



# Social Workers Registration Board

Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

## Annual Social Worker Workforce Report 2023

Spotlight Report:  
Social workers employed by non-  
government organisations (NGOs)

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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*

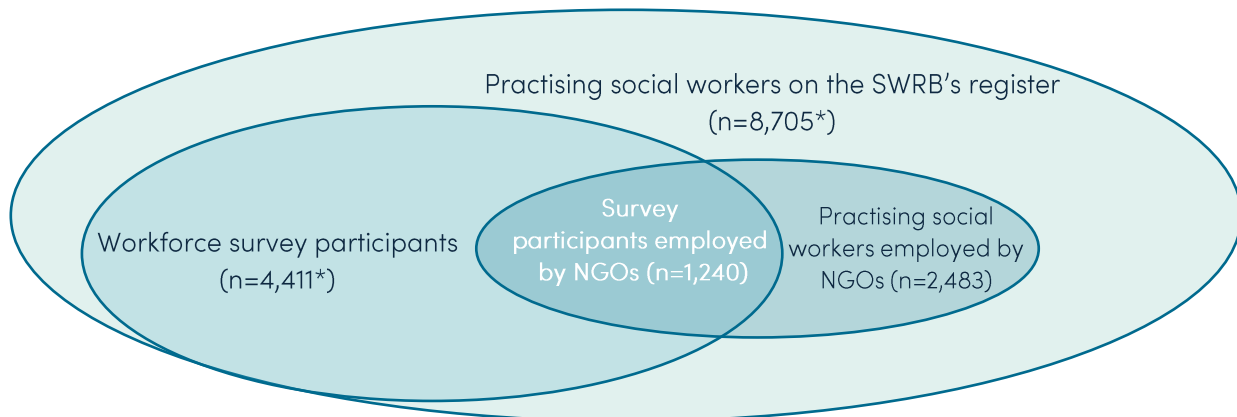
## Introduction – the SWRB’s Annual Social Worker Workforce Survey

Every year, the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) collects data from the social worker workforce through the Social Worker Workforce Survey. 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 about their work and the wider profession. The survey enables the SWRB to build an evidence base to support workforce planning and decision-making.

This 2023 Spotlight Report sits alongside the Annual Social Worker Workforce Report<sup>1</sup> 2023 and covers a subset of social workers who report that they are employed by a non-government organisation (NGO). Additional Spotlight reports are available covering social workers who report being employed in other subsets of the workforce such as Oranga Tamariki, and health/hauora organisations.

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

Over a quarter of survey participants (28%, or 1,240 social workers) reported that they are employed by an NGO. This closely aligns with the proportion of the full practising workforce of social workers employed by NGOs (29%, or 2,483 social workers).



\*Register totals as of 30 June 2023; survey sample collected May to July 2023

<sup>1</sup> <https://swrb.govt.nz/building-sustainable-workforce/>

The 2023 Annual Workforce Survey followed the same four core domains 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.

This NGO Spotlight Report provides responses from social workers employed by NGOs across these six domains. Many of the survey questions invited social workers to give feedback and reasons for their answers, reflecting the social worker voice alongside statistical findings.

## Summary of key findings – Social workers employed by non-government organisations

This report focuses on the **1,240** social workers in the survey who report that they are employed by a non-government organisation (NGO) at the time of the survey.

- Social workers employed in the NGO sector are the largest subset of the workforce survey making up 28% of the practising workforce.
- A quarter of social workers in this NGO sample are employed by one of five organisations: Presbyterian Support / Family Works, Barnardos, Salvation Army, Open Home Foundation and Stand Children's Services.
- In 2023, the salary distribution for NGO social workers trends lower than those for other employers. Pay parity is cited as a challenge by more social workers employed by NGOs than the full survey sample (66% compared to 56% of the full sample, noting that this may change over time with the settlement of pay equity claims).
- Most social workers employed by NGOs reported working in either urban (43%) or suburban areas (40%). Eight percent report that their work is national (covering the whole country), and seven percent reported working in rural areas.
- 85% of survey participants employed by NGOs report their main setting/sector of service delivery is in a community-based organisation/NGO and 5% in a community-based health service.
- Making a difference to people's lives and serving whānau and community are the highest ranked motivations for entering and remaining in the profession.
- Recruitment and retention of social workers, high workload and balancing work and personal life are identified as challenges.
- Over half of all social workers employed by NGOs identified the costs of being a regulated professional and salary as the main barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession.

### Our understanding of the NGO sector social worker workforce composition is growing

- Most social workers employed by NGOs identify as European (70%), followed by Māori (17%) and Pacific peoples (12%). Compared to other large employers of social workers such as health and Oranga Tamariki, and the full practising workforce, social workers employed by NGOs are less likely to identify as Māori.
- The workforce is predominantly female with peak age group between 50-59 years (26%). However, age distribution trends slightly younger than the full practising workforce, with a higher proportion of 20-39-year-olds.
- Two percent of social workers employed by NGOs indicated that they have a permanent disability or long-term condition that effects their ability to carry out everyday activities.

- Just over one-third (37%) report whānau/families as their primary client group or focus of their practice. This is higher than the proportion from the full survey (28%).
- A combined total of 31% of social workers employed by NGOs report working with rangatahi and tamariki as their main clients, and one quarter mainly work with adults aged 18 and over.
- 73% work full-time and a slightly higher proportion of social workers employed by NGOs work part-time, compared to the full survey sample (24% and 20%, respectively).

### NGO sector social workers are qualified and experienced.

- Almost all participants employed by NGOs held a qualification in 2023 (95%), with four out of five participants reporting a level 7 tertiary qualification or above (83%).
- Most social workers employed by NGOs gained their registration with a NZ-approved qualification (86%), or an overseas approved qualification (10%). A higher proportion (4%) registered through the S:13 Experience Pathway than the full survey (2%).
- A lower proportion of social workers employed by NGOs describe themselves as experienced compared to the full survey sample (53% and 58%, respectively). The proportion of beginning practitioners and those in leadership positions is slightly higher than the full sample.

### Workforce sustainability needs attention by NGO sector employers.

- 15% of social workers employed by NGOs plan to leave the profession in the next five years, which is a loss of over 180 social workers from the NGO sector.
- Retirement was the most cited reason for leaving, followed by burn out and high workload. However, social workers employed by NGOs were less likely than those employed by other organisations to intend to leave due to burnout, high workload, and lack of career progression.
- In 2023, over half of all social workers employed by NGOs identified the costs of being a regulated professional and pay parity as the main barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession.
- 63% reported recruitment and retention of social workers as one of the biggest challenges facing the profession.

### Knowledge and skills development are identified by NGO sector social workers.

- Just over half of all social workers employed by NGOs said that continuing professional development (CPD) in social work practice with Māori would be most helpful (52%). A similar proportion said that CPD in social work practice with ethnic and cultural groups would be helpful (49%).
- In line with the full survey findings, 43% identified the need for CPD in relation to skills for managing complexity and ethical practice dilemmas.
- Several areas for CPD were noted more frequently in the NGO sector than the full survey sample, including legislation and policies affecting social work practice, skills for conflict management, and working with whānau living with addiction and substance misuse.



### NGO sector employers support practitioners in a variety of ways.

- Professional reflective supervision (82%), and training and skills development (77%) are the most common forms of employer support reported by social workers employed by NGOs.
- 84% of social workers employed by NGOs reported that their employer paid their registration fees (in full or in part), and 95% reported that their employer pays their annual practising certificate renewal fees (in full or in part).
- Employers providing a supportive and safe working environment and space and time for reflective practice was reported highest by NGO sector social workers compared to the other largest employer types.

### NGO sector social workers believe that the standing of the profession has lifted but challenges remain.

- Nearly half (47%) of social workers employed by NGOs thought the profession is more respected since mandatory registration came into effect in 2021. A further 37% said it was 'in part'. These results closely align to those of the full survey sample.
- Pay parity was cited as a challenge by more social workers employed by NGOs than the full survey sample (66% compared to 56% of the full sample).
- Over half (51%) of social workers employed by NGOs identified the deepening of social inequity as a challenge.

