion of social workers identifying that area of CPD as helpful has increased by 10% or more since 2022.

3.2 Area of development for employer types

The chart below shows the areas of CPD identified by social workers across the four largest employer types (NGOs; Oranga Tamariki; health; iwi-based organisations). Social workers employed by iwi-based organisations indicated higher levels of interest and need for CPD than social workers from other employer types, except for CPD relating to practice with Māori and other ethnic/cultural groups.

FIGURE 25. AREAS OF CPD IDENTIFIED AS MOST HELPFUL 2023 – BY TOP FOUR EMPLOYER TYPES



The table below shows the areas of CPD identified by social workers grouped by pathway to registration, and may be useful to identify areas for targeted knowledge and skill development across the profession.

TABLE 11. AREAS OF CPD IDENTIFIED AS MOST HELPFUL 2023 – BY PATHWAY TO REGISTRATION

CPD area	NZ-approved %	S13 Experience %	Overseas pathway %	Aus-approved % [^]
Social work practice with Māori	49%	51%	59%	60%
Social work practice with ethnic and cultural groups	48%	47%	45%	30%
Skills for managing complexity	43%	37%	34%	20%
Ethical practice/dilemmas	40%	42%	35%	10%
Legislation and policies affecting social work practice	36%	33%	35%	10%
Skills for conflict management	31%	19%	24%	0%
Professional supervisor training	29%	23%	29%	40%
Working with whānau living with addiction and substance misuse	29%	24%	19%	20%
Working with whānau who have experienced family harm	26%	25%	20%	20%
Decolonisation and te Tiriti o Waitangi	25%	24%	26%	40%
Critical thinking	25%	23%	20%	10%
Professional boundaries	21%	21%	21%	10%
Working in partnerships	17%	13%	15%	0%
Supporting students on field placements	17%	12%	14%	10%
Report writing	16%	13%	13%	10%
Case management	15%	12%	11%	0%
Other	3%	2%	3%	0%
Total number in survey	3791	99	510	10

* Participants can select more than one CPD area, so totals exceed the total numbers of participants.

[^] Results should be interpreted with caution due to the low numbers of participants in this group.

Section 4 – Employer support

This section describes results from survey questions about the support provided to social workers by their employers, for their social work practice, and financial support for the payment of registration and annual Practising Certificate (PC) renewal fees.

4.1 Employer support for social work practice

The most common categories of employer support that survey participants say they receive for their social work practice are professional reflective supervision (70%) and training and skills development (67%). Just over half report that their employer provides a supportive and safe working environment, which is up slightly since the 2022 survey. Many social workers commented about abuse from clients as contributing to their feeling unsafe in their work.

TABLE 12. EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE 2023

Employer support	Number of survey participants	Survey %*
Professional Reflective Supervision	3102	70%
Relevant training and skills development, including CPD and understanding obligations as a registered social worker	2950	67%
Supportive and safe working environment	2243	51%
Space and time for reflective practice	2115	48%
Cultural supervision	1261	29%
Assistive equipment	249	6%
Other	149	3%

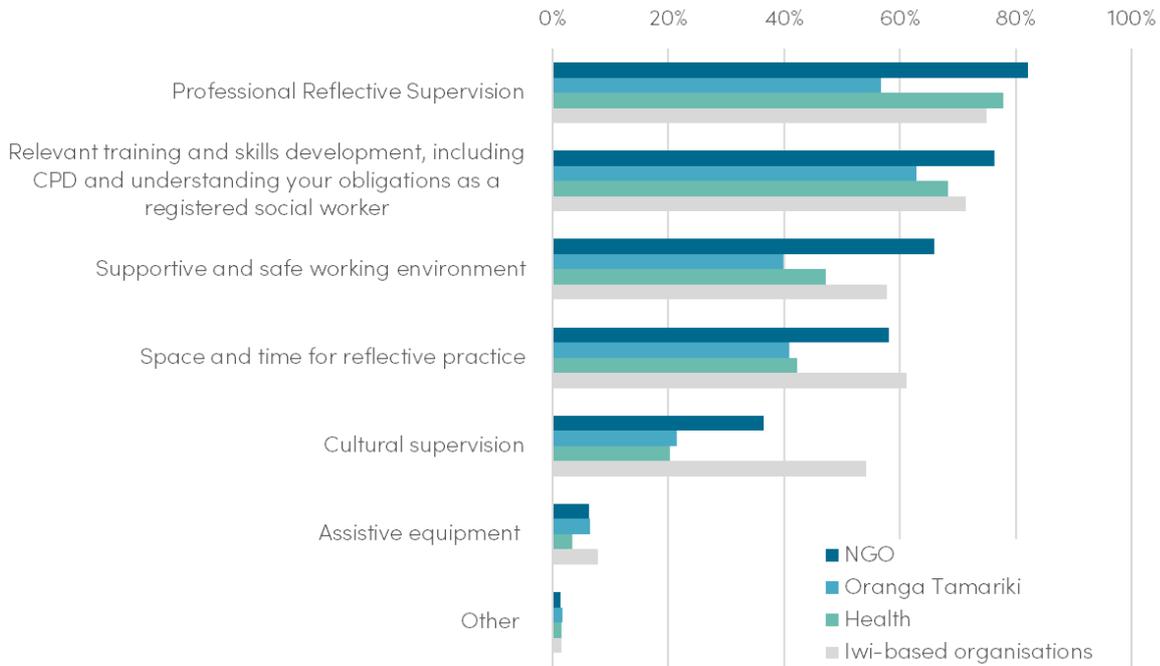
* Participants can select more than one area of employer support, so totals exceed the sample of 4411

“Abuse gotten from whānau, it’s not easy being verbally abused every day.”
(wahine Māori/Pasifika)

“Increasing verbal abuse from patients and families as resources get harder to access.”
(Pākehā female)

Across the top four employer types, survey participants from Oranga Tamariki and health reported lower levels of employer support across almost all the categories (Figure 26). Only 40% of social workers from Oranga Tamariki said they have a supportive and safe working environment and space and time for reflective practice.