### NGO sector employers show a growing focus on safe and accountable conduct.

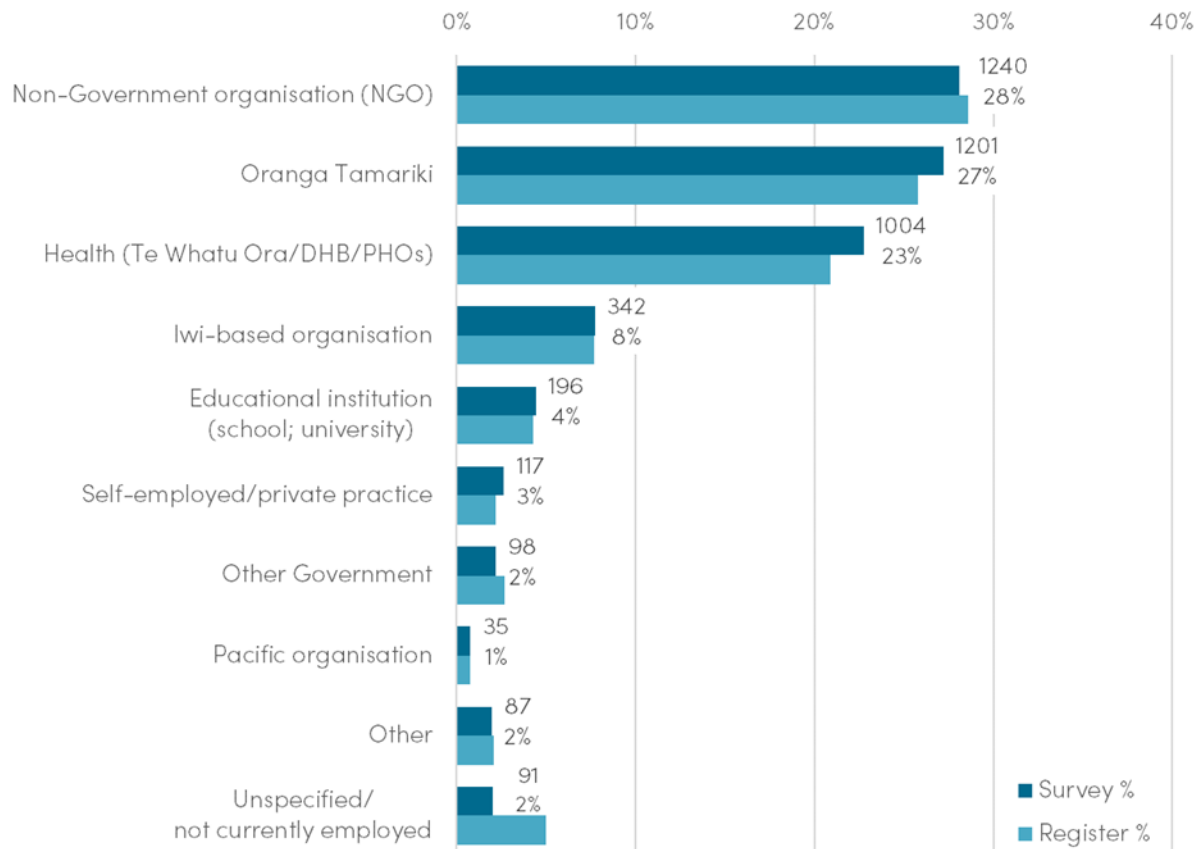
- When asked if they were confident their employer has adequate policies and procedures in place to deal with serious issues with a social worker's practice and/or conduct appropriately and safely, 95% of social workers employed by NGOs said yes. This is slightly higher than the proportion for the full survey (91%).
- When asked if they would raise concerns about another social worker's practice and/or conduct with the SWRB almost all social workers employed by NGOs said yes (95%).

## Section 1A – NGO workforce composition – Organisation type

This report focuses on the 1,240 social workers in the survey who report that they are employed by a non-government organisation (NGO) at the time of the survey.

The chart below shows the distribution of survey participants by employer type<sup>2</sup>, and confirms that our workforce survey sample closely resembles the distribution of practising social workers in New Zealand.

FIGURE 1. SOCIAL WORKERS BY 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) deliver both social and health services. For 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.

<sup>2</sup> In past workforce survey reports, NGO and iwi-based organisation employer types have been reported as a single category. For this 2023 report, NGO, iwi-based and Pacific organisation categories are reported separately to allow for more detailed analysis and reporting for social workers employed by services for priority population groups.

Around a quarter of social workers in the survey who report being employed by an NGO work for one of the five organisations shown in the table below (26%). This is similar to the proportion of the practising workforce who report being employed by the same five NGOs (32%).

**TABLE 1. MAIN EMPLOYERS WITHIN THE NGO WORKFORCE 2023**

Organisation	Number of survey participants employed by NGOs	Number of practising workforce employed by NGOs	Survey employed by NGOs (%)	Practising workforce employed by NGOs (%)
Presbyterian Support / Family Works	115	226	9%	10%
Barnardos	75	125	5%	7%
The Salvation Army	57	102	4%	5%
Open Home Foundation	51	105	4%	4%
Stand Children's Services	63	102	4%	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>32%</b>

## Section 1B – NGO workforce composition – Demographics

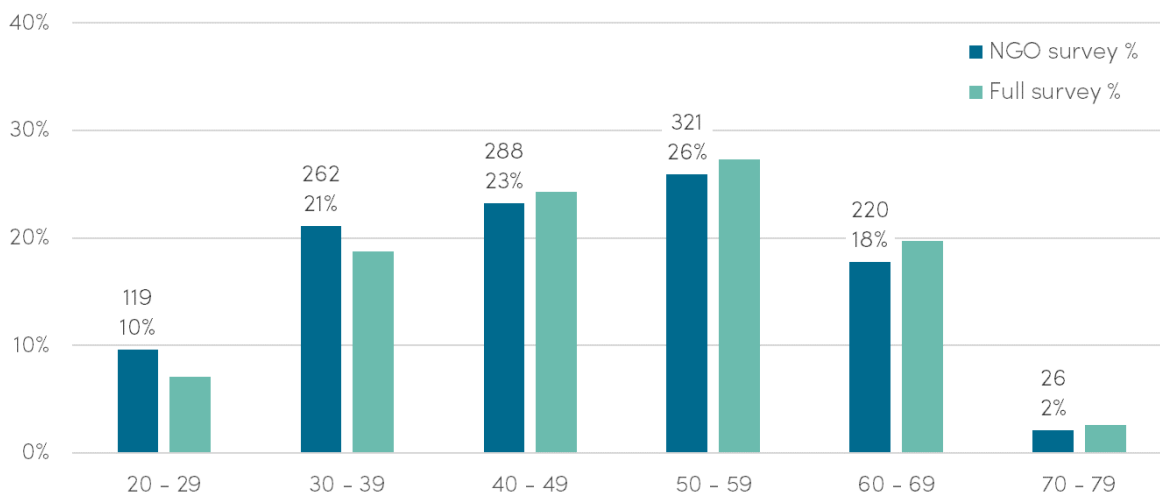
The demographic information provided by survey participants gives a picture of the current social worker workforce employed by NGOs. This includes age distribution, gender, ethnicity, and geographic region. In 2023, questions about experience of disability were added to the survey.

The survey sample of social workers employed by NGOs resembled the demographic profile of the full survey and 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 practising social workers employed by NGOs across Aotearoa New Zealand.

### 1.1 Age

The chart below shows the distribution of NGO workers across different age groups. The age distribution trends slightly younger than the full survey sample, with a higher proportion of those aged 20-39 years. The peak age group is between 50-59 years (26% of NGO survey participants).

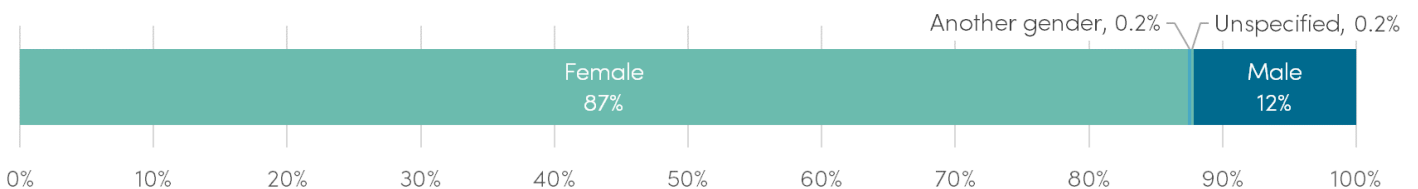
FIGURE 2. AGE DISTRIBUTION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023



### 1.2 Gender

The majority of social workers employed by NGOs who participated in the survey identified as female (87%), consistent with the gender distribution of all practising social workers in New Zealand (85%).

FIGURE 3. GENDER DISTRIBUTION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023