FIGURE 26. EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE 2023 – BY TOP FOUR EMPLOYER TYPES



4.2 Employer support with fee payment

Registration with the SWRB requires payment of registration application fee(s). Practising social workers must also have a valid Practising Certificate (PC) which is renewed annually. The survey asked social workers if their employer pays these fees in full, in part, or not at all.

Over eight out of ten participants reported that their employer paid their registration fees (in full or in part), and 92% reported that their employer pays their annual practising certificate renewal fees (in full or in part). A higher proportion of social workers have their practising certificate paid in full since 2022 (83% compared to 90% in 2023).

FIGURE 27. EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR REGISTRATION AND PC FEES 2023

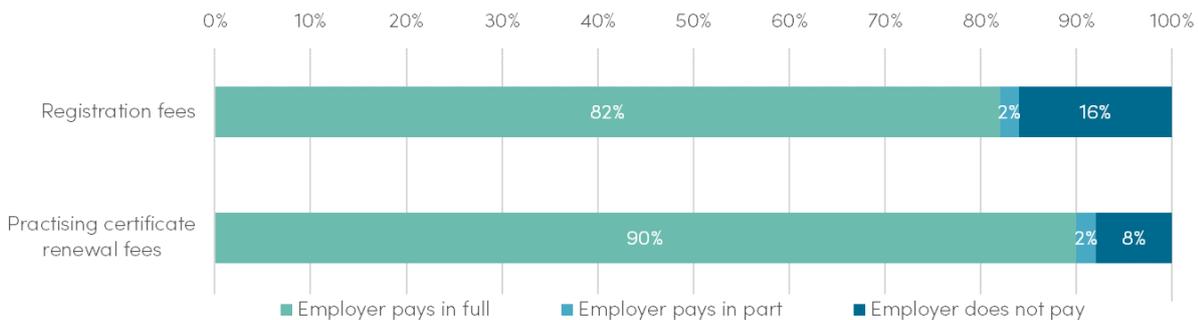
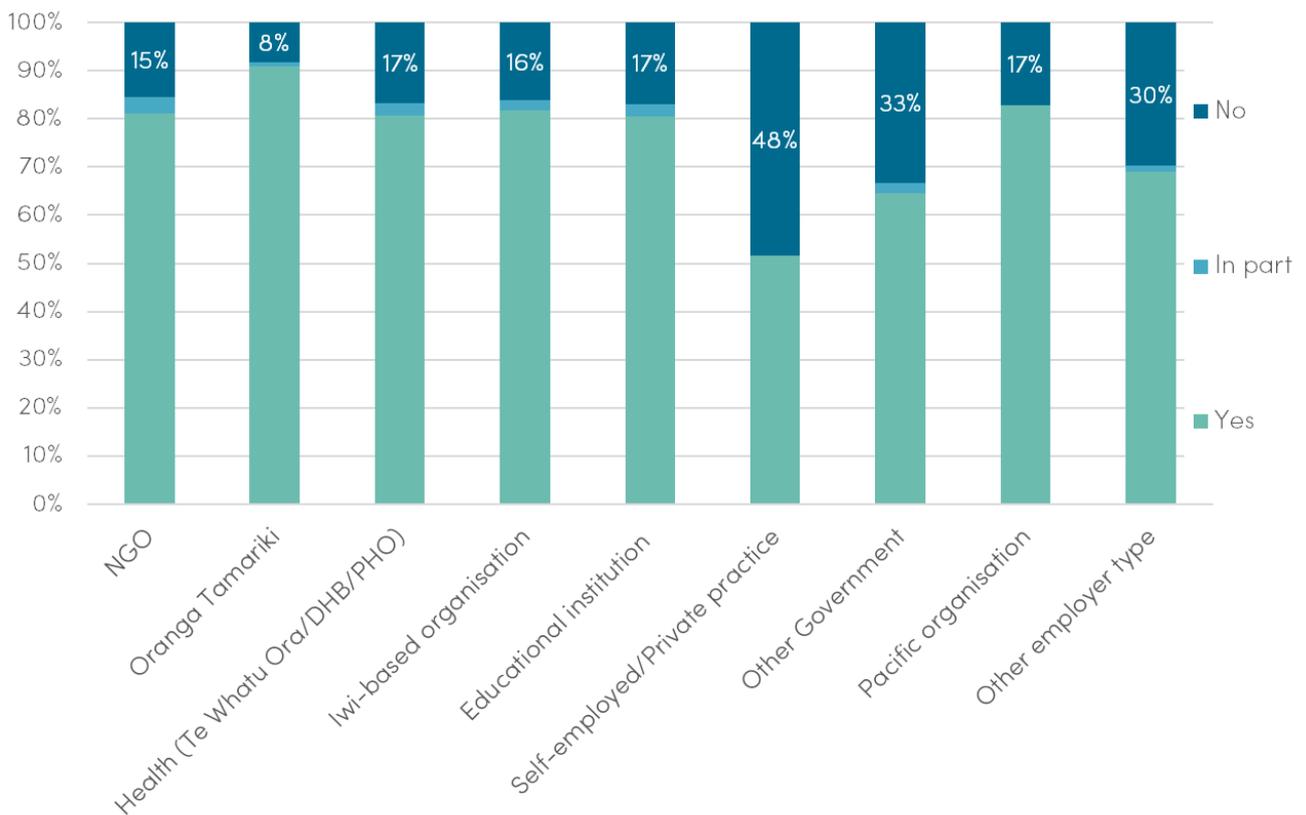


TABLE 13. EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR REGISTRATION AND PC FEES 2023

Fees paid by employer	Registration fees	Practising certificate renewal fees
Yes	82%	90%
In part	2%	2%
No	16%	8%