**TABLE 2. GENDER DISTRIBUTION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

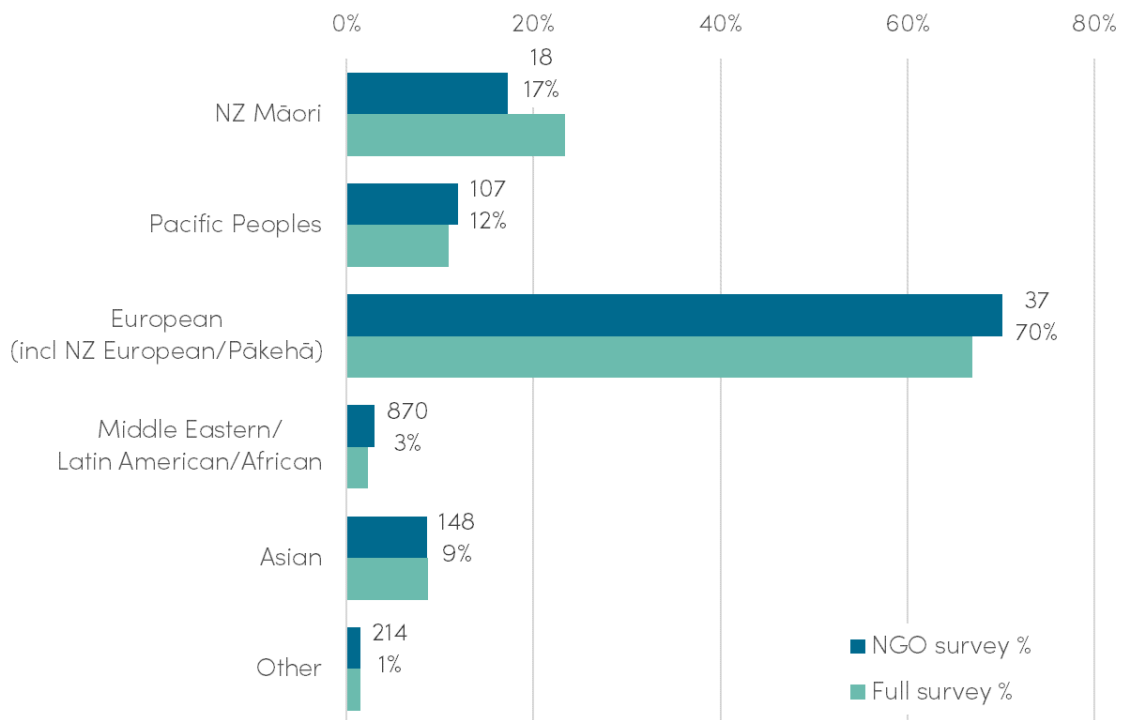
Gender	Number of NGO survey participants	Survey employed by NGOs (%)
Female	1084	87%
Male	151	12%
Another Gender	3	0.2%
Unspecified	2	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1240</b>	

### 1.3 Ethnicity

Seventy percent of NGO social workers in the survey identify as European (70%), and 17% identify as Māori. Twelve percent of NGO social workers identify as Pacific peoples. A lower proportion of social workers employed by NGOs identify as Māori when compared to other large employers of social workers such as health and Oranga Tamariki, and the full practising workforce.

The ethnic distribution of NGO social workers who participated in the survey closely resembles that of all practising social workers employed by NGOs, which gives us confidence in the representativeness of our sample (see Appendix 1 for a full description of the NGO workforce and survey data representativeness).

**FIGURE 4. ETHNICITY DISTRIBUTION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**



\*Participants can identify with more than one ethnic group, so totals exceed the sample of 1240

The table below shows the ethnic distribution of the workforce survey sample compared to the most recent census of the NZ population (2018). This comparison shows that in 2023, the same

proportion of NGO social workers identify as Māori as in the general population, and a slightly higher proportion identify as Pacific peoples compared to the general population.

**TABLE 3. ETHNICITY DISTRIBUTION. NGO SOCIAL WORKERS, COMPARING TO FULL SAMPLE, WORKFORCE 2023 AND POPULATION CENSUS 2018.**

Ethnicity	2023 NGO workforce	2023 full practising workforce	2018 Census
NZ Māori	17%	23%	17%
Pacific Peoples	12%	11%	8%
European (includes NZ European/Pākehā)	70%	67%	70%
MELAA	3%	2%	2%
Asian	9%	9%	15%
Other	1%	2%	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.

In 2023, two percent of survey participants employed in NGOs 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 29 participants in the NGO-related sample

## 1.5 Region

The geographic distribution of social workers in employed by NGOs is shown in the table below, and closely aligns with the distribution of the full survey and full practising workforce.

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

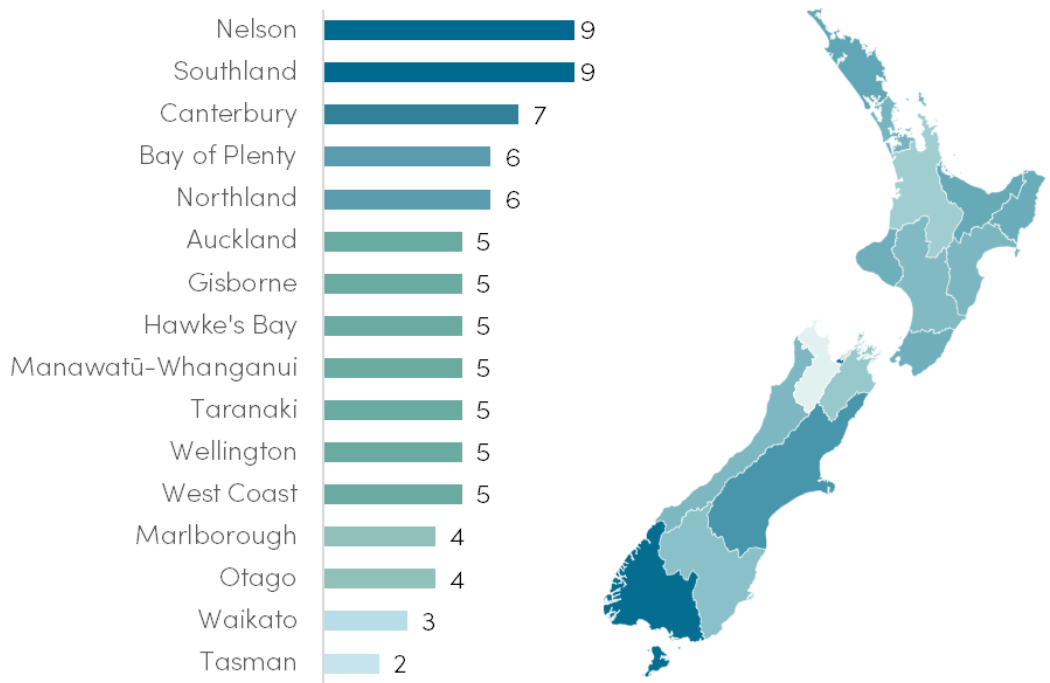
**TABLE 4. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Region	Survey employed by NGOs %	Full survey %	Full practising workforce %	Number of survey participants employed by NGOs	Number of full survey participants	Number of full practising workforce
Northland	4%	5%	5%	44	227	450
Auckland	31%	28%	29%	382	1251	2538
Waikato	6%	8%	8%	78	363	711
Bay of Plenty	6%	8%	8%	80	336	692
Gisborne	1%	2%	2%	14	64	143
Hawke's Bay	3%	4%	4%	38	192	369
Taranaki	2%	3%	3%	28	118	215
Manawatū-Wanganui	6%	5%	5%	71	237	408
Wellington	10%	11%	12%	129	498	1006
Tasman	1%	1%	0%	12	26	38
Nelson	2%	2%	2%	19	91	167
Marlborough	1%	1%	1%	10	42	66
West Coast	0%	1%	1%	4	23	49
Canterbury	18%	15%	14%	222	656	1225
Otago	6%	4%	3%	72	191	249
Southland	3%	2%	3%	35	93	264
Unspecified/International	0%	0%	1%	2	3	115
Total				1240	4411	8705

The figure below shows the geographic distribution of practising social workers employed by NGOs in New Zealand. This uses data from the full SWRB register and calculates the number of practising social workers employed by NGOs per 10,000 population in each respective region. This sits alongside the per capita geographic distribution of all practising social workers in New Zealand, as shown in the full workforce survey report<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://swrb.govt.nz/building-sustainable-workforce/>

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





## Section 1C: NGO social worker workforce composition – Qualifications, experience and role

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

### 1.6 Pathway to registration and qualifications

Most social workers employed by NGOs gained their registration with a NZ-approved qualification (86%), or an overseas approved qualification (10%). Of those NGO social workers with overseas qualifications, the most common countries were the United Kingdom, India, South Africa and the United States. Four percent of NGO social workers were registered through the S13 Experience Pathway<sup>4</sup>.

**TABLE 5. PATHWAY TO REGISTRATION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Pathway	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %
NZ-approved qualification	1067	86%
Overseas-approved qualification (incl. Australia)	128	10%
S13 Experience pathway	45	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1240</b>	<b>100%</b>

Almost all participants employed by NGOs held a qualification in 2023 (95%), with four out of five participants reporting a level 7 tertiary qualification or above (83%).

**TABLE 6. QUALIFICATIONS – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Tertiary qualification level	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %
1-6 Certificates/diplomas <sup>5</sup>	146	12%
7 Grad certificates/diplomas/Bachelor's	718	58%
8 PG Cert/Dip/Bachelor's (Hons)	139	11%
9 Master's	182	15%
10 Doctoral	0	0%
Unspecified/None	55	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1240</b>	

<sup>4</sup> <https://swrb.govt.nz/registration/experience-pathway-s13/>

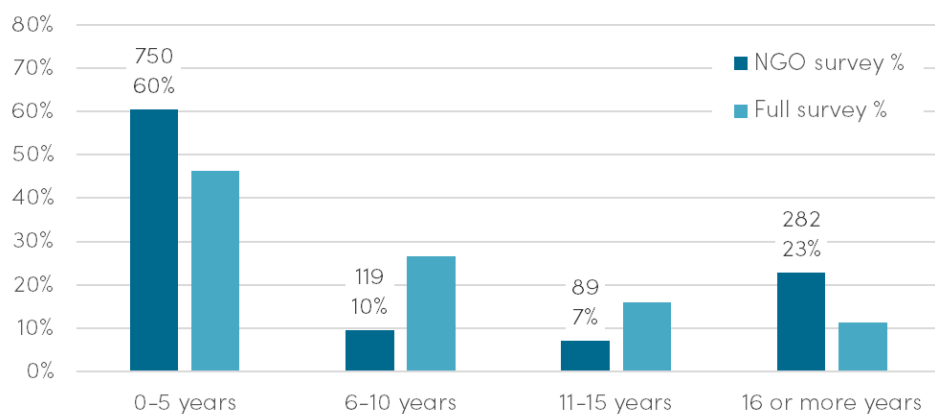
<sup>5</sup> The SWRB's register includes a number of specific historic certificates and diplomas which were recognised in the time before registration became mandatory in February 2021.

## 1.7 Years since joining the SWRB register

Sixty percent of social workers employed by NGOs who participated in the survey had been registered with the SWRB for less than five years, which is higher than the full survey (46% of whom have been registered for less than six years, see figure below).

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

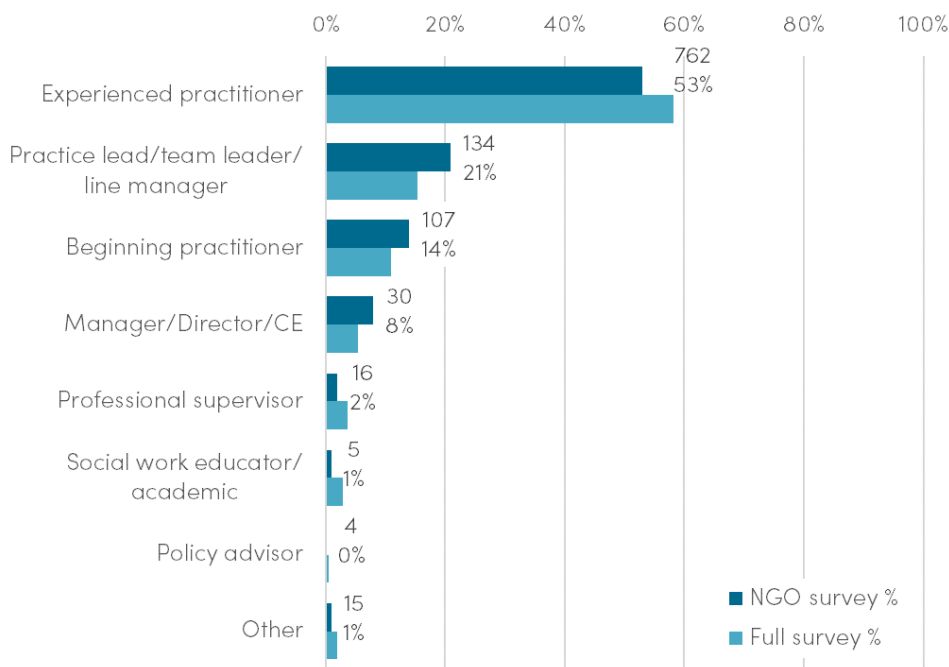
**FIGURE 6. YEARS SINCE JOINING THE SWRB REGISTER – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**



## 1.8 Level of experience and responsibility

Social workers were asked which category in the chart below best describes their level of experience/responsibility. Just over half of all NGO survey participants described themselves as 'experienced practitioners' (53%), and 21% described themselves as practice lead/team leader/line managers. A lower proportion of social workers employed by NGOs describe themselves as experienced compared to the full survey sample (53% and 58%, respectively).

**FIGURE 7. LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**



### 1.9 Sector or setting of work

As expected, given their employer, 85% of survey participants employed by NGOs report that their main setting/sector of service delivery is in a community-based organisation/NGO. Five percent report that they work in a primary health care setting.

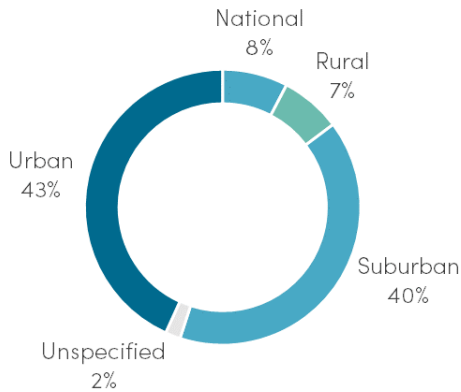
**TABLE 7. SECTOR OR SETTING OF WORK – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Sector/setting of service delivery	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %
Community-based organisation/NGOs	1052	85%
Primary health care (community-based health services)	64	5%
Private practice	32	3%
Hospital-based health services	16	1%
Oranga Tamariki	9	1%
Other Govt agency (such as Manatu Hauora (MOH), Corrections, Police, MBIE and others)	10	1%
Kaupapa Māori/iwi social services	4	0%
Social work education	4	0%
Unspecified	49	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1240</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 1.9 Current role – rural/urban and full-time/part-time

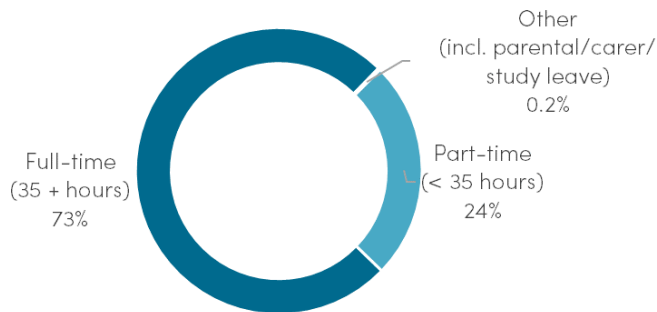
In 2023, most social workers employed by NGOs reported working in either urban (43%) or suburban areas (40%). Eight percent report that their work is national (covering the whole country), and seven percent reported working in rural areas. The population areas of work for NGO social workers are similar to those of the full survey sample.

FIGURE 8. POPULATION AREA OF WORK – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023



In 2023, 73% of social workers employed by NGOs report that they work full-time, that is over 35 hours a week. One in four reports that they work part-time (24%). A slightly higher proportion of social workers employed by NGOs work part-time compared to the full survey sample (24% and 20%, respectively).

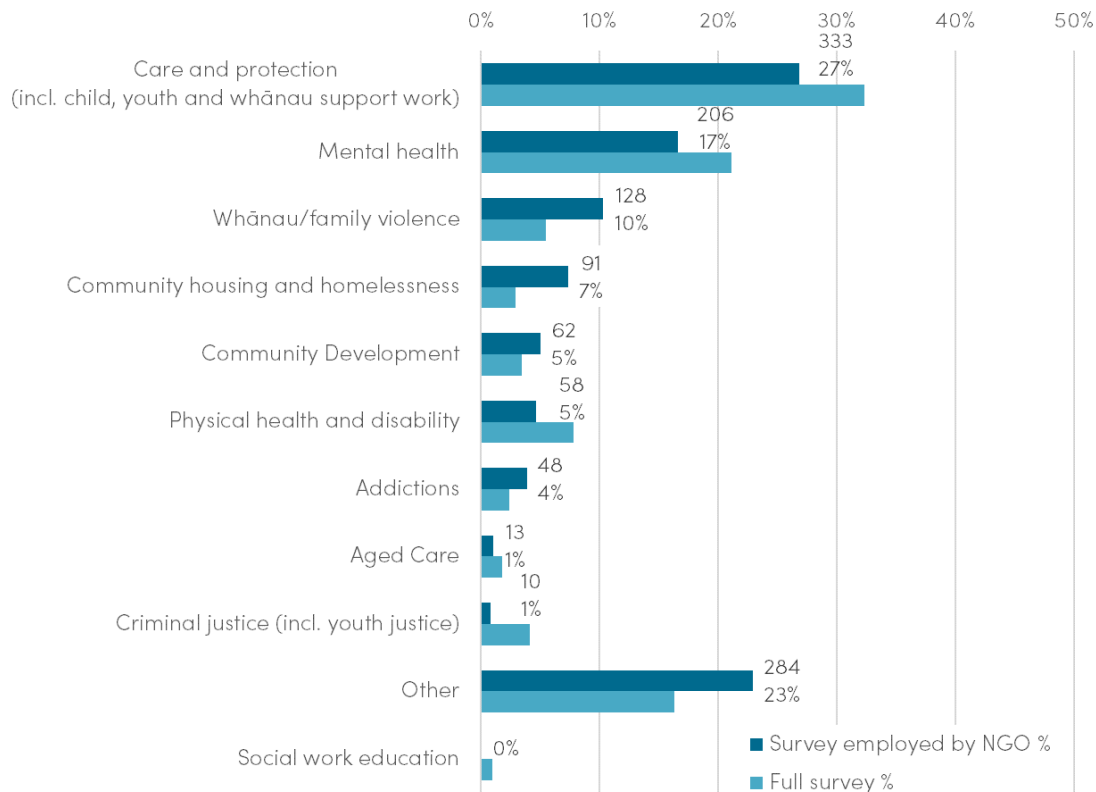
FIGURE 9. CURRENT WORK STATUS – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023



## 1.10 Field of practice

Survey participants were asked about the main focus or field of practice in which they work. Over a quarter of NGO social workers report that the focus of their work is care and protection, including child, youth and whānau support work (27%), and 17% report that they focus on mental health. Close to a quarter of NGO social workers indicated 'other' for their main field of practice (23%), and text analysis shows that these participants work in areas such as school-based social work, palliative care, and sexual harm and trauma support. Another subset of participants considered their work to be too wide 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.