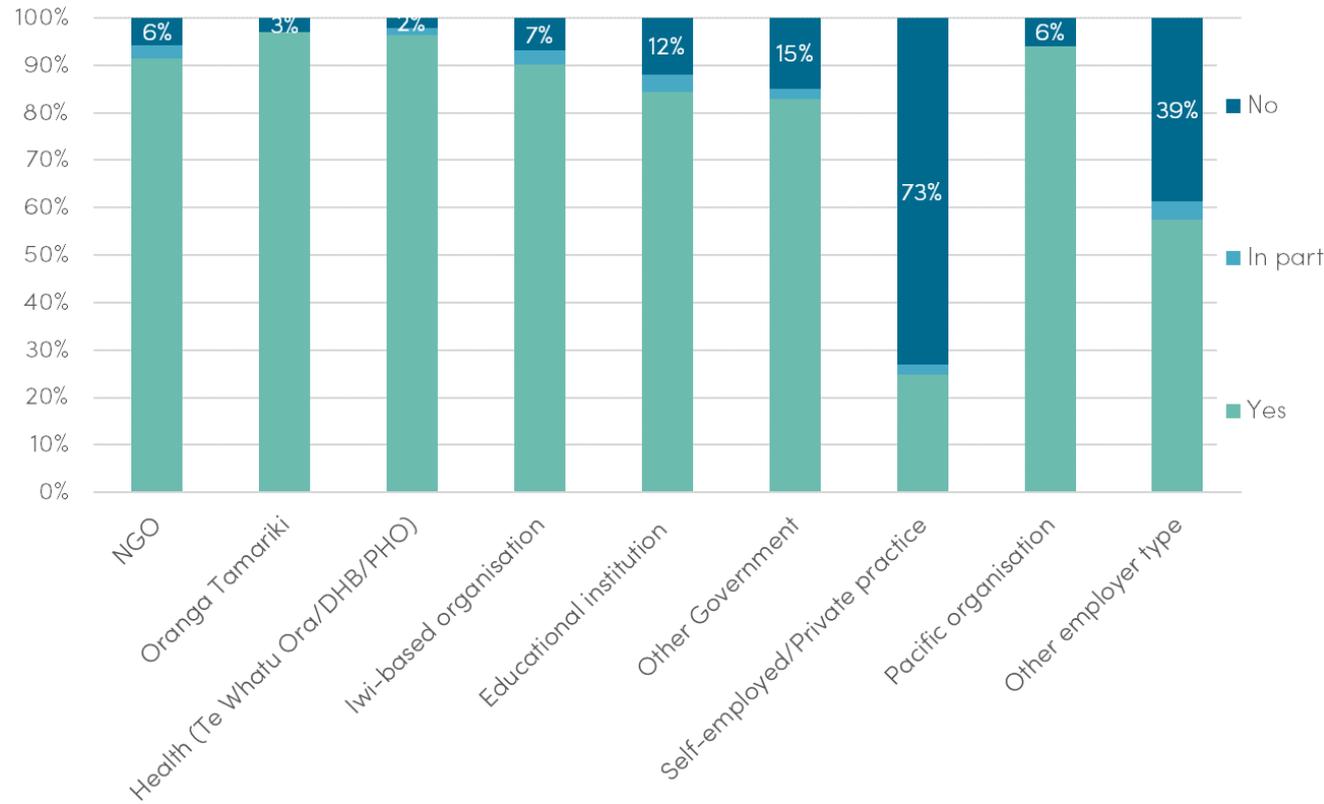
Across the top four employer types, social workers from Oranga Tamariki reported the highest level for their employer paying their registration fees (91% in part or full). Those with lower levels of employer support for registration fees fall into the smaller employer type categories such as self-employed/private practice, other Government and other employer types.

FIGURE 28. EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR REGISTRATION FEES 2023 – BY EMPLOYER TYPE



The four largest employer types pay the annual practising certificate fees for 93% to 98% of social workers (Figure 29). As seen for registration fees, those working for other employer types have the lowest level of fee payment by their employer, and results for those who are self-employed or in private practice reflect that they are less likely to have a direct ‘employer’, and usually operate on a fee-for-service basis.

FIGURE 29. EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR PRACTISING CERTIFICATE (PC) FEES 2023 – BY EMPLOYER TYPE



Section 5 – Standing of the profession

This section explores social workers' views on how mandatory registration and media coverage have impacted the respect, trust and confidence in their profession.

5.1 Impact of mandatory registration on profession

Mandatory registration for social workers in New Zealand came into effect in February 2021. In the years since, the SWRB's workforce survey has asked social workers if they think the profession is more respected now that all social workers must be registered. Almost half of participants said that they thought the profession is more respected (46%), and a further third said it was 'in part' (36%).

The proportion of social workers who do not think the profession is more respected since mandatory registration (18%) has dropped from 30% in 2022, signalling a shift in acknowledgement of the importance of registration. Participants were asked to give their reason for this answer, and many referred to registration as giving mana and integrity to the profession.

FIGURE 30. BELIEF THAT PROFESSION IS MORE RESPECTED SINCE MANDATORY REGISTRATION 2023

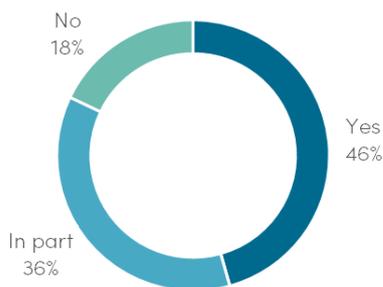


TABLE 14. BELIEF THAT PROFESSION IS MORE RESPECTED SINCE MANDATORY REGISTRATION 2023

Profession is more respected since mandatory registration	Number of survey participants	Survey %
Yes	1708	46%
In part	1362	36%
No	671	18%

"[Mandatory registration] gives more mana (credibility and integrity) to our tari and us as social work practitioners."
(wahine Māori)

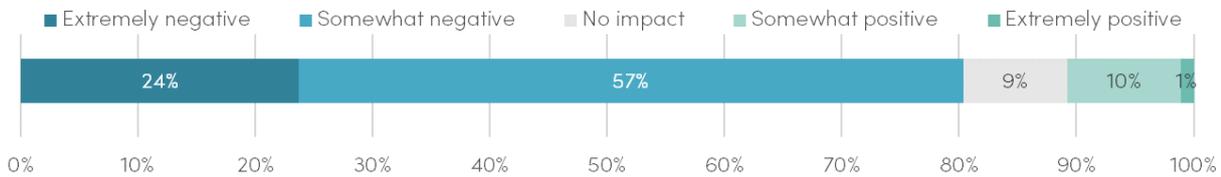
"It is in respect to the mana and right of the children and whānau we are serving that all social workers must [be] registered in order to deliver the best practice."
(Pasifika female)

"The regulating of social work profession I see has contributed to social work being recognised as on par as other professional bodies, such as psychologist, nurses etc. It has given some mana to the profession. It provides a filter and motivation for kaimahi to continuously upskill and reflect on their practice."
(Pākehā female)

5.2 Impact of media on public trust and confidence in profession

Survey participants were asked about the impact that media coverage relating to social work has had on public trust and confidence in the social work profession. Eight out of ten participants thought it had a negative impact (24% extremely; 57% somewhat negative).

FIGURE 31. BELIEFS ABOUT IMPACT OF MEDIA ON PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION 2023



“Belonging to a statutory organisation [Oranga Tamariki] every staff member is affected when there are negative press or stories highlighted by the media, who do not have all the information or circumstance. Positive or successful outcomes are not often shared.”
(tāne Māori)

“Can be difficult to quantify and measure what social workers do. This makes it difficult to fully highlight what we do and the highs it can bring along with the challenges.”
(Pasifika female)

5.3 Biggest challenges for the profession

Social workers were asked what they think the biggest challenges for the social work profession are now, and in the immediate future. Two thirds thought that the recruitment and retention of social workers would be the biggest challenge (67%). this matches what was seen in 2022 survey results.

TABLE 15. CHALLENGES FOR THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION NOW AND IN THE FUTURE 2023

Challenges	Number of survey participants	Survey %*
Recruitment and retention of social workers	2960	67%
Pay parity	2447	56%
Deepening of social inequity	2245	51%
Public perception of social workers	1989	45%
Not enough time spent with people using the services	1934	44%
Lack of visibility of social work profession to funders	1176	27%
Other regulated professions replacing social work roles	999	23%
Increasing reliance on unregulated support workforce	791	18%
Other	194	4%

* Participants can select more than one challenge, so totals exceed the sample of 4411

"More space for social workers to reflect with colleagues and less time on admin. We can easily get burnt out (or become survivors) with the sort of work we do so need emotional space with our colleagues without the pressure and high needs of client loads. Admin also takes its toll and takes us away from our purpose."

(Pākehā female)

"Attracting tāne and Māori to the profession. Cultural double shifts and the stigma of working for a system/society that is responsible for the inequities and treatment of Māori etc. Social work as a profession is building its reputation and need within the health system. It's now valued and recognised apart of the MDT [multi-disciplinary team] setting."

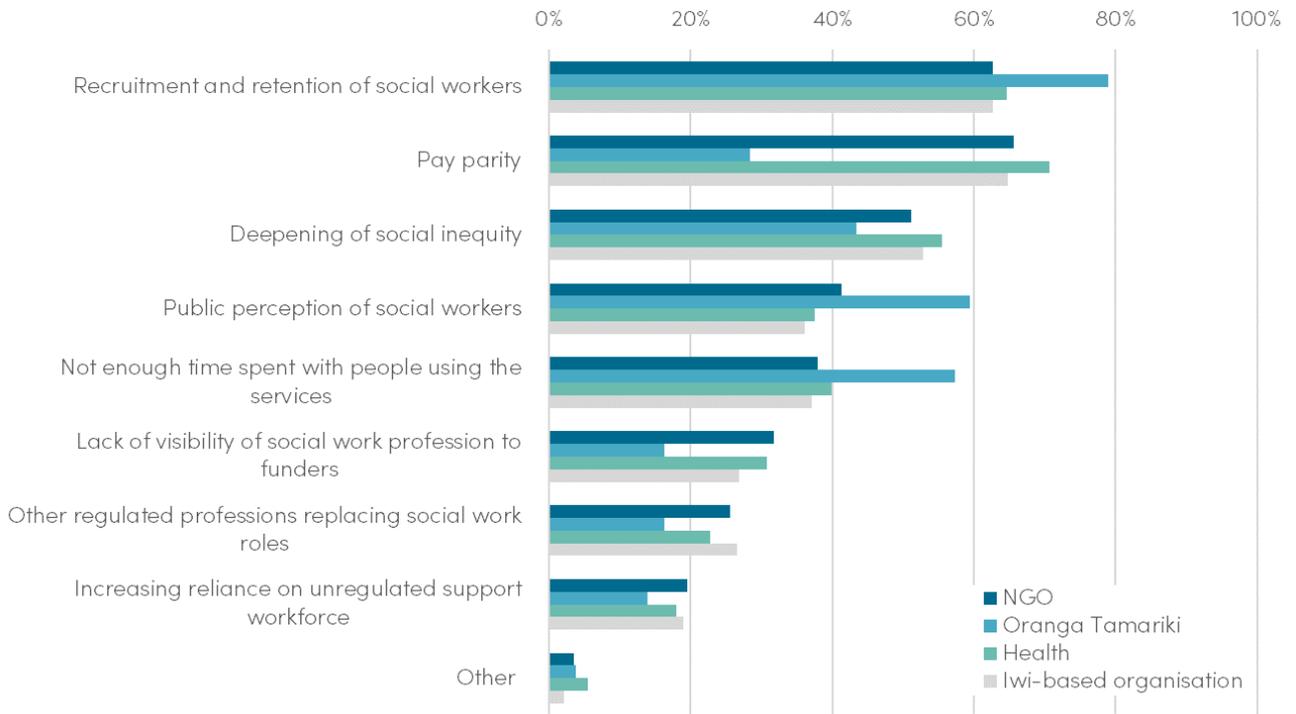
(tāne Māori)

"Making sure my practise is in line with cultural considerations yet remembering that I am a public servant and am primarily employed by my organisation, so trying to balance them and in lining them together for the best outcome."