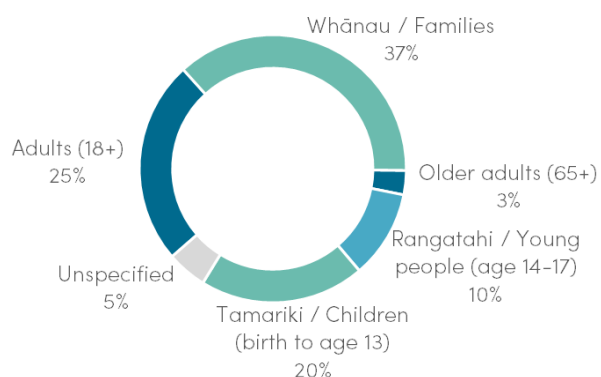
FIGURE 10. FIELD OF PRACTICE – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023



## 1.11 Primary client group

When asked about their primary client group or focus of their practice, over one-third of NGO social workers said whānau/families (37%). This is more than the proportion from the full survey (28%). One-quarter of social workers employed by NGOs said they work with adults aged 18 and over (25%). A combined total of 31% of social workers employed by NGOs mainly work with rangatahi and tamariki, which is similar to the combined total for the full survey sample.

FIGURE 11. PRIMARY CLIENT GROUP – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 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 social workers employed by NGOs to the social work profession were making a positive difference to people’s lives (82%), serving/working with/for/supporting whānau and community (74%), and an interest in social justice, advocacy and welfare (71%). These results closely resemble those of the full survey sample.

**TABLE 8. REASONS FOR JOINING SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Reason for joining the profession	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %
Making a positive difference to peoples’ lives	1018	82%
Serving/working with/for/supporting whānau and my community	916	74%
An interest in social justice, advocacy, and welfare	882	71%
Sense of purpose	601	48%
Using my own personal/lived experience to help others	528	43%
To become part of a recognised profession	261	21%
A known need for social workers	164	13%
Career opportunities	157	13%
Work flexibilities	143	12%
Salary	65	5%
Other	14	1%

\*Participants can select more than one reason for joining the profession, so totals exceed the sample of 1240

### 2.2 Reasons for remaining in the social work profession

The most selected reason for staying in the profession is the same reason most participants initially join the profession – making a difference to people’s lives (82%). Again, this closely resembles the result from the full survey sample.

TABLE 9. REASONS FOR REMAINING IN SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023

Reason for remaining in profession	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %
Making a difference to people's lives	1011	82%
Serving/working with/supporting whānau and my community	882	71%
Positive client relationships	846	68%
Varied nature of the role	792	64%
Continuous learning/professional development	594	48%
Positive working environment	505	41%
Being part of a profession	473	38%
Peer support	332	27%
Career growth opportunities	290	23%
Culturally safe environment	274	22%
Salary	142	11%
Other	11	1%

\*Participants can select more than one reason for remaining in the profession, so totals exceed the sample of 1240

### 2.3 Barriers to entering the profession

Over half of all social workers employed by NGOs identified the costs of being a regulated professional and salary as the main barriers to entering or re-entering the social work profession (57% and 56%, respectively). These results should be considered alongside the findings about employer support for registration and practising certificate fees (paid by employer for 81% and 92% of social workers employed by NGOs, respectively; see Section 4.2).

Forty percent of social workers employed by NGOs identified balancing work and personal life as a barrier to entering or re-entering the profession, the same proportion as the full sample.



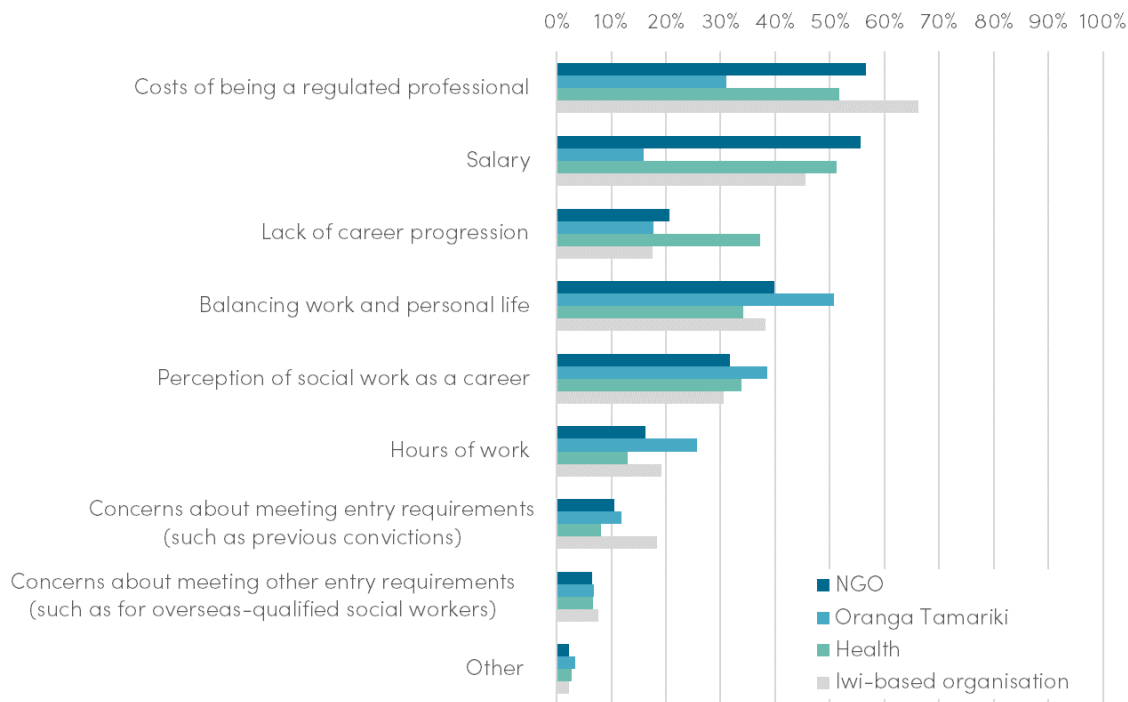
**TABLE 10. BARRIERS TO ENTERING OR RE-ENTERING SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Barriers to entering or re-entering profession	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %
Costs of being a regulated professional	704	57%
Salary	691	56%
Balancing work and personal life	497	40%
Perception of social work as a career	393	32%
Lack of career progression	256	21%
Hours of work	202	16%
Concerns about meeting entry requirements (such as previous convictions)	132	11%
Concerns about meeting other entry requirements (such as for overseas-qualified social workers)	81	7%
Other	28	2%

\*Participants can select more than one barrier, so totals exceed the sample of 1240

The chart below shows how results for social workers employed by NGOs compare to the other top three employer types (Oranga Tamariki, health and iwi-based organisations).

**FIGURE 12. BARRIERS TO ENTERING OR RE-ENTERING SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION – BY TOP FOUR EMPLOYER TYPES 2023**

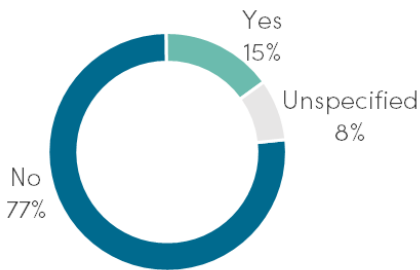


## 2.4 Five-year plan for staying in the workforce

Just over three-quarters of social workers employed by NGOs who took part in the survey plan to remain in the social work profession over the next five years (77%). Fifteen percent of participants plan to leave the profession in the next five years, which is a loss of over 180 social workers from the NGO sector. If this proportion is extrapolated out to the full practising workforce of social workers employed by NGOs, that would indicate a loss of over 370 social workers in NGOs across New Zealand.

The proportion who plans to leave the profession is similar to that for the full survey sample (see table below).