(wahine Māori)

When grouped by employer type, social workers from Oranga Tamariki were more likely to identify the recruitment and retention of social workers, the public perception of social workers and not enough time spent with people using the services as the biggest challenges for the profession now and in the immediate future (Figure 32). Social workers employed by NGOs, health/hauora and iwi-based organisations were more likely than those from Oranga Tamariki to identify pay parity as a challenge for the profession. The deepening of social inequity was identified equally across all employer types.

FIGURE 32. CHALLENGES FOR THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION NOW AND IN THE FUTURE 2023 – BY TOP FOUR EMPLOYER TYPES



Participants can select more than one challenge, so totals exceed the sample of 4411

Section 6 – Safety and conduct

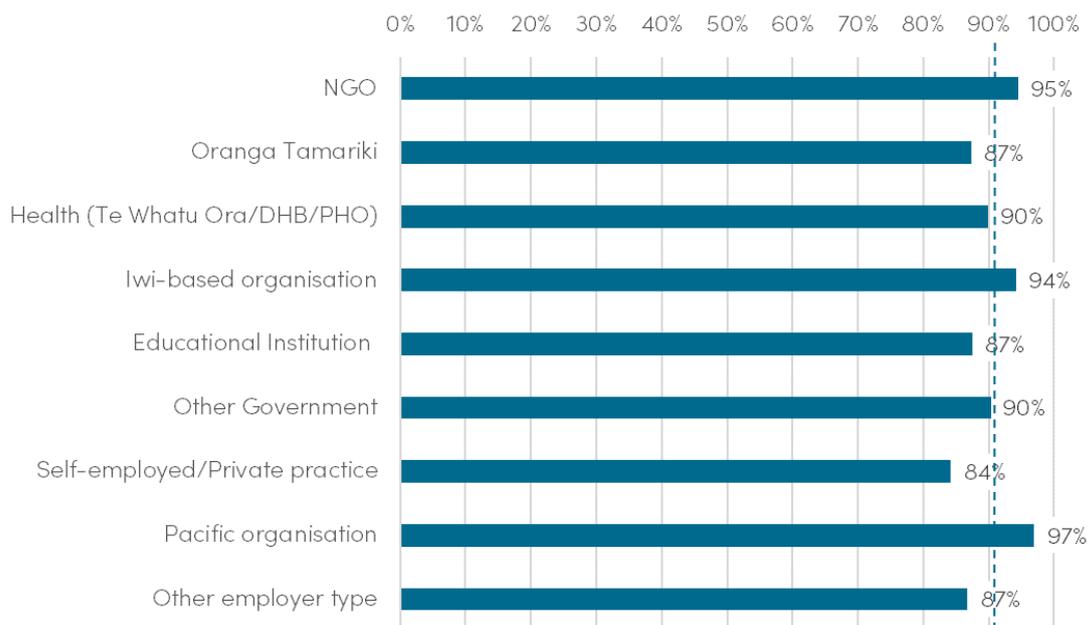
In 2023, workforce survey participants were asked two new questions about safety and conduct: confidence in their employer’s policies and processes for dealing with serious issues with a social worker’s practice and/or conduct, and whether they would report practice and conduct issues to the SWRB.

6.1 Confidence in employer’s policies and processes for practice/conduct issues

When asked if they were confident that their employer has adequate policies and procedures in place to deal with serious issues with a social worker’s practice and/or conduct appropriately and safely, 91% of participants said yes (dashed line on the chart below).

There was some variation by employer type, with social workers employed by Pacific, NGO and iwi-based organisations having the highest level of confidence in their employer’s policies and processes. Of the larger employer types, Oranga Tamariki and educational institutions had the lowest levels of confidence in their employer’s policies and processes to deal with serious practice and/or conduct.

FIGURE 33. CONFIDENCE IN EMPLOYER TO DEAL WITH SERIOUS PRACTICE/CONDUCT ISSUES – BY EMPLOYER TYPE 2023



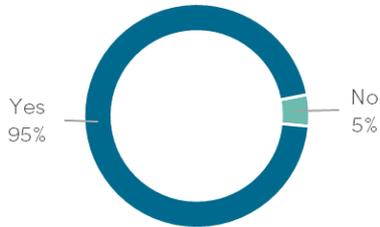
For those who did not feel confident in their employer’s ability to deal with serious practice or conduct issues, many felt that their employer did not understand or give attention to professional standards in social work.

“Employers are not aware of ethical or legal mandates regarding care and protection – and middle managers are concerned with management of staff not ethics and protection of professional boundaries.” (wahine Māori)

6.2 Raising concerns with the SWRB

When asked if they would raise concerns about another social worker's practice and/or conduct with SWRB (where it was not possible to resolve the issue with the employer), almost all participants said yes (96%).

FIGURE 34. RAISING CONCERNS OF PRACTICE AND/OR CONDUCT WITH THE SWRB 2023



For the small number of participants who would not raise concerns with the SWRB, their reasons often centred around fear of retribution, and not feeling safe to speak up without negative impacts on their working relationship with colleagues and their employer.

“There are many instances of workplace bullying or detrimental behaviours and this runs around in a loop of no change. It is now not safe to bring these issues to light as the ‘whistle blower’ mentality rules, and to do so is detrimental to your work and relational environment. It is challenging to access relevant supports outside of [organisation].”

(Pākehā female)

Closing comments

The SWRB appreciates and acknowledges the social workers who shared their time and feedback in 2023, achieving the highest response rate since the survey began (51%), and a sample that matches the demographic profile of the full practising workforce.

This gives us high confidence that the results in this report reflect the reality and diversity of all practising social workers across the motu and enables us to build on our evidence base to support workforce planning and decision-making in the social work sector. As illustrated through this survey, social workers are found in a wide range of environments, undertaking a diverse range of tasks. This breadth of activity makes it essential that the social work workforce is visible as it cuts across traditional agency responsibilities. It is important also to recognise that social workers' most selected reason for remaining in the profession is the same reason most participants initially join the profession – making a difference to people's lives (80%).

In our role as lead agency for workforce planning for all social workers, we aim to support the health and social care system to better understand and address workforce challenges. We collect and share summary information about the practising workforce, where they are working, where gaps exist, and the 'pipeline' into the workforce. We continue to strengthen and enhance our evidence base about the social work workforce, and will continue to tailor and expand our workforce survey to allow for a deeper understanding of topical issues each year. Social workers are invited to give feedback and reasons for their survey answers, reflecting the social worker voice alongside statistical findings. These data help the SWRB, as an occupational regulator, to further our understanding of how registration enhances social worker professionalism, and upholding public safety.

We continue to engage with the profession and across sectors and employers to monitor the workforce pipeline and support workforce planning and development activities. Each year, we conduct surveys of education providers and social workers, and our intention for 2024 is to add a survey of employers. This will extend our evidence base to understand the 'big picture' of the social work workforce, and how to best address current challenges.

The SWRB works in partnership with education providers, employers, policy officials and many others to shine a light on challenges and opportunities to support better, more informed workforce decision-making. We welcome feedback, comments and suggestions on ways to improve this survey or specific topics that might be useful to explore in the future.

Appendix 1: Survey sample and data representativeness – comparing participants to the full practising register of social workers

This appendix compares survey participant demographics with the full practising social worker workforce to better understand representativeness of the results.

In every demographic category shown in the tables below, the survey subset matches the profile of the full social worker workforce to within 1-2%, which gives high confidence that the survey results can be generalised to the wider workforce.

The ‘practising’ workforce refers to all social workers on the SWRB’s register with an active practising certificate (PC) as of 30 June 2023 (the end of the financial year in which the survey was conducted).

TABLE A1. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

Age group	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
20 - 29	7%	8%	313	695
30 - 39	19%	21%	827	1814
40 - 49	24%	24%	1072	2068
50 - 59	27%	26%	1206	2231
60 - 69	20%	19%	870	1639
70 - 79	3%	3%	115	243
80 or older	0%	0%	1	4
Unspecified	0%	0%	7	11
Total			4411	8705

FIGURE A1. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

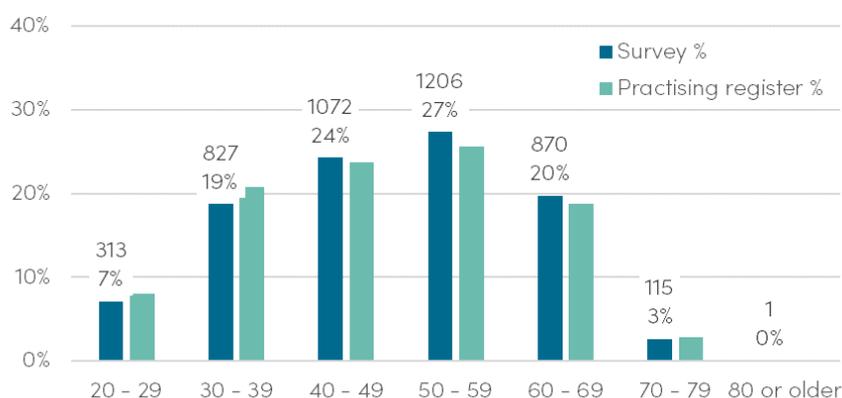


TABLE A2. GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

Gender	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
Female	85%	84%	3752	7339
Male	14%	15%	637	1319
Another gender	0.2%	0.3%	8	22
Unspecified	0.3%	0.3%	14	25
Total			4411	8705

FIGURE A2. GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

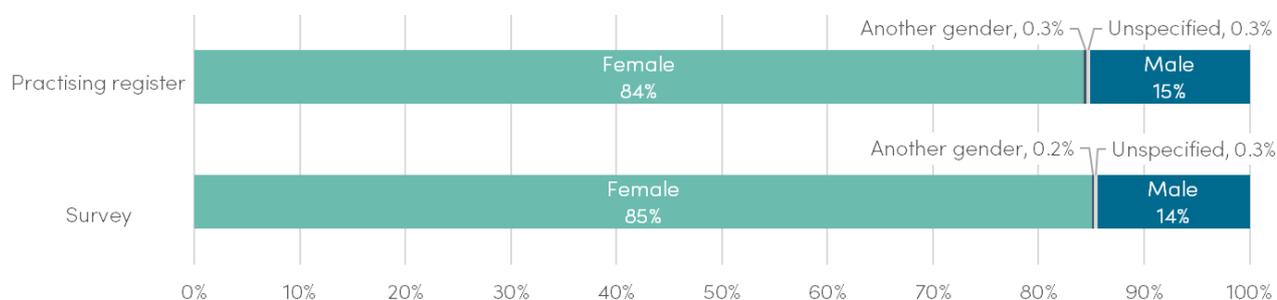
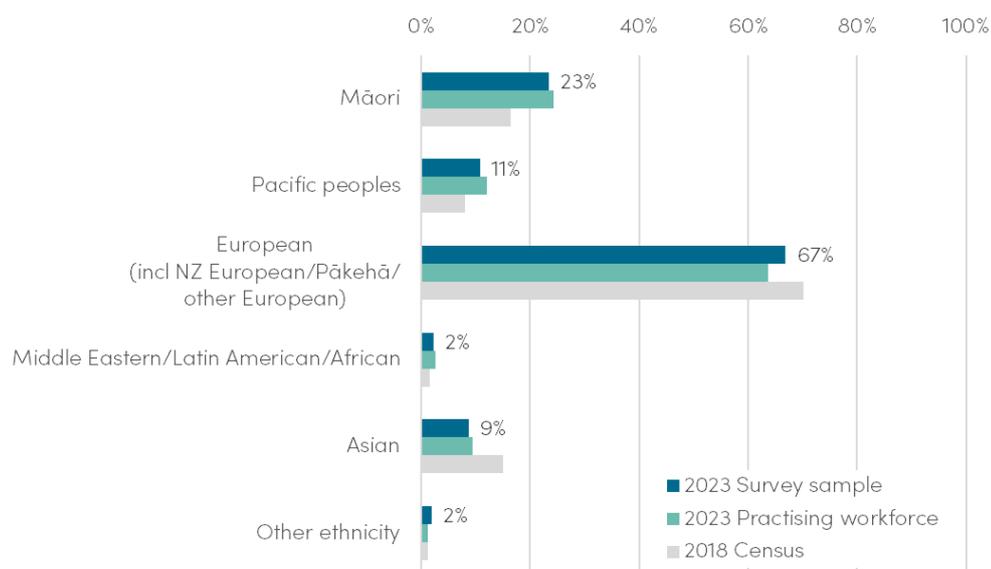