**FIGURE 13. PLANS TO LEAVE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

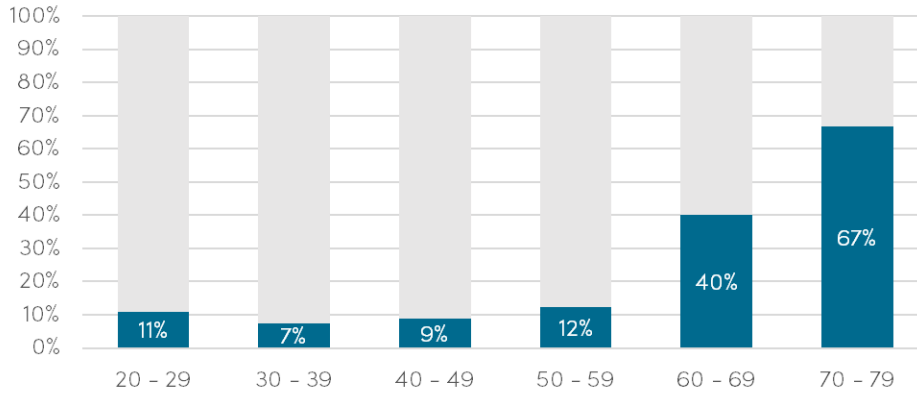


**TABLE 11. PLANS TO LEAVE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Are you planning to leave the social work profession in the next five years?	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %	Full survey	Full survey %
No	949	77%	3254	74%
Yes	188	15%	714	16%
Unspecified	103	8%	443	10%
Total	1240		4411	

The chart below shows the proportion of NGO social workers from each age group planning to leave the 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 14. PLANS TO LEAVE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023 BY AGE GROUP**



## 2.5 Reasons for leaving the profession

Of the 15% (or 188) of NGO social workers who indicated that they plan to leave the social work profession in the next five years, the main reason for leaving was retirement (43%). One-third of this subset of participants cited poor pay as a reason for leaving the profession (34%), and 31% said burnout was their reason. Close to one-quarter said high workload was their reason for leaving (24%).

Social workers employed by NGOs were more likely than those with other employers to intend to leave due to poor pay and the costs of being a regulated professional, as shown in the figure below the table.

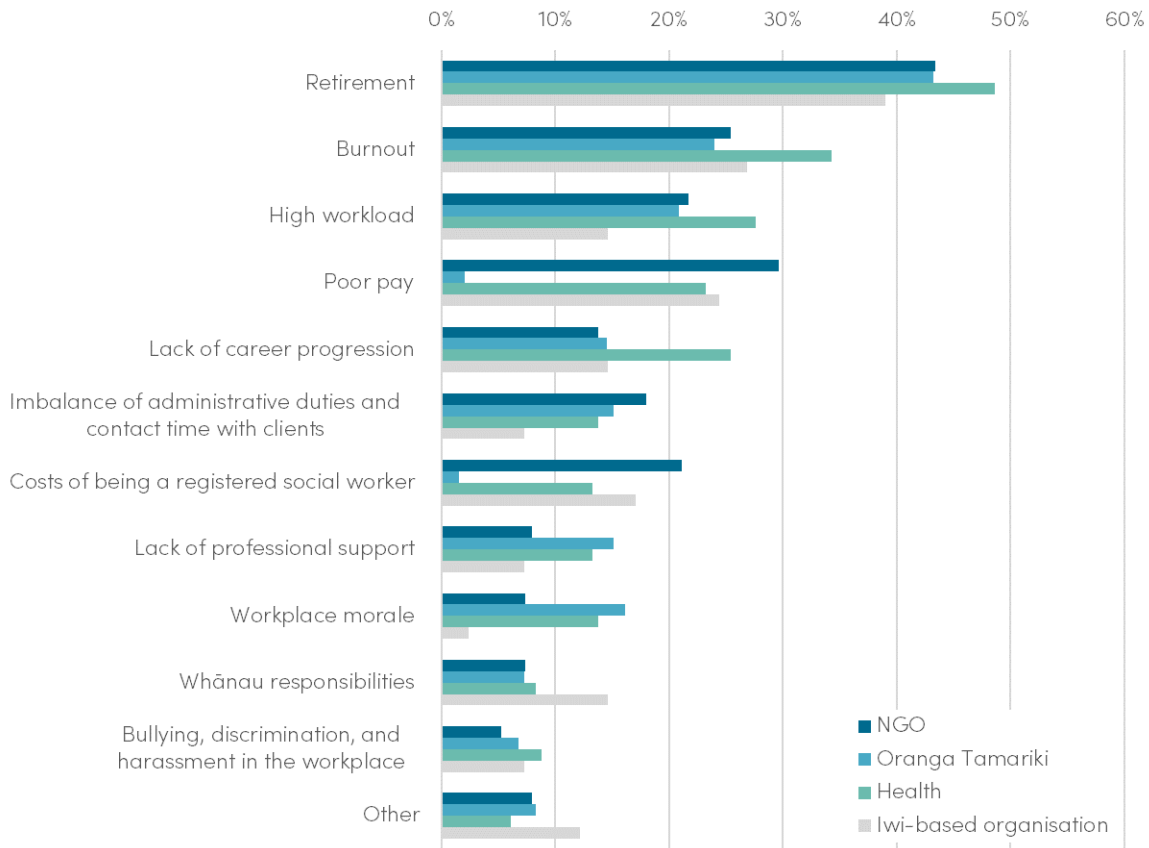
**TABLE 12. REASONS FOR LEAVING SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Reason	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %	Full survey	Full survey %
Retirement	81	43%	331	46%
Poor pay	64	34%	152	21%
Burnout	58	31%	242	34%
High workload	45	24%	197	28%
Costs of being a registered social worker	43	23%	112	16%
Imbalance of administrative duties and contact time with clients	39	21%	129	18%
Lack of career progression	31	16%	142	20%
Lack of professional support	18	10%	103	14%
Workplace morale	16	9%	101	14%
Whānau responsibilities	17	9%	71	10%
Bullying, discrimination, and harassment in the workplace	12	6%	63	9%
Other	16	9%	58	8%

\*Table denominator is 188 participants who said 'yes' to previous question about leaving profession in next five years.

Participants could give more than one reason for leaving, so totals exceed the sample subset of 188

**FIGURE 15. REASONS FOR LEAVING SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NEXT 5 YEARS – BY TOP FOUR EMPLOYER TYPES 2023**



## 2.6 Salary distribution

The most common salary category selected by social workers employed by NGOs was \$60,001 – \$80,000 annually (43%), compared to \$80,001 – \$90,000 in the full survey sample. A combined total of 8% of NGO social workers reported earning more than \$100,000 annually.

When compared to the full sample, fewer social workers employed by NGOs report earning more than \$100,000 annually (22% and 8%, respectively), and the overall distribution for social workers employed by NGOs tends to be lower than for other employers.

FIGURE 16. SALARY DISTRIBUTION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023

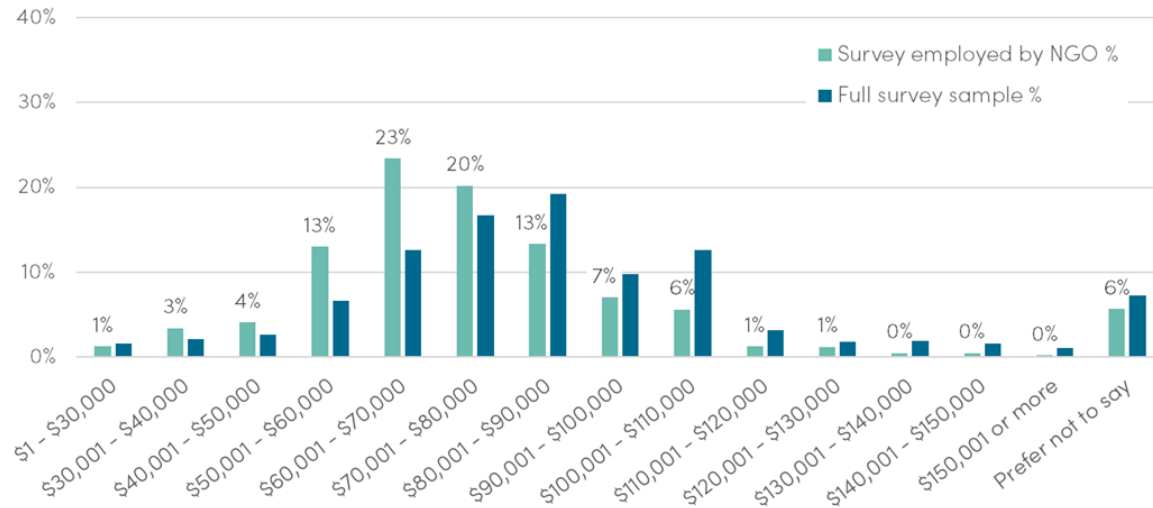


TABLE 13. SALARY DISTRIBUTION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023

Salary band	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %
\$1 - \$30,000	15	1%
\$30,001 - \$40,000	42	3%
\$40,001 - \$50,000	50	4%
\$50,001 - \$60,000	161	13%
\$60,001 - \$70,000	290	23%
\$70,001 - \$80,000	250	20%
\$80,001 - \$90,000	165	13%
\$90,001 - \$100,000	87	7%
\$100,001 - \$110,000	69	6%
\$110,001 - \$120,000	15	1%
\$120,001 - \$130,000	14	1%
\$130,001 - \$140,000	5	0%
\$140,001 - \$150,000	5	0%
\$150,001 or more	2	0%
Prefer not to say/unspecified	70	6%

## 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 skill development. They were able to select as many options as applied to them. Just over half of all social workers employed by NGOs said that CPD in social work practice with Māori would be most helpful (52%). A similar proportion said that CPD in social work practice with ethnic and cultural groups would be helpful (49%). Overall, the CPD needs identified by NGO social workers closely resembled those identified by the full survey sample.

**TABLE 14. AREAS OF CPD IDENTIFIED AS MOST HELPFUL – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

CPD area	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %	Number in full survey	Full survey %
Social work practice with Māori	640	52%	2215	50%
Social work practice with ethnic and cultural groups	604	49%	2110	48%
Skills for managing complexity	538	43%	1829	42%
Ethical practice/dilemmas	495	40%	1747	40%
Legislation and policies affecting social work practice	463	37%	1562	35%
Skills for conflict management	418	34%	1311	30%
Working with whānau living with addiction and substance misuse	378	30%	1207	27%
Professional supervisor training	374	30%	1257	29%
Working with whānau who have experienced family harm	373	30%	1097	25%
Decolonisation and te Tiriti o Waitangi	336	27%	1096	25%
Critical thinking	316	25%	1089	25%
Professional boundaries	275	22%	940	21%
Supporting students on field placements	232	19%	717	16%
Working in partnerships	202	16%	718	16%
Report writing	189	15%	676	15%
Case management	191	15%	619	14%
Other	36	3%	126	3%

\*Participants can select more than CPD area, so totals exceed the sample of 1240

## 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 NGO social workers say they receive for their social work practice are professional reflective supervision (82%), and training and skills development (77%). Two-thirds of social workers employed by NGOs report that their employer provides a supportive and safe working environment. Many social workers across all employer types commented about abuse from clients as contributing to their feeling unsafe in their work.

**TABLE 15. EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Employer support	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %	Number in full survey	Full survey %
Professional Reflective Supervision	1021	82%	3102	70%
Relevant training and skills development, including CPD and understanding your obligations as a registered social worker	951	77%	2950	67%
Supportive and safe working environment	821	66%	2243	51%
Space and time for reflective practice	723	58%	2115	48%
Cultural supervision	455	37%	1261	29%
Assistive equipment	79	6%	249	6%
Other	16	1%	149	3%

\*Participants can select more than one form of employer support, so totals exceed the sample of 1240



## 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 social workers employed by NGOs reported that their employer paid their registration fees (84% paid in full or in part), and 95% reported that their employer pays their annual practising certificate renewal fees (in full or in part).

**TABLE 16. EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR REGISTRATION AND PC FEES – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**

Fees paid by employer	Participants employed by NGOs Registration fees	Full survey Registration fees	Participants employed by NGOs PC renewal fees	Full survey PC renewal fees
Yes	81%	82%	92%	90%
In part	3%	2%	3%	2%
No	15%	16%	6%	8%

## Section 5 – Standing of 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. Half of social workers employed by NGOs thought the profession is more respected (47%), and a further 37% said it was 'in part'. These results closely resemble those of the full survey sample.

FIGURE 17. BELIEF THAT PROFESSION IS MORE RESPECTED SINCE MANDATORY REGISTRATION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023

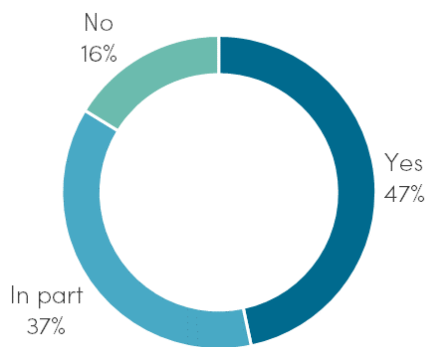


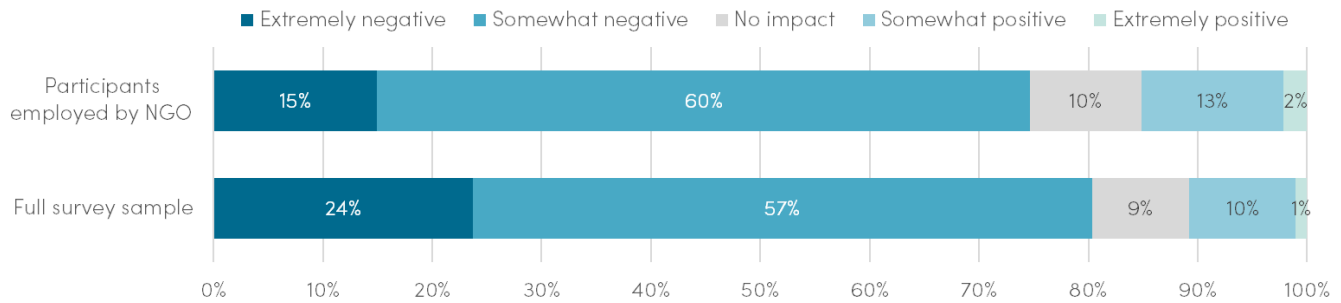
TABLE 17. BELIEF THAT PROFESSION IS MORE RESPECTED SINCE MANDATORY REGISTRATION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023

Profession is more respected since mandatory registration	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Survey participants employed by NGOs %	Full survey %
Yes	494	47%	46%
In part	392	37%	36%
No	172	16%	18%

### 5.2 Impact of media on trust and confidence in profession

Survey participants were asked about the impact of media coverage relating to social work on public trust and confidence in the social work profession. Three-quarters of NGO social workers thought media coverage had a negative impact (15% extremely; 60% somewhat negative). This is slightly lower than the full survey sample, as shown on the figure below. A quarter of all survey participants felt that media coverage has had an **extremely** negative impact on public trust and confidence in the social work profession (24%), compared to 15% of NGO social workers.

**FIGURE 18. BELIEFS ABOUT IMPACT OF MEDIA ON TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION – NGO SOCIAL WORKERS 2023**



### 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 of social workers employed by NGOs thought that pay parity is the biggest challenge (66%), followed closely by recruitment and retention of social workers (63%). Pay parity was cited as a challenge by more social workers employed by NGOs than the full survey sample (66% compared to 56% of the full sample).

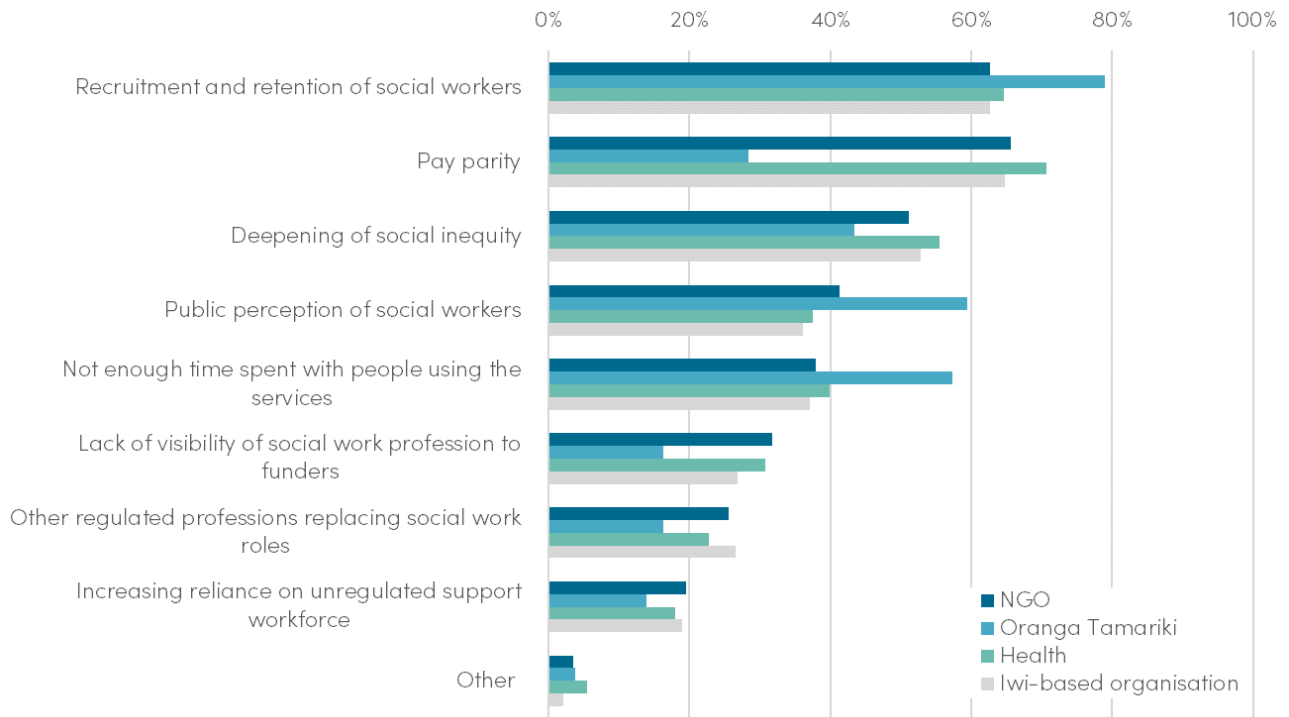
**TABLE 18. CHALLENGES FOR THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION NOW AND IN THE FUTURE 2023**

Challenges	Number of participants employed by NGOs	Participants employed by NGOs %	Full survey %
Pay parity	813	66%	56%
Recruitment and retention of social workers	778	63%	67%
Deepening of social inequity	636	51%	51%
Not enough time spent with people using the services	471	38%	44%
Public perception of social workers	513	41%	45%
Lack of visibility of social work profession to funders	396	32%	27%
Other regulated professions replacing social work roles	318	26%	23%
Increasing reliance on unregulated support workforce	243	20%	18%
Other	44	4%	4%

\*Participants can select more than one challenge, so totals exceed the sample of 1240

The chart below shows how results for NGO social workers compare to the other top three employer types (Oranga Tamariki, health and iwi-based organisations).