TABLE A3. ETHNICITY OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

Ethnicity	Survey sample %*	Practising workforce %*	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
NZ Māori	23.4%	24.3%	1032	2114
Pacific Peoples	10.9%	12.1%	480	1057
Total European (incl. NZ European/Pākehā/other European)	66.9%	63.7%	2952	4990
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	2.3%	2.6%	101	230
Asian	8.7%	9.5%	384	828
Other	2.0%	1.3%	68	111

*Social workers can identify with more than one ethnic group, so totals exceed 100%

FIGURE A3. ETHNICITY OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023



The table below shows the workforce survey distribution by ethnicity compared to the most recent census of the NZ population (2018). The 2023 survey sample and practising workforce of social workers have a higher representation of Māori and Pacific peoples than the general population.

TABLE A4. ETHNICITY OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023 AND NZ POPULATION (CENSUS 2018)

Ethnicity	2023 survey %	2023 practising workforce %	2018 Census ⁵ %
Māori	23.4%	24.3%	16.5%
Pacific Peoples	10.9%	12.1%	8.1%
Total European (incl. NZ European/Pākehā/other European)	66.9%	63.7%	70.2%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	2.3%	2.6%	1.5%
Asian	8.7%	9.5%	15.1%
Other ethnicity	2.0%	1.3%	1.2%

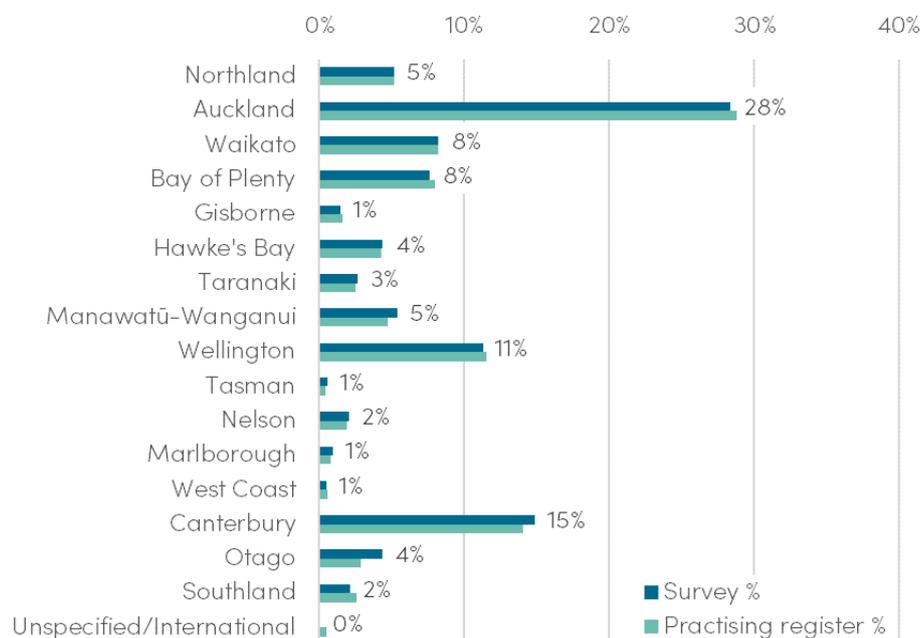
* Both Census and workforce survey use 'total response' ethnicity calculations, allowing participants to identify more than one ethnic group. Totals will add to more than 100%.

⁵ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/ethnic-group-summaries-reveal-new-zealands-multicultural-make-up/>

TABLE A5. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023 AND NZ POPULATION (CENSUS 2018)

Region	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n	NZ population ⁶ %
Northland	5.1%	5.2%	227	450	3.8%
Auckland	28.4%	29.2%	1251	2538	33.8%
Waikato	8.2%	8.2%	363	711	9.7%
Bay of Plenty	7.6%	7.9%	336	692	6.5%
Gisborne	1.5%	1.6%	64	143	1.0%
Hawke's Bay	4.4%	4.2%	192	369	3.5%
Taranaki	2.7%	2.5%	118	215	2.5%
Manawatū-Wanganui	5.4%	4.7%	237	408	5.1%
Wellington	11.3%	11.6%	498	1006	10.7%
Tasman	0.6%	0.4%	26	38	1.1%
Nelson	2.1%	1.9%	91	167	1.1%
Marlborough	1.0%	0.8%	42	66	1.0%
West Coast	0.5%	0.6%	23	49	0.7%
Canterbury	14.9%	14.1%	656	1225	12.7%
Otago	4.3%	2.9%	191	249	4.8%
Southland	2.1%	3.0%	93	264	2.1%
Unspecified/International	0.1%	1.3%	3	115	
Total			4411	8705	

FIGURE A5. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023



⁶ Stats NZ (2019). Census: Population and dwelling counts (amended) 2018. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2018-census-population-and-dwelling-counts>

TABLE A6. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS PER 10,000 POPULATION)