**FIGURE 19. CHALLENGES FOR THE SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION NOW AND IN THE FUTURE 2023 – BY TOP FOUR EMPLOYER TYPES**



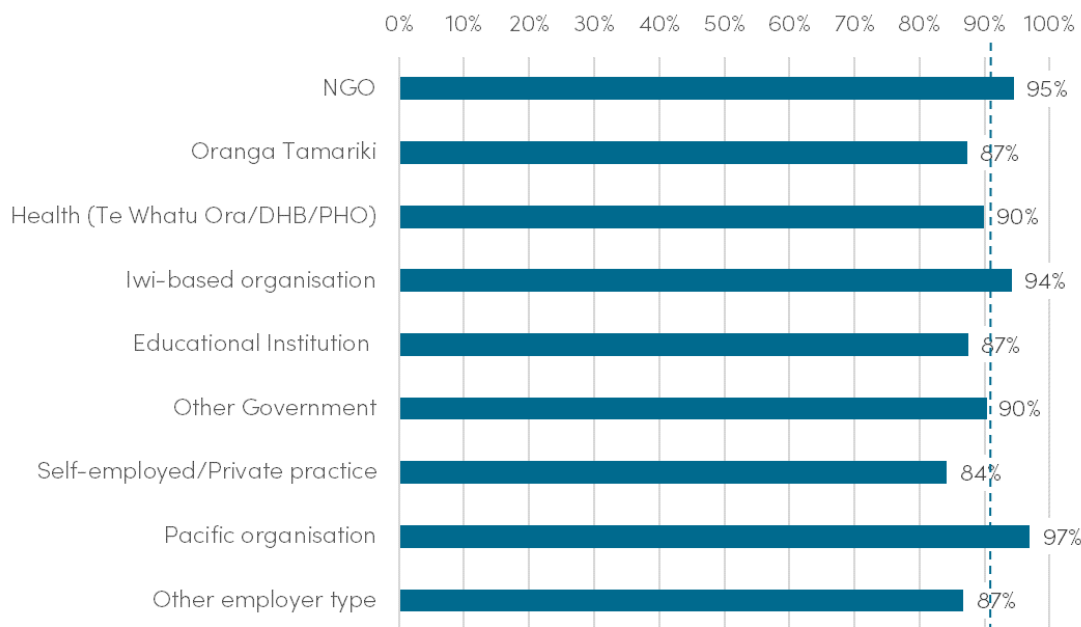
## Section 6 – Safety and conduct

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 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, 95% of social workers employed by NGOs said ‘yes’. This is slightly higher than the full survey sample (91%; dashed line on the chart below).

**FIGURE 20. CONFIDENCE IN EMPLOYER TO DEAL WITH SERIOUS PRACTICE/CONDUCT ISSUES 2023 – BY EMPLOYER TYPE**



### 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 social workers employed by NGOs said yes (95%).

## Closing comments

This Spotlight Report seeks to shine a light on the social work workforce employed in the NGO sector, exposing the depth and breadth of activity, workforce capability, opportunities and challenges facing the profession.

We continue to engage with the profession and across sectors and employers to monitor the social worker 'pipeline' and support workforce planning activities. Each year, we add to the suite of surveys and reports we produce to support these activities, and our intention for 2024 is to add a survey of employers. This will extend our evidence base to better understand the 'big picture' of the social work workforce and provide valuable insights to support future workforce planning across the sector. Over time this evidence base is being developed to provide further insight and support employers and decision-makers to determine their next steps, in order to ensure they have a sustainable and future-focussed workforce.

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 NGO social workers, and 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.

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 sample of NGO social workers to the full practising workforce

TABLE A1. AGE DISTRIBUTION OF NGO SOCIAL WORKERS COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

Age group	NGO social workers sample %	Full survey sample %	Practising workforce employed by NGOs %	Full practising workforce %	NGO social workers sample n	Full survey sample n	Practising workforce employed by NGOs n	Full practising workforce n
20 - 29	7%	7%	11%	8%	119	313	270	695
30 - 39	19%	19%	22%	21%	262	827	547	1814
40 - 49	24%	24%	23%	24%	288	1072	564	2068
50 - 59	27%	27%	24%	26%	321	1206	605	2231
60 - 69	20%	20%	18%	19%	220	870	441	1639
70 - 79	3%	3%	2%	3%	26	115	49	243
80 or older	0%	0%	0%	0%	0	1	1	4
Unspecified	0%	0%	0%	0%	4	7	6	11
Total	100%		100%		1240	4411	2483	8705

TABLE A2. GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS EMPLOYED BY NGOs COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023

Gender	NGO social workers sample %	Full survey sample %	Practising workforce employed by NGOs %	Full practising workforce %	NGO social workers sample n	Full survey sample n	Practising workforce employed by NGOs n	Full practising workforce n
Female	87%	85.1%	84.3%	84.3%	1084	3752	2136	7339
Male	0%	14.4%	15.2%	15.2%	3	637	330	1319
Another gender	0%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	2	8	9	22
Unspecified	12%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	151	14	8	25
Total					1240	4411	2483	8705

**TABLE A3. ETHNICITY DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS EMPLOYED BY NGOs COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023**

Ethnicity	NGO social workers sample %	Full survey sample %	Full practising workforce %	NGO social workers sample n	Full survey sample n	Full practising workforce n
NZ Māori	17%	23.4%	24.3%	214	1032	2114
Pacific Peoples	12%	10.9%	12.1%	148	480	1057
European (incl. NZ European; Pākehā)	70%	66.9%	63.7%	870	2676	5541
MELAA	3%	2.3%	2.6%	37	101	230
Asian	9%	8.7%	9.5%	107	384	828
Other	1%	2.0%	1.3%	18	68	111

**TABLE A4. ETHNICITY DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS EMPLOYED BY NGOs COMPARED TO FULL SURVEY, PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023 AND NZ POPULATION (CENSUS 2018)**

Ethnicity	2023 NGO social worker sample %	2023 Practising workforce employed by NGOs %	2023 Full survey %	2023 Practising workforce %	2018 Census <sup>6</sup> %
NZ Māori	17%	20%	23%	24%	17%
Pacific peoples	12%	12%	11%	12%	8%
European (incl. NZ European; Pākehā)	70.2% (60% NZ European)	67%	67%	64%	70%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%
Asian	9%	9%	9%	10%	15%
Other ethnicity	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/ethnic-group-summaries-reveal-new-zealands-multicultural-make-up/>



**TABLE A5. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS EMPLOYED BY NGOs COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023**

Region	NGO social workers sample %	Full survey sample %	Full practising workforce %	NGO social workers sample n	Full survey sample n	Full practising workforce n	NZ pop'n <sup>7</sup> %
Northland	4%	5%	5%	44	227	450	4%
Auckland	31%	28%	29%	382	1251	2538	34%
Waikato	6%	8%	8%	78	363	711	10%
Bay of Plenty	6%	8%	8%	80	336	692	7%
Gisborne	1%	2%	2%	14	64	143	1%
Hawke's Bay	3%	4%	4%	38	192	369	4%
Taranaki	2%	3%	3%	28	118	215	3%
Manawatū-Wanganui	6%	5%	5%	71	237	408	5%
Wellington	10%	11%	12%	129	498	1006	11%
Tasman	1%	1%	0%	12	26	38	1%
Nelson	2%	2%	2%	19	91	167	1%
Marlborough	1%	1%	1%	10	42	66	1%
West Coast	0%	1%	1%	4	23	49	1%
Canterbury	18%	15%	14%	222	656	1225	13%
Otago	6%	4%	3%	72	191	249	5%
Southland	3%	2%	3%	35	93	264	2%
Unspecified/International	0%	0%	1%	2	3	115	
Total				1240	4411	8705	

**TABLE A6. EMPLOYER TYPE OF SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO PRACTISING WORKFORCE 2023**

Employer type	Survey %	Practising workforce %	Survey n	Practising workforce n
Non-Government organisation (NGO)	28%	29%	1240	2489
Oranga Tamariki	27%	26%	1201	2245
Health (Te Whatu Ora/DHB/PHO)	23%	21%	1004	1817
Iwi-based organisation*	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

\* These categories include a number of iwi-based and Pacific organisations with a focus on health, and social workers employed by these are counted in the 'focus on health' subset denominator.

<sup>7</sup> Stats NZ (2019). Census: Population and dwelling counts (amended) 2018. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2018-census-population-and-dwelling-counts>

## 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 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

We moved into the second 'grow' phase from the beginning of the 2022/23 financial year, taking a more proactive approach. We continued to strengthen and enhance our business-as-usual Lead Agency work, including tailoring and expanding our Workforce Survey. We will also develop an Employers Survey for the 2024/25 financial year, and work 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.