Region	2018 population	Practising social workers (as of 30 Jun 2023)	Practising social workers per 10,000 pop'n 2023	Survey participants from region 2023	Survey sample per 10,000 pop'n 2023
Northland	179,076	450	25.1	227	12.7
Auckland	1,571,718	2,538	16.1	1,251	8.0
Waikato	458,202	711	15.5	363	7.9
Bay of Plenty	308,499	692	22.4	336	10.9
Gisborne	47,517	143	30.1	64	13.5
Hawke's Bay	166,368	369	22.2	192	11.5
Taranaki	117,561	215	18.3	118	10.0
Manawatū-Wanganui	238,797	408	17.1	237	9.9
Wellington	506,814	1,006	19.8	498	9.8
Tasman	52,389	38	7.3	26	5.0
Nelson	50,880	167	32.8	91	17.9
Marlborough	47,340	66	13.9	42	8.9
West Coast	31,575	49	15.5	23	7.3
Canterbury	599,694	1,225	20.4	656	10.9
Otago	225,186	249	11.1	191	8.5
Southland	97,467	264	27.1	93	9.5
Unspecified/International	-	115	-	3	-
Total	4,699,755	8705		4411	

TABLE A7. EMPLOYER TYPE OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

Employer type	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
Non-Government organisation (NGO)	28%	29%	1244	2489
Oranga Tamariki	27%	26%	1200	2245
Health (Te Whatu Ora/DHB/PHO)	23%	21%	1001	1817
Iwi-based organisation (incl. iwi-based health)	8%	8%	342	669
Educational Institution (school; university)	4%	4%	196	372
Other Government	2%	2%	98	193
Self-employed/private practice	3%	3%	117	235
Pacific organisation	1%	1%	35	67
Other	2%	2%	86	180
Unspecified	2%	5%	92	438
Total			4411	8705

TABLE A8. QUALIFICATION LEVEL OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

Tertiary qualification level	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
1-6 Certificates / diplomas	16%	15%	717	1357
7 Grad certificates / diplomas / Bachelor's	56%	57%	2452	5071
8 PG Cert / Dip / Bachelor's (Hons)	10%	10%	454	849
9 Master's	15%	16%	666	1386
10 Doctoral	0%	0%	1	4
Unspecified/None	3%	2%	121	194

TABLE A9. PATHWAY TO REGISTRATION OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

Pathway to qualification	Survey sample %	Practising workforce %	Survey sample n	Practising workforce n
NZ social work qualification	86%	86%	3791	7508
Experience pathway: S13	2%	2%	99	191
Overseas qualification	12%	11%	510	981
Australian social work qualification	0.2%	0.3%	10	23

Appendix 2: The SWRB’s role as Lead Agency for Workforce Planning for all social workers

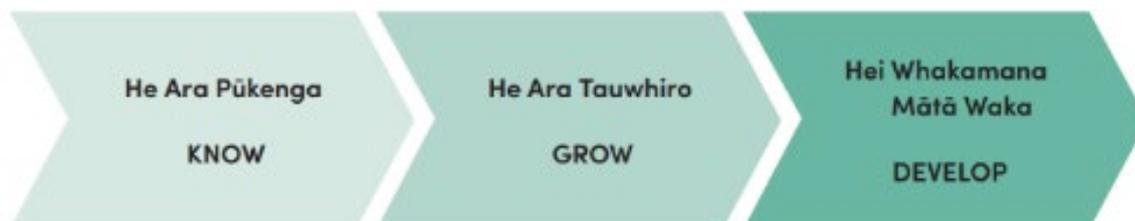
The SWRB’s role as the Lead Agency for workforce planning for all social workers was announced publicly in March 2021. The Cabinet Paper assigning the role to us stated that the emphasis should be on ‘building evidence on workforce pressures and relationships across the sector.’ To reflect that intent, we have developed an aspirational vision for our Lead Agency work:

The SWRB will provide strategic, cross-agency and cross-sectoral leadership in consultation with the sector, based on a robust evidence base, to guide the development of a strategy and action plan to support the sustainability of the social worker workforce.

This vision acknowledges the need for cross-agency and cross-sector support to enable any significant change. Our high-level outcome has also evolved and now recognises the emphasis on being data driven and evidence based:

Leveraging data to support 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.

We developed an approach to articulate what the Lead Agency role means focusing on three components of work – **KNOW, GROW, DEVELOP**.



KNOW

The initial ‘know’ phase is about building the evidence base to underpin our work.

The register of social workers provides us with valuable demographic information about the workforce. This is supplemented by the findings from our Annual Social Worker Workforce Survey and other information sources such as the SWRB’s Annual Education Providers Report, one-off surveys and pieces of research.

From this evidence, we have developed insights and briefings to disseminate to the wider sector including Ministers, other government agencies, employers and other stakeholders. These will continue to be updated regularly as the latest reports become available.

GROW

The second phase 'grow' has largely taken place from the beginning of the financial year 2022/23. It has been characterised by a more proactive approach. We continue to strengthen and enhance what is now becoming our business-as-usual Lead Agency work, including tailoring and expanding our Workforce Survey. We have also been developing an Employers Survey, and working to enhance our Annual Education Providers Survey and Report.

Increasingly we are growing our contribution at a system level and have proactively undertaken the following work:

- working with education officials on increasing the funding rate for the fieldwork components of the social work degree programmes, including providing advice to Ministers alongside the Ministry of Education and the Tertiary Education Commission
- working closely with Te Pūkenga, Te Toitū Waiora - Community, Health, Education, and Social Services Workforce Development Council, Health Workforce NZ, Immigration NZ, Public Services Commission, the Employment, Education and Training (EET) Ministerial Advisory Group and Oranga Tamariki
- identifying research opportunities, including those that draw on what we are learning through the project to better understand the social work-like workforce.

DEVELOP

The third phase 'develop' shows us now moving into external phases of work. Drawing on our existing relationships we are taking a dual approach (cross government agency and cross sector) to encourage agencies across government and sector to collaborate on a system-wide and integrated social worker workforce strategy and associated action plan.

We will also continue to build our links with other agencies that have a workforce function including the Ministries of Health and Education, Oranga Tamariki and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Based on their advice and our suite of workforce data, we will provide the Minister with updates on cross-sector engagement.